

Barbara Morgan's Photographic Interpretation of  
American Culture, 1935-1980

by

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American Culture, 1935-1980

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend in graduate school– my wife Stephanie. Her love and support were vital from my first day of classes until the day I defended. Thank you.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vii
Figure List	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>Spring on Madison Square</i> and the Early Photomontages, 1936-1945	7
Chapter Two: The Dance Photographs	42
Chapter Three: Light Abstractions	105
Chapter Four: Morgan and Books	142
Chapter Five: The Late Montages	188
Illustrations Page	217
Bibliography	218

## Abstract

In 1935, Barbara Morgan, a recent arrival in Depression-era New York, reinvented her career as an artist when she abandoned painting and adopted the medium of photography. In the four-and-a-half decades that followed, Morgan witnessed the remaining years of the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and Three Mile Island. This dissertation will trace the photographic oeuvre of Morgan as she responded to these events both directly and indirectly, while simultaneously tracking the important artistic and cultural trends of each decade.

The first chapter discusses Morgan's early photomontage work, in which she pushed the boundaries of American photography while exploring diverse metaphors for metropolitan splendor and urban isolation as well as the anxieties of the Great Depression and hope for a better future. Morgan's 1941 book *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* anchors the second chapter. The influential dance photographs that comprise this publication highlight Morgan's modernist interpretations of Martha Graham's early dances and allow Morgan to examine beauty, strength, and a complex series of emotions through simple gestures and movement. The third chapter uses the light abstraction Morgan employed as a tailpiece for *Sixteen Dances* as the starting point to investigate her connections to broader artistic trends in the United States during and after the Second World War. In 1951, Morgan published *Summer's Children*, a photographic account of life in a summer camp that marked a major departure for the artist. Chapter four examines this book in the context of the Cold War and considers such diverse topics as summer camps, progressive education, fear-mongering, and the

rise of the photo-spread. In the last two decades of her career, Morgan returned to the medium of photomontage. The fifth chapter examines this period, in which Morgan protested nuclear proliferation, environmental indifference, a perceived lack of scientific morality, and violent entertainment through her montages.



## Figure List

All figures are black-and-white photographs unless otherwise noted. All illustrations herein are protected under the laws of copyright. ©Barbara Morgan, The Barbara Morgan Archive.

Figure 1.1 Morgan, *Spring on Madison Square*, 1938

Figure 1.2 Morgan, *Third Avenue El with Cars*, 1939

Figure 1.3 Morgan, *Use Litter Basket*, 1943

Figure 1.4 Morgan, *Third Avenue El*, 1936

Figure 1.5 Morgan, *Macy's Window*, 1939

Figure 1.6 Morgan, *Kleenex*, 1940

Figure 1.7 Morgan, *City Shell*, 1938

Figure 1.8 Morgan, *Protest*, 1940

Figure 2.1 Morgan, *Letter to the World (Swirl)*, 1940

Figure 2.2 Morgan, *Rain Dancers*, 1931 [Watercolor]

Figure 2.3 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 17, 1941

Figure 2.4 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 19, 1941

Figure 2.5 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 20 & 21, 1941

Figure 2.6 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 22 & 23, 1941

Figure 2.7 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 27 (Bottom Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.8 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 29, 1941

Figure 2.9 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 30, 1941

Figure 2.10 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 31, 1941

Figure 2.11 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 33, 1941

Figure 2.12 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 34, 1941

Figure 2.13 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 35 (Top Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.14 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 35 (Bottom Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.15 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 38, 1941

Figure 2.16 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 39, 1941

Figure 2.17 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 40 (Top Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.18 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 40 (Bottom Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.19 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 41, 1941

Figure 2.20 Morgan, *Doris Humphrey, With My Red Fires (Swirl)*, 1938

Figure 2.21 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 53, 1941

Figure 2.22 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 54 (Top Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.23 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 54 (Bottom Photographs), 1941

Figure 2.24 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 55, 1941

Figure 2.25 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 74 (Top Photograph), 1941

Figure 2.26 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 75, 1941

Figure 2.27 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 76 & 77, 1941

Figure 2.28 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 78 & 79, 1941

Figure 2.29 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 80 & 81, 1941

Figure 2.30 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 94 & 95, 1941

Figure 2.31 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Pages 88 & 89, 1941

Figure 2.32 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 133, 1941

Figure 2.33 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 136, 1941

Figure 2.34 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 137, 1941

Figure 2.35 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 114, 1941

Figure 2.36 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 120, 1941

Figure 2.37 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 123, 1941 or  
Morgan, *Letter to the World (Kick)*, 1940

Figure 2.38 Morgan, *Sixteen Dances* Page 125, 1941

Figure 3.1 Morgan, *Light Abstraction*, 1940

Figure 3.2 Morgan, *Samadhi*, 1940

Figure 3.3 Morgan, *Cadenza*, 1940

Figure 3.4 Morgan, *Emanation I*, 1940

Figure 3.5 Morgan, *Opacities*, 1944

Figure 3.6 Morgan, *Layout*, 1946

Figure 3.7 Morgan, *Pure Energy and Neurotic Man*, 1941

Figure 3.8 Morgan, *Serpent Light III*, 1948

Figure 3.9 Morgan, *Trajectories*, 1946

Figure 3.10 Morgan, *Light Waves*, 1945

Figure 3.11 Morgan, *Saeta*, 1942

Figure 3.12 Morgan, *Solstice*, 1942

Figure 4.1 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Page 67, 1951

Figure 4.2 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Page 48, 1951

Figure 4.3 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Page 39, 1951

Figure 4.4 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 34 & 35, 1951

Figure 4.5 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Page 115, 1951

Figure 4.6 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 90 & 91, 1951

Figure 4.7 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 66 & 67, 1951

Figure 4.8 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 80 & 81, 1951

Figure 4.9 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 127 & 128, 1951

Figure 4.10 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 102 & 103, 1951

Figure 4.11 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 108 & 109, 1951

Figure 4.12 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 34 & 35, 1951

Figure 4.13 *Leica 1937 Photo Annual* Pages 16 & 17, 1937

Figure 4.14 *Leica 1937 Photo Annual* Pages 40 & 41, 1937

Figure 4.15 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 94 & 95, 1951

Figure 4.16 Morgan, *Summer's Children* Pages 98 & 99, 1951

Figure 5.1 Morgan, *Confrontation*, 1970

Figure 5.2 Barbara Morgan in her Studio-, 1942

Figure 5.3 Morgan, *Inner and Outer Man*, 1972

Figure 5.4 Morgan, *Frolic in the Lab*, 1965

Figure 5.5 Morgan, *Artificial Life From the Laboratory*, 1967

Figure 5.6 Morgan, *Computerized Manhattanites*, 1973

Figure 5.7 Morgan, *Fossil in Formation*, 1965

Figure 5.8 Morgan, *Incoming*, 1956

Figure 5.9 Morgan, *Ghost of the Accident*, 1978

Figure 5.10 Morgan, *Nuclear Fossilization I*, 1979

Figure 5.11 Morgan, *Brainwashed*, 1966

Figure 5.12 Morgan, *City Sound*, 1972

Figure 5.13 Morgan, *ESP Breaking Through*, 1969

Figure 5.14 Morgan, *UFO Visits New York*, 1965

Figure 5.15 Morgan, *Leaf Floating in the City*, 1970

Figure 5.16 Morgan, *City Shell*, 1938

Figure 5.17 Morgan, *Opacities*, 1968

Figure 5.18 Morgan, *Inner Strata*, 1970

## Introduction

An image of a young man striding forward, entwined with brilliant white photographs of tulips, overlays a snow-filled depiction of Madison Square. A graceful modern dancer caught by the camera in mid-twirl conveys a complex series of emotions to the viewer. A sensuous “signature” of fluid arcs of light. A pyramidal jumble of young children locked in embrace paired with delightfully simple verse. The beautiful face of a woman presented with a skeletal alter-ego amid a field of abstract montaged elements. These are the indelible photographs of Barbara Morgan.

Each image represents not only a period in the career of the artist, but an American cultural epoch as well. This dissertation will establish Morgan as an artist whose life and career were inextricably tied to the cultural and artistic currents of her life. Furthermore, through the discussion of her diverse oeuvre, the reader should obtain valuable insights into the important trends that marked the forty-five years that Morgan engaged with photography.

Barbara Morgan was born Barbara Brooks Johnson in Buffalo, Kansas, on July 8, 1900. At the age of nine months, however, her family moved to Southern California, where she spent the remainder of her childhood. Morgan’s parents fostered an intellectual environment for their daughter, in which learning and thinking were encouraged.<sup>1</sup> In turn, when Morgan graduated from high school in 1919, she enrolled at the University of California in Los Angeles, where she spent the next four years. Morgan studied art and design in a program that stressed the principles of artistic and cultural synthesis, which meant equal consideration was given to Asian, European and so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Deba Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 5.

primitive traditions.<sup>2</sup> Her professors placed a strong emphasis on reading about art in order to understand fully the complexities of its history, likely fomenting an early sense of the importance of writing and publishing.<sup>3</sup>

After graduation, Morgan joined the faculty at UCLA, where she taught design, woodcut, and painting. During this period, she also exhibited her paintings and woodcuts locally. In addition to teaching and the pursuit of her own artistic career, Morgan worked in a number of western and Native American museums and galleries.<sup>4</sup> Through her exhibition work, she was first introduced to artistic photography when employed to mount an Edward Weston show.<sup>5</sup> Weston's photography opened Morgan's eyes to the artistic possibilities of the medium, but she was ultimately convinced of this by Willard D. Morgan, her future husband. Willard Morgan discovered photography as a teenager and quickly became entranced by the medium. When the two first met, Willard had already obtained a mastery of the camera and dark room techniques. Over time, he additionally worked as an editor, a writer, and a lecturer. The two married in 1925 and soon after Willard began to teach Barbara the basics of photography.

Despite her admiration of her husband's work, Morgan was initially reluctant to accept photography as an art form on equal par with painting and sculpture. While she learned the basics of photography, she still considered it primarily a means of documentation. Over time Morgan grew fascinated with the different properties of light and how they affected the aesthetics of photographs. While this initial change of heart

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<sup>2</sup> Morgan credited Arthur Wesley Dow with the establishment of this artistic synthesis. Barbara Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10.

may have been largely aesthetic, her final acceptance of photography as her artistic medium proved much more practical.

In 1932, Morgan gave birth to her son Doug and three years later, a second son, Lloyd, followed. As a mother of two, Morgan found little time to paint. Ultimately, Willard convinced her that photography required significantly less time and was thus a logical match for the time constraints of a mother.<sup>6</sup> Within a year, Morgan set up a new studio and began to experiment with photography. Her work in that medium is the subject of this dissertation.

At the inception of her career, Morgan explored two exceedingly different photographic tracks— photomontage and dance photography. Her work in photomontage, treated in Chapter One, allowed Morgan to explore complex feelings about her new adopted home, New York City, while simultaneously facilitating the use of broad metaphors to suggest both hope and anxiety during the era of the Great Depression. She found the technical challenge of photomontage compelling as she attempted to master principles of juxtaposition and composition.

Chapter Two discusses this same period, during which Morgan also established a partnership of sorts with modern dance pioneer Martha Graham. The dance photographs provided Morgan the opportunity to master the basic techniques of still photography and focus on traditional as well as modernist depictions of beauty and strength. Morgan also explored her long-held fascination with movement and gesture, while evoking complex cultural themes of the period.

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<sup>6</sup> Margaretta Mitchell, *Recollections of Ten Women of Photography* (New York: Viking, 1979), 179-80.



In 1940, the starting point of Chapter Three, Morgan combined her fascination with light and gesture to create her first light abstraction. After fashioning this drawing with light, abstraction became a central theme in her oeuvre. Her interest in dance photography waned, while she continued to foster connections to the broader worlds of photography and art. Morgan was especially interested at the point in which these worlds intersected and attempted to foster these connections in a series of light drawings and purely abstract photomontages.

Chapter Four considers the period after the Second World War came to its grizzly conclusion and the Cold War began, when Morgan's focus shifted once again. Adopting an aesthetic more typically found in the pages of popular magazines, Morgan published *Summer's Children*, which documented life in a children's summer camp. While the possible implications of this publication remain numerous, Morgan imparted a universal plea for hope by presenting children as they played and learned simultaneously in the sylvan refuge of the natural world. Ultimately, *Summer's Children* suggests aspirations for a better future during a difficult economic, political, and cultural period.

While *Summer's Children* indicated a subtle wish to improve the world, Morgan found inspiration through more direct means later in life. Chapter Five argues that in the 1960s and 1970s Morgan returned to photomontage as a vehicle to express her dissatisfaction with a world she felt had lost its way. Her montages challenged the establishment and sought improvements in environmental policy and scientific morality, while protesting nuclear proliferation and violent entertainment. For the first time, Morgan appeared to view her artwork as a bullypulpit from which she could urge change in the world her grandchildren would inherit.

During this latter stage of Morgan's career, she began to consider her legacy as well. She published a series of monographic books and reprinted the majority of her photographs and montages. Yet, she was aware that another aspect of her legacy had already been established. Throughout her life, Morgan had written extensively about photography. She seemingly considered herself an educator as much as an artist and therefore wished to teach others everything that she herself had learned.

Today much of Morgan's legacy has been forgotten, however. Her dance photographs remain treasured artifacts of the era between the wars; yet, her photomontages, light abstractions, and photographs of children have faded from the public consciousness. To date, there has not been a full monograph written on Morgan's life and career. A 1964 issue of *Aperture* written and designed by Morgan is the only comprehensive source of information on her life.<sup>7</sup> She later published a selection of her photographs, titled *Barbara Morgan* in 1972, and a selection of her photomontages, titled *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, in 1980.<sup>8</sup> In addition, three exhibitions catalogues with short essays were published in 1978, 1988, and 2004.<sup>9</sup> Finally, a 1999 publication with a short astute essay by Deba Patnaik featured a selection of her photographs as well.<sup>10</sup> While these books provide great illustrations of Morgan's work, they fail to provide a comprehensive analysis of her career and place her oeuvre within the broader context of

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<sup>7</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture* 11.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Morgan and Morgan, 1972) and Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Amico and Stephen Robert Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978); Curtis Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, 1988); and Curtis Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance, Barbara Morgan Photographs* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*.

the art world or the history of the period. This dissertation hopes to bring new light to Morgan's legacy in its entirety by exploring the photographic career of a pioneering artist whose work was consistently bound to the intellectual and historical trends of her time.

## **Chapter One: *Spring on Madison Square* and the Early Photomontages, 1936-1945**

On a cold, crisp day, in one of the few sanctuaries of nature within the industrialized city of pre-World War II New York, a winter storm blows into Madison Square. In this hybrid space, where the metropolitan world intersects with the natural realm, large tracts of untouched snow envelop the square, only disturbed where humanity intrudes. Barren, black trees, devoid of leaves or any other signs of life, present a stark contrast to the pure, dazzling whiteness of the snow. Yet, a winter snowstorm is not the only aggressive force in this environment. Nature has been sculpted by humanity to fit its needs. Defined on two sides by fences and a sidewalk, the square caters to the park's urban masses. Slushy channels of ice, dirt, and melting snow mark the paths of New York's citizenry. Singly, or in small groups, the people trudge through the snow with guarded steps lest they slip and fall on the ice.

This frozen representation of Madison Square, this elegy of winter, represents only part of Barbara Morgan's 1938 photomontage, *Spring on Madison Square* (Figure 1.1). A sizable parallelogram, printed from an unrelated negative, is centered at the top, pictorially dominating the montage. The darkly rendered negative largely obscures the park setting. This single image portrays an energetic young man: presented in profile, he strides forward with his arms and his legs spread wide in an exaggerated step. His lithe, but muscular build befits a dancer. His exposed torso and tight, form-fitting pants, indicative of a male dancer's costume from the early period of modern dance, further this assumption. Completing the montage, two tulips and three small objects evoke displaced stamens. These five elements, interwoven with the dark image of the dancer, mirror the austere contrast of the black trees and white snow. The floral elements of the montage

were produced as a photogram: the flowers and stamens were placed directly on the negative of the dancer as it was developed on top of the montage of Madison Square. Thus, where the flowers overlay elements of the Madison Square photograph, the image below is not obscured.

Although the dancer, flowers, and Madison Square seemingly represent discordant elements, they are formally linked in this montage. The fences that border Madison Square act as a natural frame on the left and bottom edges of the negative featuring the dancer. Furthermore, in a graceful, curvaceous line, a second fence and the stem of the bottom tulip meet to form a subtle arabesque. Most of the elements in the lower half of the montage, including the dancer's striding legs, the benches, the fences, and the tulips, follow a left-to-right, horizontal course that echoes the paths taken by the pedestrians on the sidewalk. To achieve this design, Morgan flipped the negative of the dancer in order to make him stride to the right.<sup>1</sup> While the lower section of the montage is primarily oriented along a series of horizontal axes, the upper section consists mainly of vertical elements, which include the dancer's rigid torso, the fences, the benches, and the trees. These vertical elements follow the tracks of the walkers on the sidewalk on the left side of the image. Seen as a whole, the montage is bisected into largely horizontally and vertically rendered elements that together suggest a harmonious flow of movement.

While the elements of the montage present a consistent rhythm, opposing elements persist as well. The most basic of these is scale. Madison Square is overshadowed by the colossal dancer, who, in turn, is eclipsed by the mammoth tulips. If one utilizes a system of hierarchic proportion, it must be concluded that vernal tidings

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence of this decision is apparent in the reversed "54" that appears at the bottom right of the dancer's negative. Morgan likely wrote this number on the negative as she catalogued the image before using it in this montage.

dominate the image. The largest element of the montage, the tulip with its opening bud, represents a sure sign of spring. Given that the snow has melted from the road at the upper left-hand corner of the montage, it would be fair to assume the temperature is rising. Furthermore, the lightly-clothed dancer suggests a youthful exuberance often used to evoke floescence. However, his erect nipple, prominently displayed in this profile view, suggests the chill of winter remains in the air. Rather than a simple, static narrative, the artist presents a moment of transition from winter to spring.

This eclectic photomontage, created by Morgan near the end of the Great Depression, juxtaposes disparate images that initially appear to be improbable pairings. But I believe that the colligation of these disconnected elements represents a visual metaphor for the transition out of the Depression and its corresponding economic and social strife. Furthermore, *Spring on Madison Square* presages an era of harmony and prosperity, not only for New York City, but for the entire country as well.

Seven important themes emerge if one considers this montage in the context of Morgan's contemporary life and career: her recent adoption of the camera as artistic medium of choice; Madison Square as Morgan's personal frame of reference in New York City; her mixed feelings toward the city as a whole; the Great Depression; the medium of photomontage; Morgan's fascination with symbolic dance and motion; and the utilization of botanical metaphors. By carefully pondering each component of this photomontage and placing it within the scope of Morgan's over-arching philosophies during this period of her life, and paying particular attention to the way she often employed photomontage to evoke a singular idea, I intend to prove that this montage is indeed an allegory that suggests a progression from the Great Depression into an era of

economic recovery. Furthermore, as this chapter will detail, the ideologies and aesthetic concepts utilized in this montage characterize the majority of the montages Morgan created from 1936 to 1945.

In 1935, Barbara Morgan established residency in New York City, where her husband Willard Morgan received a job promoting the new Leica camera through a series of lectures. In this same year, Morgan began to experiment with photographic equipment and darkroom techniques. In an interview with *New York Times* writer Jacob Deschin, Morgan described a year in which she read photographic literature, learned how to use the equipment, and generally attempted to “catch up on what [she] didn’t know.”<sup>2</sup> Her approach to photography was initially quite systematic, as she aspired to master the technical components of the medium. Willard, who had practiced photography since he was a teenager, became Morgan’s primary teacher in this early period. Willard explained how to use her first cameras, the 4x5 Speed Graphic and the Leica. It was also through Willard that she learned about an eight-by-ten-inch enlarger, the device she would eventually use to create her early photomontages.<sup>3</sup> Willard followed a methodical and academic approach to instruction that came naturally to the couple from their collegiate experience. This encouraged the intellectual curiosity that was among Morgan’s more dominant personality traits.<sup>4</sup> When a subject spurred Morgan’s interest, such as the medium of photography, she explored it thoroughly.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Barbara Morgan: Permanence Through Perseverance,” in *Photography Annual* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1971), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 12.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan lined her apartment and studio with books on a variety of subjects, and not only did she read these books, but she would underline and write questions and comments in the margins. Deba Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 5.

As Morgan mastered the technical aspects of photography, she began to develop a more personal aesthetic. This personal approach was important to Morgan, who stated that photographers should be visual poets.<sup>5</sup> In her words, “photography is a living art in which people, places, emotions, thoughts, and acts of today’s world are textually interwoven...I want to make it clear that the foremost resource is the photographer himself.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this notion of interweaving “people, places, emotions, thoughts, and acts” led Morgan to use photomontage so frequently.

Yet, Morgan’s choice to use photomontage to express herself was artistically risky. In the 1930s, montage remained an atypical photographic technique in the United States. In fact, photomontage was widely disparaged in this country.<sup>7</sup> Morgan addressed this bias in a statement from this period when she stated:

I’ve had lots of fights about [photomontage] with dear friends who are photography people, who believe that the single image is sacred. And I say, ‘To me it’s sacred to do what’s in you!’ I find that what’s in me is multiple imagery, that it is as real to me as the external world. So I feel the responsibility to do it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” in *The Complete Photographer* (New York: National Education Alliance, 1943), 1528.

<sup>7</sup> Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*, 8. Deba Patnaik further asserts that Morgan’s extensive knowledge of avant-garde European artists and in particular Lazlo Moholy-Nagy gave her the courage to pursue photomontage. Ibid. Hal Fischer agrees with this point of view, stating that while photomontage was popular in Europe in certain circles, it was decidedly not popular in the United States and only rarely did American artists use photomontage at home. Hal Fischer, “Barbara Morgan– Individual Innovation with an American Spirit,” *Artweek* 11 (November 22, 1980): 11. Sally Stein confirms American photographers were typically skeptical, if not outright dismissive, of photomontage before World War II. She also notes that Morgan “more than any American experimented avidly with photomontage.” Sally Stein, “‘Good Fences Make Good Neighbors’: American Resistance to Photomontage Between the Wars,” in *Montage and Modern Life, 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 133-34.

<sup>8</sup> “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues with the External World,” *Bennington College- Quadrille* 5, no. 4 (1971): 12. Later in life, Morgan expressed a similar sentiment when she stated, “When I became a photographer emotionally and practically, the only way I could feel honest about photographing seriously was to photograph with imagination, rather than recording, for if I merely echoed the obvious, I would lose my creative integrity. Therefore, I began with photomontage, knowing that it could only come from creative imagination.” Margaretta Mitchell, *Recollections of Ten Women of Photography* (New York:



By embracing the medium of photomontage, Morgan made herself vulnerable to the possibility of criticism from American photographers, critics, and the public. However, as she stated, Morgan ignored their criticism, because photomontage allowed her to employ photography to explore the complexity of modern life in a way that only her painting had previously.<sup>9</sup>

Photomontages evolved into “visual metaphors” for Morgan, or “my poems” as she called them.<sup>10</sup> In a 1938 article she elaborated that photomontage “originates in this multiple kind of life we are living...the chief function of montage is that of mirroring this complex life. The multiple form which expresses it must not be chaotic but instead it must be channeled until it makes sense.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, montage allowed Morgan to distill complex subjects, such as the chaos of New York City, into single, albeit multi-layered, compositions. This approach characterized many of her early photomontages. In a 1978 interview Morgan stated this intention, when she noted that in the early montages “component images are used to form elaborate metaphors.” Morgan went on to state that “for purposes of synthesizing a new image, each component image, while still

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Viking, 1979), 180. This statement is somewhat ironic considering the many “straight” photographs that Morgan published in the 1950s. Chapter four will discuss Morgan’s “straight” photographs.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Amico and Stephen Robert Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978), 2. Morgan expanded this notion when she stated, “I always have this sort of a multiple mind’s eye activity going on. And then I’ve always been interested in poetry and metaphor, and I think of photomontage as visual metaphor.” “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues,” 12.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan used the term visual metaphors on more than one occasion including a 1985 interview with Franklin Cameron in which she stated, “my mother had been a school teacher and, loving poetry as she did, taught me to not only hear the words, but to visualize them. My montages were efforts to create visual metaphors, I guess.” Franklin Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” *Petersons Photographic* 13 (March 1985): 36. In a videotaped interview with Thomas Schiff in 1983, Morgan discusses her love of poetry as well. In this interview, she states that for her photomontage is the visual equivalent of poems. *Barbara Morgan*, VHS, Thomas Schiff (Cincinnati: Image Productions, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Photomontage” in *Miniature Camera Work*, ed. Willard Morgan and Henry Lester (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1938), 145. The Morgan family publishing firm changed its name and location several times after 1938.

evoking hints of earlier associations, becomes subordinate to a more elegantly portrayed universal.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, Morgan used each element to compose the montage, yet retained some suggestion of its original meanings. Ultimately, however, Morgan incorporates these elements into the completed montage to elicit a broad theme that still retained a connection to the real world. While her themes may not adhere to her notion of universal meaning, they certainly related to key issues in American life of this era. This is certainly the case with *Spring on Madison Square* as will become apparent through the course of this chapter.

The primary means of creating these montages was an eight-by-ten inch enlarger, on which Morgan arranged multiple negatives to be fused into a single image.<sup>13</sup> She experimented with pasting together montages from printed photographs, but ultimately found that an enlarger created more integrated, polished results.<sup>14</sup> When asked in interviews who or what influenced her to create photomontages, Morgan typically named a wide variety of sources. In her 1964 *Aperture* monograph, Morgan listed many of these together:

There were many other prompting sources for my work in photomontage. I had read Moholy-Nagy’s articles on experimental photography. Long before that, while painting in the desert, I observed and became sensitized to the multiple imagery of mirages and negative after-images. Also, in woodcut technique, the experience of over-printing successive color blocks had taught me to predict the overlays of form and texture from negatives. So when I began to feel the quality of the light-projected images on sensitive paper, it seemed quite natural to make multiple-negative

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<sup>12</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Etna M. Kelley, “Barbara Morgan: Painter Turned Photographer,” *Photography* 6, no. 73 (1938): 1.

compositions through photographic superimposition on the enlarger easel— simply because I had multiple concepts.<sup>15</sup>

To bring together the disparate “concepts” of these montages, Morgan formed a visual rhythm in her work. The sense of rhythm present in her montages often came from an intrinsic understanding of the theme. “Sometimes a form will start to haunt me, something circular, something angular,” Morgan explained, “I get to feeling kinetically in tune to it and then forms that cohere with it begin to come to me.”<sup>16</sup> Examples of this kinetically derived rhythm are numerous, from the play of light and dark in *Third Avenue El With Cars*, 1939 (Figure 1.2) to the fractured, angular design of *Use Litter Basket*, 1943 (Figure 1.3). Early childhood experiences with her father, who waxed poetic about the “dancing atoms” of which all matter was composed, also influenced her sense of rhythm. This led to Morgan’s pursuit of the “invisible life forces within the visible,” from which she believed natural rhythm derived.<sup>17</sup> The belief in the importance of invisible life forces motivated Morgan to accept serendipity as a viable determinant in her choice of subject matter.<sup>18</sup> She would often “find” her subjects through random chance, as was the case with *Spring on Madison Square*.<sup>19</sup> Morgan later recalled that the genesis of this montage occurred while she sorted recently developed negatives of the dancer Erick Hawkins. As she performed this task, she happened to glance out the window and became entranced by the image of Madison Square covered in snow. At this very

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<sup>15</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues,” 12. In a 1981 interview, Morgan described the process of selection as a form of artistic intuition. Robin Holland, “A Life in Movement,” *Darkroom Photography* 3 (1981): 47.

<sup>17</sup> “Discussion with Barbara Morgan,” *Growth of Dance in America*, Summer/Fall 1976: 272.

<sup>18</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Dada and Surrealist artists championed the use of random chance in the period between the two world wars, although Morgan never specifically indicated that either artistic movement influenced her work.

moment, a friend burst into her studio and presented her with tulips declaring, “Don’t worry, it’s Springtime.” This chance intersection of elements coalesced in Morgan’s mind to shape *Spring on Madison Square* and its complex iconography.<sup>20</sup>

It is likely that the development of Morgan’s personal photographic sensibilities were initially engendered, at least in part, by this and other reactions to New York, a city appropriately known for its fast-paced life as well as its kaleidoscopic cityscapes. Furthermore, New York City, a teeming metropolis alive with countless layers of meaning and moments, led Morgan to combine her negatives into photomontages in an effort to capture the multitudinous, fractured visage that the city offered.<sup>21</sup> As she stated, “visual and emotional impacts while photographing New York City in 1935 had turned me to photomontage, for rarely could a single image from the teeming city express the complexity that I felt.”<sup>22</sup> At least initially, the city inspired Morgan, yet its sheer intensity simultaneously overwhelmed her.

Morgan’s aesthetic and emotional reaction to New York is the subject of her earliest published montage, *Third Avenue El*, 1936 (Figure 1.4). A horizontally oriented photograph of Third Avenue shot from underneath an elevated train line fills the lower third of this montage. It is a complex image choked with urban detail. A cursory examination of the photograph yields a line of catenated storefronts that appear to extend infinitely to the horizon, snow-covered sidewalks replete with pedestrians, streets clogged with parked cars, idling trucks that wait as pedestrians traverse a crosswalk, and even a

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<sup>20</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 2-3. Morgan’s 1971 quote from *Image* magazine explaining the conception of *Use Litter Basket* indicates this use of serendipity as well. Barbara Morgan, “My Creative Experience with Photomontage,” *Image* 14, nos. 5-6 (December 1971): 18.

<sup>21</sup> Morgan, “My Creative Experience with Photomontage,” 20.

<sup>22</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 21.

lone, abandoned tricycle. The steel supports of the elevated train line bestride this urban environment. The supporting columns of the structure are interspersed throughout the photograph and the platform above the street creates a natural register upon which a second photograph is situated. This second image, depicting a mass of heavy, riveted girders, seems attached to the lower image with a large bracket. Through the combination of the two photographs, Morgan presents New York as a vertical city. Writing about her early montage work in 1971, she noted that, "...the intake of the New York lifestyle lent itself to the fractured, layered structure of photomontage" especially the "stratas of people, place, mood, and meaning..."<sup>23</sup> This stratification of the city is particularly apparent in this image. The girders, which are likely part of the El superstructure, a bridge, or the skeletal foundation of a building, are shot close-up and thus highly detailed. The viewer instantly recognizes the intense weight of so much metal. This conglomeration of steel beams weighs upon the urban environment in the lower photograph. This arrangement provokes the question: do the steel and glass structures of New York support their inhabitants or do the people of New York support the structures? To tease out this quandary, Morgan overlays a single figure upon the upper photograph of the montage. Jaggedly cut from a different negative, this lone man appears suspended in the air above New York. Is this one man simply observing the frenzied city? Does he represent the isolation inherent even within such a close-quartered environment? In either case, he is out of place, isolated from his fellow pedestrians, and trapped amid the steel exoskeleton of a severe, unyielding environment.

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<sup>23</sup> Morgan, "My Creative Experience with Photomontage," 20.

Isolation and detachment are common threads in many of Morgan's photomontages of this period. In other montages, Morgan paired the theme of isolation with beleaguered, overwhelmed citizens in the city. In a 1953 article for *Aperture* Morgan noted that on any day in New York in the 1930s, one could find a person lost and confused amid the crowds and traffic of the city. Morgan went on to write that a photograph of such an individual could highlight his or her inner panic and bewilderment, by focusing on the "paralyzed stillness" of the individual as compared to the swirling masses of men and machines surrounding him.<sup>24</sup> This type of image appears to be the inspiration for the 1943 photomontage *Use Litter Basket*. Aesthetically, this montage is considerably more dynamic than her work of the 1930s. She presents a fragmented, prismatic view of New York with several large, open voids of blank space. While it is difficult for the viewer to identify an obvious focal point in the image, the man wearing a hat and his doppelganger mirrored in an adjacent storefront window are more prominent than the crowds, pedestrians, windows, or the reversed sign which reads "use litter basket." The montage alludes to the mental state of this man, whose expression manifests displacement, anxiety, and an inability to comprehend the myriad of stimuli surrounding him. His mouth is agape, his brow wrinkles, and his searching eyes are ringed with dark, disquieting flesh. In a 1971 article in *Image* magazine, Morgan explained her inspiration for this montage:

On Forty-Second Street I saw a bewildered soul staring intently into a store window covered with reflections. Impulsively I shot the scene with my Leica and turned away not wanting to intrude, but swinging around, I faced, ironically, a 'Litter Basket' which impulsively, I also shot. For several days this tragic juxtaposition

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<sup>24</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 24.

hovered in my mind, until I related the fragmented images in a single picture to express this unbelonging in a geometric city.<sup>25</sup>

Morgan, perhaps purposely, wrote about “this unbelonging” instead of “his unbelonging.” This lack of specificity leaves open the possibility that she is expressing her own sentiments toward the city as well. In a 1938 article in which Morgan justified her embrace of photography as an artistic medium to journalist Etna Kelley, Morgan explained her first impressions of New York:

We arrived at midnight, and at once I felt the tensile strength of the city, its vertical shafts rooted in stone, so different from the West, where buildings seem to rest lightly on their foundations. There was a challenge for me in New York, and a fascination- I hated it and loved it at the same time. I was intensely conscious of its depths, its great heights, its immense perspectives, flanked by the air spaces above the rivers at each side of Manhattan Island. I felt the conflict between the heroic proportions of the structures as against the people, who were hurried, subordinated, not masters of themselves. And the people, crowds of them threading their way in streams of varying speeds...the contours of the buildings; the precise machine-like quality of the city; its refinement of detail in wire, steel rails and the skeleton of buildings going up; the pattern of steel symbolic of modern construction...<sup>26</sup>

Morgan’s statement could serve as a caption for *Use Litter Basket*, with the inclusion of “immense perspectives,” “air spaces,” and “hurried, subordinated” people presented as “crowds...threading their way in streams of varying speeds.” She also describes the “machine-like quality of the city” and the “pattern of steel symbolic of modern construction” readily apparent in the montage.

This quote also appears to harken back to the notion of “unbelonging in a geometric city” as Morgan wrote in the *Image* article.<sup>27</sup> Thus, her internal view of the

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<sup>25</sup> Morgan, “My Creative Experience with Photomontage,” 18.

<sup>26</sup> Kelley, “Barbara Morgan: Painter Turned Photographer,” 1.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan, “My Creative Experience with Photomontage,” 18.

city evidently remained fairly consistent between 1938 when she spoke with Etna Kelley and 1943 when she fashioned *Use Litter Basket*. Morgan viewed the city as oppressive to its creators. Man is overshadowed by the city, dominated by his own construction. The photomontage presents a fractured, muddled cityscape that defies comprehension. For Morgan, the juxtaposition of the bewildered man and the words “use litter basket” indicate the disposability of the individual in a faceless, uncaring metropolis. To further clarify this point, Morgan placed a cut-out with four tiny people atop the sign. Their diminutive size precludes the viewer from discerning any distinctive, individual characteristics. They are nameless drones, puppets of the city itself. Their placement begs the questions: is the city dispensing orders regarding waste disposal or are these people the waste to be disposed of in the litter basket below them— after being used up and spit out by New York?

The cityscape of New York is also the focus of another photomontage from this era, *Third Avenue El with Cars*, 1939. Unlike *Use Litter Basket*, however, this montage does not present an obvious viewer within the image. In other words, this montage is not about the relationship between one person and the city, but instead about the city as an entity separated from its makers. This montage is visually similar to the *Third Avenue El* montage of 1936. Using a design reminiscent of the earlier montage, the lower third of *Third Avenue El with Cars* again depicts an urban street under an elevated platform of the subway system. However, in this case, Morgan shot the original photograph from the corner where two streets intersect. By shooting from this location and from a vantage point above the street as well, she succeeded in further complicating the space. It is difficult to delineate the sidewalks from the roadways. The people, cars, and columns all



blend together in a natural montage suggestive of the symbiotic relationship of man and machine in the city. Here, the human beings are much less the focus, as is further clarified by the upper two-thirds of the montage. Instead of steel girders above the neighborhood, Morgan placed a series of parked automobiles—sleek, black cars positioned bumper to bumper and cropped on all sides. Through the image as a whole, Morgan suggested a city built for automobiles more than their human occupants. It is an environment more amenable to the needs of machines than mankind. In this sense, the image is certainly critical of the city and could be seen as representative of Morgan's 1964 characterization of modern cities as “machine-smothered, self-obsessed, high-decibel, smog-belts.”<sup>28</sup>

The idea of the cityscape as a montage clearly interested Morgan at this time. This was apparent in several of the straight photographs used in the photomontages described above. However, she also published two unmanipulated, single-negative photographs that depicted the city as a series of integrated, montaged layers: *Macy's Window*, 1939 (Figure 1.5), which will be subsequently discussed, and *Kleenex*, 1940 (Figure 1.6). She called these photographs “natural photomontages.”<sup>29</sup>

Morgan shot *Kleenex* through a corner window display that exhibits a complex, nearly Cubist pyramid of Kleenex boxes with a lone mannequin head near the center of the photograph. Through the window, we see blurry pedestrians walking down the street. Yet, the size and scale of the major elements of this image remain distorted, the pedestrians seeming to blend in with the boxes of Kleenex. As a whole, the photograph suggests a collage of products and people. The humans are depicted as no more

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<sup>28</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Holland, “Life in Movement,” 47.

important than the disposable tissues, a theme Morgan explored in *Use Litter Basket* as well. By shooting this image through the storefront windows, Morgan produced an eerie, ghost-like quality that intensifies the overall lack of specificity. The photograph seems to ask: is the city the home of mankind or of its products?

*City Shell*, a photomontage from 1938 (Figure 1.7), also considers the question of what type of home humanity designed for itself in New York. Morgan specified her ideas for this montage in 1980 when she wrote:

In New York, 1937, I was looking from my fourth story studio window, admiring the ‘new’ Empire State Building, which was then an heroic symbol of ‘modern man’; when a friend came in with a beautiful shell which we placed on the window ledge. Suddenly, seeing the Empire State Building and shell simultaneously, I thought: ‘this shell is also a Habitat!– the rhythmical creation of an anonymous architect!’ So, I was instantly inspired to create the photomontage and to counterplay the shell with the geometric Empire State Building– which I turned upside down because I felt that the primitive shell will outlive our man-made skyscrapers.<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned above, the background of the montage consists of the Empire State Building– a stark, angular building rendered dark and foreboding. It is shot from below and at an oblique angle reminiscent of Constructivist photography. Superimposed on the photograph of the building is a white shell.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, an image of five pedestrians overlays the shell. The photomontage clearly juxtaposes the shell and the building in order to highlight the new geometry humanity has imposed on the world. While nature prefers spirals and undulating lines, as indicated by the shell and the paths of the pedestrians, mankind has nonetheless created a stark geometry of perpendicular angles.

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), np.

<sup>31</sup> This shell appears to be a whelk, probably a pear whelk or *busycon spiratum*, a member of the class gastropoda and the family melongenidae. Kenneth Wye, *The Encyclopedia of Shells* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 161.

Yet, there is more to this image. The shell once served as home to a mollusk. This creature produced the shell much as mankind built the edifices of the city as a means of protection and security. Years later, after the sea creature has long since perished, the shell remains. Morgan thereby suggests that the legacy of mankind is not only art and literature, economics and philosophy, but also the structures of our cities that were constructed with materials intended to outlast their creators.

Once Morgan conceived *City Shell*, the process of creating it was rather intense.

In 1938, Etna Kelley described how Morgan brought her idea to fruition:

The shell, of course, was carefully chosen from many that were inspected and discarded. The vertical shot of the Empire State Building was made from the centre of New York's busiest thoroughfare, Fifth Avenue, under the momentary protection of a traffic policeman who shielded her from passing automobiles. To get the line of pedestrians in proper formation, she spent a morning perched precariously on a projection, a sort of 'cow-catcher' jutting out one flight above the street, on the Flatiron Building. She felt that her vigil was worthwhile when several people on the sidewalk below her fit into the pattern she had hoped for, at the time of day when their shadows were at the proper angle to match the lighting of the shell photograph.<sup>32</sup>

Like so much of the work from this period in Morgan's career, this montage also deals with the Great Depression. In 1964, Morgan described her conceptualization of *City Shell* this way:

In the Depression I had made shots of the triumphant Empire State Building, which somehow seemed ironic when confronted with jobless people walking the streets. On my studio window sill lay some crystals, fossils, and shells, which I unconsciously studied when I looked down through the window pane at the wandering men out of work.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kelley, "Barbara Morgan: Painter Turned Photographer," 1.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 22.

In reading this passage, it becomes apparent that Morgan considered this montage in terms of Depression-era New York.

Morgan also considered the economic plight of New York in the natural montage *Macy's Window*, 1939. This photograph evokes the work of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century French photographer Eugène Atget and others who used the play of light and reflection on shop windows to conceive otherworldly spaces. Like Atget, Morgan utilizes multiple layers of space in the image including the sidewalk, the store window, the mannequin, the products just inside the window, and the reflection of the buildings across the street. Yet, she employs this visual multiplicity differently than Atget and those he directly influenced. At the left edge of *Macy's Window* stands a single woman, a spectator. She looks directly at the scene that the viewer beholds, although from a slightly different angle. By placing this woman in the lower left corner of the image, Morgan marginalizes her role in it. As in many of her New York montages, Morgan uses this natural conflation of visual layers to suggest a chaotic, inhospitable city. Yet, there are underlying economic factors at work as well.

The woman is physically separated from these goods by the store window, which in Morgan's photograph likely acts as a metaphor for the current economic downturn. It is feasible that like so many New Yorkers during the Depression, this spectator can wistfully consider the items on display, but is unable to purchase them.<sup>34</sup> She wears a handsome, black coat with a fur collar, but stares solemnly at the latest fashions that likely exceed her current means. The enticements of the city tempt the woman, but the city does not provide ample lucrative employment to guarantee the attainment of such

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<sup>34</sup> Curtis Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, 1988), 17.

products by any but a few of New York's inhabitants. In this sense, this photograph is specifically representative of Depression-era New York.

By the time Morgan arrived in New York in 1930, the Great Depression was already taking shape. The stock market had crashed less than a year before, in October 1929, and market losses continued to mount with each following year. By June 1932, stocks were worth only fifteen percent of their value from September, 1929.<sup>35</sup> The direct effect that the market economy had on the populace as a whole was astounding. In 1930, 150,000 Americans lost their homes to foreclosure. The next year, an additional 200,000 homes were surrendered. In 1932, the number of foreclosed homes increased to 250,000. Overall, by February of 1933, more than half of all homeowners in the United States had defaulted on their mortgages, which led to the eviction of over one thousand American families from their homes each day due to foreclosure proceedings.<sup>36</sup> The winter of 1932 represented a low point in American economic history. Due to financial and agricultural collapse, between fifty and sixty million Americans, out of a population of approximately 126 million, lived in a state of poverty.<sup>37</sup> One in four workers remained unemployed and many workers who did manage to retain their jobs had their hours and pay severely cut.<sup>38</sup> Nine million people lost their life savings.<sup>39</sup> In turn, the nation was thoroughly disheartened. Prior to the Depression, the dominant belief among the middle and upper classes held that poverty resulted from personal faults such as laziness, drunkenness, or

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<sup>35</sup> Ronald Edsforth, *The New Deal: America's Response to the Great Depression* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Bernice Cohen, *The Edge of Chaos: Financial Booms, Bubbles, Crashes and Chaos* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1997), 277.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

hedonism. Yet, at the height of the Depression, many formerly middle class citizens found themselves in a state of poverty and were confused because they did not believe that they exhibited these weaknesses. In 1933, three out of every ten new applicants for public assistance in New York were unemployed white-collar workers.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary sociologists emphasized the psychological damage on wage-earners who had never before been unemployed.<sup>41</sup>

The winter of 1932-33 was a transitional period in political history as well. This four-month period marked Herbert Hoover's defeat in his bid for a second term as President of the United States and witnessed preparations for Franklin D. Roosevelt to take office. Due to the economic, social, and political uncertainty of the period, many citizens abandoned their faith in the government. Americans lost their respect for legal authority, causing the incidence of petty thievery and looting to rise precipitously. Mass actions such as strikes, anti-eviction riots, hunger marches, and seizures of public buildings grew common, and the police often responded by gassing or shooting unarmed participants. Attempted assassinations, lynch mobs, and vigilante actions added to the violence of the era. In the eyes of many, it appeared that the United States had reached its breaking point.<sup>42</sup> American cities largely bore the brunt of the unemployed masses, and New York City was particularly hard hit.<sup>43</sup> Wrote one visiting British politician in

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<sup>40</sup> Edsforth, *New Deal*, 80.

<sup>41</sup> New York social worker and reformer Lillian Ward noted that, "the loss of home, of ties, of position, the humiliation of bread lines, the appeal to relief agencies" all contributed to "the overwhelming sense of failure" felt by these workers who lost their jobs. *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Historian Roger Biles compiles anecdotes such as, "Boston authorities reported that men with self-inflicted gunshot wounds sought refuge from the cold in hospitals and jails. Even those people fortunate enough to retain jobs, homes and financial security saw around themselves the unmistakable reminders of the cities worsening condition. As one Chicagoan wrote movingly of the city's plight, 'You can ride across

1932, “those gray-faced, shambling men, standing about in serried rows and groups, had never been there, looking like that...listlessly parked against the walls, blocking the sidewalks....”<sup>44</sup> Morgan encountered this atmosphere just as she was settling into New York life.

However, the winter of 1932-33 also represented a turning point in the Depression. Just as the situation became most grim, Roosevelt took office and inaugurated a massive program of change. On March 4, 1933, Roosevelt gave his inauguration speech in which he declared, “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”<sup>45</sup> In this same speech, he announced the inception of the New Deal. In the spring of 1933, Roosevelt launched his famed “Hundred Days,” which brought a degree of hope, if not direct improvement, to the U.S. economy and the plight of many American citizens.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note that after the first 100 days, Roosevelt continued to enact legislation to improve the national economy. He created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by an executive order on May 6, 1935, with 1.4 billion dollars earmarked for relief employment. Eventually the WPA spent 11.4 billion dollars and at

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the lovely Michigan Avenue Bridge at midnight...while twenty feet below you, on the lower level of the same bridge, are 2,000 homeless, decrepit, shivering, and starving men, wrapping themselves in old newspapers to keep from freezing, and lying down in the manure dust to sleep’.” Roger Biles, *A New Deal for the American People* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 207.

<sup>44</sup> Rick Beard, ed., *On Being Homeless: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 1987), 145.

<sup>45</sup> Edsforth, *New Deal*, 6-7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. During the first 100 days of his presidency, Roosevelt closed all the banks in the nation and declared a national bank holiday for four days, while banking reforms could be put in place. He began the process of repealing Prohibition. He founded the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which employed 275,000 young men initially and eventually blossomed to 500,000 positions. In his most direct act to aid Americans, Roosevelt also signed an emergency relief bill, the Federal Emergency Act, which distributed five million dollars within the Hundred Days and gave license to create the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, which was intended to distribute 500 million dollars in direct cash grants to city and state work relief projects. In total, fourteen major pieces of legislation passed in 100 days. Taken together, an immediate positive effect was attained. James Olson, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the New Deal* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 177.

its peak employed 3.3 million people.<sup>47</sup> Although the WPA is well known for its affiliated programs that served to aid artists, seventy-seven percent of the money spent by the WPA funded large-scale building and construction projects.<sup>48</sup> These vast public works projects changed the face of New York and other cities across the nation. Despite these attempts to aid the U.S. economy, recovery was by no means complete. Massive numbers of citizens still required some form of assistance, particularly in New York.

In March 1936, over 1.5 million people (twenty percent of the city's population) received some form of public relief.<sup>49</sup> A 1936 count estimated 13,000 homeless people living in New York. Two years later, the number reached between 16,000 and 18,000.<sup>50</sup> Shantytowns appeared in Central Park, Riverside Park, and along the East River.<sup>51</sup> The largest of these improvised communities stretched for a mile and a half along the Hudson River on Manhattan's Upper West Side.<sup>52</sup>

The suffering of New York City and the nation as a whole was made worse by Roosevelt's actions in 1937 when he tried to reverse the large debt amassed by the United

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<sup>47</sup> Olson, *Historical Dictionary of the New Deal*, 548-49.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy Ellen Rose, *Put To Work: Relief Programs in the Great Depression* (New York: Monthly Review, 1994), 104. Eight and a half million Americans who received wages from the WPA worked on labor intensive public works projects including: 639,000 miles of roads and streets; 31,000 miles of sidewalks; 122,000 bridges; 1,000 tunnels; 1,050 airfields; 68,000 buildings including schools, hospitals, firehouses, and airport buildings among others; 8,300 stadiums and athletic fields; 12,800 playgrounds; and a vast network of water and sewer systems including 19,700 miles of water mains and 24,000 miles of sewers and storm drains. Edsforth, 225-26. Through Willard Morgan's employment with Leica and other commissions and endeavors, the Morgans did not suffer serious financial problems during the Depression and Barbara Morgan never sought employment from the WPA. The rampant sexism of the WPA may have factored into her decision as well. Only seventeen percent of the WPA workforce was female, compared to twenty-five percent of the workforce as a whole. Furthermore, the WPA paid women significantly lower wages than it paid their male counterparts. *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Beard, *On Being Homeless*, 145.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* On a single night, October 3, 1935, the police attempted to count the number of homeless in New York and found 4,044 men "sleeping in subway stations and trains, in parks, and under bridges." Six months later they expanded their search and found 5,823 men in a single night. *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>52</sup> Edsforth, *New Deal*, 83.



States government. He ordered vast reductions in work relief programs in an effort to eliminate the deficit of the coming fiscal year. Roosevelt believed this would demonstrate the success of the New Deal and effectively end recovery efforts. Instead, it caused another steep economic downturn. By March 1938, another four million Americans had filed for unemployment benefits.<sup>53</sup> Within a month, Roosevelt realized his folly and in a fireside chat on April 14, he declared it the responsibility of the government “to create an economic upturn” by increasing government borrowing and spending in an attempt to trigger private investment.<sup>54</sup> Roosevelt then asked Congress for three billion dollars to go to the WPA and other agencies. Congress eventually approved the bill for the full amount requested plus 100 million dollars more.<sup>55</sup> The year 1938 saw the greatest rise in WPA positions since its inception, from approximately 1.5 million positions in late 1937 to 3.3 million in November of 1938.<sup>56</sup> After a brief slump, the American economy began to improve once again and Americans were elated.<sup>57</sup> During this transitional period, specifically November or December of 1938, Morgan created *Spring on Madison Square*.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 163-64. Roosevelt popularized the term “recession” to distinguish this economic collapse from the previous larger one. Ibid., 152.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>55</sup> Biles, *New Deal for the American People*, 146-47.

<sup>56</sup> The staggering figure of 3.3 million represents the largest number of workers employed by the WPA at any one time. Rose, *Put to Work*, 96-97.

<sup>57</sup> Historian Ronald Edsforth states that many historians today note that original New Deal policies were not totally successful and that only World War II brought an end to the Depression. Nonetheless, due to an increase in the Gross National Product and a corresponding upswing in employment figures, most Americans saw the latter half of 1938 as a period of recovery. Edsforth, *New Deal*, 166-67.

<sup>58</sup> I established this date based on three salient points of information. First, Morgan dated *Spring on Madison Square*, 1938, thus no other years need to be considered. Second, when Morgan described how the idea for this montage came to her, she noted that she was cataloguing images of Erick Hawkins, the dancer portrayed in the montage. Since the image comes from *American Document*, Hawkins joined Graham’s dance troupe in June, and *American Document* premiered only two months later on August 6, 1938, then the montage would have been created after June, 1938. Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham*:

Later in life, Morgan often discussed the way in which she witnessed the Depression. In a 1979 interview, Morgan referred to the horrors of seeing “these desperate people sitting in the gutters of Madison Square.”<sup>59</sup> In another example from her 1964 monograph, Morgan attempted to compare what she saw in New York to the poverty she witnessed in her California youth. She wrote that “Day after day men out of work shuffled listlessly through Madison Square. In the west, I had witnessed dire poverty... [but] not the claustrophobic, spiritual poverty of the city breadlines in a machine world.”<sup>60</sup> The imagery in this quote is reminiscent of the photograph of Madison Square that Morgan used as the foundation for *Spring on Madison Square*. Interchangeable figures monotonously shuffle through the snow, struggling to keep their footing.<sup>61</sup> Morgan not only cultivated an allusion to the Depression, she also portrayed a specific site highly indicative of the type of suffering endemic to the nation in the 1930s.

Due to Madison Square’s central location, its residents witnessed much of the squalor of the Depression. In 1930, two annexes were added to the Municipal Lodging House on East 25<sup>th</sup> Street, which could hold 1,712 lodgers. The Municipal Lodging

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*Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 156. Finally, in the same statement, she noted that when the idea for the montage came to her, she was looking out the window at a snow-covered Madison Square. New York City saw no snowfall between June and October 1938. Not until November 1938 did snow again fall in New York City. Twelve and a half inches of snow fell in November and 1.1 inches fell in December. United States Weather Bureau, *Monthly Weather Calendars and Miscellaneous Weather Facts for New York City (1871-1949)* (1950), np. Thus, Morgan must have created *Spring on Madison Square* in either November or December of 1938. Interestingly, this initially appears to deviate from her recollection of the montage’s roots in which she claimed a friend had entered her studio and said “Don’t worry, it’s Springtime.” It also conflicts with the notion that this montage was created between the cusp of winter and spring. Two plausible scenarios explain these conflicts. First, perhaps her friend’s statement was intended to suggest that she was bringing a touch of spring into the studio with the tulips, not that it was actually the season of spring. Second, Morgan likely intended the montage to be metaphoric, not literal. Therefore, it was not necessary for Morgan to create the montage near the end of the winter in any literal sense.

<sup>59</sup> “Dramatizing the Dance– Interview with Barbara Morgan,” *Dance Life*, 1979: 42.

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> A similar effect is achieved with the pedestrians in *City Shell*.

House provided twenty-one percent of the lodging and seventy-eight percent of the meals served to the homeless by New York City.<sup>62</sup> This location was less than one mile east of Madison Square. About one mile north of Madison Square, Bryant Park often served as the locus of poverty-stricken men gathered in search of inexpensive nourishment from the One Cent Restaurant. Morgan's photograph of Madison Square, with its lines of citizens trudging through the snow, appears to mimic the orderly bread lines that snaked through Bryant Park and other locations throughout the city.

The inclusion of a specified location in *Spring on Madison Square* remained unique among Morgan's photomontages of the period. While the other montages incorporate unidentified views of the city, *Spring on Madison Square* utilizes the vista from Morgan's studio.<sup>63</sup> This is the way she saw New York on a daily basis. I would argue that for Morgan, Madison Square, especially covered in snow and slush, was not only a synecdoche for the whole of New York City, but more importantly for Depression-era New York City. As she stated, "we all pontificate from our personal frames of reference," and for her this was New York City during the Great Depression.<sup>64</sup> Specifically, her frame of reference was her the view of Madison Square.

The photograph of Madison Square that Morgan used for *Spring On Madison Avenue* serves as an icon of the latter years of the Depression and is symbolic of Morgan's view of Depression-era New York not only in terms of location, but in other

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<sup>62</sup> Beard, *On Being Homeless*, 145, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Morgan's husband built the studio for her in 1935, a few years after the couple moved to the eastern seaboard. Morgan maintained this studio for six years. Deschin, "Permanence Through Perseverance," 23. Her studio was located at 10 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street on the fourth floor, so she shot northwest to the corner of East 23<sup>rd</sup> and Madison Avenue, which defines the southeast corner of Madison Square.

<sup>64</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 9.

ways as well.<sup>65</sup> The weather acts as a metaphor for the cold economic climate. The accumulation of snow, through which the figures struggle, represents the many oppressions of economic hardship. The photograph of the dancer presents a strong contrast to this imagery. Fervent, proud, and majestic, he strides forward. As Morgan stated,

I felt that in the anguish of that period there wasn't enough jobs or confidence or hope and I began to see it in these dancers who were barely scraping along. They had no money. They were doing something they believed in. They were giving out joy, confidence, hope. Here was something human, something warm, something dedicative. They were giving out to the people and I began to photograph them.<sup>66</sup>

This image of the dancer resonates with hope and confidence for the future. Dance became the intersection between Morgan's negative feelings toward the deprivation, suffering, and detachment she witnessed in New York and the optimism she believed art could instill.<sup>67</sup> In Morgan's own words, "I present [the photographs] for all people who care for dance; and who find in these images something of man's struggle for freedom."<sup>68</sup> It is important to note that New York was recognized as the capital of modern dance in the United States. As *the* location for dance, it represented the point of interchange between the Depression and dance. In dance Morgan found the embodiment of many of the positive themes she wished to portray at this time.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> While Morgan fashioned six montages before 1940 that depict New York during the Great Depression, it is *Spring on Madison Square* that seems to best represent her overall view of the period as represented by her quotes about the era in numerous interviews. These quotes are interspersed throughout this chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 7. Chapter two presents a thorough analysis of Morgan's dance photographs and her relationship with Martha Graham.

In 1935, just as she was settling into life in New York, Morgan began to attend Martha Graham's dance performances.<sup>70</sup> Soon after, Morgan and Graham met and a friendship quickly developed that would last six decades.<sup>71</sup> The period during which Morgan and Graham met corresponded to an era of fertile growth in the latter's career. In the late 1930s and the early 1940s, her choreography shifted from an inward focus that concentrated on the world of dance itself to a more nationalistic current.

With martial conflicts growing in Europe and the shift away from radicalism, Graham was among a large group of American artists who sought refuge in the concept of an American identity.<sup>72</sup> *American Document*, a modern dance ensemble piece that premiered August 6, 1938 in Bennington, Vermont, particularly characterized this shift in tone.<sup>73</sup> Graham conceived the performance much like a popular minstrel show. Each section represented a different period of American history and was treated like an act.<sup>74</sup> The performance opened with the "walk around," during which all the characters paraded across the stage. The "walk around" was repeated between each section to distinguish clearly the four episodes of the piece: Indian, Puritan, Emancipation, and the present day. A speaker on stage read lines from various documents including the Declaration of

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<sup>70</sup> Morgan had been working with photomontage for approximately six months before she started the series of Martha Graham dance photographs. Barbara Morgan, interview by Jean Tucker, October 17, 1979, original tape copied to a compact disk, Collection of the University of Missouri, Columbia. While many assume that the dance work was as or more important than the photomontages to Morgan, she stated otherwise on at least two occasions. In a 1938 interview with Etna Kelley, Morgan called photomontage her preferred medium and the dance photographs came second. Kelley, "Barbara Morgan: Painter Turned Photographer," 2. This view would not change with time either. In a 1979 interview, Morgan stated "people always make a big deal about the dance photographs, but the photomontages are really a deeper part of me." Suzanne DeChillo, "Barbara Morgan: The Photographer of the Dance," *New York Times*, January 14, 1979.

<sup>71</sup> Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>73</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 156.

<sup>74</sup> Don McDonagh, *Martha Graham, A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 134.

Independence, a letter from Red Jacket of the Seneca, Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," Jonathan Edwards' sermons, the "Song of Songs," and Walt Whitman's poems. The lines were intended to aid the audience in following the theme of each component.<sup>75</sup> *American Document* attempted to establish an American sensibility in dance while simultaneously striving to attract the American public. Graham intended to create a hybrid of drama and dance, something the public could understand and appreciate readily.<sup>76</sup> By presenting a compressed social history of the United States, she hoped that audiences would relate to the subject matter and thus the piece as a whole. Furthermore, through a display of patriotism, Graham aspired to change American opinion about the position of dance in public entertainment.<sup>77</sup> She wished for dance to become a genre of entertainment that appealed to the masses. In this endeavor, she largely succeeded. By her third national tour in 1939, *American Document* had won not only critical acclaim, but the praise of audiences as well.<sup>78</sup>

Patriotism and a nationalist agenda were not the only innovations in *American Document*, however. As scholar Ernestine Stodelle notes, this piece also displayed a raw sexuality with its inclusion of a male dancer and intimate sequences between the lead male and female dancers.<sup>79</sup> This was Graham's first performance to include a male

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<sup>75</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> McDonagh, *Martha Graham*, 134-35.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>78</sup> Franko, *Dancing Modernism*, 69. For the next decade many choreographers and companies tried to repeat Graham's success with similarly patriotic fare, though inevitably they did not meet with the same level of success. McDonagh, *Martha Graham*, 135.

<sup>79</sup> Ernestine Stodelle, *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham* (New York: Schirmer, 1984), 106-7.

dancer, which was a revolutionary change for her company.<sup>80</sup> The male dancer who appeared in *American Document* was Erick Hawkins, the same dancer whose confident, striding profile is presented in Morgan's 1938 montage, *Spring on Madison Square*. Hawkins arrived at the rehearsal space for Graham's dance company as the troupe worked on a nearly complete version of *American Document*. Enthralled by Graham's modern dance techniques, he requested a small role in the piece. Although the loose framework of *American Document* would have allowed Graham to create a small part for Hawkins without any major changes to the work as a whole, she instead decided to revise the entire piece and gave him the co-leading role.<sup>81</sup> This action fostered discontent among many of the female dancers. Not only were they openly annoyed that Hawkins received a principal role shortly after joining the group, while other dancers had been members of the company for over ten years, but several other objections surfaced from the dancers and critics as well. First, Hawkins came from the enemy camp, ballet. Second, he was assertively male in an otherwise female dance company and in several scenes he was essentially nude aside from small shorts or tight pants. Finally, he asserted a sexuality that many dancers and critics considered inappropriate for dance.<sup>82</sup>

Given these circumstances, the fact that Morgan chose a photograph of Hawkins to place in *Spring on Madison Square* definitely appears meaningful. On the most basic level, Morgan asserted her support of Graham's inclusion of a male dancer, regardless of the criticism he incurred. However, Morgan's decision was much more complex. She likely intended to introduce into her montage the raw sexuality that Hawkins brought to

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<sup>80</sup> Franko, *Dancing Modernism*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> McDonagh, *Martha Graham*, 132.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

his performance. Sexuality is definitely a part of spring, when the world of nature procreates and the cycle of life is begun anew. Without the male dancer in the montage, the suggestion of reproduction would be fruitless. Hawkins appears muscular, young, and in the prime of his life. He represents hope for the future— a hope that generations will succeed him and life will go on, which is the very essence of the season of spring. But, it is not merely his idealized body that suggests hope for the future, but it is the particular dance he is performing as well. Morgan chose a photograph from the final section of Graham's *American Document*, which not only affirms the role of democracy in the United States, but also expresses confidence in the future of our country.<sup>83</sup> Hawkins, the dancer, represents all Americans as an icon of patriotism who Americans can venerate as an exemplar of their country's values. In Morgan's book, *Martha Graham, Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, the photograph of Hawkins from *American Document*, the same one she utilized for *Spring on Madison Square*, is accompanied by the following text placed beneath the photograph,

This is one man...  
this is one million men...  
this man has a power. It is himself, and you...<sup>84</sup>

The power of this one man to affirm democracy needed to be unquestionable, and the strong presence and opinions of Erick Hawkins made him perfect for this role. The erudite Hawkins graduated from Harvard before entering Balanchine's School of American Ballet. However, he abandoned ballet in favor of modern dance the same year that he joined Graham's company, claiming he needed the freedom that only modern

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>84</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 136.



dance permitted.<sup>85</sup> His strong personality eventually led him to establish his own school and his own philosophy of dance that he would call the “normative ideal.”<sup>86</sup> The rhythm of movement as a positive force for humanity strongly influenced Hawkins’ dance. This idea facilitated a strong connection to Graham’s ideas of dance and Morgan’s ideas about art, especially as evinced in *Spring on Madison Square*.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, the specific pose Morgan chose to highlight in her montage is important as well. Hawkins danced several roles throughout *American Document* and Morgan shot many photographs of the dancer in a variety of poses. Yet, she preferred this specific pose: Hawkins striding forward, moving through both space and time. In this movement the image of Hawkins connects with the image of Madison Square. Whereas the pedestrians slog slowly and uncertainly through the wintry mire that simultaneously represents winter in New York and a metaphor for the Great Depression, Hawkins presses forward actively and exuberantly as the embodiment of the season of spring. He makes forward progress toward an uncertain future, but one that his presence, the connotation of which is established in the dance, suggests will be meritorious and hopeful. Hawkins distills the act of walking into a singular dance step, and simultaneously transforms the quotidian toil of treading through the snow into an act of joy and perseverance. The unassuming fence of Madison Square could be seen as a musical score, providing the rhythm and tune for this dance of modern life in the urban city. Thus, motion, in the way of dance, becomes a potent element of the montage for both the dancer and the pedestrians.

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<sup>85</sup> Katharine Sprague, “A Portrait of Erick Hawkins” (master’s thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1989), 6.

<sup>86</sup> The normative ideal involved the conception of natural movement in dance. *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

*Spring on Madison Square* was not the only photomontage of the period in which Morgan utilized dance imagery. In *Protest*, 1940 (Figure 1.8), we see the body of a single male dancer, ebulliently leaping over an urban crowd gathered in New York. This crowd appears to consist of two groups of citizens. One group marches in a loose formation that varies between five and six men across on the right side of the photograph. Near the end of this line, one man holds a tri-colored flag that may represent France, while another man holds a banner.<sup>88</sup> The second group of people is tightly packed together on the left side of the image and seems to be watching the procession. The exact nature of the event is unclear, however the title suggests that the crowd is demonstrating for some undetermined cause. For Morgan, the specific nature of the event is of lesser importance. Instead, this photograph likely exemplifies freedom and hope for the artist. By combining this photograph with the image of the dancer's uninhibited motion, Morgan suggests freedom of spirit, freedom of thought, freedom of movement, and freedom of assembly simultaneously—qualities she considered vital for struggling Americans. This montage indicates Morgan's support for the inherent right of Americans to protest, whether through street demonstrations or on the stage. Morgan described the pioneers of modern dance as "often nearly starving," like many Americans during the Depression. Yet, as she goes on to say, "they never gave up, but forged life-affirming dance statements of American society in stress and strain."<sup>89</sup> In other words, modern dance indirectly protested the indignities inflicted upon mankind in this difficult era through metaphorical performances that nonetheless offered hope for a better future.

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<sup>88</sup> In 1940, the United States had still not declared its official position on the growing war in Europe. In this same year, German forces completed their occupation of France. It is feasible that this protest was instigated by some aspect of the developing war in Europe.

<sup>89</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 14.

Thus, she held up modern dancers as models for all Americans. Here, she directly connects the people and modern dance in a single image as the arc formed by the legs of the dancer mirrors the arc of a parade of protesting citizens as they march past the crowd. It is movement as much as ideology that links these seemingly disparate images.

Morgan used a similar device to link the elements of *Spring on Madison Square*. This brumal narrative largely unfolds with the aid of a dark-room trick: the doubling of the image of the pedestrians heightens the sense of motion. By exposing the negative of Madison Square twice, and out of register, each image appears to represent a different moment in time. The silhouetted, darkened figures at the bottom of the montage appear next to their lighter, translucent, and seemingly transitory doubles. This creates the illusion that the figures move through space as one would see in the frames of a motion picture or in a time-lapse photograph. Through darkroom savvy, the pedestrians assume varying speeds, from a fast clip to a careful, plodding crawl. Thus, there is a sizeable gulf between the figures at the bottom left and their doubles, while those at the bottom right appear only slightly blurred, as if they are moving much more slowly. Morgan likely achieved this effect by turning the negative clockwise before exposing the image a second time. She utilized this technique on several occasions in her depictions of dance.<sup>90</sup> The less solid, transitional figures represent the past, where the pedestrians were located moments before. The darker figures represent the present, or where they are now. The space between the two represents the time that has passed and establishes a sense of motion. Thus, the moving pedestrians are rhymed with the dancer striding forward to produce a potent connection between these two elements of the montage.

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<sup>90</sup> In her dance images Morgan typically captured the dancer in two different positions on a single negative via double exposure, rather than exposing the same negative twice. Chapter two extensively discusses the use of double-exposure in Morgan's dance photographs.

The disparate elements of the montage including the Depression-era photograph of Madison Square, the image of Erick Hawkins, and the sense of motion that establishes the rhythm of the montage are all linked by the photogram of the tulips and stamens. Formally and compositionally, the tulips link the two primary elements. The graceful arabesque of the lower tulip becomes an extension of the line established by the Madison Square fence, as the tulip snakes across the space of the dancer. Furthermore, the snow and trees of Madison Square are incorporated into the image of the tulips, allowing the atmosphere of Madison Square to seep through the picture into the dancer, uniting these two incongruent images. These flowers are not strictly formal elements, however. They can be read as the conclusion to the montage's narrative—the arrival of spring. One tulip, with its bud still closed, prepares to open. The fully opened second flower has reached the height of its botanical maturity. This is the state in which a tulip will reproduce, as it opens to expose its reproductive organs. Below the opening tulip, three stamens represent this floral reproduction, the hallmark of springtime activity. The yearly cycle of flowers form a natural rhythm, which Morgan noted in an interview when she stated, “to the elastic mind there is a great urge to grow in the new rhythm of things, to unfold and flower from the soil and seed of our own time.”<sup>91</sup> These tulips present rhythm both through their formal portrayal as well as the natural cycles that determine their growth.

*Spring on Madison Square* presents a more complex iconography, however, in that the tulips are but one element in the overall narrative. Morgan formally links these tulips and their reproductive organs to the dancer. The upper tulip blossoms across his chest, just as his dance step reaches its fruition, while the three stamens are formally

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<sup>91</sup> Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan*, 10

rhymed with the dancer's fingers. As Beverly Seaton notes in *The Language of Flowers*, the tulip often represents a declaration of love in Western literature and art.<sup>92</sup> *Spring on Madison Square* thereby presents multiple incantations of love: the dancer's love of movement; the artist's love (and hope) for humanity; the love that springtime brings, when, traditionally, the thoughts of young and old alike turn to romance; and finally the notion of love as a prerequisite for reproduction. In addition, white flowers often signify purity in Western culture, a notion that fits well with the uncensored spirit of the dancer whom Morgan presents.<sup>93</sup> The connection between love, hope, and springtime has been used in poetry and literature throughout the history of written language, and the iconography of *Spring on Madison Square* mirrors this trend.<sup>94</sup>

The tulips are merely the finale in a complex dance in three acts. Born of the deprivation, yet determination, of the Depression as represented by the men and women who trudge through the snow and ice of Madison Square, this first act transitions to the ebullient dancer. Youthful and energetic, he leaps across the landscape signaling change and hope. The outcome of his dance, his hope, and his strength are the budding blossoms of spring as represented by the tulips. These flowers signal florescent virtue and the promise of a better tomorrow. The Depression will end, all of our hard work and suffering will be repaid. This is the message of *Spring on Madison Square*, an auspicious message for the future of the United States, a message of hope for a country that has suffered greatly.

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<sup>92</sup> Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 196-97.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>94</sup> While nineteenth century literature is particularly rife with such imagery, the legacy of connecting love, hope, and springtime has a strong history in western literature. Such allusions are present at least as early as the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter and continue through the sonnets of Shakespeare among others.

Ultimately, *Spring on Madison Square* is the most personal of all the montages Morgan created between 1936 and 1945. It presents her own view of New York during the Great Depression as seen from her private workspace. It utilizes a negative from the dance photography that dominated her artistic output during this period. The photograph of dance she chose for the montage highlights the sense of motion that fascinated Morgan during this period. And the tulips not only represent the realms of nature and science that Morgan had explored since her youth, they also typify the beauty with which she chose to surround herself during the hardship of this historical era. Therefore, each component of the montage is not only a separate act in an overall theatrical allegory of hope, but each element is also a personal reference for Barbara Morgan as an American, as an intellectual, and as an artist.

## Chapter Two: The Dance Photographs

Alone in a night-darkened field, a single flower, as pure and white as it is delicate, sways gently in the wind as it blossoms in the light of the moon. A complex, multi-faceted white abstraction stands out against a backdrop of dark grays and blacks. A woman dressed in a flowing white gown is trapped within a frame; she pushes and struggles to expand the space, to create room to move and breathe. An elegant dancer, enshrouded in flowing white silk, spins her body into a complex pose that she holds momentarily for an unseen camera.

These are but a few of the many possible descriptions of Barbara Morgan's 1940 photograph *Letter to the World (Swirl)* (Figure 2.1), a photograph with several plausible connotations. On the most basic level, the photograph presents the viewer with an image of the dancer Martha Graham sustaining an intricate pose from her 1940 dance *Letter to the World*. She contorts her body and costume so as to emphasize both the vertical and the horizontal axes of the pose. From her right hand, lifted high above her head, down to her planted right leg, Graham creates a smooth arc along the contour of her body. The contrast between the black backdrop and the white costume tightly fitted to her right arm and her waist highlights the upper segment of this arc. Below her torso, the folding and the twisting fabric of her costume furthers this line. Simultaneously, as she bends her entire form to her left, she also raises her left foot to the level of her right thigh and contorts her left arm backwards so as to rest the side of her left elbow on her left knee. This is all executed as she spins her body clockwise on her right foot. Yet, it is her costume that captures this gesture as her body appears immobile in the photograph. The

centrifugal force of her turn unfurls her long white skirt and produces a semi-circle of white material that emphasizes the horizontal plane.

This complex pose presents a multitude of contrasts. The smoothness of the twirling material to the left of Graham's body contrasts the silky folds where the fabric encircles her leg and waist. Her smooth sculpted bodice contrasts the flexures of her gravity-bound sleeves, just as the smoothness of the milky skin of Graham's face contrasts the furrows of the skin on her neck as the muscles and tendons are pulled taut. The pure white of Graham's dress emerges from the inky blackness of the unlit studio space, just as the small white ribbon in her hair prominently materializes from her black satin hair. The tips of her fingers seem to caress the edge of the photograph, while the lower extremities of her body disappear into the folds of white silk, suggesting that the dancer is suspended from the frame of the photograph by her fingers and spins as an ornament or bauble. She holds her head up high, elevates her chin, and peers into the eyes of the viewer. Graham appears at once in motion and still, contorted yet at ease, sultry yet distant.

The multiplicity of visual contrasts present in *Letter to the World (Swirl)* appears frequently in the oeuvre of the two artists whose work this single photograph represents: the dancer Martha Graham and the photographer Barbara Morgan. These artists worked closely together for half a decade, each constantly challenging the other to improve and expand her artistic horizons. Although photography and dance certainly remained potent art forms in their own right, when presented together through the partnership of Graham and Morgan, the art of movement and the art of the camera melded to highlight the strengths of each field. The study in contrasts presented by *Letter to the World (Swirl)*



was in many ways the summation of a successful partnership that allowed the artists to explore a multitude of formal ideas as well as artistic, historical, and cultural themes. While Graham sought a photographic legacy for her artistry, the collaboration provided Morgan with the perfect subject to explore her newly chosen medium of photography. Through the course of these years, Morgan mastered lighting, composition, make-up, action photography, and sequencing. Additionally, Graham's unique style allowed Morgan to cultivate her long-held fascination with the medium of dance itself, but also afforded her the opportunity to experiment with the evocation of complex themes through still photography, especially the notion of hope in a trying era; create connections between photography and other traditional artistic media; distill human emotions and beauty; and explore the technical possibilities of the camera, such as double exposure. Finally, this potent partnership allowed Morgan to publish a book of her photographs that cemented her own fame and propelled her career forward.

Barbara Morgan's interest in dance long predated her adoption of the camera. When asked about her earlier interest in dance, Morgan inevitably recounted of one of her earliest childhood memories. While outside with her father one day, he began to regale her with tales of an unseen realm, the inner world of solid objects. The idea that every seemingly concrete object consisted of countless atoms in constant motion fascinated young Morgan. Her father pointed to her finger, an apple, and a bird, claiming that each was an amalgamation of these active particles. He then said the words Morgan would remember for the rest of her life: "everything in the world is dancing."<sup>1</sup> At the age of five or six, the emergent artist within Morgan was entranced. In her young mind, she

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 6. This story appears with only subtle variations in well over a dozen other publications.

began to see the world as a stage for an infinite number of dancers, whether in motion or at rest. “Dance is inherent in everything,” she would later say. “I see a snake going through the grass, a bird flying, two automobiles colliding— I see it as dance. Dance is merely a form of the whole life force in action.”<sup>2</sup> The expression of the life force through movement substantiated the interconnectedness of the world, the “harmony of motion” in which the disparate elements of the world cohere.<sup>3</sup> Thus, when Morgan came into contact with artists who intentionally utilized the movements of their body as art, she described their dance as “vital stuff, emotional and imaginative energies brought to bodily expression with beauty and power.”<sup>4</sup>

Morgan’s first encounters with the world of modern dance occurred during her undergraduate years at UCLA. In her final year, Morgan and a group of seven fellow students in a life drawing and painting class grew dissatisfied with the monotony of a static model “just sitting there like a piece of dead wood.”<sup>5</sup> The group concluded they needed to study movement in order to improve their life drawing abilities. They approached Bertha Wardell, an experimental dance teacher at UCLA, who had studied with Isadora Duncan.<sup>6</sup> As Morgan later commented, they did not ask Wardell to teach them to be dancers, but rather to help them “understand rhythm and body mechanics for

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<sup>2</sup> “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues with the External World,” *Bennington College— Quadrille*, 5, no. 4 (1971): 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Dance Photography” in *The Complete Photographer* (New York: National Education Alliance, 1943), 1132.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Barbara Morgan: Permanence Through Perseverance,” in *Photography Annual* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1971), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Margaretta Mitchell, *Recollections of Ten Women of Photography* (New York: Viking, 1979), 179.

use in painting.”<sup>7</sup> Professor Wardell agreed to work with Morgan and the other students. Morgan later noted the unique experience consisted of a number of “weird and interesting things” intended to help the students understand all different types of gestures. We even “had a little drum which we kicked around to sort of get the dance idea into our blood stream,” Morgan said.<sup>8</sup> Later, after Morgan graduated and began teaching at UCLA herself, she and her husband Willard traveled to Arizona and New Mexico during the summer in order to paint and photograph the landscape. They quickly became captivated with local Native American culture.<sup>9</sup> With time and persistence, they were accepted into the homes of the tribal members and allowed to watch their dance rituals.

The first Native American dance performance Morgan witnessed occurred in the summer of 1928 in a Tewa village located in the Hopi territory of New Mexico. She and Willard were permitted to watch the masked dancers known as kachinas conduct a protracted rain dance that lasted most of the day. Dance historian Ernestine Stodelle later recounted Morgan’s description of this dance:

...thirty-four dancers in grotesque animal masks made of mud, wearing heavy silver-and-turquoise necklaces, their skins painted from mask to girdle, and accompanied by a similarly masked drummer, formed ‘a supple living line [that] never moved forward or back, and was full of subtle inner movements....The deep chanted song, in complete rhythm with the pounding of the feet into the earth, was to receive the prayer for rain.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Deschin, “Barbara Morgan: Permanence through Perseverance,” 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Franklin Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” *Petersons Photographic* 13 (March 1985): 35. On these long summer trips, the Morgans traveled with “Packrat,” the vehicle that provided transportation, accommodations, and storage during their adventures. Morgan would later call Packrat their “camping jalopy.” Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ernestine Stodelle, “Barbara Morgan: Emanations of Energy,” *Dance Magazine* 65 (August 1991): 46.

Although this was not the first dance performance that Morgan witnessed, it was the first time she witnessed the power and meaning that dance could harness. Morgan later wrote that as a child she had seen the great Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, perform. While she found Pavlova's movements visually attractive, she found herself unmoved overall. Not until she first witnessed Native American dances with the emphasis on spirituality did Morgan understand the power of the medium.<sup>11</sup> Morgan believed the Native American tribes she befriended retained a closer connection not only to nature, but to man's earliest ancestors who had "learned how to harmonize the spiritual energies of the tribe through ceremonial dance movement."<sup>12</sup> Morgan later reported to art historian Margareta Mitchell that "while observing the dance movement under the sky, I sensed the growing harmony among the people absorbing the dance. This is the great blessing that dance can give."<sup>13</sup>

The effect this initial dance had on Morgan powerful enough that she asked her new friends to allow Willard and her to watch any and all future dances rituals. In time, the Morgans additionally witnessed the Sun Dance, Snake Dance, and Corn Dance, which were daylong ritual ceremonies that used the rising and the setting of the sun as signals for the dances to begin and end.<sup>14</sup> In incorporating the movement of the heavens into their rituals, the dancers became "partners in the cosmic process," Morgan later said. They "attuned me to the universally primal— rather than to either the 'primitive' or the

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<sup>11</sup> Cameron, "Barbara Morgan: Quintessence," 35.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 18.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, *Recollections*, 179.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

‘civilized’.’<sup>15</sup> Morgan was drawn to the idea that dance acted simultaneously as the point of connection between the dancers, the tribe as a whole, all of mankind, and between mankind and the greater world.<sup>16</sup> In the Native American dance rituals she witnessed, Morgan perceived the embodiment of concepts she had long wished to express.<sup>17</sup>

The Hopi’s distaste for cameras proved the one great disappointment for the couple. Morgan stated that the tribes they encountered considered the camera an “evil eye.” However, Willard managed occasionally to take a few surreptitious shots with his Leica.<sup>18</sup> Morgan’s solution was quite different, and perhaps less controversial. In 1931, she created a color woodcut titled *Rain Dancers* to recount her experience (Figure 2.2).<sup>19</sup>

A few years later, two occurrences motivated Morgan to combine her interest in dance with her new exploration of photography as her primary artistic medium. First, she attended a retrospective that honored the career of the late dancer, Isadora Duncan. Morgan recounted that only “a few mementoes of the dancer had been assembled,” which she found distressing. She would later state that she then realized “photographers have

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Tucker, ed., *The Woman’s Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 93. Morgan’s interest in Southwestern Native American culture mirrored a trend instigated by Mabel Dodge Luhan (née Mabel Sterne) after the United States’ entry into World War I. Luhan moved to Taos where she and her peers “explored” Native American culture. More recent scholarship calls into the question the value of Luhan and her cohorts’ patronage. According to Lois Palken Rudnick, despite their good intentions, this group contributed to the commercialization of native arts and portrayed Taos “as a pristine utopia filled with exotic native ‘others’.” Lois Palken Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Barbara Morgan: Everything is Dancing*, VHS, Ted Haimes and Edgar Howard (New York: Checkerboard Foundation, 1983). In 1945 Morgan wrote “The dance as a civic constructive or destructive spiritual power has been used throughout human history. But in our industrialized cultures there are only vestiges of public ceremonials, such as football rooting sections... while dance flourishes as a theater art, as a personal jitterbug outlet, or as ballroom and folk dancing.” Barbara Morgan, “Modern Dance,” *Popular Photography* 16, no. 6 (June 1945): 68. Additionally, in 1940, Morgan wrote “dance is a barometer of the vitality of a people; and to the social historian the dance of a time, place, and people is important and revealing.” Barbara Morgan, *Photographing the Dance* (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1940), 239.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Amico and Stephen Robert Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, *Recollections*, 179.

<sup>19</sup> Stodelle, “Barbara Morgan: Emanations of Energy,” 46.

an opportunity to be of service...to posterity through documentation— a documentation that is needed perhaps more for the dance than for other art forms.”<sup>20</sup> A second motivating factor for Morgan were the performances of emerging modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. Morgan later stated, “the minute I saw those dances, I felt that they were tied to Indian dance ritual and all that I had experienced in the southwest.”<sup>21</sup> Morgan’s introduction to Graham came via a mutual friend, Julien Bryan, who was the director of the International Film Foundation.<sup>22</sup> When the artists met, Morgan immediately asked Graham if she had been influenced by Native American dance rituals when she created the choreography of her dances. Graham responded that Indian ceremonial dances were among her greatest inspirations.<sup>23</sup> Morgan subsequently recounted that without thinking she blurted out that she wanted to create a book focused on Graham’s dances. Without hesitation Graham agreed.<sup>24</sup> Graham realized her legacy was at stake. As she wrote in 1941, “the only record of a dancer’s art lies in the other

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<sup>20</sup> Etna M. Kelley, “Barbara Morgan: Painter Turned Photographer,” *Photography* 6, no. 73 (1938): 2.

<sup>21</sup> Suzanne DeChillo, “Barbara Morgan: The Photographer of the Dance,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1979. Later in life, when asked why she focused all of her attention on modern dance, Morgan said “I don’t want to insult people, but I just never felt the connection to ballet that I feel for modern dance, and therefore I never wanted to photograph it.” Robin Holland, “A Life in Movement,” *Darkroom Photography* 3 (1981): 49.

<sup>22</sup> “Discussion with Barbara Morgan,” *Growth of Dance in America*, Summer/Fall 1976: 272.

<sup>23</sup> Morgan later learned that Graham’s interest in Native American dance was influenced by Louis Horst, with whom Graham maintained a relationship for a period early in her career. According to Morgan, Horst took Graham to the Southwest to see the rituals of many different tribes. Of particular interest to Horst was Penitente culture in which he found a style of music both haunting and difficult to predict. Patrick Bensard and Kristin Kirkconnell, “A Conversation with Barbara Morgan,” *Contact Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 15. Graham also spent time at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House in Taos. Luhan exposed an entire generation of artists, writers, poets, photographers, intellectuals, and others to the Southwest and Native American culture. Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas*, 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” 35. Morgan quoted this story on numerous occasions and unlike some of her stories, the details were always identical.

arts.”<sup>25</sup> The subsequent partnership between this nascent photographer aspiring to document modern dance and the modern dancer seeking a visual record of her career proved as successful as it was mutually beneficial.

Morgan first photographed Graham at a New York Guild Theatre rehearsal in 1936.<sup>26</sup> Over the next five years, Morgan held most of her photographic sessions in her studio overlooking Madison Square or at Columbia University’s McMillan Theatre.<sup>27</sup> Before the initial photographic sessions with Graham, Morgan exclusively used a Leica camera.<sup>28</sup> However, when Morgan commenced the series of dance photographs, she switched to the Speed Graphic 4x5 that became her favored camera over the course of the next decade.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Graham concluded that “the work of an individual can be explained, criticized, or eulogized by means of the written word. A painting or a work of sculpture can give the world another artist’s concept of a dancer. [But] photographs present more tangible evidence of a dancer’s career. Photographs, when true to the laws that govern inspired photography, reveal facts of feature, bodily contour, and some secret of his [the dancer’s] power.” Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. The date in *Sixteen Dances* directly conflicts the information Morgan later provided for photographs of *Lamentation*, *Satyric Festival*, and other dances, which were dated 1935 in her 1972 monograph. Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Morgan and Morgan, 1972). Curtis Carter noted this discrepancy with *Lamentation* in the end notes of his 2004 catalogue for the exhibition “Faces of Modern Dance, Barbara Morgan Photographs” as well. Curtis Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance, Barbara Morgan Photographs* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2004), 20. It is also interesting to note that Morgan states that she conducted her first session during a rehearsal, since nearly all of her subsequent photo shoots occurred during private sessions with the dancers in order to specifically avoid the atmosphere (and the lighting) of a rehearsal or a performance. “Dramatizing the Dance—Interview with Barbara Morgan,” *Dance Life* 14 (1979): 44.

<sup>27</sup> Morgan also occasionally used the Henry Street Settlement Playhouse. Deba Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 7. Morgan and Graham both knew the director of the theatre program at Columbia University, who allowed them to use the McMillan Theatre as well. “Dramatizing the Dance,” 42.

<sup>28</sup> Haimes and Howard, “Barbara Morgan: Everything is Dancing.”

<sup>29</sup> Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” 36. Morgan stated in a later interview that she occasionally used a Leica, a 5 x 7 view camera, a Rolleiflex, or a Contaflex during this period as well. With only a few exceptions, she used these other cameras for non-dance photographs, however. Deschin, “Barbara Morgan: Permanence through Perseverance,” 23. Deba Patnaik claims that Morgan occasionally used an Ikonta B during this period as well. Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*, 7. In an article that Morgan wrote in 1940, she gave perhaps the most vivid and exhaustive description of how she used a multitude of different cameras and films: “I use various cameras for specific jobs; but I find that the Speed Graphic equipped with the Kalart

When she first photographed Graham, Morgan considered herself a practiced amateur. Decades later, when she looked back at these early photographic sessions, she still felt the same way.<sup>30</sup> During the first few sessions with Graham, Morgan developed a unique method of photographing dance. Morgan eschewed the use of a tripod and moved with the dancer to capture the images when she first photographed Graham.<sup>31</sup> In many respects, this first photographic session must have resembled a *pas de deux* as the dancer and photographer echoed each other's steps. But Morgan quickly abandoned the free-form movements of these early sessions in favor of complex lighting. Yet, even as she refined her methods, she tried to retain the close connection between Graham and herself in other ways. The artists adopted a ritual in which they would sit silently together before a photo-session until they each felt attuned to the task at hand.<sup>32</sup>

The process of shooting the photographs continued to be collaborative as well. Morgan enumerated the gestures that most interested her for that session, then she and Graham mapped out and timed that section of the dance. Then, as Morgan detailed in a

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Lens-Coupled Range Finder and the Parallax View Finder for close-ups is the camera with which I do the bulk of work. The 3¼ x 4¼ or 4 x 5 yield large enough negatives to give good definition in an enlargement. The focal plane shutter goes up to 1/1000 second, which is ample for dance action as even 1/550 will catch most leaps, turns, and falls. The f:3.5 Zeiss Tessar gives me, with my lights, a working range on solo figures averaging 1/100 at f:8. If I want to step down for greater depth of field and at the same time have greater speed, I find that the Speed Graphic is more reliable for flash-adapting than other cameras I have used... [In terms of film] I have used principally Agfa Superpan Press and Eastman Super Panchro Press with a Weston rating of 64 under artificial light. Now I am experimenting with Eastern Tri-X and Agfa Triple S with favorable results. All of these films I develop in Harvey Panthermic 777 to a gamma of .8 or .9. This fine grain developer, with its energy kept constant by the replenisher system, gives me negatives which can be enlarged to great size. In my dance photograph exhibits... I use many 16 x 20 pictures to give large scale swing and movement. As often only a part of the negative must be blown up, I am able to make such enlargements from this development." Morgan, *Photographing the Dance*, 231-32.

<sup>30</sup> Cameron, "Barbara Morgan: Quintessence," 36.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Morgan never specified at what point in her career she began to use a tripod or which photographs utilized this coordinated approach to photographing Graham.

<sup>32</sup> In a 1985 interview, Morgan explicitly explained the ritual she and Graham adopted to prepare for a session, "I would be setting up my camera and she might be doing her hair. Neither of us would speak. Whoever was ready would lift her finger and go sit on the floor. The other one would sit about 15 feet away and we would both sit there until we felt we were into the spirit of what were going to shoot. Then we would lift a finger and both get up and begin." Ibid.



1979 interview, "...we'd chant together, 1-2-3, or whatever, so we'd get in rhythm together. Then I would put chalk where the moment was and then I'd get the camera."<sup>33</sup>

The two artists intended to "reduce the entire performance into just those essential moments" that characterized the crux of the dance.<sup>34</sup>

Through these years, Morgan and Graham's deep connection extended beyond their photographic sessions. Morgan viewed Graham primarily as a philosopher and only as a dancer secondarily. Morgan claimed Graham "dances because philosophically this is the way she sees life or wants to interpret life."<sup>35</sup> This corresponded with Morgan's need to interpret the world around her through photographs and montages. The idea of capturing that which was fleeting, transitory, or even seemingly unseeable through photography fascinated Morgan. She explained her impetus in a poetic passage of an article that she wrote for *Aperture*:

An eddy in a stream forming at the jut of a boulder, swirls and flows away. New water feeds through this swirling configuration, making and remaking the energy pattern, which remains virtually the same, although the fluid vehicle is ever changing. This introduces a new consideration. Now we are discriminating between the eddy as a form, and the water as a substance which made the form visible. The eddy pattern is visible to the physical eye, but the form is purely a concept created by the mind. One photographs the substance to reveal the form.<sup>36</sup>

This is a particularly poetic and yet astute metaphor for the relationship between dance and photography. Morgan saw dance as a conception, a series of movements the human mind connects to create overall form. Photography, in capturing a single frame of the

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<sup>33</sup> "Dramatizing the Dance," 44.

<sup>34</sup> Haimes and Howard, "Barbara Morgan: Everything is Dancing."

<sup>35</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," 19.

sequence, could accurately suggest the whole of the form if the photographer possessed the technological faculties, an understanding of dance as a medium, and a precognition of the essence of the specific dance he or she photographed.<sup>37</sup> In the history of dance photography before Morgan, these three skill sets were rarely, if ever, combined to create successful dance photographs.

There was a long history of photographing dance and dancers before the collaboration of Morgan and Graham. In his 1987 book, *The Fugitive Gesture—Masterpieces of Dance Photography*, William Ewing traces this history from dancers posing for daguerreotypes in the late 1840s to the artwork of the Photo-Secessionists, who utilized ballet dancers to create an artistic veneer for their photographs.<sup>38</sup> The sixty years in between witnessed carte-de-visite images of ballerinas, cabinet cards and stereocards depicting dancers, and the motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge that included waltzes.<sup>39</sup> Ewing notes, however, that until the turn of the twentieth century the vast majority of photographers only presented posed dancers, rather than any actual suggestion of dance.<sup>40</sup>

After the turn of the century, the work of three important photographers preceded Morgan's 1930s and 1940s dance photographs: Baron Adolf de Meyer, Edward Steichen, and Arnold Genthe. Baron de Meyer, best known for his photographs of the Nijinsky ballet company, also photographed other dancers including the ballerina Anna

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<sup>37</sup> According to Morgan, these three skills are not only necessary to photograph modern dance. In a 1940 article, she described the most effective ways to photograph ballet, country dances, cowboy dances, Native American dance rituals, square dances, folk dances, "American Negro Dancing," Vaudeville, night clubs, waltzes, the foxtrot, the tango, and even strip teases. Morgan, *Photographing the Dance*, 236-39.

<sup>38</sup> William A. Ewing, *The Fugitive Gesture: Masterpieces of Dance Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), passim.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 18.

Pavlova and another modern dance pioneer, Ruth St. Denis.<sup>41</sup> Edward Steichen famously photographed Isadora Duncan at the Parthenon in 1920. He also photographed Martha Graham in 1931.<sup>42</sup> Arnold Genthe published *The Book of Dance* in 1916, which included photographs of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Loie Fuller, Maud Allen, and many others.<sup>43</sup> Dance scholar Judith Alter has carefully studied all of the books that published the photographs of these famous artists as well as a number of lesser known photographers. She concludes that most of these photographs are either artistic photographs, generally utilizing a Pictorialist aesthetic, in which the dancers are posed for aesthetic effect or documentary photographs intended to illustrate specific dance techniques.<sup>44</sup> Steichen's famous series of Isadora Duncan exemplifies the artistic category in that they were shot from a great distance and utilized the dancer as a model with no evidence of her vocation.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, when Genthe photographed Duncan, the dark backgrounds and softened details imitated a painted portrait above all else.<sup>46</sup> Alter later notes that nearly all of Genthe's dance photographs are reminiscent of his style of artistic portraiture, in which he presents the model in full or partial profile and carefully posed.<sup>47</sup>

All of these photographs meant to evoke a specific mood or to highlight the beautiful form of the dancers' bodies, rather than to suggest an actual performance.

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Brandau, ed., *De Meyer* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 15, 37, 39-41.

<sup>42</sup> Christian Peterson, *Edward Steichen: The Portraits* (San Francisco: Art Museum Association, 1983), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Judith B. Alter, *Dancing and Mixed Media* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 103-4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 99, 103.

<sup>45</sup> Alter notes that only one photograph captures Duncan up close and uncropped. *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Morgan was somewhat more generous in her assessment of Genthe as she wrote, “when Arnold Genthe photographed Isadora Duncan, the slow film emulsion and inadequate lighting apparatus made him photograph poses rather than uninhibited movement. That he captured so much of her spirit in spite of this undeveloped equipment is the greatest credit to the artistry of both Duncan and Genthe.”<sup>48</sup> Morgan’s ability to overcome the static limitations of photography and suggest motion made her work revolutionary. In other words, Barbara Morgan certainly had precursors in the field of dance photography, but her work was pioneering nonetheless. This aspect of her career trajectory mirrored that of Martha Graham in many respects. Before Graham, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis defied the conventions of ballet and expanded the repertoire of movements available to their fellow dancers. Graham and her cohorts of the 1930s, however, created the modern dance movement as a separate and vital entity in the world of dance.<sup>49</sup> The fact that Morgan and Graham, pioneering women in their respective fields, worked together makes their careers all the more intriguing.

The brief period in which Morgan photographed Graham represented an important era in the dancer/choreographer’s burgeoning career, as her style and focus underwent an important transformation. According to Margaret Lloyd, the influential dance critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* in the 1930s, the crux of modern dance for Graham and others was in the torso. All movement emanated from the torso as thrust.

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<sup>48</sup> Morgan, “Dance Photography,” *The Complete Photographer*, 1133.

<sup>49</sup> Dance historian Selma Jeanne Cohen wrote: “Something very exciting happened in dance, which began in the late 20’s, but really began to capture audiences in the 30’s. There was a fundamental new approach to theatrical dance. Martha Graham called it, ‘communicating the interior landscape,’ and Doris Humphrey spoke of it, ‘as moving from the inside out.’ Today’s modern dance is not as urgent as what it was in the 30’s...This was a pioneer movement.” Selma Jeanne Cohen, “I See America Dancing: Dance Photographs by Barbara Morgan” in *East Quad Symposium- Museum of Art Exhibition & Performance at the University of Michigan, September 21, 1991* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Barbara Morgan Archive, 1991), np.

The dancer's arms and legs merely continued these gestures, rather than generating the original motion. For Graham, each gesture expressed a specific emotion or relayed some inner turmoil. In other words, modern dance both literally and figuratively came from within the dancer. An exploration and expansion of this central principle constituted Graham's initial contribution to modern dance.<sup>50</sup>

Morgan's photographs, however, document Graham's shift away from pure formal exploration in the early years of her career, toward historical and contemporary issues as expressed by narrative elements. In many ways, the primary venue for these photographs, Morgan's 1941 book *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, allowed Graham to encapsulate this era of her career, in that she chose which dances were essential for Morgan to document. The book represents the sixteen dances Graham believed the most influential in her career up until 1941.<sup>51</sup> Yet the dances are not presented chronologically. Instead, Morgan's sense of design and drama determined the order.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the first sequence in the book, *Frontier*, premiered in 1935, a full six years after *Sarabande*, the oldest performance included in the book.

Morgan considered *Frontier* among the classics of Graham's oeuvre and it certainly exemplified the new direction of Graham's career. *Frontier*, which is subtitled "American Perspective of the Plains," celebrates the courage and commitment of the pioneers who settled in the west, according to dance critic Jennie Schulman.<sup>53</sup> The dance

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<sup>50</sup> Margaret Lloyd, "An Oracle Speaks Simply," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 1936.

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> The design, sequencing, juxtapositions, and text of the book will be thoroughly discussed in chapter four.

<sup>53</sup> Jennie Schulman, "Martha Graham Lives On," *Back Stage* 44, no. 6 (2003): 11.

does not depict any specific geographical or historical context, rather it evokes the experience of the frontier.<sup>54</sup>

The spare set design aids in this generality. *Frontier* was the first performance in which Graham collaborated with the sculptor Isamu Noguchi.<sup>55</sup> He placed a small fence with two rough-cut beams in the center of the stage. Two ropes were tied beneath the fence and extended into the wings on each side of the stage. These three elements constituted the entire set. *New York Times* dance critic Clive Barnes described the setting in a revival of the piece as the “visual equivalent of a Haiku poem.”<sup>56</sup> Most scholars and critics have agreed that the central theme of the set was empty space. In 1938, Lloyd wrote that the ropes led the viewer’s eye through the vast space of the empty set toward the fence rails.<sup>57</sup> In her analysis of a later performance, dance critic Jennifer Dunning wrote “Isamu Noguchi’s rope sculpture suggests a world without horizons, one that cannot be contained by wooden fences.”<sup>58</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick call the set a “scenic device to suggest the vast plains of the Midwest” and write that it instilled a “feeling of boundless, timeless infinity.”<sup>59</sup> Dance historian Joseph Mazo more specifically suggests that the “v” formed by the ropes depicts a “vast plain leading to a distant horizon.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects* (Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007), 133.

<sup>55</sup> Maureen Janson, “Martha Graham: Modern Dance Pioneer,” *Dance Teacher* 27, no. 3 (2005): 85.

<sup>56</sup> Clive Barnes, “Miss Graham Offers Solo ‘Frontier,’” *New York Times*, April 11, 1975.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Lloyd, “Virile Is the Word for It,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 4, 1938.

<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Dunning, “Dance in Review: ‘Deep Song’ and ‘Frontier,’” *New York Times*, October 11, 1993.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 151.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph H. Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* (Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book Company, 2000), 168.

Graham highlighted the empty space as she interacted with this unique set throughout her performance. Dance critic Anna Kisselgoff wrote that on three occasions the dancer outlined a small square with her movements. According to Kisselgoff this expressed the boundaries of the pioneer's territory within the vast space of the plains.<sup>61</sup> Mazo writes that on the surface the dance depicts the conquest of the American frontier, but on a deeper level it confronts the "mastery of all expanses."<sup>62</sup> Throughout the performance Graham's gestures suggest that she is taking possession of space, according to dance historian Dee Reynolds.<sup>63</sup> *Boston Herald* dance critic Walter Terry, who viewed the performance in the 1930s, ignored any suggestion of conquest and instead wrote that Graham "succeeds in suggesting the vast spaces of the plains in relationship to the small scope of the human body."<sup>64</sup> Thus, Terry felt that Graham's dance expressed the vastness of the Midwest by comparing the open space of the stage to the relatively small body of the pioneer.

Barbara Morgan's photographs of *Frontier* expressed many of these same themes. The first photograph in *Sixteen Dances* features a segment of one of the ropes extending from the top left corner of the image to the bottom right (Figure 2.3). Neither end of the rope is visible. Morgan appears to indicate that open, limitless space plays an important role in this series. Below the photograph of the rope on the same page, a small square image of Martha Graham standing in front of the fence confronts the viewer. This image

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<sup>61</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance: Graham's 'Frontier' Revived," *New York Times*, April 9, 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Mazo, *Prime Movers*, 168.

<sup>63</sup> Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects*, 134-35.

<sup>64</sup> This citation comes from a January 4, 1938 article that Terry wrote for the *Boston Herald*. It was reproduced in a compendium of his reviews. Walter Terry, *I Was There: Selected Dance Reviews and Articles—1936-1976* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1978), 18.

is considerably smaller than the photograph of the rope above. The difference in scale again suggests boundless space.

On the next page, a photograph presents the first large-scale image of the dance (Figure 2.4). Graham stands with her right foot on the stage and her left foot planted waist-high atop the fence. With her head turned to her right, her sightline follows her right arm, which points to the horizon. The photograph fills the right page. However, the impenetrable black space, toward which Graham points, bleeds over the gutter of the book nearly halfway onto the left page. This darkness seems to be spreading as it engulfs the pioneer woman. One gets a sense of open space and claustrophobic closeness simultaneously.

On the following pages, Morgan places three photographs of Graham alone on stage (Figure 2.5). The first depicts the entire stage complete with both ropes and the fence. In the center, brightly lit from above, Graham contorts her figure in a multifaceted pose. With her right foot firmly planted on the stage, her left leg remains high in the air, but largely hidden under her skirt. Only her left foot emerges from under her dress, nearly level with her head. Her right arm reaches above her head and her left arm disappears into the folds of her costume. Considered as a whole, the pose creates a visual rhyme with the “v” of the ropes behind her. This photograph highlights the comparison between the vastness of open space with the body of the dancer that Walter Terry indicated in his review.

While the most prominent lines of this first photograph are diagonal, the other two photographs are primarily horizontal. In the second photograph, Graham’s split legs fan her dress out upon the stage in front of her. In this photograph, the pioneer’s body



appears to be one with the earth. In the third photograph, Graham balances on her right leg, while the rest of her body evokes a horizontal plain. Lit from overhead in such a way that her right leg is consumed by the darkness, the composition focuses the viewer's attention on the horizontal plain of her body above. With her arms forming parallel lines, she appears to mimic the shape of the fence which largely disappears into the darkness. In these three photographs, Graham's body imitates the three main elements of the set design: the ropes, the stage, and the fence. These photographs support dance scholar Dee Reynolds's interpretation of a revival performance in which she notes that "Graham's movement interacts closely with the lines of these objects."<sup>65</sup>

A single photograph nearly covers the two-page spread that follows (Figure 2.6). Graham appears on the left. She stands with her hands at her sides, her face largely in shadow. She appears motionless and solemn. The right page is entirely black save for a single shallow ray of light. Graham is alone in an infinite expanse. This photograph exemplifies Reynolds and McCormick's description of the pioneer woman as a "courageous figure in a remote place, undaunted by momentary weakness."<sup>66</sup>

The final photograph of this sequence returns to the theme of possession that so many dance historians and critics addressed (Figure 2.7). Graham stands with her right leg on the stage and her left leg atop the fence post. Her body appears at rest suggesting a conclusion to the narrative. Her dress covers nearly a third of the fence. Her body language and facial expression indicate determination and resolve. She appears to have conquered and claimed this territory.

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<sup>65</sup> Reynolds goes on to carefully describe two different poses that mimic the diagonals of the ropes and the horizontal lines of the fence. Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects*, 133-34.

<sup>66</sup> Reynolds and McCormick, *No Fixed Points*, 151.

*Frontier* was likely the first dance that Morgan saw live before she photographed it.<sup>67</sup> Yet, as mentioned previously, Morgan did not photograph a performance itself. Instead, Morgan used a specific technique to capture the essence of the dance. After viewing a performance several times, she would allow a few weeks to elapse. “I’d just let the images drift around in my mind,” she later noted. “After a week or two I would suddenly remember a gesture- ten, twelve different gestures that epitomized the dance. I’d tell Martha what I thought they were and, you know, we agreed every time,” she concluded.<sup>68</sup> Morgan internalized the dance and in the process found the essential gestures that she later captured on film. In *Frontier*, Morgan focused on a series of gestures that led to the final image of strength and self-reliance. Graham’s interest in accentuating strength during times of hardship, a theme that seemed exceptionally relevant during the Depression, particularly attracted Morgan. “Martha made her dances out of the history of our country. They were affirmations of strength, hope, and endurance, qualities that dug deep in our nation’s cultural heritage,” Morgan later stated.<sup>69</sup> Graham’s dances with American themes indicated a growing trend in the culture of the Depression in which artists, writers, and other cultural purveyors turned to other difficult eras in American history and singled out individuals or groups that manifested

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<sup>67</sup> For the *Sixteen Dances* book, Morgan photographed several dances that premiered before she began to photograph dance. Thus, it is likely that Graham recreated these performances solely for Morgan’s camera. *Frontier*, on the other hand, premiered on April 28, 1935, the same year that Morgan became interested in photographing dance.

<sup>68</sup> Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” 36.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

perseverance. Van Wyck Brooks wrote about this phenomenon when he discussed the idea of a “useable past.”<sup>70</sup>

Graham was not the only dancer/choreographer to evoke tenacity during trying times. Morgan found similar responses in much of the modern dance choreography of the era. The poverty and depredation that she witnessed in the lives of these dancers furthered her connection to modern dance. Morgan compared the modern dance of the 1930s to Native American ceremonial dances, which were intended to foster kinship within the tribe through times of disease, drought, or other hardships.<sup>71</sup> Morgan felt her photographs of these performances could spread the message of modern dance beyond college campuses and major cities where the performances took place. In a 1983 videotaped interview, Morgan explained one of the reasons she wanted to publish Graham’s photographs, in particular, by simply stating that she “felt the dance book could give spirit and life and hope.”<sup>72</sup>

It is important to note, however, that not all of Graham’s dances were meant to be uplifting. *Lamentation*, the second oldest dance presented in *Sixteen Dances*, premiered early in 1930, so Morgan did not have the luxury of attending the original performance. This solo typified the earlier style of Graham’s work in which she explored a singular theme rather than a broad narrative. Although short, no more than three minutes in

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<sup>70</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Useable Past,” *The Dial* 64 (1918): 337-41. While Brooks first wrote about the concept of a “useable past” in 1918, this ideology gained popularity during the 1930s.

<sup>71</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Haimes and Howard, “Barbara Morgan: Everything is Dancing.” While Morgan befriended Roy Stryker and admired the work of the Farm Security Administration photographers, she also felt that their mission was misguided. Instead of focusing on hope and promise, she felt that they often highlighted misery and hopelessness. Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 9. In contrast, Morgan considered her goals purely altruistic. As she stated in a 1979 taped conversation, she wished to use her photographs to help people. Barbara Morgan, interview by Jean Tucker, October 17, 1979, original tape copied to a compact disk, Collection of the University of Missouri, Columbia.

length according to Martha Graham Dance company artistic director Ron Protas, intensity marked this performance.<sup>73</sup> The dance revolved around the theme of grief. As Morgan stated in *Sixteen Dances*, “Lamentation is a ‘dance of sorrows.’ It is not the sorrow of a specific person, time or place, but the personification of grief itself.”<sup>74</sup> In *Sixteen Dances*, the sequence begins with a single, square close-up of Graham (Figure 2.8). Her body remains shrouded in tight-fitting cloth that covers her from head to ankles. Shadows obscure half of Graham’s face. Her eyes stay closed as creases mark her forehead and cheeks. The theme of grief is palpable. Graham’s abstract pose produces a similar effect. Dance critic Deborah Jowitt calls Graham’s performance a “jersey-shrouded embodiment of grief.”<sup>75</sup> While her face remains recognizable, she transforms her body into a highly stylized form. Her truncated torso and head appear to emerge from an inner circle of darkness.

Scholars and critics frequently mention the sculptural quality of *Lamentation*. Dee Reynolds calls *Lamentation* an “extraordinary sculptural dance.”<sup>76</sup> Anna Kisselgoff compared the dancer in a 1990s performance to “an assemblage of overlapping forms embodying grief.”<sup>77</sup> Maureen Janson, writing for *Dance Teacher*, stated that the dancer “wore a tube of fabric that stretched to create a moving sculpture expressing struggle,

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<sup>73</sup> Protas took over this position in 1991, after the death of Graham. Jennifer Dunning interviewed Protas in 1999 for a piece in the *New York Times*. Jennifer Dunning, “Martha Graham’s Legacy: How the Dances Will Now Be Danced,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1999.

<sup>74</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Graham Redivivus: Stories That Make the Heart Quake,” *The Village Voice* 48, no. 5 (2003): 61.

<sup>76</sup> Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects*, 126.

<sup>77</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, “Dance Review: Back to the Futuristic Martha Graham,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1994.

confinement, and grief.”<sup>78</sup> Alastair Macauley, dance critic of *The Guardian*, also noted the costume in a revival performance of the 1970s, calling the “tube of stretching jersey...an early instance of Graham’s genius for costume.”<sup>79</sup>

In her interpretation of *Lamentation*, Morgan captured the sculptural quality of the performance and highlighted the moments where emotional articulation and formal abstraction intersected. In some cases, Morgan appears to draw inspiration from additional artistic media including painting, drawing, and collage as well. The first photograph in the sequence remains typical of this series. This photograph explores the expressive possibilities of the human body. The connection between contortion and expression likewise motivated Graham. She felt one could extract the essence or the soul of a performance through abstraction. This is the primary formal concept in most of the photographs that Morgan included in the *Lamentation* sequence of *Sixteen Dances*. In each of the eight photographs, Graham and her costume elicit strange, inhuman configurations. She realized the power of abstraction early in her career. In 1980, Graham stated, “abstraction has always meant, for me, the juice of an orange. It’s very real.”<sup>80</sup>

In the second photograph of the series, Graham contorts her body to suggest a single block from which two hands emerge (Figure 2.9). The complex gesture, missing head, and rough surface of Graham’s dark hued garment are reminiscent of the expressive bronzes of Auguste Rodin. Subsequent photographs resemble an abstract drawing, the sculpture of Henry Moore, Michelangelo’s slaves emerging from the stone, and an orant

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<sup>78</sup> Janson, “Martha Graham: Modern Dance Pioneer,” 85.

<sup>79</sup> Alastair Macauley, “Martha Graham,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 1979.

<sup>80</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, “Dance View—Powerful Images of Martha Graham’s Art,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1980.

figure of the Judaic and early Christian tradition among other similarities (Figures 2.10-2.13). In the eighth and final photograph, Morgan and Graham present the viewer with resolution (Figure 2.14). Also, for the first time in *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan exposes the negative twice. An image reminiscent of the sixth photograph, but instead placed horizontally, is superimposed with a faded image of Graham squatting on the ground, looking down at her alternative self. In a 1979 article, Morgan explained the image:

This is a deliberate double exposure, done because the dance ended this way: After going through agony and tragedy, as Martha explained it, she spiritually accepted tragedy and therefore was able to look back upon her tragic self with a new vision. So I deliberately used the old tragedy and put it horizontally as if it was part of the past and placed her above and looking down upon it [in the second exposure], as if now it was part of the past.<sup>81</sup>

The emotionally charged nature of *Lamentation* prompted Morgan to suggest the consummation of grief in this way. In her 1980 book *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, Morgan noted that “while absorbing the sequence of the emotional gestures of Martha Graham’s dance, *Lamentation*, I ‘saw in my mind’s eye’ the overlapping emotional transformation: from anguish and utter tragedy, to final acceptance and release.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, Morgan preconceived the photographic result of this series and chose to interpret the dance rather than simply record it, an approach that she frequently utilized from that point forward. In a 1981 article for *Darkroom Photography*, Morgan reiterated this notion when she stated that the use of multiple exposures “has something to do with not just copying what exists in the world. And it helped get across the idea of movement...in a piece.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “Dramatizing the Dance,” 47-48.

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), np.

<sup>83</sup> Holland, “A Life in Movement,” 49.

This series of eight photographs presents a unique approach to documenting dance. As Jowitt wrote in a 1981 article for *Ballet Review*, Morgan was concerned with “exploring her medium as well as with revealing the essence of her subject. The pictures are as much about light and dark, weight, texture, shape, as they are about Martha Graham.”<sup>84</sup> One of the key elements of this series is lighting. Morgan employs light and shadow to emphasize gestures, to establish patterns, to aid in abstracting the human body, to move the viewer’s eye about the image, to create echoes among the parts of Graham’s body, and to visually balance many of the photographs. Another important element is what Morgan called “kinetic design.” In the article “Kinetic Design in Photography,” Morgan explained that any photographer could freeze movement with a camera, but in kinetic design, “the raw material, is to be lifted out of its natural flux and transformed into a new entity [that is] aesthetically satisfying.”<sup>85</sup> In practical terms, kinetic design forces the photographer to pre-visualize how a photograph will appear after it is developed. As Morgan wrote, “unless the photographer, through composition, anticipates the visual image in the latent image, no amount of skillful processing can produce a work of art.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, the photograph should be visually balanced, even if the means of

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<sup>84</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Books: Morgan Looks at Graham,” *Ballet Review* 9, no. 1 (1981): 110.

<sup>85</sup> Morgan, “Kinetic Design in Photography,” 19. Later, in the same article, Morgan explained the origins of the kinetic design concept: “Kinetic design is based upon the reciprocal relations of dynamic and passive elements within the visual frame. In Chinese art canons the forming of harmony from active and passive opposites is called the principle of Yin and Yang; that is, the interplay of male and female polarities. In the less figurative terms of the west, we speak of tension and release, introvert and extrovert, black and white, as some of the typical differences that set up conflict and so, vitality and movement in design.” *Ibid.*, 24. Sharon Ann Avery connects the kinetic design concept to a theory of tension and release commonly associated with the German Expressionist movement in modern dance. Sharon Ann Avery, “Photography as Performance” (master’s thesis, University of New Mexico, 1999): 54-55.

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” in *The Complete Photographer* (New York: National Education Alliance, 1943), 1528. Incidentally, Ansel Adams began advocating previsualization as a photographic practice in 1941, just two years before this was written.

obtaining formal equilibrium were extraordinarily complex. For example, as Morgan noted when discussing the fifth photograph in the *Lamentation* sequence:

In this picture the oblique sweep of the thrust to the top must be countered. The head is counter, but I deliberately created this dark space in the lower left corner to do that. I also was intrigued here by the curve of the ankle, which echoed the upper knee. The curve of the ankle went with the curve of the knee which went with the curve of the head.<sup>87</sup>

In many of these early sequences Morgan emphasized visual balance. According to Doris Hering, Morgan stated that in her earlier dance photographs, she sought for the pictures to look as dynamic upside down as they did right side up.<sup>88</sup> This approach likely informed the photographic sequence of *Lamentation*, in which Morgan was more intrigued with the formal appearance of these photographs than she was with the impression of sorrow. Morgan reacted to many of Graham's dances in this manner. She appears less interested in the underlying themes and more attracted to the enigmatic forms she could tease out of the gestures. In many of Morgan's photographs the theme of the specific dance is no longer apparent or necessarily relevant.

*Ekstasis* represents another photographic sequence that does not rely on the original theme of Graham's dance for content. John Martin, dance critic for the *New York Times* when *Ekstasis* premiered in 1933, wrote that the dance explored "rituals of worship."<sup>89</sup> Yet, Morgan's short sequence of two photographs concentrates on formal and aesthetic concerns. In the first photograph, Graham, wearing a tight-fitting knit dress, stands on her left foot (Figure 2.15). She holds her right foot off the ground and

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<sup>87</sup> "Dramatizing the Dance," 46-47.

<sup>88</sup> Doris Hering, "Barbara Morgan: One of America's Great Photographers Reflects A Decade of Dance, 1935-1945," *Dance Magazine*, July 1971: 44.

<sup>89</sup> John Martin, "The Dance: Martha Graham's Art," *New York Times*, November 26, 1933.



pulled away from her body seemingly as far as is possible while wearing the close-fitting costume. The total distance between Graham's legs is approximately the length of two of her feet. Due to this pose, the lighting of the photograph, and the weave of the dress, the viewer can clearly see the silhouette of Graham's legs through the material. The subtleties of light and dark gradation create a sensual and nearly seductive portrait of beauty. To achieve this goal, Morgan eschewed the stage in favor of a generic space with a white wall and a dark floor under tightly controlled lighting.

For this photograph, Morgan selected a pose that highlighted Graham's attractive figure, rather than expressing any deeper meaning inherent in the dance. In describing the photograph in an article for *Graphic Graflex Photography*, Morgan discussed the overtly formal qualities of this image, stating that the photograph was posed in order to highlight the "sculptural clarity of the figure," rather than the narrative of Graham's dance.<sup>90</sup>

The second photograph depicts a cropped image of Graham's body covered by the same knit dress from her chest to her calves (Figure 2.16). The harsh lighting on the left side of the photograph prominently displays the weave of the garment. This highly abstracted image centers on the undulating lines of Graham's body and the beauty of the human form. Morgan's photograph subjectively interpreted the performance once again. She attempted to distill all of her impressions of the dance sequence into a single photograph. Yet no suggestion of the ritual of worship remains. A later description of the image noted that "the torso composition of Martha Graham in Ekstasis epitomizes my feeling for the dance; the side and back lighting frees and solidifies the sculptural form;

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<sup>90</sup> Morgan, *Photographing the Dance*, 230.

the tonal shift of the triangle of light projects distance and supports a rhythmical monumentality.”<sup>91</sup> Morgan commonly focused on formal elements in her dance photographs as she stated in an article on dance photography:

I work as a kinetic light-sculptor. Instead of static sculptures in solid stone, I am working with kinetic sculpture fixed by light. I think of the bodies in their space as a series of convex and concave forms in rhythmic movement. I send light upon these forms, making patterns of light tones, middle tones, and dark tones; over convex heads, backs, breasts, thighs, bent knees; and concave eye sockets, undercut jaws, armpits, knee recesses, etc. The full emotion of the design in the sum of these parts.<sup>92</sup>

While Morgan emphasized the purely formal qualities of this and other photographs, in a 1999 *New York Times* article, critic Vicki Goldberg focused on Morgan’s interpretation of beauty, noting that Morgan focused in this photograph on Graham’s personal attractiveness and her lithe dancer’s body. Goldberg described Morgan’s photograph as a “sinuous column emblematic of the female form, life, and the potential for movement.”<sup>93</sup>

Morgan’s formal interpretation of *Ekstasis* nonetheless corresponded with Graham’s own view of the dance. Despite the broader theme of ritual, in *Ekstasis*, Graham explored new types of movement. In a 1980 interview, Graham explained that the genesis of this dance came from a pelvic thrust gesture that she discovered one day. This led Graham to explore “a cycle of distortion” that she found deeply meaningful. “Before *Ekstasis*, I had been using a more static form, trying to find a ritualist working of the body,” she concluded.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Morgan’s cropping or distorting of Graham’s form,

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<sup>91</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Morgan, “Dance Photography,” *The Complete Photographer*, 1135.

<sup>93</sup> Vicki Goldberg, “Transfixing Motion and Emotion in a Shutter’s Blink,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1999.

<sup>94</sup> Kisselgoff, “Dance View.”

with its emphasis placed on the hips and pelvis, suited Graham's own conception of this dance.

In a manner similar to *Lamentation*, *Celebration*, which premiered in 1934, expressed the singular idea of its title. Ray C.B. Brown, of the *Washington Post*, lauded the "intensity of the emotional content" after seeing a 1938 performance.<sup>95</sup> Fifty years later, dance critic Lynn Garafola described a performance of *Celebration* as "a work possessed, like the dancers themselves, by the elation of continuous movement."<sup>96</sup> The two-page spread in *Sixteen Dances* includes three photographs. The first photograph, at the top of the left-hand page, captures four dancers in profile, leaping into the air in nearly identical poses (Figure 2.17). Their arms lift above their backward-tilted heads. Their left knees point toward the ground and are severely bent so that their left feet point up toward their hair. Two-tone slit dresses allow the viewer to see the taut musculature of the dancers' flexed left legs. Their right legs, tucked beneath their bodies, point backward for the two dancers on the left, and point downward for the two dancers on the right. Seen in formation, the complex poses of these dancers evoke upward movement and the release of kinetic energy.

According to the original program notes, "*Celebration* expresses the intense inner excitement we feel in the face of the great events" and "portray the spirit's triumph."<sup>97</sup> Morgan's photograph captures this theme as the ebullient leaps of joy embody the dynamic energy one feels after a triumph. The dancers are shot from below, which

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<sup>95</sup> Ray C.B. Brown, "Postlude," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1938.

<sup>96</sup> Lynn Garafola, "Reviews," *Dance Magazine* 62, no. 3 (March 1988): 19.

<sup>97</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 12.

allowed Morgan to crop out the floor of the stage, thereby suggesting leaps unbound by gravity. Instead, the photograph suggests the supremacy of the human spirit.

The second photograph appears at the bottom of the left page (Figure 2.18). In this photograph, cast members pose in a series of different positions. The complex composition of this photograph is typical of *Celebration*, characterized, as John Martin wrote, by the “continually shifting groups.”<sup>98</sup> Anna Kisselgoff wrote that *Celebration* featured “ever-changing units” of dancers that were “constantly regrouping in different clusters and patterns before a few detach themselves from the cluster.”<sup>99</sup> Morgan’s photograph illustrates these generic descriptions. On the left, a group of five dancers stand on straight left legs while holding their right legs up to establish a forty-five degree angle. To the immediate right of these five dancers and in the back of the group, a performer has leapt into the air with her arms extended out from the sides of her body and parallel to the stage as her legs form another forty-five degree angle and her toes point toward the ground. Immediately in front of this dancer three women sit on the ground, each with her arms extended in front of her, crossed at the wrists, about a hand’s length from the ground. One of the seated women remains obscured by another dancer who has leapt into the air in the same pose as the woman in the back. Finally, at the far right, two women, balanced in complex, difficult poses, generate a series of vertical and horizontal lines. Viewed as a whole, this confusing image presents a multitude of diagonal, vertical, and horizontal foci. In attempting to capture the look of this dance, Morgan fails to convey the theme of celebration.

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<sup>98</sup> John Martin, “A Capacity House Sees Miss Graham,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1934.

<sup>99</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, “Martha Graham’s Ongoing Affirmation of Life,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1987.

The third photograph, which occupies the entire right page of the spread, presents three women at the apex of a jump so that they appear to be floating just above the stage (Figure 2.19). Each dancer holds her body almost perfectly straight, with legs together and toes pointing toward the ground, while her dress unfurls in an unseen wind. Together, the three dancers form a circle, which they extend outward with their outstretched arms that overlap at their wrists. The photograph suggests the Three Graces and the overall effect is quite beautiful and triumphant. Unlike the other stiff and frozen photographs in this sequence, the third photograph appears lively and active. Morgan specialized in action shots such as this one.

Numerous critics and historians credit Morgan as the first photographer to capture action in a way that conveys the fluidity of motion itself.<sup>100</sup> To achieve this goal, Morgan extensively prepared for each photograph beforehand. “In action photography, the photographer must anticipate the architecture of his movement-composition” she stated in the *Magazine of Art* in 1942. “The photographer must be able to visualize and predict every possibility, throughout the chain of processes,” Morgan added.<sup>101</sup> In a 1940 article, Morgan extensively detailed the design and execution of an action shot utilizing *Doris Humphrey as the Matriarch from ‘Red Fires,’* in which the dancer “whirls triumphantly in a flowing circular skirt.”<sup>102</sup> (Figure 2.20) After choosing which sequence to photograph, Morgan had to create the final image in her mind. She decided that the key moment was when the spiral of the skirt and the horizontality of the dancer’s outstretched arms opposed the verticality of the dancer’s body. She then mirrored this opposition

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<sup>100</sup> Goldberg, “Transfixing Motion and Emotion.”

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Morgan, “In Focus: Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” *Magazine of Art* 35, no. 7 (November 1942): 252-53.

<sup>102</sup> Morgan, *Photographing the Dance*, 235.

where the floor met the background behind Humphrey. For the final element of the composition, Morgan wrote that “the triumphant set of the head on the neck crowns the inverted vortex of this kinetic pattern.”<sup>103</sup> After rehearsing the sequence and determining the position on the floor from which Humphrey would commence the twirl, Morgan fixed her camera on this spot. Next, she considered the light. She wished to illuminate the figure so that the whirl of the skirt opposed the background and simultaneously suggested “the sweep of morbid emotions” evoked by Humphrey’s character.<sup>104</sup> To accomplish these goals, Morgan swept “a light and shadow pattern across the floor and upon the background echoing the spiral of the action” and additionally created “staccato notes of white in the face and fists [to] give final binding tension to the design.”<sup>105</sup> Finally, she had to determine the shutter speed. Morgan sought a shutter speed that would keep the body of Humphrey sharp, while the outer section of the skirt appeared fluid. If the shutter speed were too fast, the image would appear frozen and false, like “a trick-amusing or grotesque,” Morgan wrote, “in which the dancer becomes a dragonfly impaled in an insect collection while the liberating flow of emotional energy at the root of all dance is killed.”<sup>106</sup> However, if the shutter speed were too slow, the dancer would blur. In the *Red Fires* photograph as well as the *Celebration* sequence, Morgan often found a shutter speed between these extremes in which certain parts of the body or costume remained less well-defined due to the motion, while the rest of the body appears

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 235-36.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 236

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Morgan, “Modern Dance,” 68.

precisely detailed.<sup>107</sup> The key to success in this regard was to capture an exact instant, especially in a jump or leap.

The third photograph in the *Celebration* sequence captures just such a moment. “I clicked at the instant when muscular effort to reach the elevation had been spent and momentary relaxation conveys triumph rather than strain,” she wrote in *Sixteen Dances*. “If I had wanted an expression of frenzy I would have shot earlier and fast— at the greatest moment of stress,” Morgan concluded.<sup>108</sup> In the essay “Esthetics of Photography” she further clarifies her theories on photographing jumps by breaking the leap into phases that the photographer must identify. First comes the moment before the peak of the action, when the bodies tense in preparation. According to Morgan, the photographer chooses this phase “for an athletic picture of muscles, cords, [and] effort.”<sup>109</sup> The peak represents the second phase of the jump, when the dancers still hold their breath, but the tension begins to release. Time and space seem to be arrested as the figure appears to defy gravity. A photographer seeking to capture “poetry of movement” should release the shutter at this moment, Morgan believed. The final phase of the leap is the descent in which the tension has been released, breath has been expelled, and the energy of the jump has been discharged. The third photograph from the *Celebration* sequence captures the second stage, the peak of elevation, which creates the impression of buoyancy and uplifting spiritual release. In *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan chooses to conclude the *Celebration* sequence with this photograph.

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<sup>107</sup> Morgan, “Esthetic of Photograph,” 1546-547.

<sup>108</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 149.

<sup>109</sup> Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” 1546.

Graham first performed *Celebration* in the spring of 1934. Later that year, Graham premiered a much more complicated and nuanced dance, *American Provincials*. A solo performed by Graham constituted the first act of this dance. In the first photograph of Morgan's *American Provincials* sequence, Graham stands alone on stage wearing a full-length gown (Figure 2.21). Her right hand reaches for the heavens while her fingers spread and her eyes follow the trajectory of her arm. She placed her left hand on her left shoulder, which turns away from the camera in a way that allows the viewer to fully concentrate on the raised right hand. Graham explained this pose as "a challenge to God. I remember exactly why I did it," she continues, "to mean 'tell me exactly why you curse me'."<sup>110</sup> This desperate challenge to both God and her fellow citizens comprises the theme of *American Provincials*. Graham loosely based the dance on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*.<sup>111</sup> The lead character is the victim of staid morality and the strict sexual repression of the Puritan tradition. Dee Reynolds wrote that in the 1920s and 1930s a cultural trend inspired by Sigmund Freud led many men and women to believe that any force that attempted to curb natural sexual impulses remained essentially evil. Thus, Reynolds believes Graham's dance represents a screed that challenged contemporary social mores as much as the seventeenth-century Puritan tradition.<sup>112</sup> In his 1934 review of *American Provincials*, John Martin noted an inherent sexuality in the performance as well.<sup>113</sup> Martin does not explicitly state what elements of the dance suggested a sexual theme, but Morgan's photograph might provide one answer. The

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<sup>110</sup> Kisselgoff, "Dance View."

<sup>111</sup> John Martin wrote that a summer spent in New England inspired Graham to create *American Provincials*. John Martin, "Martha Graham Gives New Dances," *New York Times*, November 12, 1934.

<sup>112</sup> Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects*, 118.

<sup>113</sup> John Martin, "The Dance: Graham Again," *New York Times*, November 25, 1934.



dancer's costume appears provocative in the context of seventeenth-century New England. Loose from the waste down, but tight-fitting on the torso, it appears sensuous and sexual. In Morgan's photograph, the costume emphasizes Graham's breasts and her slender body simultaneously.

Light plays an important role in Morgan's photograph as well. The bright, harsh lighting "parallels the mordant quality of the dance," Morgan wrote in *Sixteen Dances*.<sup>114</sup> Yet, the lighting also creates a distinct shadow, an alter-ego for the dancer. While Graham stands in the center of the harsh light, her shadow lurks behind her, tracking her every move as if this shadow represented the secret sins that drive the narrative of the dance. No critic or historian mentions the use of a shadow in the performance itself, so Morgan likely devised the shadow to clarify the subtext of dueling personas within the performance.

In the second photograph of the sequence, Graham remains alone on stage (Figure 2.22). Now she squats with her thighs nearly parallel to the ground. Graham shields her eyes from the bright light (of judgment?) from above. In Morgan's photograph, however, this pose becomes a paradigm of equilibrium. In covering her eyes with her hands, Graham juts her elbows out to each side of her head, thus mirroring the position of her legs below. Her entire body remains perfectly symmetrical and balanced, including her costume with its white stripe that runs the length of her torso. This pose focuses on balance: not only the dancer's balance to maintain the pose, but the delicate equilibrium of the individual who balances terrestrial and spiritual concerns.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 150.

<sup>115</sup> In 1980, Graham commented on this notion of balance, "Balance to me does not mean standing on one leg, but having all of the body parts come together. My mother had a ship captain's desk. It was controlled

The first act of *American Provincials* relies heavily on gesture to explicate the narrative of the performance. Gestures often denoted the underlying themes of Graham's dances. Gestures suggested the emotional underpinnings of the character, signaled change, or indicated the mood of the piece. For Morgan's dance photographs, gesture was doubly important. The still nature of photography meant Morgan had to rely on gesture if she wished to suggest the meaning of the dances she photographed. Morgan, however, retained a deep connection to the significance of gesture anyway. She believed that human culture had used gesture for centuries to impart meaning. When writing about kinetic design, Morgan described a long history of gesture, particularly in Asian cultures, which included not only dance, but theatre and puppetry as well.<sup>116</sup> Morgan also noted that in many types of entertainment, gesture clarifies the role a performer plays. "The Hero, the Temptress, the Villain, the Clown project their roles through their stage bearing before a line is spoken..." Morgan wrote in 1953.<sup>117</sup> Her initial conception of the power of gesture came from a rather odd source: puppetry. As an undergraduate at UCLA Morgan joined the Gilpin Puppet Theater.<sup>118</sup> In this venue Morgan witnessed the efficacy of body language and learned how to find the key gesture in a given sequence. Morgan noted that in modern dance, gestures repeat three, four, five times or more, so

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by weights that could shift with the shifting of the sea. I always thought this would be the secret of the balance of the body— the ability to go with the shifting of time, space, and emotion." Kisselgoff, "Dance View."

<sup>116</sup> Specifically, Morgan wrote: "A further resource lies in the study of the formalized gestures used in Oriental temple rituals and theatre performances. One sees in the Chinese theatre, the Javanese Wayang shadow puppets, the Devil Dances of Tibet how natural gesture has been modulated by poetic invention during centuries into symbols of beauty and power. A certain leg-swinging pantomime informs a Chinese audience that the actor is mounting a horse. The silent lifting of a square of white cloth announces death. These and more intricate movements which originated in life movement, have been transformed into rhythmic art forms." Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," 20.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>118</sup> Avery, "Photography as Performance," 32.

that the audience does not miss the meaning of the piece. However, in puppet theatre, an emotional gesture occurs only once.<sup>119</sup> The puppeteer must emphasize or even exaggerate that gesture in such a way that the audience does not miss it, just as Morgan emphasized the key gestures in a performance in order to translate the three-dimensional and active nature of dance into the two-dimensional and still nature of photography.

The Act of Judgment constitutes the second section of *American Provincials*. This is not God's judgment, but that of the lead character's fellow citizens. Morgan includes two small photographs on the second page, below the photograph that concludes the Act of Piety (Figure 2.23). These smaller photographs present a flurry of activity. In the image on the left, Graham lies on the floor in an awkward position with her back arched and one arm above her head. Behind her, the other dancers raise their arms and legs high in the air suggesting their perception of moral superiority. In the image on the right, three dancers closely surround Graham. They link their arms about her and look up to the sky and away from her as two other dancers in the background twirl in a near-crouched position. It appears as if Graham's character has been captured and is being held for her moral crimes.

In the final photograph of the sequence, on the third page, Graham stands before the other eleven dancers (Figure 2.24). They remain seated with their faces turned from the camera. Furthermore, their dark costumes blend together to create a single mass. This jury of her peers seems unified in their judgment. As John Martin wrote, the "departure on the part of one from tradition results in a ferocious condemnation, part sex,

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<sup>119</sup> "Dramatizing the Dance," 42.

part pride, all demoniacal.”<sup>120</sup> In front of these women, Graham stands in a willowy contrapposto. She raises her chin and her hands gesture ambiguously, as if she speaks to the jury before accepting her fate. Persecuted and alone, Graham’s character stands in the harsh light of the jury’s damnation.

*Deep Song*, which Graham first performed in December 1937, also focuses on personal suffering. The subject of the dance is the rising tide of civil war in Spain.<sup>121</sup> *Washington Post* dance critic George Jackson called *Deep Song* “a dance of pain.”<sup>122</sup> Morgan wrote that “the forms of the dance— its swirls, crawls on the floor, contractions and falls— are kinetic equivalents of the human experiences in war which inspired *Deep Song*. It is the anatomy of anguish from tragic events.”<sup>123</sup> Considering the emotional subject matter, the intensity and poignancy of the photographic sequence are no surprise.

On the first page, at the top left, Morgan places a relatively small image of Graham (Figure 2.25). Lit by a single spotlight focused on her face, the darkness largely encompasses Graham. The simple lighting scheme allows Graham to emerge from the blackness. Other than an obscured white bench, there is no setting. The viewer must consider Graham alone. She stands with her arms spread wide as the hem of her dress

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<sup>120</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 13.

<sup>121</sup> In November 1936, General Francisco Franco led his troops into Madrid to conquer the recently elected Republican government. Several European fascist dictators, including Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Antonio Salazar, supported Franco with heavily armed units of soldiers. A ragtag bevy of volunteers from throughout Europe quickly gathered to support the Spanish Republican cause. Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 10-12. Newspapers and magazines covered the story throughout the United States, but the New York Press latched onto the story and quickly generated a wave of support for the Spanish Republic throughout the city. Robert W. Snyder, “The New York Press and the Spanish Civil War” in *Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 33. Like Graham, many visual artists, photographers, writers, poets, political cartoonists, and performing artists subsequently showed their support for the Spanish Republic through their chosen media. Carroll and Fernandez, *Facing Fascism*, 102-69.

<sup>122</sup> George Jackson, “Graham’s Visceral Pleasures,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 1989.

<sup>123</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 14.

flares outward as well. Below this image, in a second photograph, Graham contorts her body into a pose of utmost grief. She balances her weight on a single foot, with her other bent leg held in the air and her body slumping forward at the waist. Her balled up hands cover her eyes. The painful narrative commences with this photograph.

On the second page of the sequence, Morgan utilize a montage of four photographs to fill the page (Figure 2.26). In each image, Graham places her body upon the ground. There appears to be a sequence of images from the top left to the bottom right in which the dancer crawls on hands and knees across the stage lit only from above with a strong spotlight. Additionally, in a fourth image at the top right of the page, Graham squats with her knees and calves flush with the stage as she leans her head far back and lifts a single arm into the spotlight. Although these are four separate photographs and the stage and a single spotlight are visible beneath and above Graham in each, by printing a consistent black background, the photographs join together like a single montaged image. This sequence brings the narrative to life, suggesting movement and the passage of time.

Morgan presents the third and fourth pages of this sequence in a similar manner. The montage of three photographs span the two pages, ignore the gutter of the book, and are joined by the dense blackness of the background (Figure 2.27). In each of these three poses, Graham stands erect and the stage nearly disappears beneath her. Here, the dancer appears to float in the ether, untethered from the terrestrial world. At left, an unseen force blows Graham backward. Her arms, head, torso, legs, and even her dress all indicate this backward motion. The viewer naturally assumes the presence of an invisible bomb blast. At the bottom of the left page, a small image of Graham shows the dancer

moving her hips and swaying her arms. Frozen in time, this motion lacks clarity and seems out of place when considered alone. However, as part of the greater narrative, it becomes apparent that Morgan is suggesting the blast of the bomb, to which the other images of Graham react. On the right page, Graham faces her counterpart across the gutter. She attempts to shield her face and torso from the blast, even as her body prepares to leave the ground from the force of the weapon. This innovative sequence illustrates a horrific act of war using nothing more than the human body to depict the action.

The ensuing pages display two large photographs of Graham's back (Figure 2.28). The photograph on the left crops Graham at the waist. She holds up her hands in a strange gesture in front of her face as her body appears frozen in a languid contrapposto. More than any of the other photographs in this sequence, this image remains highly formal in its play of light and dark. Due to lighting and the color of her costume, the image is an accumulation of contrasts. With the dancer's hands over her eyes and the contrasting lights and darks of the image, it appears that this woman again witnesses an explosion. In this context, Graham's pose on the right page reads as the same woman falling backward. Her arms spread out, her legs collapse beneath her, and her center of gravity suggests she will hit the ground momentarily.

The following two page spread elucidates the aftermath of the preceding four (Figure 2.29). The victim of the bomb, contorted and in horrible pain, lies suffering. On the left page, the darkest image of the sequence presents the face, hand, and part of the dancer's torso in the fading light of the explosion. Her body arcs backward. Her visage appears uncomprehending. She is slightly out of focus. On the right, Graham has stricken the stage, arms and legs splayed; her body crumpled by the force. In the final

photograph of the sequence, on the following page, the dancer lifts her left hand and left leg high into the air, while still upon the ground and with her face to the stage. Graham seemingly leaves her destroyed body in favor of the ethereal realms. To conclude this sequence, Morgan places a blank and purely white page next to this photograph suggesting the afterlife for which the dancer is destined. The final photograph, brightly lit from the right side of the image, may signify divine light from heaven itself illuminating the dancer.

Of all the sequences in *Sixteen Dances*, *Deep Song* is by far the darkest in tone. The lighting is of primary importance in understanding this sequence. As Amico and Edidin note in *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, “this insistence upon light as symbol even begins to take precedence over human form...”<sup>124</sup> Conceptually, Morgan considered light before all else. She believed it the photographer’s job to master light rather than allowing the camera to control the aesthetics of each photograph.<sup>125</sup> She expounded on the importance of light in an essay entitled “Dance into Photography,” which later appeared in *Sixteen Dances*. In this essay she states:

Light is the most enthralling of all photographic elements, possessed of endless excitements. Light is to the photographer what movement is to the dancer, the active principle without which there can be no dance. The reaction I get from light is of energy, vibrations, responsive, impersonal, timeless, tapping the inexhaustible dynamics of the universe. This cosmic force is everybody’s workaday tool. Light has a real parallel with dance, being itself a dance of frequencies.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth McCausland, “Barbara Morgan Photographs the Dance,” *Minicam Photography* 5, no. 7 (1942): 42.

<sup>126</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 150.

Morgan learned about lighting during her college years when she volunteered to set up stage lighting for a group of French playwrights who visited UCLA.<sup>127</sup> The playwrights staged *Failures* at the Potboiler Little Theatre.<sup>128</sup> The play traced emotional changes over time and Morgan's task was to continuously change the mood on stage through lighting.<sup>129</sup> Before accepting this position, Morgan possessed no knowledge of theatre or stage lighting, so she was forced to learn on the job. As she later noted, the expertise she gained from this experience taught her much about the power of lighting.<sup>130</sup>

The other opportunity that helped Morgan to master photographic lighting came from the commission that Willard received to photograph the Albert Barnes Collection of African Sculpture in the early 1930s. Morgan was not yet a photographer herself, but the commission was so large that she agreed to help Willard by designing the lighting, experimenting as she went.<sup>131</sup> This project cemented her faith in the power of creative lighting. She found that the way she lit a fertility sculpture from Sudan or a mask from the Ivory Coast greatly changed its appearance. The objects could seem either menacing or benign depending on the way they were lit.<sup>132</sup>

Years later, when Morgan began her series of dance photographs, she remembered all she had learned and utilized these lessons to create more powerful photographs. Before shooting a single frame, she lit the sequence as a whole in a number of different ways entirely in her mind. For example, she learned that if she placed light

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<sup>127</sup> Cameron, "Barbara Morgan: Quintessence," 36.

<sup>128</sup> Casey Allen, "Camera 35 Interview: Barbara Morgan," *Camera 35* 22 (1977): 58.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Cameron, "Barbara Morgan: Quintessence," 36.

<sup>131</sup> "Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues," 14.

<sup>132</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 11.



beneath a dancer, he or she would appear to lift in the photograph or if she engulfed the dancer in darkness, as Graham is throughout the *Deep Song* sequence, then the dancer would appear compressed, as if being acted upon by an outside force.<sup>133</sup> Once Morgan considered these and other possibilities, she chose which scheme worked best to convey the ideas she wished to express in the photographs and lit the sequence accordingly.<sup>134</sup> By pre-envisioning the lighting construction, Morgan avoided the time-intensive process of setting up pilot lights and working with the dancer to perfect the lighting. Instead, she could set up all of the lights beforehand, so that once the dancer arrived at her studio she was prepared to take photographs immediately.<sup>135</sup> Thus, her precognitive abilities were nearly as important as her advanced lighting schemes.

Morgan frequently provided elegant quotes about the importance of lighting in her dance photographs. In 1940 she claimed, “I want to work out fugues of lights and their shadows modified by other lights and their shadows which will build up a light architecture in the stage space around the moving figures, to become a separate world and evoke specific dramatic values.”<sup>136</sup> Thirteen years later, she wrote, “I love to build a lighting scheme in which light and the moving subject matter is reciprocally alive; now moving in opposition, by-passing, flowing together, modulating into shadow, reappearing in muted areas, until the entire design is rich and mobile.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues,” 14.

<sup>134</sup> Morgan, “Dance Photography,” *The Complete Photographer*, 1136-137.

<sup>135</sup> Morgan, “Modern Dance,” 68.

<sup>136</sup> Morgan, “Dance Photography,” *The Complete Photographer*, 1142.

<sup>137</sup> Morgan, “Kinetic Design in Photography,” 27. Morgan became so well known for her lighting that her work often appeared as models of advanced techniques in lighting. For example, in a 1941 article for the *New York Times* entitled “Tandem Flash Work Requires Planning to Balance Light of Several Bulbs,” Jacob Deschin used Morgan’s photograph *Louise Kloeppe: Statement of Dissent* to illustrate a photograph

Given the importance that Morgan placed on lighting, Morgan shot all of the photographs in *Sixteen Dances* in her studio with special lighting that she designed individually for each shot.<sup>138</sup> This was typical throughout the period that Morgan photographed dance. She never photographed the dances live because she felt the stage lighting in performances too poor and inadequate for her purposes.<sup>139</sup> Since Morgan tightly controlled the lighting without the collaboration of Graham and in the *Deep Song* sequence the lighting comprises a major element of the narrative, it is fair to say that the story here is told equally by Graham and Morgan. Graham's dance certainly remained a primary motivation. However, Morgan used her own inventive lighting, then designed and sequenced the photographs in the book, in order to clarify the narrative.

*Sixteen Dances* ends with four sequences that marked the current style of Graham's dances when Morgan published the book in 1941. Four of the five performances that Graham choreographed between 1938 and 1940 appear. Each is a complex, multiple-part narrative that strives to elucidate one central idea and several minor themes. These performances also presented Morgan with greater challenges than the earlier work. Graham's earlier dances typically presented a single idea, whether in the form of a solo or a performance with several dancers. Morgan could choose singular gestures that interpreted each concept. The last four dances that comprise *Sixteen Dances*, however, were ensemble pieces that mirrored the narrative structure of theatre or ballet in that each communicated a storyline through the sequence of acts. To capture the meaning of these dances, Morgan was forced to photograph stage sets with multiple

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that used three simultaneous flashes. Jacob Deschin, "Tandem Flash Work Requires Planning to Balance Light of Several Bulbs," *New York Times*, November 16, 1941.

<sup>138</sup> Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance*, 13.

<sup>139</sup> "Dramatizing the Dance," 44.

dancers and a number of different poses. I believe that these represent her least successful photographs in *Sixteen Dances*. Morgan likely felt similarly, since she did not later publish or exhibit most of these ensemble photographs. For example, Morgan's 1964 monograph in *Aperture*, which she personally designed, includes five dance photographs. Of those five photographs, the only image to include more than two dancers is a montage of several scenes from *Deaths and Entrances* which Graham choreographed after Morgan published *Sixteen Dances*. In her later years, Morgan primarily published and exhibited photographs of one or two dancers, in which form, lighting, pose, and motion remain the primary focal points, instead of the narrative of the dance. Nonetheless, in *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan apparently felt obliged to document the entire performances of these last four sequences. It is also worth noting that these were among the few dances that Morgan witnessed live on the stage, as opposed to being reproduced by Graham and her company after the fact.<sup>140</sup> Her increased familiarity with these dances is apparent in several ways. Three of the last four sequences identify the dancers and the characters they portrayed. Two of the sequences list the acts under the caption "action" and even explain the narratives of these acts. Morgan also includes dialogue from the performances in three of the four sequences. Morgan utilized all of these devices in order to convey the meaning of the dances to a viewer who she realized might otherwise miss the intricacies of the performance. This ploy succeeds and most viewers likely understood the intended meaning of the dances with Morgan's text. Yet, many of the photographs in these sequences lack visual dynamism.

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<sup>140</sup> This is due to the fact that Morgan began photographing Graham in 1936. Of the dances photographed in *Sixteen Dances*, only *Deep Song*, *American Document*, *Every Soul a Circus*, *El Penitente*, and *Letter to the World* were staged after 1936.

*El Penitente*, 1940, perfectly exemplifies this phenomenon. Strong religious overtones marked this performance. A 1942 *Christian Science Monitor* review called *El Penitente* “a dance play that is very nearly a prayer.”<sup>141</sup> In *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan describes the impetus for the dance:

The Penitentes of the Southwest are a sect which believes in purification from sin through severe penance. Even today, in old and New Mexico, they practice ancient rites, including the crucifixion. The dance bears no factual relationship to these practices, but is presented as a story told after the manner of the old mystery plays. The three figures enter, assume their characters and perform as a group of players.<sup>142</sup>

On the first page of the sequence, Morgan lists the three dancers and the characters they play, as well as provides a ten-part list of the “action.” As the viewer subsequently flips through the pages of the sequence, he or she easily follows the narrative with the aid of what amounts to a contents page. However, most of the individual photographs are not nearly as powerful or evocative as those found in earlier sequences. For example, on the ninth and tenth pages of the sequence Morgan captured an act that portrays the “Death Cart.” (Figure 2.30) As the first page of the sequence explains to the viewer, “The Death Cart is the symbol for sin.”<sup>143</sup> In the first of the two photographs that span this two-page spread, Erick Hawkins embodies the Penitent. He wears a black hood over his head and is harnessed with a rope tied around his body to a crude wooden cart upon which Graham stands wearing a hooded black costume. Hawkins places the weight of his body on his hands and feet in a prostrate position as he struggles to pull the cart. Merce Cunningham,

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<sup>141</sup> M.L., “‘El Penitente’,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 3, 1942. “M.L.” is almost certainly Margaret Lloyd, the dance critic of the *Christian Science Monitor* at this time.

<sup>142</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 14. A 1970 review in the *Hartford Courant* noted that although *El Penitente* was “based on the penitent passion plays of Mexican folk society, it transcends the specific and delivers us the soul of ritual.” Jim Roos, “‘El Penitente’s’ A Mystic Ceremony,” *Hartford Courant*, August 4, 1970.

<sup>143</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 86.

playing Christ, looks at this scene from the shadows, behind a curtain. In the second photograph on the right page, Graham, now wearing all white, has left the cart and lies on the ground on her back. The Penitent, released from his yoke, now sits on his knees with his hands folded in front of him and his head down. Christ stands behind the Penitent and places his hands on the sinner's cheeks. These were likely powerful scenes in the original dance, but in these still photographs, the action appears lifeless and confused. The image looks more like a still photograph of an amateur theatre production than a photograph by Barbara Morgan. These and many of the other photographs in this sequence appear all the more lifeless when compared to the third and fourth pages of the sequence in which Morgan photographs Hawkins alone as the Penitent (Figure 2.31).

The first photograph of Hawkins on the left page presents a close-up image of the Penitent leaping into the air. Hawkins wears only a simple pair of pants with the cuffs rolled at the ankle. He holds between his hands a doubled length of white rope. The photograph is shot against a light-colored backdrop and lit from above and to the right. The play of light and shadow highlights the dynamic composition of Hawkins' leap. His arms spread the rope above his head, while his neck cranes and his torso bends backward. His feet and legs follow the backward arc of his body. The motion and dynamism of the pose are readily apparent. Morgan purposefully lights the rope and torso in the same manner to visually rhyme the tight, rolling muscles of his abdomen with the weave of the rope. Placing his eye sockets in shadow hides his eyes from the viewer. In the second photograph, on the right page, Hawkins remains in the air. He has released the rope with one hand in order to flagellate himself. His head tilts back so that only his chin, cheek, and the tip of his nose remain visible. His arm crosses his body as the rope moves mid-

flight toward his back. All of his muscles and tendons tense for action and his veins stand out underneath his skin as well. These two photographs presented side by side capture the spirit of Graham's *El Penitente* more successfully than the sequence as a whole. Morgan's strongest photographs highlight the details of the dancers' bodies and costumes through carefully controlled lighting, rather than the more narrative details of the performance itself. Thus, not surprisingly, these two photographs of Hawkins as the Penitent appear frequently throughout Morgan's career in publications, exhibitions, and even in her montages.

While the ensemble photographs of *El Penitente* are not among Morgan's most compelling images, they do highlight Morgan's attention to detail. In creating a photograph, Morgan considered all the aspects of its creation that would affect the eventual outcome. This not only included the type of camera and film, the setting, lighting, costume, gesture, and movement; Morgan also closely analyzed the make-up and hair of the performers. In *El Penitente*, in which Graham plays three different parts, the dancer's make-up changes to aid in the identification of the individual characters. Rather than allowing her subjects to do their own make-up, Morgan carefully controlled the application of make-up in her photographs. When applying make-up, Morgan considered not only the facial expression of the character being portrayed and how it would appear in a photograph, but many other factors such as the speed of the dancer's movements, the strenuousness of the sequence, and the gender of the dancers in an ensemble.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Morgan wrote extensively on the application of make-up for photographs. In one particularly specific passage she wrote, "Makeup is a subject by itself— but regular panchromatic makeup gives a clear rendering of the face. Accenting of eyes, eyebrows, lips or other features must proceed from the character of the dance. Makeup for movement is not the same as for still portraiture. When the final interest is the whole

The final two sequences of *Sixteen Dances*, *Letter to the World* and *American Document*, represent a turning point in the careers of Morgan and Graham. *American Document* sealed Graham's reputation as a modern master of dance choreography, while Morgan's photographs of *Letter to the World* cemented her position as a photographer of note.

Graham's influential performance of 1938, *American Document*, represented a condensed social history of the United States delineated not only through dance, but also through the written word. Graham began the performance with a "walk around" in which all of the characters paraded across the stage. This established narrative cohesion for the American story to follow as each section of the dance was divided by another "walk around." The dance split into four components: the Indian episode, Puritan episode, Emancipation Episode, and Now.<sup>145</sup> *American Document* marked Graham's attempt to enter the mainstream of popular culture and achieve a following among the general public, not just other modern dancers, choreographers, and critics.<sup>146</sup> She included spoken words in the performance to make the piece a hybrid of theatrical drama and dance, in hopes that the American public would understand and appreciate the piece more

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body in motion, the head and features must be treated in relation to the total design. If action is fast, the eye length may be extended somewhat at the corners, the eyebrows prolonged, the mouth increased, in order to register. In slower poses a portrait makeup is best unless some bizarre effect is part of the portrayal. The powder base should not be heavy and greasy as strenuous exercise under the lights brings out beads and streams of perspiration. A light foundation cream patted on uniformly in a very thin film looks natural rather than caky [sic], is entirely comfortable and does not have to be retouched during work except for occasional repowdering. An assistant is on hand at such times with powder puff, Kleenex, comb, and mirror...If male and female dancers are to be photographed together, then the men should make-up slightly darker." Morgan, *Photographing the Dance*, 232-34.

<sup>145</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 15.

<sup>146</sup> Don McDonagh, *Martha Graham, A Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 135.

easily.<sup>147</sup> The spoken words of the performance were not dialogue, however. Instead, the performance utilized a narrator who read from a diverse series of documents that were considered intrinsically American, including the Declaration of Independence, a letter from Red Jacket of the Seneca, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and Walt Whitman's poetry.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the overall format of the dance loosely resembled that of minstrel shows, which were exceedingly popular at the time. Graham intended to establish an American sensibility.<sup>149</sup> After watching the premier of *American Document*, Edward Barry, of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, wrote,

As thoroughly American as an Indian brave, a minstrel show interlocutor, or a radio announcer, is Martha Graham's elaborate new dance composition...A big, friendly audience constituted excellent tinder for the sparks which flew from the stage. For 'American Document' deals with subjects which are almost as non-controversial as mother or the flag. It salutes the Declaration of Independence, the emancipation proclamation, and the Gettysburg address. It manages to squeeze out a tear for the dispossessed Indians. At the very end it plumps safely for democracy.<sup>150</sup>

As Barry noted, audiences responded positively to this new type of dance. The introduction of American themes created a connection with American audiences that Graham had never previously achieved. While earlier reviews of Graham's performances used adjectives such as "macabre" and "unhealthy," reviews of *American Document*

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. In 1939, Cecil Smith of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* called *American Document* Graham's "first serious excursion into theater art." Cecil Smith, "Week to Bring Martha Graham and Ted Shawn to Chicago," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1939.

<sup>148</sup> Morgan, *Sixteen Dances*, 15.

<sup>149</sup> McDonagh, *Martha Graham, A Biography*, 134. Maureen Needham Costonis wrote that Graham would later indirectly reject the notion that *American Document* mirrored elements of a minstrel show. Graham even claimed that she had never personally attended such a performance. However, Costonis argues that this type of performance remained so pervasive in American popular culture before World War II that Graham could have utilized minstrel show elements without knowing their original source. Maureen Needham Costonis, "Martha Graham's American Document: A Minstrel Show in Modern Dance Dress," *American Music* 9, no. 3 (1991): 300.

<sup>150</sup> Edward Barry, "Martha Graham Dances a Salute to Democracy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1939.



touted Graham's "devout patriotism."<sup>151</sup> Isabel Morse Jones of the *Los Angeles Times* even went so far as to open her critique of *American Document* with the superlative statement, "If you love America, see Martha Graham!"<sup>152</sup> Cultural historian Mark Franko writes that Graham's choreography of the late thirties and early forties "alluded increasingly to American history in ways that made her materialism take a backseat to nationalism." Franko goes on to note that "Graham was not alone in seeking the high ground of American identity" at this time.<sup>153</sup> Wanda Corn writes about this trend extensively in the introductory chapter of *The Great American Thing*. She cites Paul Rosenfeld, Waldo Frank, Malcolm Cowley, Matthew Josephson, Marsden Hartley, and Grant Wood as prominent writers, intellectuals, and artists who turned to American themes in the two decades leading up to World War II.<sup>154</sup>

*American Document* premiered at the Bennington Dance Festival of 1938, which John Martin described as the "most brilliant of its annual festivals."<sup>155</sup> The Bennington Dance Festival concluded a five-year project by Bennington College to bring the most influential modern dancers and choreographers to the Vermont campus. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm and their respective companies all participated as resident artists for the summer, which provided the choreographers a unique environment to develop new performances to premier at the college. Bennington hired Morgan as the official photographer of the festival and granted her a two-week

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<sup>151</sup> Costonis, "Martha Graham's American Document," 298.

<sup>152</sup> Isabel Morse Jones, "American Dance Play Impressive," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1939.

<sup>153</sup> Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>154</sup> Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 12

<sup>155</sup> Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance*, 15, 17.

residency during which time she photographed classes, rehearsals, and the final performances. While Morgan took numerous photographs of the rehearsals and performances, all were informal shots. She did not intend to include them in any exhibition or publication due to the disadvantageous lighting conditions. Instead, she used this experience to familiarize herself with the intricacies of the dances.<sup>156</sup> This also marked the first time that Morgan, the dance community, and the general public witnessed *American Document*. By Graham's third national tour of *American Document* just a year later, in 1939, the dance saw attendance swell enormously and received gushing critical reviews.<sup>157</sup> For example, *The Atlanta Constitution* praised Graham's ability to bring history alive through dance and lauded the company's "rhythmic grace with perfect muscular control."<sup>158</sup>

*American Document* marked a turning point in Graham's oeuvre in many senses. She successfully moved toward the center of mass entertainment; she changed the make-up of her company as several established dancers left and a few male dancers joined; and she changed the typical rhythm of her pieces, the type of material, and even the style of the dance.<sup>159</sup> Yet, Morgan's sequence in *Sixteen Dances* is not quite as universally successful. When seen as a whole, Morgan's inspired design of the sequence achieves her primary goal for this dance. She montaged photographs and text in a way that preserved the flavor of this unique performance. Conversely, when considered individually, the photographs are less interesting. The ensemble photographs appear

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>157</sup> Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics*, 69.

<sup>158</sup> Lee Rogers, "History of Nation Is Told in Dance," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 27, 1939.

<sup>159</sup> McDonagh, *Martha Graham, A Biography*, 137-38.

purely documentary and frozen. The duets with Hawkins and Graham seem largely lifeless (Figure 2.32). The solo shot of Hawkins striding forward, which was such a brilliant addition to *Spring on Madison Square*, pales as a stand-alone image (Figure 2.33). Even the double exposure of three female dancers, who stand in for all American mothers, appears strangely confused and frenetic (Figure 2.34). Yet, when all of these images are paired with text and considered with the other photographs in the sequence together, they bear fruit as a narrative sequence.

The final series of photographs, *Letter to the World*, depicted another large-scale narrative performance. These photographs also represented Morgan's greatest success to date. *Letter to the World* elevated Morgan to the role of storied photographer in the minds of many. The photographic sequence for *Letter to the World* spans twelve pages, not including the two preceding pages of which one is blank and the other gives the title of the sequence alone. The first page with imagery once again includes text that identifies the list of characters and the dancers who play each part, as well as a list of the different sections of the performance as a whole (Figure 2.35). Additionally, the first page features two small photographs, each accompanied by quoted text. Words play an important role both in Graham's performance and Morgan's sequence of photographs, as is fitting for a dance loosely based on the life of the American poet Emily Dickinson. Each two-page spread includes snippets of text culled from Graham's performance. Furthermore, all of the dialogue used in the performance comes from the poetry of Dickinson. Thus, the story is told, at least in part, through the poet's own words.<sup>160</sup> As Morgan designed this sequence, the text and the photographs are integrated so as to be

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<sup>160</sup> In the original performance, the dancer Jean Erdman read the lines while dancing. According to Margaret Lloyd, this represented the "outer Emily" interacting with friends and family. M.L., "'Letter to the World,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, November 28, 1942.

visually connected rather than separate. As is typical of her book design, this sequence becomes as a multiple page montage in which each two-page spread represents an act and the viewer must consider all twelve of the pages together to comprehend fully the intricacies of the narrative. When one considers the sequence in this manner, it clearly succeeds. The dynamic combinations of poetry and photographs allow the viewer a glimpse into the life of the poet as perceived by Graham's choreography. And while many of the ensemble photographs powerfully evoke specific emotional moments from Dickinson's life, once again the photographs of Graham alone stand out as the most compelling. The ensemble photographs, which depict the stage filled with props and numerous dancers with varying costumes, require the text to form a cohesive narrative, while the photograph of Graham in a pure, white gown with her body in a horizontal position as she kicks her leg backward above her body stands alone (Figures 2.36 & 2.37).<sup>161</sup> Presented without text, the photograph fills most of the page. Nearly equal in power, the final photograph of the sequence features Graham as a solitary figure once again (Figure 2.38). She sits on a simple white bench, her eyes closed and her hands folded in her lap. It is the consummation of the performance as well as the conclusion of the photographic sequence, and it is quietly powerful in both roles. Below the simple text reads "This is my letter to the world." While the complex design of text and photographs adequately conveys the meaning of the dance, in time it would be these two photographs from *Sixteen Dances* and a third, *Letter to the World (Swirl)*, which did not appear in *Sixteen Dances*, that would be remembered as the epitome of this performance. To

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<sup>161</sup> Figure 38, which appears on the tenth page of the *Letter to the World* sequence, later became known as *Letter to the World (Kick)*.

understand the meaning and the majesty of *Letter to the World*, one can simply focus on these three photographs.

*Letter to the World (Kick)*, as the first of the three photographs would later be titled when Morgan exhibited and published it separately, is by far Morgan's most famous photograph. Journalist Vicki Goldberg notes that Morgan "took full advantage of Graham's remarkable costume to suggest the vector of movement before, during, and after the split second that her camera halted it." Goldberg continues "Graham's voluminous skirt momentarily was back toward her head as her foot, invisible beneath the fabric, kicks up behind her." Timing was crucial because "the skirt must have subsided as soon as the shutter clicked."<sup>162</sup> But, visually, this photograph does not focus on motion, as Deborah Jowitt notes in an article for *Ballet Review*. Jowitt writes that Morgan arrested the gesture at its completion and the secret of its beauty comes from this suspended and balanced pose, in which the preceding action drives the flowing structure of the skirt.<sup>163</sup>

While Jowitt focuses on form, Anna Kisselgoff considers this photograph's place in the narrative of Dickinson's life:

Its image conveys not merely a dancer in action but the inner emotion distilled in that movement. Anyone who has seen 'Letter to the World' will recognize the moment captured by Mrs. Morgan there as the peak of emotion in the entire work... This is the solo in which the Emily Dickinson figure resolves her interior crisis. Her hopes for love have been dashed. If she appears physically crippled for a brief instant, it is because her emotional paralysis is translated into a visual metaphor. Yet, as Mrs. Morgan sought to point out, the freedom with which the back leg kicks upward is a dramatic projection of a will to resolve this crisis.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Goldberg, "Transfixing Motion and Emotion."

<sup>163</sup> Jowitt, "Books: Morgan Looks at Graham."

<sup>164</sup> Kisselgoff, "Dance View."

To capture these complex emotions in a single photograph presented Morgan with a technical challenge. In a 1988 interview, Morgan stated that she wanted “the body to be very firm, but I wanted this to be fluent.”<sup>165</sup> To achieve this effect, Morgan set the shutter at a 500<sup>th</sup> of a second. Simultaneously, Morgan sought to portray this moment in Dickinson’s life in which she has accepted that her love life has failed and turns to poetry for fulfillment. Thus, Morgan created a composition which included an “empty space like Haiku poetry into which her imagination would soar.”<sup>166</sup> She went to say that in designing this photograph she was “very much influenced by Oriental art and Haiku poetry.”<sup>167</sup> Morgan largely controlled the depiction of space through the lighting. She lit the stage space from multiple sources and placed Graham against a nearly black background, so that she emerges from the dark as a beacon of white light.

This photograph held importance for Graham as well who stated that “there are certain moments that are caught– like the kick– which are deep moments in my life.”<sup>168</sup> Yet, the technical process Morgan undertook to create this image was time-consuming and difficult for the dancer. Morgan and Graham worked an entire day on this photograph. As Graham later stated, “I would do it over and over. I would get tired and lie down on the floor...What she did was make me resort to the physical aspect of the dance...There is no playing to the audience, there is only the musculature.”<sup>169</sup> This illuminating quote by Graham illustrates Morgan’s perfectionism, but also a cagey

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<sup>165</sup> Bensard and Kirkconnell, “Conversation with Barbara Morgan,” 17.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Kisselgoff, “Dance View.”

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

attempt to circumvent Graham's own perception of the dance. By exhausting the dancer, both mentally and physically, Morgan forced Graham to abandon everything but the movements themselves. This allowed Morgan to explore this pose free from the fetters of Graham's own interpretation. It is for this reason that this photograph is among her most successful dance images.

While *Letter to the World (Swirl)* does not appear in *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan later referred to this photograph as the moment which followed *Kick*.<sup>170</sup> In an interview with Anne Tucker, Morgan said:

The photograph referred to as KICK symbolizes the agony of Emily's life after she has given up her tragic love affair. The second picture in the sequence, SWIRL, was shot at a slower speed for a more relaxed feeling. In the first picture she is horizontal; now she is vertical. She's beginning to transcend that agony; she's no longer as burdened. I had her hand go off into the darkness at an oblique, vertical angle to show that Emily had risen out of her personal life and was arriving at the detached state of a poet. But there's also a twist in the form, indicating that she's not altogether released.<sup>171</sup>

Morgan never explained why she did not include *Swirl* in *Sixteen Dances* and it remains an unfortunate omission. Had she replaced the penultimate photograph in the *Letter to the World* sequence in the book with *Swirl*, there would have been a more cohesive conclusion to the narrative. Nevertheless, *Swirl* became another iconic photograph of *Letter to the World*.

Perhaps the strongest aspect of *Swirl* is its incomplete emotional transformation. The narrative turns on this image, as is illustrated by Graham's twirling costume and the complex contortion of her body. Morgan portrays the young poet as beautiful, yet

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<sup>170</sup> *Letter to the World (Swirl)* was later published in the monograph Morgan edited and designed for Morgan & Morgan. Morgan, *Barbara Morgan*, Morgan and Morgan, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Tucker, *Woman's Eye*, 95.

conflicted. While the motion of her body appears fluid, the centrifugal focus belies any suggestion of freedom. She twirls and spins, but cannot shake off her retrospection. Her face evokes her complicated emotional story as well. The curious lack of emotion in Graham's countenance suggests a psychologically spent woman. Her body fights the churning tide of her personal narrative, while her mind has accepted her fate. In an article for *Dance Magazine*, Doris Hering also notes the contradictions of Graham's pose. Hering, however, believes that it was the arms of Graham that suggested Dickinson's conflict. She notes that while one arm reaches into the air in an attempt to affirm a new beginning, Graham's other arm remains inverted and awkward.<sup>172</sup>

The final photograph of the *Letter to the World* sequence finds Graham seated quietly upon a small bench. She exudes passive acceptance. The struggles and inner turmoil have lapsed in favor of emotional and physical silence. The viewer sees that Dickinson's poetry shall become the only outlet of the passions that still roil deep within her otherwise quieted soul. Below Morgan placed the printed words "This is my letter to the world." Dickinson's story has ended, the letter is at its conclusion.

The critical response to *Sixteen Dances* was universally positive. However, the critics did not all agree on what they were lauding. In his eloquent and historically minded review of the book, John Martin extensively praised the book. Yet, he only mentions Morgan's name once and never acknowledges her photographs, sequencing, or design work. Instead, Martin used his review to expound upon the greatness of American Dance in the 1930s and its continuing rise at the dawn of the 1940s.<sup>173</sup> A 1941 review of

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<sup>172</sup> Hering, "Barbara Morgan," 43.

<sup>173</sup> John Martin, "Moods of the Dance," *New York Times*, September 28, 1941.



the book in *Dance Observer* by Elizabeth McCausland was more attentive to Morgan's specific contribution in photography when she wrote:

Without question, these are the best photographs of the dance today. Intensely dramatic and romantic though they are in some instances, they are free from pictorialism or picturesqueness, from melodrama or stunting artificiality. They spring from the photographer's awareness of the subject (in this case, the medium) she is setting down. There is no casual turismo about Barbara Morgan's approach to the dance: she has lived with the dance and lived the dance in a deep kinesthetic knowledge, which now reflects itself in the photographs. They are not abstractions from the whole, but parts which represent the whole.<sup>174</sup>

McCausland certainly intended nothing but the highest of praise for Morgan in this review. Yet, she suggested that Morgan's greatest asset was her strong connections to the medium of dance, which allowed her to document Graham's dance in a manner that best exemplified the spirit of the performances. McCausland calls Morgan's photographs "parts which represent the whole," which indirectly suggests that the photographs could not stand on their own.<sup>175</sup>

Martin and McCausland's responses both fail to see Morgan's photographs as independent works of art that are not entirely reliant on Graham's performances. This is understandable, however, if one considers *Sixteen Dances* carefully. In the book, Morgan's role appears to be subordinate to that of Graham. The first page, even before the title page, includes only two words: "Martha Graham." The title page itself features Graham's signature in huge lettering and Morgan's name appears much smaller below.

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<sup>174</sup> Elizabeth McCausland, "Books on the Dance," *Dance Observer* 8, no. 9 (1941): 120.

<sup>175</sup> In a third review that focuses on objective documentation of Graham's performances, Edward Alden Jewell wrote "The dance, strictly speaking, is outside our domain, although in the deepest sense all of the arts are pertinent here. At any rate, I should not want to miss mentioning the remarkable photographs by Barbara Morgan that, in a volume published by Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, so arrestingly report the choreographic art of Martha Graham." Here, the word "report" makes his position on the artistry of the photographs clear. Edward Alden Jewell, "A Survey of Publications of Art," *New York Times*, June 14, 1942.

Graham penned the first section and again her signature appears below. Morgan's introduction follows with her name printed in small letters. After the photographs, a long, scholarly essay by George Beiswanger describes Graham's oeuvre with no mention of Morgan. Next, the book includes Morgan's most technical essay on photographing dance, which seemingly relegates her role to that of documentary photographer rather than an artist. The book even includes a list of the dances not pictured with descriptions, as if the photographs presented were mere documentary. One assumes that the focus on Graham and modern dance above the artistry of Morgan's photographs was a marketing ploy by Duell, Sloan, and Pearce. Since Graham's star was rising in the dance world and Morgan remained relatively unknown in most circles, it made sense from a business point of view to highlight Graham and modern dance.

It appears that hindsight allowed some critics to understand what Morgan wished to accomplish with her book. In a 1975 article, Anna Kisselgoff wrote that "Barbara Morgan's book of photographs of Martha Graham, published in 1941, remains the most celebrated photographic treatment of a dancer."<sup>176</sup> Perhaps more importantly, she went on to say that "the result was never a mere pictorial record of Miss Graham's choreography and dancing: the photographs were works of art in which Mrs. Morgan 'interpreted' the dances and yet remained true to their essence."<sup>177</sup>

As has been detailed thus far, Morgan presented all of the photographs in *Sixteen Dances* within sequences. However, she exhibited and published most of her photographs of other dancers as stand-alone images. From 1936 to 1945, Morgan photographed a multitude of modern dancers and choreographers beyond Martha Graham

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<sup>176</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, "Spirited Photos 'Speak' of Miss Graham's Elan," *New York Times*, June 19, 1975.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

and her troupe.<sup>178</sup> Yet the majority of these photographs were taken after she published *Sixteen Dances* in 1941.

The years that immediately followed the release of *Sixteen Dances* represented a time of change in Morgan's life as well. The Morgan family left New York City for West Scarsdale, New York where they built a new family home. Integrated into the new home was a studio for Morgan. Designed specifically for dance photography, the studio eschewed the typical rectangular format. Instead, it was two feet wider at one end. Furthermore, an upper level at the back of the studio allowed Morgan to shoot the dancers from above.<sup>179</sup> Although Morgan took a large number of dance photographs in the 1940s, fewer of these photographs found their way into publications and exhibitions than those from the earliest years of her career. The photographs most commonly cited, and reproduced by Morgan herself, depict Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, José Limón, Valerie Bettis, and Merce Cunningham.

American audiences could only see these photographs through exhibitions, however. Beginning in 1938, Morgan's dance photographs traveled in exhibitions throughout the country. By 1945, her photographs had been viewed by American audiences in over 150 venues on college campuses and in metropolitan centers throughout the United States.<sup>180</sup> Vicki Goldberg even notes that many Americans first witnessed modern dance through Morgan's dance photography exhibitions, since modern

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<sup>178</sup> Deba Patnaik claims that Morgan was most likely the only photographer of the era who worked with dancers of African and Asian descent. Deba Patnaik, "Barbara Morgan: The Visual Poet," in *"I See America Dancing, Photographs of American Modern Dance by Barbara Morgan" at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, February 12- March 13, 1994* (Dobb's Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan and Morgan, 1994), 2.

<sup>179</sup> The respective walls were eighteen feet and sixteen feet in width. The distance between these walls was twenty-five feet. Deschin, "Permanence through Perseverance," 23.

<sup>180</sup> Curtis Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, 1988), 17.

dancers rarely staged performances outside large cities.<sup>181</sup> These touring shows culminated in a grand exhibition in 1945 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York titled “Modern American Dance.” The *New York Times* first announced the exhibition on March 2<sup>nd</sup> of that year stating that Morgan’s photographs “illustrate the evolution of modern American dance during the last decade.”<sup>182</sup> Just one month later, the *Times* ran a two-page spread that included five of Morgan’s dance photographs and a small text box that explained the importance of the exhibition.<sup>183</sup> That same year, the Inter-American Office of the National Gallery of Art under State Department sponsorship toured this same exhibition of approximately fifty photographs throughout South America with text panels written by Barbara Morgan and John Martin translated into Spanish and Portuguese for the various locations.<sup>184</sup> One wholly positive review appeared in *The Standard*, an English language newspaper in Argentina.<sup>185</sup> The *Buenos Ayres Herald* also ran a short, but glowing review of the exhibition on June 24<sup>th</sup> that noted large attendance at the exhibition.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Goldberg, “Transfixing Motion and Emotion.”

<sup>182</sup> “Modern Art Museum Alters Display List,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1945.

<sup>183</sup> “Modern American Dance,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1945. The exhibition was also listed in a *New York Times* “Things for Children To Do” column on March 30, 1945. This article noted that admission was thirty cents for adults and twelve cents for children. “Things for Children to Do,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1945.

<sup>184</sup> The exact number of photographs shown in the exhibition remains unclear. One *New York Times* article says forty photographs, another claims fifty. A review of the exhibition in *The Standard* states that forty-four photographs appeared in the exhibition. The title of the exhibition seemingly changed for some venues as well. In Argentina, the exhibition opened on June 23 at the Argentine-North American Cultural Institute under the title, “Modern Dance in the United States.” The exhibition was scheduled to close only five days later. “Photographic Exhibition of Modern Dance,” *The Standard (Argentina)*, June 19, 1947.

<sup>185</sup> In an interesting note, the review was published on June 19, four days before the exhibition opened to the public. *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> “Photographic Study of Modern Dance,” *Buenos Ayres Herald*, June 24, 1947. Morgan participated in another South American project as well. In 1943, Morgan was involved with a short film project called *Growing Americans*. This American film, the Agricultural Film Unit of the Coordinator’s Office produced for release in South America with narration in both Spanish and Portuguese, promoted the value of raising

After receiving near-universal acclaim for these national and international exhibitions of modern dance photographs, Morgan shifted her focus to other photographic subjects. No evidence suggests that she took dance photographs after 1945 and no reason was ever offered for this major change in her career.<sup>187</sup>

Yet, the dance images Morgan took from 1936 to 1945 defined her career in the minds of many. *Letter to the World (Swirl)* and the other collaborative photographs created with Graham and other modern dancers provided Morgan the opportunity to master the camera and explore the complex formal and intellectual themes of the period. She distilled the beauty and power of Graham's dances into singular images that relayed Graham's mastery of gesture, the narrative of Graham's performances, and her own complex interpretations of Graham's oeuvre.

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chickens. Morgan's sons Douglas and Lloyd played the part of two boys who worked at a chicken farm and Morgan took photographs of the production. Incidentally, the Morgan boys did raise chickens at home. Morgan wrote of this project: "this type of modest American propaganda film is a close cousin to the documentary. As long as it keeps its roots in the honest soil and unglamorized American life for end purposes of human understanding and serves practically to show how real things get done, it is a fertile trend." From the tone of this text, it appears that Morgan was uncomfortable being associated with American propaganda and this is her attempt to justify it to herself. Barbara Morgan, "Growing Americans: Shooting Stills for a Government Short," *U.S. Camera* 7, no. 1 (1944): 44-47, 54.

<sup>187</sup> At very least, she would never publish any dance photographs that utilized negatives dated after 1945.

### Chapter Three- Light Abstractions

In 1940 Barbara Morgan was in the process of finishing the lay-out for *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs*. As she finalized the design of the book, one last decision needed to be made. The last page of the book remained empty as she could not decide whether to conclude the book with a final written statement or another photograph. As she weighed her options, she opened the newspaper one morning and found an article concerning factory efficiency. The article detailed an experiment in which a sociologist attached a small flashlight to the wrist of a worker who placed lids on cans all day. The sociologist recorded the movement of light for a pre-determined period and then used the resulting data to create a sequence of the worker's gestures. Morgan was transfixed. The strange "scribbles" of light in the resulting photographs immediately brought to mind the types of gestures and rhythms that Morgan had been recording in modern dance over the course of the last five years.<sup>1</sup> The notion of capturing light as a direct product of movement fused Morgan's two central obsessions at that time, the "pervasive, vibratory character of light energy" and the "physical and spiritual energy" of gesture or movement.<sup>2</sup> Within a few minutes Morgan had conceived the tailpiece of her

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Light Abstractions," (working manuscript for Jean Tucker's *Light Abstractions*), [1979?], 1-2. Barbara Morgan Archive, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York (Hereafter Morgan Archive).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 27. Morgan often wrote of her fascination with light and movement. In a manuscript for an exhibition catalogue that included her light abstractions Morgan wrote that "light has always been for me— and still is— Life's miracle. Photographs would not exist without Light and neither would Life. Through childhood, after a storm, with rain dropping from the slender leaves of our eucalyptus tree, and after the sun came out, I would sit enthralled watching the light center in each tiny raindrop— filled with secret mystery!" Morgan, "Light Abstractions," 2. In another article Morgan wrote about her fascination with motion: "Wherever I am, I watch, directly and also out of the corner of my eye, the rhythm, phasing, and reflexes of people, places, machines, animals, fungus, insects, traffic, waves in water— everything, living or dead." Barbara Morgan, "Dynamics of Composition" in *Leica Manual: The Complete Book of 35mm Photography* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1973), 365. In an unpublished letter to Beaumont Newhall, Morgan states that her ongoing fascination with light and gesture were the key influences in creating the light abstractions, even if

first book. She would create a light abstraction that highlighted the natural movement of the human body.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout her career, Morgan had always been attracted to problem-solving. One of her great pleasures in adopting photography as her primary artistic medium was the wealth of technical processes that she had to master or occasionally invent in order to create the types of photographs that she envisioned. The first light abstraction presented yet another such challenge. First, she purchased yards of solid black material. She next sewed black-out curtains for her studio window, a black robe, and a black mask. Then, she covered one wall of her studio with the remaining black cloth. Since she was still experimenting, she set up both her 4 x 5 camera and a 5 x 7 camera and prepared all the developing chemicals so that she could test the negatives after each subsequent trial.<sup>4</sup> She also engaged an unnamed helper to open and close the shutter at her request.<sup>5</sup> Once all of the preparations had been made, Morgan tied a flashlight to her right hand, turned off all the lights, and began to experiment with different gestures and speeds using the same counting technique that she had often employed in her sessions with modern dancers.<sup>6</sup> After exposing six negatives, she developed the results. Through these experiments, she managed to learn how to create lines both thin and wide, solid white

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the conception for this photographic technique was born out of the newspaper article. Barbara Morgan to Beaumont Newhall, nd, Morgan Archive.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, "Light Abstractions," 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> In the 1979 manuscript for Jean Tucker's *Light Abstractions*, Morgan refers to this helper as "a dancer friend, whose husband was a painter, and so [she] understood both rhythm and design." Ibid., 2. In a 1981 interview in *Darkroom Photography*, Morgan notes that this dancer was part of Martha Graham's company. Robin Holland, "A Life in Movement," *Darkroom Photography* 3 (1981): 50. Finally, in an unpublished letter to Beaumont Newhall, Morgan states that this young dancer was interested in film-making as well. Barbara Morgan to Beaumont Newhall, nd, Morgan Archive.

<sup>6</sup> As Morgan would count, each number represented an accent for the gesture. Ibid. Thus, in the first experiment she might count to three at a specific speed and in the next attempt, she might count to four at a different speed. Morgan, "Light Abstractions," 2.

circles, and blurred effects as well.<sup>7</sup> She also learned to avoid many of the hazards of working under such conditions, which included insufficient depth of field, focus, and light bounce from the floor.<sup>8</sup> Once she had mastered all of the technical issues involved in creating light abstractions, she set out to fashion the specific light abstraction she had envisioned.

The first fully realized light abstraction that Morgan published was *Light Signature*, which appeared as the tailpiece of *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Figure 3.1). *Light Signature* used all of the graphic elements that Morgan had learned in the course of her experiments. Yet, more importantly, as we shall see through the course of this chapter, this initial light abstraction and those that followed were indicative of Morgan's views on the intersection of abstraction, light, and modernist photography as well as her connection to the world of art and photography in the 1940s and beyond.

As published in the book, *Light Signature* employs a format that is approximately 2½ inches square. Calligraphic lines of varying widths appear to issue in dynamic concentric arcs from a blurred central core. The energetic arcs of light, set against a perfectly black background, add to the visual dynamism. The title is quite witty for a tailpiece as well. By calling the image "Light Signature," Morgan essentially signs the book with a photograph and places her own artistic mark upon a book in which Graham seems to be the dominant force.

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1981 interview with Robin Holland, Morgan stated that she opened the shutter only once for each negative. Holland, "Life in Movement," 50. However, in her manuscript *Light Abstractions*, Morgan stated that she would open and close the shutter multiple times to create the circles of white light. Morgan, "Light Abstractions," 2.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Morgan to Beaumont Newhall, nd, Morgan Archive.



It is also worth considering the role that Morgan played in creating this photograph. Instead of documenting another performer, Morgan executed the actions and directed a helper to use her camera. She purposefully stepped out from behind the camera to create an artistic work in which she was the primary participant. This is made manifest by the fact that Morgan never revealed the name of the young woman who opened and closed the shutter. It appears that Morgan self-consciously claims the stage in her own photographs for the very first time. Instead of highlighting the beautiful gestures of others, Morgan explores the gestures and rhythms which she had always felt within herself without exposing her body to the camera directly. She removes the physicality of rhythm and motion in favor of pure, unfettered gesture as represented by the lines of light.

After completing *Light Signature*, Morgan fashioned three other light abstractions in 1940 that would eventually be exhibited and published.<sup>9</sup> *Samahdi* is based on an overall circular shape similar to that of *Light Signature* (Figure 3.2). However, it is heavily weighted along the top with several arcs of thick, modulated light. The center of the composition consists of a crescent, overlaid with a checkmark. *Cadenza* incorporates an ethereal, blurred light smudge at the top of the composition (Figure 3.3). The other elements of this light abstraction, including two circular arcs and two gestures that incorporate multiple oxbows, appear to emanate from this abstract light entity. The central line of *Emanation I* twists and turns in a manner that evokes a glowing spring (Figure 3.4). At two points, where this line meets others, Morgan includes glowing light bursts, which visually suggest a reaction as the lines touch. The two circular arcs

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<sup>9</sup> Although Morgan only published four straight light abstractions that she created in 1940, she additionally published a montage titled *Pure Energy and Neurotic Man* that combined a complex abstraction with a photograph of a man's hand.

modulate from thin to thick. These streaks also incorporate areas of gray and black within the lines in a manner reminiscent of the dry brush of some masters of Asian calligraphy.

Although light and motion were certainly central to the conception of these last three light abstractions, as they were for *Light Signature*, Morgan would later clarify that she also considered deeper, more complex, issues when she rendered the latter three. As Morgan stated: “the creative person’s role, as I see it, is to extract the most significant, most moving aspects– to refine and essentialize them, to get rid of the unnecessary, and to articulate the subtlest, most intense, most profound expression possible.”<sup>10</sup> The light abstractions embody the ultimate markers of refined and “essentialized” expression. Unlike *Light Signature*, which evolved largely by chance, the three subsequent light abstractions were pre-conceived and carefully composed.<sup>11</sup> Thus, these artworks are at once syntactical in that the appearance of the finalized photographs refer directly to the method and means of their creation (gesture and light caught on film) and simultaneously expressive in their evocation of broader concepts. *Cadenza*, for example, suggested a connection to the world of music. A cadenza is a composition played or sung by a soloist. Morgan appears to connect her work to the “essentialized” expression of a musical passage as performed by an individual. In another example, *Samahdi* offered a metaphor for “the Buddhist state of individual serenity within cosmic awareness,”

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<sup>10</sup> Curtis Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, 1988), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, “Light Abstractions,” 42.

according to Morgan.<sup>12</sup> Defined as a state of deep trance in the Buddhist religion, “samadhi” usually requires complete focus on a single object.<sup>13</sup> Although Morgan never stated as much directly, it appears that she considered this artwork a plausible object upon which one could concentrate or meditate. However, any direct connections to music or Buddhism remain tenuous. The light abstractions instead represent abstract icons for Morgan— complex puzzles that combined light and motion in order to evoke expansive, nebulous themes without fixed meaning, thereby eliciting subjective interpretation from the viewer. In this sense, the titles provide a framework, but the viewer must fill in the details.

One theme that may indirectly unify all four light abstractions is vitalism. In the 2007 exhibition catalogue, *Pollock Matters*, Jonathan Katz lays out a convincing argument that many artists between the wars were strongly influenced by vitalist doctrine.<sup>14</sup> The central philosophy of vitalism stated that an array of invisible forces shape the universe and thereby connect all of creation.<sup>15</sup> Katz states that many artists

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<sup>12</sup> Morgan was confused, but seemingly pleased, when the Atomic Energy Commission in Washington D.C. asked her for the right to reproduce this light abstraction for their literature. Barbara Morgan to Phyllis Matchette, November 5, 1971, Morgan Archive.

<sup>13</sup> Damien Keown, ed., *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed July 7, 2008). Scholars Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen contend that many American artists, musicians, and poets had a fleeting interest in Buddhism in the 1930s and 1940s due to D.T. Suzuki’s 1934 publication, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and Dwight Goddard’s *A Buddhist Bible*, 1938. Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 76.

<sup>14</sup> Katz focuses his argument on Jackson Pollock, but also lists Henry Moore, Vasily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, Alexander Calder, Robert Motherwell, and Mark Rothko as adherents of vitalism. Jonathan D. Katz, “Jackson Pollock’s Vitalism: Herbert Matter and the Vitalist Tradition” in *Pollock Matters*, ed. Ellen G. Landau and Claude Cernuschi (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 2007), 62.

<sup>15</sup> In “Vitalism and Contemporary Thought,” Joseph Chiari claims that the underlying principles of vitalism appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as a reaction to cultural reliance upon materialism that denied the human soul. Joseph Chiari, “Vitalism and Contemporary Thought” in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass

employing a vitalist philosophy attempted to depict light, energy, and/or motion in their artworks, as these were plausibly the underlying universal forces.<sup>16</sup> Morgan's light abstractions can certainly be viewed in the context of this philosophy. These artworks directly pair light and motion through this unique photographic technique. Furthermore, Morgan often wrote of the "dancing atoms" from which all matter was comprised as well as the "invisible life forces within the visible" and the "energy of life itself."<sup>17</sup> Rather than using the term vitalism, however, Morgan referred to "rhythmic vitality," which she defined as the "essence of life force." She went on to describe rhythmic vitality as "the poetic mysticism of the East and the pragmatic dynamics of the west brought into resonance."<sup>18</sup> In other words, for Morgan, rhythmic vitality represented an amalgamation of all artistic styles that together suggested the fundamental universal life forces. In order to exemplify the key concepts of vitalism, Morgan ultimately turned to abstraction.

In 1960, Morgan wrote that abstraction was "no longer a new frontier; but is quite generally an assimilated discipline of seeing and composing."<sup>19</sup> In 1940, however, when Morgan created the light pieces, abstraction continued to evolve as a phenomenon in the American world of art. In 1936, Alfred Barr Jr., the first director of the Museum of

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 245. However, the writing of Henri Bergson brought vitalism into the twentieth century, achieving an international vogue that influenced intellectuals, theologians, scientists, and artists among others. Sanford Schwartz, "Bergson and the Politics of Vitalism" in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 277.

<sup>16</sup> Katz, "Jackson Pollock's Vitalism," 62.

<sup>17</sup> "Discussion with Barbara Morgan," *Growth of Dance in America*, Summer/Fall 1976: 272 and "Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues with the External World," *Bennington College—Quadrille* 5, no. 4 (1971): 13.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 9. Curtis Carter likened Morgan's concept of rhythmic vitality the ideas of Rudolf Arnheim, who wrote about art and visual perception. According to Carter, Arnheim "might characterize [rhythmic vitality] as the dynamic forces that describe the structural orders of feeling the visual perception that link our mental processes with the material world." Curtis Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance, Barbara Morgan Photographs* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2004), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Under the Sun," *Aperture* 8, no. 4 (1960): 197.

Modern Art in New York, curated an exhibition titled “Cubism and Abstract Art.” In the accompanying catalogue, Barr wrote that in the twentieth century many artists are “driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearance.” “Abstract art needs no defense. It has become one of the many ways to paint or carve or model,” he concluded.<sup>20</sup> A 1938 article by recent émigré Laszlo Moholy-Nagy heralded the “destruction of the old representational image in order to achieve new experiences, a new wealth of optical expression.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, when American Abstract Artists was founded in 1936, the organization claimed to be the first of its kind in the United States. Furthermore, a 1938 editorial statement of the AAA defended abstraction from “largely unsympathetic and biased criticism.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, by 1940, many American artists had adopted abstraction, but universal acclaim had yet to be achieved.

Morgan had been an early adherent of abstraction, employing abstracted forms as early as the 1920s in her watercolors and prints. By 1940, Morgan had forged a strong artistic connection with abstraction as a broad concept. She would write extensively about abstraction as well. In 1963, Morgan published “Abstraction in Photography” as part of her husband’s *Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer*. In the article, Morgan wrote that each photograph is technically an abstraction in that it “intercepts the light refracting from the subject and ab-stracts (Latin: *abs- trahere* to draw

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<sup>20</sup> Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Cubism and Abstract Art” excerpted in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 362.

<sup>21</sup> Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, “From Pigment to Light,” *Telehor* 1, no. 2 (1938): 32-36, reprinted in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. Nathan Lyons, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 74.

<sup>22</sup> “American Abstract Artists: Editorial Statement 1938” in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 378.

from) from this image-bearing beam the basic latent-image.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, both physically and psychologically, each photograph “is an abstraction from the life-flux of our visual world.”<sup>24</sup> These are telling statements in more than one way. It is significant that Morgan chooses to parse the word abstraction itself in order to explain its connection to photography. She uses the cognates of language to insinuate an inherent connection between the notion of capturing imagery on film via light and the Latin root of abstraction. Thus, photography draws from light, which mirrors the real world, just as abstraction draws from the real world via the artist’s mind.

Morgan also inherently connects abstraction and photography as a means of justifying her use of abstract imagery in an era in which the implied realism of photography was often emphasized due to the dominance of photo-journalism and photographic documentation. Morgan wrote that she felt the need to defend abstraction from those who believed that the role of photography should be naturalism.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth McCausland, who wrote for the *Springfield Republican* and numerous photography publications, counted herself among the most prominent critics of artistic photography. In 1939, McCausland wrote “today we do not want emotion from art... We want truth... That truth we receive, visually, from photographs recording the undeniable facts of life today.”<sup>26</sup> World War II only strengthened McCausland’s convictions. In 1942, she expanded her argument to include all of the arts when she wrote, “war has swept non-intelligibility into historical discard... Indeed, communication is the use— and the only

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Abstraction in Photography” in *The Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer*, vol. 1 (New York: Greystone, 1963), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, “Under the Sun,” 195.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth McCausland, “Documentary Photography,” *Photo Notes*, January 1939: 8.

justification— of all the works produced in the various arts.”<sup>27</sup> In another example, critic Albert Fenn praised the number of “straightforward, meaningful prints” and lauded the editors for keeping the number of “Fuzzie Wuzzies” at a minimum in his review of *U.S. Camera Annual 1940*.<sup>28</sup> Critics were not the only writers on the attack either. In a 1938 statement of purpose, the influential Photo League, which counted a sizeable number of professional photographers among its ranks, declared, “photography has long suffered...from the so-called ‘modernists,’ who retired into a cult of red filters and confusing angles much beloved by the manufacturers of photographic materials.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Morgan felt the need to defend artistic photography and particularly abstraction from both critics and fellow photographers alike.

The notion of filtering real world imagery through the artist’s mind fascinated Morgan because it allowed for multiple interpretations of a single subject from both the artist and the viewer. Morgan called abstract photography a “multi-leveled medium” and stated that each viewer would interpret an abstract photograph differently.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it should not be a surprise that Morgan utilized abstract imagery and compositions for the majority of artworks that she created in the 1940s. Among these are two geometric abstractions titled *Opacities*, 1944, which Morgan called a serial photogram, and *Layout*,

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth McCausland, “Photographic Books” in Susan Doge Peters, “Elizabeth McCausland on Photography,” *Afterimage* 12 (1985): 12. Ironically, McCausland wrote wholly positive reviews of Morgan’s *Sixteen Dances* publications in 1941 and Morgan’s other dance photographs in 1942. Elizabeth McCausland, “Books on the Dance,” *Dance Observer* 8, no. 9 (1941): 120-21 and Elizabeth McCausland, “Barbara Morgan Photographs the Dance,” *Minicam Photography* 5, no. 7 (1942): 40-47.

<sup>28</sup> Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 92. Eisinger cites Bruce Downes as another vehement critic of high art photography. Writing primarily for *Popular Photography*, Downes openly insulted any photographer whose work suggested a purpose beyond documentation, accusing photographers such as Man Ray and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy of fashioning “esoteric posings” and creating work that is “perversely complicated and obscure.” *Ibid.*, 127-29.

<sup>29</sup> “For a League of American Photographers,” *Photo Notes*, August 1938: 1.

<sup>30</sup> Morgan, “Abstraction in Photography,” 60.

1946, that Morgan identified as a “shadow photogram.”<sup>31</sup> (Figures 3.5 & 3.6) Morgan also incorporated light abstractions into two published photomontages. *Pure Energy and Neurotic Man*, 1941, includes an active, dynamic light abstraction with a single human hand in the upper right corner (Figure 3.7). *Serpent Light III*, 1948, features fragmented segments of undulating light abstractions photomontaged together with a wholly abstract series of lit planes and geometric elements (Figure 3.8).

Morgan felt the need to defend abstract photographs from critics who claimed that such pictures only attempted to ape the realm of painting.<sup>32</sup> She argued that abstract photography not only remained wholly independent from abstract painting, but was in fact superior.<sup>33</sup> She wrote that in photography, abstraction “is the form-changing, form-making expression inherent in the medium by which the photographer recasts the objective vision, to project his subjective vision.”<sup>34</sup>

Many historians of art and photography have placed Morgan within a continuum of modernist photographers and noted that she was certainly influenced by previous generations. Curtis Carter names Henry Peach Robinson and Robert Demachy as early predecessors of Morgan’s use of abstract imagery and composition, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, and John Heartfield as more recent influences on Morgan’s oeuvre.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980), 49.

<sup>32</sup> Aaron Siskind may have reignited this critique when he proclaimed the influence of abstract painting on his own photography in a 1945 essay in *Minicam Photography*. Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation*, 132-33.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan, “Under the Sun,” 195, 197.

<sup>34</sup> Morgan, “Abstraction in Photography,” 58.

<sup>35</sup> Curtis and Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs*, 12. Diane Kirkpatrick also notes the influence of Moholy-Nagy and even quotes from his posthumously published 1947 book, *Vision in Motion*, to illustrate her point. Diane Kirkpatrick, “I See America Dancing, Barbara Morgan and 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Photography,” in *East Quad Symposium—Museum of Art Exhibition & Performance at the University of Michigan, September 21, 1991* (Morgan Archive, 1991), 1.



Each of these artists was a pioneer not only in his use of abstract imagery, but in abstracting the medium of photography itself.<sup>36</sup> Deba Patnaik states that *Cadenza* is highly reminiscent of Francis Bruguère's light sculptures and Naum Gabo's linear constructions.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, one cannot ignore the influence of the early stirrings of the Abstraction-Expressionist movement in American painting when viewing two of Morgan's photographs from the mid 1940s: *Trajectories*, 1946 and *Light Waves*, 1945 (Figures 3.9 & 3.10). Visual similarities suggest that Aaron Siskind's distilled images of surfaces and Arthur Siegel's early experiments with abstraction may have been influential as well.

These numerous influences would coalesce in Morgan's work to produce a potent and unique style of abstraction that would influence photographers of the next generation such as Minor White as well. In 1942, Morgan experimented with photographing ice as it formed on her studio windows.<sup>38</sup> The abstract photographs that emerged from this series, including *Saeta*, 1942, and *Solstice*, 1942, were produced a few years before White's signature *Equivalent* series of frost on a window (Figures 3.11 & 3.12). Furthermore, Morgan's light abstractions expressed visual counterparts of pure gesture nearly half a decade before a mature Abstract-Expressionist movement brought such gestures to the fore in American painting. Gene Thornton, an astute observer who wrote for the *New York Times*, even went so far as to question whether Morgan's 1940 light

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<sup>36</sup> Combination prints, hand-worked gum bichromate prints, photograms, solarization, and mass media photomontage were the more prominent manipulations that these artists introduced to the world of photography.

<sup>37</sup> Deba Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 8. Both Bruguère and Gabo were idiosyncratic modernists who simultaneously explored abstract imagery and geometrically influenced composition.

<sup>38</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 32.

drawings might have directly influenced the drip-technique pioneered by Jackson Pollock.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, William Agee argues that Morgan's contributions to American modernism prior to World War II were vital to the development of post-War American abstraction.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout her career, Morgan was a strong proponent of modernism. As early as 1927, she wrote an article titled "The Meaning of Modernism in Art" for *Artland*, a small California publication. In the article, she argued that modernism was vital because it encouraged growth and innovation in American life.<sup>41</sup> By 1938, during the Great Depression, Morgan felt the need to defend modernism against a hostile public. In defense of modernism, Morgan wrote:

Whether individually one likes modern painting or dislikes it, is not the point. One may not like a steel building as well as a charming adobe building molded by human hand. But at this moment steel is the material which answers the desire of builders for strength to achieve height and therefore maximum space utility. In the same way, modern painting may offend eyes accustomed to the comparative naturalism of the painting tradition descended from the Greeks and the Renaissance. But at this historical moment of picture making a form is demanded which can express simultaneity,

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<sup>39</sup> Gene Thornton, "From Peasants to Gruesome Nudes," *New York Times*, March 19, 1972. Recent scholarship by Ellen Landau suggests that Herbert Matter was likely a primary influence upon his friend Pollock's drip paintings. Landau cites the 1943 exhibition, *Action Photography*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which Matter designed, as influencing Pollock's interest in "action" effects. Ellen G. Landau, "Action/Reaction: The Artistic Friendship of Herbert Matter and Jackson Pollock" in *Pollock Matters*, ed. Ellen G. Landau and Claude Cernuschi (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, 2007), 24. However, it is important to note that one full wall of *Action Photography* featured the dance photographs of Barbara Morgan. Furthermore, Morgan's light abstractions preceded Matter's *Ink and Glycerine*, 1943, and *Light Pen Drawing*, c. 1944-45, which are believed to have inspired Pollock, by over three years. Considering the strong connections of both Morgan and Matter to the Museum of Modern Art, it is equally reasonable to assume that Morgan greatly influenced Matter, who subsequently influenced Pollock.

<sup>40</sup> Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Morgan, "The Meaning of Modernism in Art," *Artland: A Magazine of the Arts*, February 1927: 3-4. In a 1926 article in the *Los Angeles Times* cited by Curtis Carter, Morgan states that modern art "when at its liveliest is a movement of discovery of the new beauties and new poignancies of our own age and of all ages..." Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs*, 8.

speed, movement, psychological content, specific textures, and the full gamut of forms and experiences that engage us today.<sup>42</sup>

It is not that Morgan felt that the art of the ancients and the Renaissance was necessarily lacking. Instead, Morgan believed that the world had changed significantly since the Renaissance and that the art world needed to explore new channels of thinking in order to keep pace. Modernism represented a new way forward for Morgan and in her opinion abstraction lay at the heart of modernism. She did not, however, see abstraction as an end unto itself. In a 1960 review in *Aperture*, Morgan notes that abstraction first appeared in the arts of the Paleolithic era and has been employed intermittently ever since.<sup>43</sup> Thus, abstraction is not really a new direction in the art world. Abstraction is just another tool that can be used to create meaningful works of art. Morgan believed that an astute artist must use abstraction for a greater purpose than merely creating an artwork that looks “modern.”

For this reason, Morgan held that an artist must be knowledgeable about the history of art.<sup>44</sup> An intelligent artist must not only know the work of her contemporaries, but must have an understanding of the foundations of the art tradition. Perhaps this explains Morgan’s fascination with prehistoric and ancient art. The Lascaux Caves particularly captivated Morgan. In a 1975 letter, Morgan wrote that Lascaux “enchanted me more with a cosmic-rooted awareness than I had ever experienced so overwhelmingly.”<sup>45</sup> In an interview four years later, Morgan noted that the paintings of Lascaux include reality, abstraction, and fantasy. She goes on to state that these are the

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<sup>42</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Photomontage” in *Miniature Camera Work*, ed. Willard Morgan and Henry Lester (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1938), 152.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan, “Under the Sun,” 195.

<sup>44</sup> Franklin Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” *Petersons Photographic* 13 (March 1985): 36.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Morgan to Diana Loercher, November 3, 1975, Morgan Archive.

three main types of representation. Finally, she notes how the discovery of prehistoric amalgamations of these seemingly disparate types of representation inspired her own work.<sup>46</sup>

On the same 1959 trip that brought Morgan to Lascaux, she also visited many sites of ancient art and culture including Knossos, Delphi, Athens, Tarquinia, Karnak, and Stonehenge.<sup>47</sup> Morgan did not view these ancient sites as reminders of cultures long lost. She thought of the timeline of art history from the ancients to the present as intimately tied together through anthropology. She did not believe that each subsequent generation created art in a vacuum. She saw an artistic continuum that inspired her.

Nor was Morgan alone in this view of the history of art. Only three years later, Pre-Columbian scholar George Kubler revolutionized the study of art when he published *The Shape of Time*. Kubler argued that art developed gradually over time, rather than in distinct periods. As he eloquently noted, in the progression of artistic practice “continuity rather than rupture is the criterion of value among students of meaning.”<sup>48</sup> For Kubler, archeology, anthropology, and art history were no longer mutually exclusive fields of study. They were instead closely connected vehicles that illuminated meaning both in the past and in the present. Thus, when Morgan visited ruins of the pre-historic and ancient world in order to understand art history as a continuum, she was at the forefront of changing art historical thinking.

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Morgan, interview by Jean Tucker, October 17, 1979, original tape copied to a compact disk, Collection of the University of Missouri, Columbia. Although Morgan never specifically explained how prehistoric art influenced her artwork, one can assume that she is referring to her photomontages.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 36. In an unpublished manuscript about Morgan’s life and career, Nancy Newhall writes that key sites on this 1959 trip included Crete, Mycenae, Delphi, Athens, Barcelona, Lascaux, and Stone Henge. Nancy Newhall, “Barbara Morgan” (working manuscript for *Infinity*), [1968?], 23. Morgan Archive.

<sup>48</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 127.

Morgan's attraction to a comprehensive canon of art meant that the exhibition style of the collector, Dr. Alfred Barnes, particularly impressed her.<sup>49</sup> Rather than hanging the art of like periods and styles together, Barnes paired works in innovative ways. For example, Barnes placed a painting by El Greco, and an African sculpture, next to a painting by Picasso. Morgan noted that this triptych indicated Picasso's influences. But, more importantly, she saw this as an attempt to "catalyze their ultimate art essence."<sup>50</sup> The ideology of artistic juxtaposition had also been a key concept in her education at UCLA, where Morgan noted that "Occidental and Oriental," prehistoric and contemporary art were taught with equal emphasis.<sup>51</sup>

Morgan's connection to the canon of art history becomes readily apparent if one reads a broad selection of her articles and reviews. When she writes about the supremacy of black-and-white photography, she cites Odilon Redon's musings on the power of black.<sup>52</sup> Later in that article, Morgan writes that the colors found in contemporary photography pale in comparison to the rich hues exhibited in Persian miniatures, Coptic textiles, Limoges enamels, Venetian paintings, and the contemporary work of Henri Matisse.<sup>53</sup> An article dissecting photomontage finds Morgan casually analyzing paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Vasily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee in

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<sup>49</sup> Chapter two discusses Morgan's work with the Barnes collection.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. In an interesting aside, Morgan stated in 1983 that she had "always felt closer to Oriental art than to our own European art." *Barbara Morgan*, VHS, Thomas Schiff (Cincinnati: Image Productions, 1983).

<sup>52</sup> Morgan opens the article with Redon's quote: "One must respect black. Nothing prostitutes it." Barbara Morgan and Ivan Dmitri, "Is Black and White Better Than Color? No! Says Ivan Dmitri, Yes! Says Barbara Morgan," *Modern Photography* 86 (July 1952): 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

a section that notes the contributions of painters in creating a photomontage aesthetic.<sup>54</sup> In a review of a photography exhibition at Eastman House for *Aperture*, Morgan writes knowledgeably of Marcel Duchamp and Umberto Boccioni.<sup>55</sup> These citations among others illustrate that Morgan considers photography within the realm of the history of art.

Despite Morgan's knowledge and passion about painting, sculpture, and myriad other art forms, she still selected photography as her primary artistic medium. Morgan was quoted as saying "as an artist of the Machine Age I need the extended vision of the camera."<sup>56</sup> This extended vision included an expansive view of the place of photography within Western culture.

In 1942, just two years after Morgan created her first light abstraction, she noted two potent directions in photography. She wrote that ever-improving camera technology rendered amateur photography more popular than ever before. She claimed that over twenty-five million recreational photographers in the United States alone took advantage of the "You press the button we do the rest" technology made possible by the Kodak Brownie.<sup>57</sup> Morgan also wrote about the multitude of new roles that the camera was playing in World War II. This included press photographers documenting the war, aerial photography for reconnaissance and mapping, and novel military uses of the camera that Morgan assumed were being invented at that time.<sup>58</sup> The spirit of necessity, innovation, and even relaxation that Morgan felt was indicative of the world of photography circa

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<sup>54</sup> Morgan, "Photomontage," 152-53.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Birth and Proliferation of the Photographic Image," *Aperture* 10, no. 2 (1962): 56.

<sup>56</sup> *Barbara Morgan: Paintings, Photographs* (Los Angeles: Ceeje Galleries, 1965), np.

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Morgan, "In Focus: Photography, The Youngest Visual Art," *Magazine of Art* 35, no. 7 (November 1942): 249.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

1942 did little to discourage her artistic spirit. She believed that amateur photography represented a new international style of folk art and that military uses of the camera bred innovation that would filter into the world of art photography.<sup>59</sup> But, perhaps more importantly, Morgan believed that art might somehow be the by-product of this activity as well. She wrote that “art, as the unorthodox by-product of various kinds of photographic activity, is a healthy state of affairs. Only if there is this reciprocal flow between life and art can there be any health and growth in either.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, Morgan hoped that utilitarian and amateur photographers would transcend their roots to become the artistic photographers of tomorrow. In Morgan’s mind, experimentation remained vital.<sup>61</sup> But, the ultimate goal was still art. In the same 1942 article, Morgan wrote:

Photography deals not only with the familiar. It is a bridge to the unknown. In creative hands, photography is reshaping our cognizance of the universe, destroying outmoded concepts and setting up new premises whereon to build new subjective values—the seedbed of art.<sup>62</sup>

The key to understanding Morgan’s point here is the notion of “reshaping our cognizance.” Morgan believed that every photographer should seek to transcend pure

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<sup>59</sup> It is likely that the leadership of first Willard Morgan, then Edward Steichen in the Museum of Modern Art’s photography department were strong influences on Morgan as well. These influences will be extensively discussed in the fourth chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, “In Focus: Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” 250.

<sup>61</sup> Morgan’s son Doug claims on a website touting the Morgan family publishing business that Willard Morgan was the first photographer to test Harold Edgerton’s strobe flash technology in 1942. Doug Morgan cites a 1942 series of photographs of Ansel Adams, Willard and Barbara Morgan, and Beaumont and Nancy Newhall as evidence of his claim. According to Doug Morgan, it was Willard Morgan who found industrial, military, and journalistic uses for this new technology. Doug Morgan, “Morgan and Morgan, About Us,” <http://www.morganmorgan.com/html/aboutus.html>. It is likely that this was the type of current innovation that sparked Barbara Morgan’s imagination.

<sup>62</sup> Morgan, “Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” 254.

documentation. The trick is to “transform raw material into art which will live.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, a good photograph can at once reflect real world issues and simultaneously be artistic by suggesting a subjective interpretation of the vision before the camera. Thus, a gifted photographer does not imitate reality, but instead creates photographic signs or symbols that are more meaningful than that which is visually signified. Morgan called the resulting image a “new photographic reality” that occurs when a synthesis of artistic imagination and conception met the technical resources of the camera.<sup>64</sup>

Morgan wrote that the camera was not inherently documentary in function. She noted that photographic images differ from human vision dramatically in that a photograph is non-stereoscopic, is produced in black and white, exists in only two dimensions, drastically changes the scale in most cases, and freezes the natural progression of time.<sup>65</sup> Since photography cannot accurately reproduce human vision, it must be a mediated reproduction. Morgan felt that such mediated reproductions were best placed within the realm of art. Finally, Morgan believed that any artist, whether painter, sculptor, printmaker, or photographer, should pursue the creation of beauty as his or her ultimate goal.<sup>66</sup>

Morgan also recognized that many Americans were dubious of photography as a fine art. She was acutely aware that some viewers felt that photography should not even be considered within the realm of the arts because it was not a hand-made medium. In response to these skeptics, Morgan argued that:

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” in *The Complete Photographer* (New York: National Education Alliance, 1943), 1549.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1528.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1528-530.

<sup>66</sup> Morgan and Dmitri, “Is Black and White Better Than Color?,” 52.



They forget that the hand holding the brush is also a machine, an organic tool, evolved to serve our appetites and spirit— a kind of resilient tweezer through which runs our own nervous vibration. That so much beauty has been fashioned by the hand of man is not due to the hand per se, but to the passion of the human spirit that forges a vehicle of expression by controlling the hand. Driven by this same passion, but demanding superior instruments for further flights of expression, photographers master the augmented function of the eye through the lens, and the augmented function of the hand through the miraculously fine image-making of the photo-chemical process. The photographer makes his camera part of himself as the violinist does his violin.<sup>67</sup>

Morgan was not the only photographer who attempted to convince the world of the legitimacy of artistic photography. Despite the numerous successes of fine art photography in the first half of the twentieth century, many photographers continued to feel that the public at large considered photography a lesser artform. In 1959, Ivan Dmitri, a talented portraitist and pioneer in the evolution of color photography, established the “Photography in the Fine Arts” series with the backing of the *Saturday Review*.<sup>68</sup> These six traveling exhibitions were juried by American museum curators in order to establish their artistic merit. The exhibitions were intended to highlight a wide swath of photographic practice in the United States, but the emphasis always focused upon artistic intention above all else. Morgan supported the efforts of Dmitri and the PFA by exhibiting at least two photographs in PFA exhibitions: a photograph of the back of her son’s head (*Lloyd’s Head*, 1944) and a portrait of Charles Sheeler (*Charles Sheeler and His Favorite Beech Tree*, 1945).

In the years preceding the PFA exhibitions, Morgan felt that the American public was particularly cool to experimental photographic media. She believed that many

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<sup>67</sup> Morgan, “Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” 251.

<sup>68</sup> Cornell Capa, *Master Photographs from PFA Exhibitions, 1959-67* (New York: International Center of Photography, 1988), 8.

patrons of the arts saw her light abstractions and photomontages as slavish imitations of a painted aesthetic. Morgan responded, in an article titled “Advancing Photography as a Fine Art,” that painting and photography were diametrically opposed in so many ways that most comparisons were unnecessary.<sup>69</sup> She also believed that the advancement of new ideas and fresh perspectives was vital to the continual progression of the art world, and photography required such original thinking.<sup>70</sup> Finally, for those naysayers who claimed that the compositions of most photographs are derivative of painting, Morgan wrote that while many typesetters and graphic designers were inspired by the work of Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky, and other painters, no one would confuse their posters, pamphlets, books, and other finished products with a modernist painting.<sup>71</sup> Certainly photographers were influenced by the history of art, but that does make their work derivative. Picasso was influenced by Paul Cézanne and African sculpture, but was never accused of imitating either.

Morgan held that photography offered a unique way for an artist to envision both real world imagery and ideological concepts. Partially for this reason, Morgan adamantly argued that black-and-white photography was superior to any of the photographic techniques that reproduced color.<sup>72</sup> In 1952, she co-wrote an article for *Modern*

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<sup>69</sup> In her *Aperture* monograph, Morgan did admit that some types of photomontage, such as collage with drawing added, were derivative of painting. She noted, however, that she had never personally created that type of photomontage. Furthermore, she believed that a photomontage that strictly utilizes negatives is distinct from painting due to the manner in which light is used. She goes on to write that she feels similarly about photograms. Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Advancing Photography as a Fine Art” in *The Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer*, vol. 1 (New York: Greystone, 1963), 87.

<sup>71</sup> Morgan, “Photomontage,” 154-55.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan represented the majority of photographers in eschewing color photography at this time. Although several color photography processes existed, all were difficult to use and costly as well. Thus, due to cost and complexity, most photographers chose black-and-white photography regardless of any

*Photography* titled “Is Black and White Better Than Color? No! Says Ivan Dmitri, Yes! Says Barbara Morgan” that addressed this very issue. Morgan eloquently argued that black-and-white photography represented the true soul of the medium because it forced the photographer to interpret rather than copy. She felt that color photography engendered simplistic replication of the world, in “postcard colors” no less.<sup>73</sup> Her argument should not be seen as a paean to black-and-white photography strictly because it was traditional, however. Morgan strongly believed that photographers should stay abreast of the latest technical trends. In 1942, she wrote that a photographer must continually read all of the latest technical literature and experiment with new products and processes in order to gauge their effectiveness toward achieving his or her artistic goals.<sup>74</sup> For Morgan, the technology of photography allowed the camera to serve as a more effective tool. She was enamored of the latest cameras, films, chemicals, and flashes not for their own sake, but because they increasingly allowed Morgan to work instinctively.<sup>75</sup> Once she mastered the technology, she could forget about it entirely and instead focus on fashioning artistic photographs.

Morgan considered finely crafted composition among the key components of an artistic photograph. In an article titled “Dynamics of Composition,” she wrote:

‘Composition’ is actually co-position; the placement of component parts in their dominant and sub-dominant roles. For a two-dimensional picture is something like a chess board, where each element has a role which influences every other element, but in which dominant action is a centering force. The heart of a composition stems from opposition and rhythmic vitality, which can

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debate concerning aesthetics and other issues. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that color photography became easy and inexpensive enough for the majority of photographers to consider.

<sup>73</sup> Morgan and Dmitri, “Is Black and White Better Than Color?,” 55.

<sup>74</sup> Morgan, “Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” 253.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

be variety ordered through proportion, subordination, transition, symmetry, and asymmetry, all interpreted through lighting, natural and artificial.<sup>76</sup>

To achieve a compelling composition, Morgan believed in pre-visualization. She felt that if the photographer could not see the finished structure of the photograph before the click of the shutter, then the photograph was unlikely to succeed.<sup>77</sup> In an article titled “Esthetics of Photography,” Morgan wrote that “the lens indiscriminately records everything” so it was the photographer’s task to “take nature firmly in hand” by envisioning the composition in advance.<sup>78</sup>

Historians of photography often link the concept of pre-visualization to Ansel Adams. According to Adams, when he photographed *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park* in 1927, he envisioned the final print long before he captured the scene as a negative.<sup>79</sup> To obtain his vision, he carefully controlled the lighting employing a “zone system” of his own invention. No evidence exists to suggest that Adams directly influenced Morgan. However, the two artists engaged in spirited correspondence for at least two and half decades from 1945 to 1969. The tone of Adams’s letters is generally informal and suggests that the two were friends rather than just colleagues. In one letter, Adams addresses Morgan as “Dearest, Most-Admired, Exalted Guruness, Priestess, and Friend.”<sup>80</sup> In another letter, Adams closes with “love, Beard-in-chief” and includes a

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<sup>76</sup> Morgan, “Dynamics of Composition,” 353.

<sup>77</sup> Morgan, “Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” 252.

<sup>78</sup> Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” 1531. In the same article, Morgan praised photograms as perfect examples of pure composition. *Ibid.*, 1535-536.

<sup>79</sup> David Peeler, *The Illuminating Mind in American Photography: Stieglitz, Strand, Weston, Adams* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 288-89.

<sup>80</sup> Ansel Adams to Barbara Morgan, April 21, 1965, Morgan Archive.

doodle with his signature (first name only).<sup>81</sup> Adams mentions lunch conversations, dinner plans, imminent grandchildren, and other personal details in a number of letters. Their correspondence also dissects more serious topics including the “Family of Man” exhibition.<sup>82</sup> Adams taught Morgan archival printing techniques later in her career as well.<sup>83</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Adams influenced Morgan’s concept of pre-visualization as she wrote about composition.

Once an artist-photographer has mastered composition, he or she must next learn how to control light, according to Morgan. She frequently wrote about the expressive mystery of light, which she saw as a nearly magical force. On many occasions, she noted that light laid the foundation for photography and she waxed poetic on the relationship between artistic spirit and the unfathomable nature of light. In a 1979 manuscript, Morgan even noted that part of the impetus for creating her light abstractions came from her fascination with light. She went on to write, “From my California childhood, the beauty and mystery of light, linked to movement, has been and still is my root inspiration.”<sup>84</sup> Morgan believed that every photographer must learn to understand the basic properties of light before expecting to create a successful photograph.<sup>85</sup>

However, a mastery of light and pre-visualization of the final photograph are not enough to create an artistic photograph, in Morgan’s opinion. The darkroom is another

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<sup>81</sup> Ansel Adams to Barbara Morgan, June 5, 1971, Morgan Archive.

<sup>82</sup> In a 1955 letter, Adams wrote: “That Man’s Family [sic] gives me the creeps! I do not respond to such applications of photography!!! It always seems to me that huge blow-ups are apologies for lacking qualities. Yet, the idea could be fine if the quality of the image was adequate. I am weary of the Non-Art approach to photog. Art is merely emotional intensity! ---without it, what’s the use??” Ansel Adams to Barbara Morgan, January 25, 1955, Morgan Archive.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan’s foray into archival printing will be discussed in chapter five.

<sup>84</sup> Morgan, “Light Abstractions,” 42.

<sup>85</sup> Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” 1530.

important tool for the photographer. Morgan supported cropping, dodging, and other darkroom techniques in order to obtain the perfect finished print.<sup>86</sup> In 1953, she wrote that negative sizes were wholly arbitrary and thus should not determine the final proportions of a print.<sup>87</sup> In terms of tonal contrasts, Morgan noted that an artist might choose to re-interpret a negative in subsequent printings.<sup>88</sup> For Morgan, the work she accomplished in the darkroom allowed her to transcend “the obvious click of the shutter.”<sup>89</sup> It evoked the difference between documentation and art. As she wrote in 1973:

When the creative photographer has mastered composition, a further fulfillment lies in the fine craftsmanship of the final print itself. The general public, absorbing photography chiefly through TV and newsprint, rarely experiences the sensuous beauty possible in a superbly printed photograph. Even if the pictures in these mass media are well composed, they still do not bring to the viewer the full potential of rich tonal relationships that the photographer can give to his own darkroom creations. A thoroughly fine print extends the photographer’s eloquence and his integrity, carrying his expression to a new level of intensity and depth.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, once the perfected print had been created, Morgan also mounted and framed the photograph personally. She believed that the finished photograph should be viewed as an art object. It must be carefully mounted in order to highlight the print, and perhaps more importantly, it must be framed as well. Morgan was quoted in a 1969 article for the *New York Times* concerning framing in photography, in which she noted that only when a

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<sup>86</sup> Tucker, “Interview with Barbara Morgan.”

<sup>87</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Kinetic Design in Photography,” *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 22.

<sup>88</sup> Tucker, “Interview with Barbara Morgan.” The re-interpretation of the negative was also Morgan’s response to some photographers and critics who believed that patrons would not begin to seriously collect photographs until photographers set edition limits and then destroyed the negative. She wrote that she believed that “to destroy a negative seems a form of murder.” Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Cameron, “Barbara Morgan: Quintessence,” 36.

<sup>90</sup> Morgan, “Dynamics of Composition,” 366.

photograph is framed does it become a “thing” or an art object. When left unframed, the print seemed more ephemeral to Morgan.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Morgan stated that the artist should carefully consider the design of the frame in terms of size, color, and texture in order to perfectly match the print to its frame and thus create an integrated whole.<sup>92</sup>

It is important to note that Morgan was not only concerned with physical appearance and technical issues in the contemporary world of photography. She felt that it was equally important for a photographer to retain strong ties to the past and present in terms of artistic content as well. Morgan’s initial connection to art photography came from preparing an exhibition for Edward Weston at UCLA. On many occasions, Morgan wrote that Weston’s 1926 exhibition opened her eyes to the artistic possibilities of photography. She later wrote of her revelation,

I learned what I thought was impossible, that by looking at something and absorbing it emotionally, intellectually, or whatever, that you could inwardly transform it. In other words, you have an object and you know its a shell or a person’s body or even a toilet seat. You don’t deny it, but you go beyond it. You get essence, you get symbolism, you get the eternal meaning, the meaning that goes beyond the individual reality.<sup>93</sup>

After Morgan helped Edward Weston stage an exhibition at UCLA, they became friends as well. Morgan wrote that Weston was among her closest friends between 1925 and 1930. Not only did she refer to him as a “terrific party man,” she also noted that he personally stimulated her artistic progression.<sup>94</sup> Nor did their relationship end when Morgan left California. According to one source, Weston was a frequent overnight guest

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<sup>91</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Frames Are Back in Photography,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1969.

<sup>92</sup> Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography.” 1533-534.

<sup>93</sup> “Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues,” 12.

<sup>94</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Barbara Morgan: Permanence Through Perseverance,” in *Photography Annual* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1971), 19.

at the Scarsdale house through the years.<sup>95</sup> In a 1977 interview, Casey Allen attributes this interesting quote to Morgan: “I was always with him when other people were around. I don’t ever recall being alone with him. But he was... I was very fond of him.”<sup>96</sup> This quote seems to suggest that Morgan may have harbored an innocent crush on the charismatic Weston. In either case, their friendship would last for the rest of Weston’s life. In a 1984 tribute to Weston in *Aperture*, Morgan recounts visiting Weston for the last time as he was on his deathbed.<sup>97</sup>

Weston inspired Morgan to rethink the relationship between real world objects and the camera in order to find something deeper than surface appearance. Stylistically, however, Weston’s influence on Morgan paled in comparison to that of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who inspired the spirit of Morgan’s experimentation when she became a photographer in 1935. She clarified this belief just three years later in an article titled “Photomontage,” in which she wrote that many artists were experimenting with the photographic medium before World War II, but it was Moholy-Nagy who first experimented with photograms and negative-based photomontages.<sup>98</sup> Moholy-Nagy’s early career at the Bauhaus introduced a generation of German artists to a new vision of photography in which geometric abstraction and experimentation were predominant. After the Bauhaus was shuttered by the Nazi party in 1933, Moholy-Nagy moved to Chicago to likewise influence an entire generation of American photographers at the

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<sup>95</sup> Dils cites an interview with Lloyd Morgan as the source of this information. Ann Dils, “Barbara Morgan: Photographing Life” in *Dance, Culture, & Art-Making Behavior: Proceedings, October 31-November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997*, 138. Morgan Archive.

<sup>96</sup> Casey Allen, “Camera 35 Interview: Barbara Morgan,” *Camera 35* 22 (1977): 57.

<sup>97</sup> Morgan also published two portraits of Weston that she had taken, a photograph of Minor White at Weston’s studio, and three of her photographs that she felt bore the influence of Weston. Barbara Morgan, “A Tribute to Edward Weston,” *Aperture* 95 (1984): 29-31.

<sup>98</sup> Morgan, “Photomontage,” 152. Chapter one discussed this article at length.



Institute of Design.<sup>99</sup> Moholy-Nagy persuaded his followers to abstract photographic vision and strip down subject matter to its essence, which could be a simple pattern, a texture, a dominant line, or any other formal element that held personal meaning for the photographer. In other words, Moholy-Nagy encouraged photographers to discover subjective meaning by photographing the real world. This notion certainly influenced Morgan. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the writing of Moholy-Nagy promoted the use of experimental photographic techniques.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the experimentation of Moholy-Nagy inspired Morgan's photomontages directly and her light abstractions indirectly in that he paved the way for her experimentation in the field and suggested that new photographic media could still be invented and subsequently considered by the art world. In Morgan's mind, Moholy-Nagy freed her and other photographers to interpret the medium of photography itself. Yet, Morgan is widely considered among the first American photographers working in the United States to experiment with photography to such an extensive degree.<sup>101</sup>

By the 1950s, however, Morgan had become privately frustrated that American photography was no longer moving forward. In a letter to Minor White, Morgan wrote:

...I feel we are in a stasis. You can't go on worshipping the grand old men forever. Painters are not waiting for Picasso to die, they are pressing on— even though maybe not so super, and Picasso didn't wait for Cezanne to die...This spark is bristling in the painting world- where is the new spark in the photographic—? Avante Garde

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<sup>99</sup> Moholy-Nagy opened the New Bauhaus in 1937 in Chicago. In 1939, the New Bauhaus became the School of Design in Chicago. Finally, in 1944, the name was changed to the Institute of Design. Lloyd Engelbrecht, "Educating the Eye" in *Taken by Design: Photographs from the Institute of Design, 1937-1971* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>100</sup> Morgan goes on to credit John Heartfield as another essential pioneer of photomontage and Man Ray as another key figure in the development of the photogram as well. Morgan, "Photomontage," 152.

<sup>101</sup> In a *New York Times* article, Vicki Goldberg writes that Morgan seriously experimented with photomontages and light abstractions at an earlier date than most American photographers. Vicki Goldberg, "Transfixing Motion and Emotion in a Shutter's Blink," *New York Times*, March 14, 1999.

[sic] is dragging its tail behind it– there aint [sic] none. Is this because automation– Polaroid– mecahnical [sic] color processing further steals from the ‘making’ experience of the photographer? Is it true, as [Jacob] Deschin thinks, that the photog is sinking into the machine? Does that explain the terrific resurgence in painting– the satisfaction of wallowing– tactility doing touching– palette knifing the lush pigment. I don’t know the answers--- but I crave a new vision.<sup>102</sup>

Yet despite this frustration, Morgan continued to work to change the world of photography from within. She had been the consummate insider for years due to the connections and positions of family and friends.

In 1943, Willard Morgan became the first director of the Department of Photography at the newly established Photography Center at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Although Willard’s tenure would not last much more than a year and he would only curate a single exhibition at MoMA, his role as the first director cemented the position of the Morgans within the New York artistic community as important figures in the world of photography.<sup>103</sup> With her insider’s knowledge, Morgan wrote fluently of the New York photographic scene on many occasions. For example, in a 1963 article, Morgan carefully laid out the history of photography at the Museum of Modern Art from its inception to its contemporary leadership under John Szarkowski; explained the importance of George Eastman House in the world of photography at that time; and wrote

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<sup>102</sup> Barbara Morgan to Minor White, September 29, 1955, Morgan Archive. Incidentally, Minor White also experimented with light in his career, although no solid evidence links the experimentation of White and Morgan directly.

<sup>103</sup> Jennifer Steensma, “Willard Morgan at MoMA” (working paper), nd, 1,4. Morgan Archive. Incidentally, when Willard Morgan was hired as the director of the photography department, Beaumont Newhall officially held the position of head curator. However, Newhall was in active military service at this time, so his wife Nancy Newhall was acting curator. When Willard Morgan left the Museum in July, 1945, the Photography Center closed and the photography department was subsumed back into the museum proper. *Ibid.*, 6.

convincingly of the contemporary public perception of photography in the greater New York area and beyond.<sup>104</sup>

Morgan was also quite aware that despite a substantial number of critics, photography was increasingly accepted as a fine art medium by private collectors and the general public as well. Morgan realized that this led to the solidification of a canon of artistic photographers from the invention of the medium to the present. Given her dedication to the field, she also wished to claim her place within that canon. A private debate concerning who invented light abstractions provides the perfect example of this motivation in Morgan. In an undated letter to Beaumont Newhall, Morgan explains that she created abstract light compositions several years before Pablo Picasso was credited with this invention.<sup>105</sup> She notes that she created her first compositions of this sort in 1940 and 1941. Then, in 1945, she fashioned a photomontage that incorporated a light abstraction with an image of dancer Erick Hawkin's hand. This montage appeared in a 1945 MoMA exhibition. She speculates that Gjon Mili, the photographer who photographed Picasso creating light abstractions, either saw the first light abstraction in

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<sup>104</sup> Morgan, "Advancing Photography as a Fine Art," 77, 83-84. It is worth exhibiting the breadth of Morgan's knowledge of the contemporary world of photography by including a passage from this article: "General interest grows: more art museums are establishing print collections and exhibition galleries. An example: Hugh Edwards, Curator of Photography, Chicago Art Institute. More universities teach and exhibit photography, for example, Van Derek Coke both teaches and coordinates exhibits at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. More commercial galleries are selling fine prints to collectors, such as the Siembub Gallery Boston, and Molly Malone Cook's Photographer's Gallery VII of Provincetown, Massachusetts. Attendance is growing in more photographic workshops in many parts of the country. Instruction in art quality photography is being taught by such masters as Ansel Adams in Yosemite; Minor White in Denver, Portland, Oregon, and Idylwild, California; Henry Holmes Smith at Indiana University, Bloomington; Ruth Bernhard in San Francisco; and Nathan Lyons in Rochester, New York..." Ibid., 87.

<sup>105</sup> In the January 30, 1950 issue of *Life* magazine, there was a three page spread of photographs by Gjon Mili that depicted Pablo Picasso creating light drawings. According to the short paragraphs that accompanied the photo-spread, Mili had originally photographed ice skater Carol Lynne "stunting with flashlights on her toes." These photographs appeared in the March 26, 1945 issue of *Life*. When Mili showed Picasso these photographs, Picasso was supposedly inspired to create light drawings. In addition to the *Life* photo-spread, an exhibition of Mili's photographs of Picasso opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in January, 1950 as well. *Life Magazine* 28, no. 5 (1950): 10-12.

her Graham book or viewed the montage at the MoMA exhibition and got the idea to have Picasso create something similar.<sup>106</sup> Morgan also explained her reason for sharing this information with Newhall:

Just for the record, I want this foregoing material to be known, because it was first a labor of love doing it, but I think it was a genuine contribution at its period. I have several quite good compositions that can be used with text. I wondered if you would care to do an article on it. I think of you first, partly because I think you are the best, but also because you showed that Light Design before the Picasso things of Mili. If you don't want to I will do it myself, but I don't want to sound either boastful or mad- but just straight historical fact. There is another aspect, too. I drew and painted before photographing...and designed, so it really was an incorporation of all this training as a kind of synthesis of media. While with Picasso, Mili was just steering him along in a superficial fling, as a stunt. Actually I had an almost religious sense of the communion with the cosmic force of light.<sup>107</sup>

The fact that Morgan chose Beaumont Newhall, an influential figure in the world of photography, as the potential author for this proposed article is significant. It proves that Morgan's connections in the world of art and photography were manifold.

In fact, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall were among Morgan's closest friends. The Newhalls are often cited as the founders of modern photographic scholarship and they appear to have been frequent house-guests at the Morgans' Scarsdale home.<sup>108</sup> The personal correspondence between Barbara Morgan and the Newhalls illustrates their friendship. In a 1955 letter from Beaumont Newhall to Morgan, he informally addresses

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<sup>106</sup> Barbara Morgan to Beaumont Newhall, nd, Morgan Archive. Morgan made similar claims in a 1979 interview with Jean Tucker. Tucker, "Interview with Barbara Morgan."

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Morgan to Beaumont Newhall, nd, Morgan Archive.

<sup>108</sup> Leonard Amico and Stephen Robert Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978), 6.

her as Barbara and closes with “best to Herc.”<sup>109</sup> Yet, it is the letters between Morgan and Nancy Newhall that really illustrate the couples’ connection. In a 1949 letter from Nancy Newhall to Morgan, Newhall writes:

I was thinking how three gals lately have told me about troubles with their sisters, and also that in spite of all that I wished I had one, when I suddenly realized that I do have--- the finest in the world, ones I truly love and picked out myself, and you first of all! Ok, my spiritual sister?<sup>110</sup>

Their friendship had professional implications as well. Nancy Newhall wrote a manuscript about Morgan’s life and career in 1968. Newhall adopted a subjective approach in her narrative of Morgan’s career, writing as a close friend who uses her personal connection and anecdotes to tell the story of the artist.<sup>111</sup> For her part, Morgan not only wrote many personal letters to Nancy Newhall, but she indirectly noted in a 1955 letter to Minor White that the couples often got together when she mentioned a fun weekend gathering in which the Newhalls stayed at the Morgan house.<sup>112</sup> The couples were so close that when the Morgans bought two acres in Scarsdale, New York, the Newhalls bought the two-acre lot that adjoined the Morgans’ new property. For the next

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<sup>109</sup> Beaumont Newhall to Barbara Morgan, August 24, 1955, Morgan Archive. “Herc” was Willard Morgan’s nickname among close friends. It is short for Hercules and referred to his impressive stature and strength.

<sup>110</sup> Nancy Newhall to Barbara Morgan, June 1, 1949, Morgan Archive.

<sup>111</sup> Newhall, “Barbara Morgan,” *passim*.

<sup>112</sup> Barbara Morgan to Minor White, October 10, 1955, Morgan Archive. The Morgan and Morgan website recounts the hijinks of one gathering from the viewpoint of Nancy Newhall who wrote “Another evening, with Willard and Barbara Morgan in Scarsdale, resulted in even more hilarious photographs. Barbara had just acquired one of the new strobe flash units and wished to test it before employing it on a company of dancers. Amateur acrobatics are traditional at such moments. Ansel [Adams] did handsprings on top of a stool; he and Beau chased each other in mock battle, the one with a coil of extension cable as a weapon and other with a preposterous gourd. The giant Willard called Herc, short for Hercules, by his wife and close friends was moved to join in. He and Beau between them tackled Ansel, a mere six footer. One got him by the shoulders, the other by the knees, and beaming down at his comic fright, threatened to toss him away.” Doug Morgan, “Morgan and Morgan, About Us,” <http://www.morganmorgan.com/html/aboutus.html> (accessed June 20, 2004).

year or so, the two couples would go to the properties most Sundays to have a picnic and work on clearing the lots.<sup>113</sup> Morgan's friendship with the Newhalls allowed her to maintain a strong connection to two of the most influential venues in the world of photography: the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York until the end of Beaumont Newhall's tenure as director in 1947, then George Eastman House where Newhall became curator in 1948 and later director from 1958 until 1971.

Many of Morgan's other important acquaintances came from her involvement with the American Artists Congress. The AAC formed in 1936 as an organization dedicated to stemming the rising tide of fascism throughout the world. Morgan was not among the founding members of the organization. However, she exhibited a dance photograph in an AAC exhibition.<sup>114</sup> She was also closely involved in a proposed exhibition that a number of photographers organized and brought before the executive committee of the AAC. Morgan acted as the recording secretary for this proposed exhibition, served as general coordinator, and was among the speakers when this group met with the executive committee. The exhibition sought to make the world aware of the rise of fascism in the United States and throughout the world. The list of artists and other individuals involved with this exhibition was extensive and includes among others:

Berenice Abbott, Russell Lee, Dorothea Lange, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, Paul Strand, and Ralph Steiner.<sup>115</sup> Although no evidence exists to suggest that

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<sup>113</sup> The Morgans subsequently purchased the Newhalls' lot when Beaumont joined the Air Force and went overseas during World War II. Newhall, "Barbara Morgan," 14, 16.

<sup>114</sup> Morgan exhibited a photograph of Martha Graham from *Deep Song*. Lloyd Morgan and Janet Morgan, in discussion with the author, July 9, 2006, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

<sup>115</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Prospective Photographic Exhibit to be Sponsored by American Artists Congress," (report to the Executive Committee of the American Artists Congress), January 21, 1937, np. Morgan Archive. It is also worth noting that the Barbara Morgan Archive holds an extensive collection of

this exhibition was ever held, many of the organizers are mentioned among Morgan's friends in future documents and correspondence.

Morgan's friendship with Minor White was established years later when the two photographers worked together at *Aperture*. *Aperture* magazine was founded as a response to the shift away from artistic photography in the 1930s and 1940s. For two decades *Life* magazine and photojournalism had come to dominate the world of photography. White wished to tilt the balance back to an emotive, more personal style of photography that returned to modernist ideals and abstraction. Thus, he and a group of like-minded photographers started *Aperture* to foster a new artistic community that was reminiscent of the era of Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession. White also believed that a photographer could use abstraction as a subjective tool to instill meaning in a photograph. This viewpoint often framed his photographs and his writing in *Aperture* as well.

Morgan was among the co-founders of *Aperture* and from the beginning she was intimately involved in the project. In a 1952 letter to Morgan, White candidly discusses some of the issues that had arisen for issue number 4 of *Aperture*, including the paper company's request for free issues, the number of subscribers necessary to cover the costs of the issue, and the use of students and their wives to prepare press announcements and sample pages.<sup>116</sup> Even after White took over as an independent editor and largely controlled all aspects of *Aperture* personally, he continued to keep Morgan up to date on the inner workings of the publication due to their friendship. In a 1964 letter to Morgan,

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unpublished, vintage photographic portraits of American Artists Congress members taken by Barbara Morgan.

<sup>116</sup> Minor White to Barbara Morgan, September 26, 1952, Morgan Archive. White does not identify the paper company by name.

he once again discusses financial details of the publication, including a massive debt of \$9,000 that had recently accrued.<sup>117</sup> In that same year, White published a monographic issue of *Aperture* concerning Morgan's life and career. While Morgan edited the issue and controlled the content, White did include a short paragraph in which he thanked Morgan for her contributions over the years and breathlessly praised her as a person.<sup>118</sup>

The connection between White and Morgan was not strictly professional either. A series of letters written between 1946 and 1968 indicates a close friendship. They always address each other informally; they discuss art, mutual friends, politics, and a multitude of other topics; and they mention weekends spent together.<sup>119</sup> White clearly respects Morgan as a photographer as well, as is apparent when he writes "whenever a young hopeful leaves my office he has usually been advised to look up Barbara Morgan. And since that is the most alive place in the New York area I feel justified in such advice."<sup>120</sup>

Morgan's letters to White were no less personal, although she often adopted the tone of a mentor. For example, in a 1955 letter, Morgan encourages White to be himself

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<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, White keeps the letter informal by including nearly fifteen exclamation points after the \$9000 figure. Minor White to Barbara Morgan, December 10, 1964, Morgan Archive. In a 1958 letter, White also discusses funding, operating expenses, and thanks Morgan for her help in encouraging a donor to financially contribute to the periodical. Minor White to Barbara Morgan, October 18, 1958, Morgan Archive.

<sup>118</sup> The text of this acknowledgement read: "It is our pleasure to extend our deep feelings of gratitude to Barbara Morgan for her contributions to *Aperture*. Her direct experience observations of the feeling states peculiar to painting and to photography add much to the perennial discussion of what kind of art is photographic." He adds "how wonderful to behold a person who has developed all of these capacities because of her practice of living as a whole being." Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 1.

<sup>119</sup> In 1952, White wrote that "the high spot of the summer was your being in town— but we won't go into taht [sic]." Minor White to Barbara Morgan, September 26, 1952, Morgan Archive. Later, when Willard Morgan became ill, White sent his "warm wishes and whatever goes with that which might heal or encourage him to continue back to health." Minor White to Barbara Morgan, August 16, 1967, Morgan Archive.

<sup>120</sup> White goes on to discuss Pat Caulfiend, to whom he recently gave this advice. Minor White to Barbara Morgan, January 11, 1955, Morgan Archive.



and to stop relying on the old masters.<sup>121</sup> In another letter that year, Morgan praises White as a teacher, writing "...you do radiate your dedication and they respond to it– the true tradition of teaching. There are so few ‘teachers’ at least in photography.”<sup>122</sup> Morgan also visited White shortly before his death and she wrote of that last meeting nostalgically in a 1984 issue of *Aperture* that commemorated White’s life.<sup>123</sup> Thus, Morgan’s relationship with White served her well professionally, as she maintained a strong connection to *Aperture*, but also allowed her to exchange ideas with a close friend, who happened to be quite influential in the world of photography.

While the Newhalls, Adams, and White represented Morgan’s closest friends, she had many other artist acquaintances including Stuart Davis, Charles Sheeler, Berenice Abbott, Wynn Bullock, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Russell Lee, Gordon Parks, Arthur Rothstein, Margaret Bourke-White, Anita Delano, and Laura Gilpin.<sup>124</sup> In the greater world of art, Morgan maintained a close relationship with a number of influential writers and critics including *New York Times* writer Jacob Deschin and editor of *Art News*

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<sup>121</sup> Barbara Morgan to Minor White, October 10, 1955, Morgan Archive.

<sup>122</sup> Barbara Morgan to Minor White, August 11, 1955, Morgan Archive.

<sup>123</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Western Influence,” *Aperture* 95 (1984): 32.

<sup>124</sup> Davis, Sheeler, Abbott, and Bullock are listed as close friends by Deba Patnaik. Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*, 10. Moholy-Nagy is listed as a frequent overnight guest by Ann Dils. Dils, “Barbara Morgan: Photographing Life,” 129-44. Morgan spoke about her friendship with Gilpin in an interview with Jean Tucker. Tucker, “Interview with Barbara Morgan.” Morgan felt close enough to Gilpin that she even wrote a letter to Sally and Mitchell Wilder to personally thank them for agreeing to become custodians of Gilpin’s “life’s work in photography.” Barbara Morgan to Sally and Mitchell Wilder, May 11, 1978, Morgan Archive. Janet and Lloyd Morgan listed Parks as a close friend and identified Rothstein, Lee, and Bourke-White as frequent party guests. Lloyd Morgan and Janet Morgan, in discussion with the author, July 9, 2006, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. A letter from Abbott is quite informal and includes a thank you for a “superb book and a pile of orchids.” Berenice Abbott to Barbara Morgan, nd. Morgan Archive. Morgan was a student at UCLA when she first met Delano. The two later became close friends. In a 1976 interview, Delano mentions Morgan as a close friend on many occasions. “Southwest Artist and Educator: Anita Delano,” Anita Delano interviewed by James V. Mink (Oral History Program, UCLA Archives, 1976).

Thomas Hess.<sup>125</sup> Nor were Morgan's friendships limited to the world of art. Other close friends and allies included the director of the Farm Security Administration Historical Division, Roy Stryker; architect Frank Lloyd Wright; anthropologist Margaret Mead; poet William Carlos Williams; and architect Buckminster Fuller.<sup>126</sup>

It is feasible that this diverse panoply of friends and colleagues encouraged Morgan to consider such an assorted range of topics in her artwork. This diversity of thought is no more apparent than in the light abstractions. While these artworks are inherently photographic, Morgan described them in poetic and spiritual terms. She considered the scientific properties of light. She contemplated the anthropological history of dance and gesture and attempted to capture the architecture of movement that she believed to be intrinsic to humanity. In creating the light abstractions, she appeared as connected to the artistic, cultural, and intellectual cross-currents of the Western world as she was to that of the world of modernist photography she inhabited on a daily basis.

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<sup>125</sup> In a 1955 letter to Minor White, Morgan recreates a phone conversation with Deschin in which they strategize to create more photography exhibitions in New York City. Barbara Morgan to Minor White, September 29, 1955, Morgan Archive. In a different 1955 letter to Minor White on the same day, Morgan discusses running ideas by Hess at *Art News*. The tone of the letter suggests that she considers Hess a solid ally. Barbara Morgan to Minor White, September 29, 1955, Morgan Archive.

<sup>126</sup> Leonard Amico cites Stryker as among Morgan's friends. Amico and Edidin, *Photographs of Barbara Morgan*, 9. Morgan's friend Wright was the subject of a humorous story she liked to tell about visiting the Bardall House in Los Angeles. Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 9. Deba Patnaik lists Buckminster Fuller, William Carlos Williams, and Margaret Mead as Morgan's close friends. Patnaik, *Barbara Morgan*, 10.

## Chapter Four- Morgan and Books

“I love you round,  
I love you square,  
I love you like,  
A great big bear.”<sup>1</sup>

Are these familiar words? Did you sing them as a child? Whether or not you answered yes to either of these questions is not vital in understanding the strange little cadence. These are obviously the words of a child’s rhyme. One can envision the sparkling eyes of small children as they learn such a ditty, their smiling faces chanting the words. One can imagine the high pitched squeal of laughter that follows the song. This was a rhyme once heard at Camp Treetops, a summer camp for children in upstate New York. This little gem was immortalized in Barbara Morgan’s 1951 book, *Summer’s Children*, on a page that depicts four small children engaged in a group hug (Figure 4.1). It is easy to imagine the chant followed immediately by the unencumbered embrace. Therein lies the power of Morgan’s publication. This evocative book of photographs paired with text is formatted to bring joy to anyone who takes a minute to sit down and just look.

A quick glance suggests a simple publication, a book that marks a departure from the avant-garde style of photography Morgan had pursued to this juncture in her career. However, Morgan utilized all her skills as a designer as well as her years of experience with photomontage and her familial connection to the world of publishing to create a book that can also be analyzed as an artwork. When considered in terms of the era of its production, *Summer’s Children* insinuates more complex implications as well. During a

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Summer’s Children* (Scarsdale, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1951), 67.

difficult era in American history, Morgan began photographing children and ultimately produced a book of these images. The meaning conveyed by this book differed depending on the viewer, who might focus upon the adoption of modernist photo-spreads, the passion Morgan had for publishing and book design work, the American trend to focus inward on one's family after World War II, the apparent embrace of Cold War values, the promotion of summer camps as a refuge for children, or the visual depiction of the ideals of progressive education. Yet, I believe one theme trumps all others: Morgan purposefully fashioned a universal message of hope for any viewer who opened this publication.

*Summer's Children* consists of a series of black-and-white photographs taken primarily by Morgan over the course of fifteen years of summer trips to Camp Treetops.<sup>2</sup> The photographs are reproduced with a grainy quality often associated with popular photography magazines such as *Life*. The connection to standard photo-journalism is furthered by the simple composition and straightforward presentation of the photographs, which feature easily decipherable narratives. Many of the pictures capture a specific moment of action, often perfectly timed to encapsulate the given activity as a whole. For example, the photograph on page 48 of *Summer's Children* depicts a girl who appears to be flying over a lake as she executes a swan dive (Figure 4.2). Other tightly cropped photographs focus the viewer's attention on the nexus of the action being portrayed. A

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<sup>2</sup> One photograph by Willard Morgan, Barbara Morgan's husband, and a three photograph series of a canoe trip by Frederick Dean, whose affiliation with Camp Treetops is unknown are included in the book. *Ibid.*, 6. According to Jacob Deschin, photography critic for the *New York Times*, Morgan chose the photographs in the book from approximately four thousand negatives she exposed over the course of fifteen summers. Jacob Deschin, "Pictures of Children," *New York Times*, June 3, 1951. She used three different cameras to produce the photographs: a Leica, a Rollei with follow-focus finder, and a Speed Graphic. All of the photographs utilized natural light. Barbara Morgan, "Kinetic Design in Photography," *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 21-22.

photograph on page 39 illustrates how to place your feet in stirrups when riding a horse (Figure 4.3). The head of the horse and rider have been cropped in order to focus the viewer's attention on the rider's foot to which the instructor attends. To foster a more dynamic impression of specific amusements, and indicate Morgan's continuing allegiance to modernism, she occasionally employs experimental formatting as well. On page 74 a fragment of one photograph bleeds off the upper left edge of the page and the photograph below is cropped to form a parallelogram.

Text comprises another key component of this project. It is not a traditional literary book, however, in which photographs or illustrations simply augment the text. Here, Morgan upends this standard literary practice by using small segments of text almost like sound bites to complement the primary focus of the book, which is the photographs. Three main types of text appear throughout the book. Simple block text frequently spells out the theme of a series of photographs, whereas quoted text, which evidently represents the spoken words of the children or their counselors, often elucidates the narrative of the photographs. On pages 34 and 35 of the book, for example, we see children and counselors waving at the camera from a Ford truck (Figure 4.4). This photograph pairs with an image of a young woman looking expectantly outside the frame. Morgan links these photographs with the text below that reads "So long. Bring me a dragon fly!"<sup>3</sup> Finally, Morgan includes excerpts from popular camp songs and stories from Camp Treetops.

The words become another graphic element of the book. On page 115, which depicts one child with a small lizard and another boy with a can ostensibly filled with

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<sup>3</sup> Morgan, *Summer's Children*, 34.

worms, Morgan formed the text into an undulating shape that complements the quoted line “How would you like a nice fat worm for supper?”<sup>4</sup> (Figure 4.5) Other creatively formatted text sections visually balance the photographs on the page. Four photographs of children at play on pages 90 and 91 are balanced by eight distinct sections of text that present the words from camp songs, for example (Figure 4.6).

This juxtaposition of various texts and photographs is an essential element of the book. Morgan declared in a 1965 interview that a successful picture book need not be a simple album of photographs. She believed that a picture book should be “an organic entity with thematic rise and fall.”<sup>5</sup> This does not suggest that the book must follow traditional literary modes necessarily, but “it should marry picture and words and cohere as a book” in which pictures set the pace.<sup>6</sup> In turn, most of the two-page spreads present montages in which the photographs and text relate to one another in a number of different ways.<sup>7</sup> Some of these spreads are quite straightforward, such as the series of photographs on pages 66 and 67 that depict children and adults embracing (Figure 4.7). The four short lines of verse that opened this chapter: “I love you round, I love you square, I love you like, A great big bear,” accompany these images.<sup>8</sup> In another example, on pages 80 and 81, the photograph on the left page depicts an animated staff member telling a story to children in their pajamas, below which one finds the text of a story about “Monkey-Man” becoming a fly (Figure 4.8). The opposite page presents a photograph of a child hanging

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>5</sup> Edna Bennett, “The Boom in Picture Books,” *U.S. Camera & Travel* 28, no. 3 (1965): 80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Amico and Stephen Robert Edidin, *The Photographs of Barbara Morgan* (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1978), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Morgan, *Summer's Children*, 67.

from the rafters in a manner similar to a monkey. Thus, the text links the two photographs.

In some cases, Morgan forgoes text and relates the photographs through form and content. For example, in a simple pairing of two photographs on pages 126 and 127, a young girl plays a recorder on the left page, while two children dance barefoot in the grass on the right page (Figure 4.9). These photographs connect on multiple levels as the pleasures of music, dance, and a natural setting are all interconnected. William Agee notes that the seemingly simple photograph of the girl playing the recorder could be viewed as an update of Titian and the Western pastoral tradition. He additionally states that the photograph is reminiscent of Matisse's *Joy of Life*, with which Morgan was familiar from her time working at the Barnes Foundation.<sup>9</sup>

Other compositions focus on singular gestures in order to link the photographs. On page 102 of *Summer's Children*, a counselor peers through a microscope, which is paired with an image on the right of a young boy bent over a writing project in the same manner, thus presenting an obvious formal comparison as well as the suggestion of learning by example (Figure 4.10). In another inspired juxtaposition on pages 108 and 109, Morgan pairs an image of a girl holding a small snake, which wraps itself around her forearm, with a photograph of another child holding up a complicated "Cat's Cradle" of string intertwined about her fingers (Figure 4.11).

In Morgan's mind, the power of photography lies in multiple photographs in relation. Morgan told *New York Times* writer Jacob Deschin, "I tend to think of pictures

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<sup>9</sup> Curtis Carter and William Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs* (Milwaukee: Patrick & Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, 1988), 28.

in groups, the relationships of one to the other, rather than as single pictures.”<sup>10</sup> For Morgan, this meant that her photographs were shot with exhibitions or books in mind.<sup>11</sup> Although a technical virtuoso with a camera and in the darkroom, Morgan rarely made photographs intended to stand alone after World War II. The multitude of ways that photographs could be linked together, including photo-essays, photomontages, and specific juxtapositions, interested Morgan. Through the course of her career, she experimented with each of these forms. In *Summer’s Children*, however, juxtaposition was her primary modus operandi. For Morgan, juxtaposition represented more than a visual technique. Its unique aesthetic signified inspired vision.

In 1963, Morgan wrote “Juxtapositions in Photography” for *The Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer*. Early in the article, Morgan differentiated between juxtaposition and other means of linking photographs, writing: “Juxtaposition should not be confused with reportage, which is a more extended treatment of a theme in a connected picture program. Nor should it be mistaken for photomontage, which unites various images by technical controls into one design.”<sup>12</sup> She went on to explain that she used the term juxtaposition to denote the special relationships between photographs on the same page or across the gutter from each other in a book.<sup>13</sup> To Morgan, a successful

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Pictures in Series,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1956).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Morgan and Ivan Dmitri, “Is Black and White Better Than Color? No! Says Ivan Dmitri, Yes! Says Barbara Morgan,” *Modern Photography* 86 (July 1952): 86.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Juxtapositions in Photography” in *The Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer*, vol. 10 (New York: Greystone, 1963), 1896.

<sup>13</sup> As an example, Morgan cited a two-page spread in *Summer’s Children* that depicted barn chores. She wrote that the juxtaposition “on facing pages shows a tiny boy holding a cow’s tail away from the milk bucket as he hypnotically watches a counselor rhythmically squirt-squirting the milk into the pail. On the opposite page, the photo is of a horse’s huge head munching hay from a boy’s fist. Under the milking shot, in smaller scale, is another photo of a learning experience in the barn world: the out-thrust neck and glittering eye of the greedy horse which snatches the armlod of hay before the boy can ‘give’ it to him. In



juxtaposition was a “collision of mental associations resulting from a collision of pictorial values.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the role of juxtaposition is much like individual rhymes within the body of poem. The juxtaposed pictures create part of an extensive narrative, yet there are special relationships between these photographs due to visual proximity. These special relationships particularly interested Morgan. She wrote of the power of incongruity as well as its opposite, formal rhymes and visual puns, as a means of shocking the mind into recognizing unexpected connections between pictures.<sup>15</sup> Thus, any two pages within a book, even taken out of context as one flips through the pages at random, would maintain formal coherence.

When Morgan published *Summer's Children* in 1951, the notion of visually linking photographs as well as photographs and text was well entrenched in American popular culture. In the late nineteenth century, half-tone reproduction first made it possible to print photographs and text on the same page. Subsequently, photographic illustration began to surpass hand-drawn imagery as public opinion increasingly relegated traditional illustration to the realm of interpretation or opinion rather than the factual reporting of events. The public believed that the mechanically rendered photograph was inherently real and objective, as opposed to the mediated drawing.<sup>16</sup> No publication better exemplifies this trend than the esteemed *New York Times*. When Adolph S. Ochs purchased the *New York Times* in August, 1896, no photographs graced the pages of the

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addition to the photos, six short phrases sum up, amplify the meaning, and launch the action into the next sequence.” Ibid., 1904.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1896.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Craig, “Fact, Public Opinion, and Persuasion: The Rise of the Visual in Journalism and Advertising” in *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 36.

newspaper, but that would quickly change.<sup>17</sup> On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1896, the *New York Times* published its first photographs on page one of the *Sunday Magazine* supplement.<sup>18</sup> By the 1920s, photography was so commonplace in American popular culture that the *Times* felt the need to modernize its pages and incorporate a greater number of photographs.<sup>19</sup> The next decade witnessed an explosion of photo-journalism in the *New York Times* and other newspapers, as well as the emergence of magazines that extensively employed photography.

The photo-essay, in which multiple pages of photographs were devoted to a single subject or story, developed in Germany between 1928 and 1929.<sup>20</sup> The two periodicals *Berliner Illustrierte* [sic] *Zeitung* and *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* pioneered the use of this new vehicle for photography.<sup>21</sup> The German publications *Kölnische Illustrierte* and *Feuerreiter*; the *Illustrated London News*, a British periodical; the French magazine *Vu*; and the American periodical *Vanity Fair* followed the example of *BIZ* and *MIP*.<sup>22</sup>

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1936, the face of photography in the United States changed forever with the publication of the first issue of *Life* magazine. From day one *Life* succeeded. By the end of the first year of publication, the circulation of *Life* reached 1.5

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Galassi, *Pictures of the Times: A Century of Photography from the New York Times* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Dreishpoon, *The Tumultuous Fifties: A View from the New York Times Photo Archives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Galassi, *Pictures of the Times*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Time N. Gidal, *Modern Photojournalism: Origin and Evolution, 1910-1933* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Tim Gidal notes that *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* utilized an atypical spelling of “illustrierte” in its title. Gidal also identifies many photographers as forerunners to the modern photo-essay including Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, and Heinrich Zille. *Ibid.*, 10, 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21 and Erika Doss, ed., *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 3.

million and still failed to satisfy demand.<sup>23</sup> World War II only served to expand *Life's* readership. In 1940, the circulation of *Life* was 2.86 million. By 1948, circulation nearly doubled to 5.45 million copies sold.<sup>24</sup> By the late 1940s, each week twenty-one percent of Americans over the age of ten, approximately 22.5 million people, saw a copy of *Life* magazine.<sup>25</sup>

One of lasting effects of *Life* magazine's popularity was the proliferation of the photo-essay. *Life* had not pioneered this style of journalism, but by using the established photo-essay formula, with modern graphics and a montage aesthetic, *Life* joined a growing cultural zeitgeist and aided in its propagation.<sup>26</sup> The popularity of the photo-essay continued to grow during the 1940s. By 1951, when Morgan published *Summer's Children*, the photo-essay remained the dominant means through which the nation viewed photography.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It has been estimated that *Life* could have sold five to six million copies of the magazine each week had the printing presses been able to meet that capacity. Loudon Wainwright, *The Great American Magazine: An Inside History of Life* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 81-82. Perhaps for this reason, *Life* maintained what advertising agencies termed the highest "pass-along factor" of any large-scale periodical in the nation. In other words, more individuals read each copy of *Life* than any other magazine. A survey in July, 1938, indicated that the average issue of *Life* was perused by 17.3 people. James L. Baughman, "Who Read *Life*?" in Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, 42.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, 3. When one considers a broader time frame, *Life's* connection to the American public was even more impressive. In 1950, Time Inc. commissioned a market research study by Alfred Politz to determine readership over thirteen weeks. The study concluded that during this period, approximately fifty percent of Americans over the age of ten had seen one or more copies of *Life*. Baughman, "Who Read *Life*," 42.

<sup>26</sup> Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Some critics contend that *Life's* readership was not indicative of the entire nation. One 1946 study showed that readers of *Life* magazine were on average thirty to thirty-four years of age, from the professional and skilled labor classes, married and college-educated. Another study conducted by *Life* concluded that the magazine's greatest penetration was in the top income bracket that comprised home and car owners. *Life's* share of this market was thirty-seven percent. In each subsequent income bracket, *Life's* market penetration lowered. Baughman, "Who Read *Life*," 43-44. It is important to note that Morgan would have fit into the typical patterns of *Life* readers as a college-educated and married woman whose family owned both a house and a car. Most of her friends and colleagues would have fit into these broad

Historian of photography Jonathan Green claims that the power of the photo-essay lay in its simplicity. It allowed the viewer to consume an idea or story quickly with little if any cognitive effort. The inclusion of simplistic and redundant headlines and captions only aided in this goal.<sup>28</sup> In Green's opinion, the photo-essay was not advantageous for photography as a medium. Photo-essays often stripped away the context of the photographs and changed the photographer's intended meanings either due to juxtaposition with other photographs or through the use of text. One could argue, however, that the primacy of the singular photograph constitutes but one model for successfully using photography and that a shift in context for individual photographs is not problematic when it serves a greater purpose, such as the promotion of a compelling idea through sequence.

Morgan certainly subscribed to the latter view in that the context of her original photographs held little importance. On pages 34 and 35 on *Summer's Children*, for example, Morgan has created a farewell narrative by pairing a photograph of children and a counselor waving from a Ford truck with a photograph of a female counselor looking to the right outside the frame of the photograph (Figure 4.12). By bleeding each photograph into the gutter, Morgan suggests a single image, rather than two distinct photographs. Furthermore, the photographs are connected by the text below which includes the quote "So long. Bring me a dragon fly!" and a caption "Expeditions set forth and activities commence."

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patterns as well. Additionally, this group likely comprised the majority of her audience both for her exhibitions and her publications.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Abrams, 1984), 42. Green cites the lack of interest in the first edition of Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which was published in 1941, as proof that the general public was not receptive to photographs presented without captions or other text. *Ibid.*, 44.

Green goes on to argue that the photo-essay denied individuality in that the importance of human subjects is diminished in favor of the greater ideas of the overall narrative. Morgan is certainly guilty of this as well. She fails to identify any of the children or staff members. One could argue that the participants merely act as props to highlight certain activities. Once again, however, one must consider whether it is acceptable to subordinate the primacy of the individual in order to highlight themes or ideas that affect broad swathes of humanity. In either case, Morgan openly promoted her allegiance to linking photographs in the 1950s. In 1956, Morgan spoke to the Village Camera Club in New York, which was preparing to embark upon a project entitled “What New York Means to Us.” In her talk, Morgan strongly recommended the use of thematic photographs in sequence rather than singular photographs. She justified this by simply stating that photographic sequences were more powerful.<sup>29</sup>

The popularity of *Life* magazine as well as its predecessors and successors certainly influenced Morgan when she chose to publish a book of documentary-inspired photographs and utilize the aesthetic of the photo-essay. However, the changing tenor of photographic exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York inspired her as well. The changes Edward Steichen brought to MoMA upon his promotion to head curator of photography in 1947 are well-documented. He advanced a vision of popular photography that referenced the pages of periodicals and fashion magazines. His first major exhibition, *The Exact Instant*, 1949, focused on photo-journalism and therein marked a shift away from the high art model of photography toward a populist style of

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<sup>29</sup> Deschin, “Pictures in Series,” 142.

photography already prevalent in periodicals.<sup>30</sup> Yet even before Steichen accepted the position at MoMA, a new trend had began to develop. The vast majority of large exhibitions held at MoMA between 1937 and 1951 were devoted to documentary or photo-journalist style photography.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in 1941, during Willard Morgan's tenure at MoMA, he presented *The American Snapshot*, which did not exhibit vernacular photographs as the title suggests, but did focus on family-centered photographs reminiscent of the pictures one would find in the family photo album.<sup>32</sup> Thus, even before Steichen's appointment at MoMA in 1947 and the subsequent direction of his tenure, Barbara Morgan witnessed a gradual shift in the style of photography away from fine art photography and a modernist bent toward photo-journalism and documentary photography through the increasing popularity of photographic periodicals as well as within the galleries of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It seems quite reasonable to assume that this shift in popular culture influenced Morgan when she decided to synthesize her photographs of Camp Treetops and publish these pictures together in book form.

Much like photo-spreads and the exhibitions of documentary photography at MoMA, Morgan intended her books to be viewed as a whole.<sup>33</sup> In her 1964 *Aperture* monograph, Morgan noted the "visual intake from a picture book forms a kind of serial-

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<sup>30</sup> Dreishpoon, *Tumultuous Fifties*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> These include *War Comes to the People, A Story Written with the Lens* (1940); *Images of Freedom* (1941); *Road to Victory* (1942); *Airways to Peace and Tunisian Triumphs: War Photographs* (1943); *Manzanar: Photographs by Ansel Adams of Loyal Japanese American Relocation Center* (1944); *Power in the Pacific* (1945); *Music and Musicians* (1947); *Photographs of Picasso by Mili and Capa* (1950); *Korea: The Impact of War in Photographs* (1951); and *Memorable Life Photographs* (1951). Green, *American Photography*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Berenice Abbot is one of several reviewers and critics to note this fact in her review. Berenice Abbot, "Summer's Children— New, Refreshing, Affirmative," *American Photography* 45 (November 1951): 678.

photomontage in the mind....”<sup>34</sup> In other words, she viewed the photographic book as a large, complex montage of photographs and text meant to be considered en bloc. She clarified this view with her description of the creation of a book as the moment when “the component photographs lose their separate importance; the individual pictures take on reciprocal meaning by their cross-linking in page layout... and new overtones project back and forth in their page-by-page currents.” Morgan concluded by writing that these elements “finally consolidate into the fresh born entity, a Book!”<sup>35</sup> Life at Camp Treetops was the primary theme of *Summer’s Children*. Thus, the individual photographs of children frolicking in nature, camp activities, camp facilities, animals, and children performing chores encapsulate all aspects of summer camp life. This book is not intended to be viewed as a series of photographs, it is instead an object that juxtaposes or montages a number of similar and dissimilar images in order to evoke a central idea that Morgan referred to as a “natural outgrowth of a cumulative experience.”<sup>36</sup>

For this reason, Morgan carefully distinguished between literary books and the type that most interested her, those primarily dedicated to photographs. As she stated, “Since Gutenberg, the text-centered book has become a highly perfected form with almost infinite variations; while the photography-centered book, as a graphic art form...is still very immature...”<sup>37</sup> Photography pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot established the genre of the picture book when he published *Pencil of Nature* from 1844 until 1846.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Morgan, “Kinetic Design in Photography,” 23.

<sup>37</sup> Bennet, “Boom in Picture Books,” 80.

<sup>38</sup> Beaumont Newhall, *Photography and the Book* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, 1983), 22.

Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard followed in Talbot's footsteps by publishing a series of travel photography books in 1851.<sup>39</sup> After the initial forays into photographic books by Talbot and Blanquart-Evrard, the phenomenon became fashionable. Books of photographic portraits, travel photos, the Civil War, and surveying photographs were published with much success in the 1860s and 1870s as the technology of photographic reproduction improved.

The turn of the century ushered in an important development in the progression of the photographic book. From 1903 to 1917, Alfred Stieglitz published *Camera Work*, which moved away from mass-production and high profit margins.<sup>40</sup> Instead he concentrated on the aesthetics of the publication itself. The photographs were beautifully reproduced and coupled with handsome typography. This publication focused on photography, rather than using photographs to illustrate a secondary subject. Thus, *Camera Work* represented one of the few photography publications to spotlight the subject of photography directly since Talbot's initial endeavor.

In the decade following World War I, many European artists began to explore the intersection of photography and books in a new, experimental mode. Alexander Rodchenko matched the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovski with his own photomontages in the 1923 publication, *Pro Eta*. In 1929, Werner Gräff published the influential *Es Kommt Der Neue Fotograf!* Gräff loosely based his book on the 1929 exhibition "The New Photography," that first opened in Stuttgart, then traveled to Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Zagreb, Basel, and Zurich. *Es Kommt Der Neue Fotograf!* would remain influential for

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Camera Work* was never intended as a commercial venture. According to Pam Roberts, Stieglitz believed that a focus on profit undermined artistic freedom. Pam Roberts, *Camera Work: The Complete Illustrations 1903-1917* (Cologne: Taschen, 1997), 12.



decades due to experimentation that included unique cropping of the photographs and creative layouts chosen specifically to highlight the creative possibilities of photography. With her knowledge of the world of photography and publishing, Morgan likely knew *Es Kommt Der Neue Fotograf!* The unique lay-outs of the book appear to have influenced both *Sixteen Dances* and later *Summer's Children*.

By the late 1930s, many American photographers considered it necessary to create a photographic book to highlight their art. Yet, the style of the books changed. Many photographers of the era eschewed the experimental aesthetic of the previous decade in Europe, in favor of a straightforward, documentary approach. Photographer Margaret Bourke-White and writer Erskine Caldwell pioneered a new type of book that blended prose and photographs in 1937 with *You Have Seen Their Faces*. The book opens with fourteen pages of documentary photographs depicting men and women living and working in the southern United States. Most pages display a single photograph presented with the location and a quote by the subject of the image. Sixteen pages of prose follow this section and the photographs and text alternate in this manner throughout the book. Bourke-White and Caldwell utilize the photographs and prose to dissect issues of class, race, and labor throughout the book.<sup>41</sup> In 1941, writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans incorporated photographs and prose in the influential publication *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. However, although both photographs and text described the same Alabama sharecroppers, the different media were segregated in the book. The photographs were presented at the front of the book and the prose followed.

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<sup>41</sup> Two years later, Caldwell and Bourke-White published *North of the Danube*, which used the same formula to document a broad swath of Eastern Europe.

In 1939, Berenice Abbott published *Changing New York*, which also incorporated her photographs and the text of Elizabeth McCausland. However, unlike the books of Bourke-White and Evans, this book adopted a simple formula in which each two-page spread represents a pairing of Abbot's photography and McCausland's writing. The right page presents a single photograph nearly centered on the page, while the left page lists the location and date of the photograph as well as text that relates to the image. This straightforward approach to the photographic book was later mirrored by Wright Morris who published *The Inhabitants* in 1946.<sup>42</sup> This publication was unique, however, in that Wright utilized his own photographs and text to describe life in the American heartland.

From a design standpoint, Morgan's books mimic the experimental nature of the European publications of the 1920s, rather than the straightforward approach of American photography books of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Yet, Morgan's books and the other American publications of the same era share one important commonality: the documentation of life in the United States. When Morgan published *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photography*, in 1941, it represented a unique subject. Yet, she retained the focus on a singular subject. Just as Bourke-White photographed New York or Walker Evans depicted Alabama sharecroppers, Morgan photographed the dances of Martha Graham.

Publishers found similar books concentrated upon a solitary theme particularly profitable, especially when sold as gifts during the holiday season in the years after

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<sup>42</sup> Morris' next publication in 1948, *Home Place*, abandoned this formula. While each two-page spread incorporated a single photograph on one page and text on the other page, much like *The Inhabitants*, now the right and left orientation of photograph and text often changed. Furthermore, the text constituted a continuous novel, rather than individual pages of description.

World War II as the market for picture books grew rapidly.<sup>43</sup> The large publishing houses attained substantial profits by ordering as many as 450,000 units. This lowered production costs without the need to reduce the price of these large books. Furthermore, many of these picture books retained at least the impression of an artful volume. They were prestige items which enriched the publisher's reputation in the marketplace. Yet Robert McLaughlin, the researcher on picture essays for the Science Library, stated that these books "are bought or given as expensive gifts with the express idea of having them repose on library shelves or coffee tables— but not to read, seldom even to look at."<sup>44</sup> The consumers of these volumes were rarely enlightened photography connoisseurs, and as photography critic Edna Bennet emphasized, this led to a large number of mediocre, or even shoddy, photography books. This did not discourage many photographers from pursuing photographic book projects, however. As Bennet noted, "Almost any serious photographer will tell you he is planning to do a book— either as a self-imposed assignment or on a grant."<sup>45</sup>

Morgan's *Sixteen Dances* was published just ahead of this glut of photography books that would soon fill the stores.<sup>46</sup> Yet, it also stood out among its peers due to its unique aesthetic. Despite her obvious skepticism of the genre as a whole, Bennet called Morgan's first book "one of the most enduring and best designed picture books" and she

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<sup>43</sup> Bennet, "Boom in Picture Books," 68.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>46</sup> Before *Sixteen Dances* arrived in stores, columns dedicated to dance as well as general lists of upcoming books announced its publication. For example, *New York Times* dance critic John Martin provided advance notification of the book on April 20, 1941. Then, just three days later, the book was again listed in a column titled "Books— Authors." John Martin, "Folk and National Arts of Haiti, England and America— Week's Events," *New York Times*, April 20, 1941 and "Books— Authors," *New York Times*, April 23, 1941.

stated that Morgan is “as noted a book designer as she is a photographer.”<sup>47</sup> Many other critics lauded Morgan as well. In *Dance Observer*, McCausland wrote extensively of the book’s design, praising Morgan’s creativity and attention to detail.<sup>48</sup> In 1981, when Deborah Jowitt reviewed the re-issue of *Sixteen Dances* she suggested that perhaps Morgan intentionally paralleled the nimble book design with the “dynamics of dance phrasing.”<sup>49</sup> The publishing industry recognized Morgan on an organizational level as well when she received the American Institute of Graphic Arts Trade Book Clinic Award in 1941 for her work on *Sixteen Dances*.<sup>50</sup>

Published by Duell, Sloan & Pierce, *Sixteen Dances* initially cost six dollars, which failed to defray the company’s costs of producing such an elaborate publication.<sup>51</sup> Morgan confirmed this lack of financial reward in an interview with Edna Bennet when she stated “Money was never an issue... At that time, I figured my expenses to be around \$4000; labor was never even estimated. In the intervening years, the royalties have little more than paid for actual cash expenses.” For Morgan, the book itself was the reward. It

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<sup>47</sup> Bennet, “The Boom in Picture Books,” 69.

<sup>48</sup> “Its nearly square format (10½ x 11¾ ) is well-suited to the use of both vertical and horizontal compositions. The large page also makes possible reproduction of pictures on a scale commensurate with their inner weight and thrust. Tonality is employed to the fullest in Benday areas, airbrushed shadings, reversed lettering, gray on white, etc. To make the reproductions of as fine quality as possible, the book was produced by sheet-fed gravure... In designing the book, Barbara Morgan used a free layout, with double spreads, bleeds, and other contemporary stylistic devices. Free white space is played off against the intense blacks and grays of the photographs. Sometimes text is used on the page, sometimes it is inserted within the area of the photograph, all according to her sense of the sequence of the dance idea. Though one might differ on details, the design is highly successful as a whole. It suggests how pictures and text may be integrated, the one medium complementing the other.” Elizabeth McCausland, “Books on the Dance,” *Dance Observer* 8, no. 9 (1941): 120-21.

<sup>49</sup> Deborah Jowitt, “Books: Morgan Looks at Graham,” *Ballet Review* 9, no. 1 (1981): 111.

<sup>50</sup> Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs*, 124.

<sup>51</sup> Bennet, “Boom in Picture Books,” 69. When *Sixteen Dances* was re-issued in 1980, it sold for thirty dollars. Anna Kisselgoff, “Dance View— Powerful Images of Martha Graham’s Art,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1980. Incidentally, in the initial preparation to re-issue *Sixteen Dances*, Morgan realized that the original plates of the 1941 edition had been lost. In turn, Morgan reconstructed the book entirely from her own original negatives. Curtis Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance, Barbara Morgan Photographs* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2004): 20n9.

provided the opportunity to highlight the greatness of Martha Graham through Morgan's unique vision. She spoke of the fulfillment she attained from exploring "thematic structure, mood totality, interrelating [and] the excitement of giving birth to a book as an entity."<sup>52</sup> This passion for book production itself possibly explains the success of the book design and the resulting praise that it garnered. In fact, this was not Morgan's first book design effort. She had practiced this craft in the past.

In 1936, Morgan was credited with the cover and arrangement of the *Leica 1937 Photo Annual*.<sup>53</sup> This publication included a short essay by the editor and some biographical material on the photographers, but the primary focus was 152 Leica photographs. Although each page presents a single photograph, Morgan clearly paired the photographs across the gutter to create engaging juxtapositions. For example, a photograph of a worker standing on a single steel beam at a construction site is paired with an image of young boys sitting comfortably on the highest beam of a tall fence (Figure 4.13).<sup>54</sup> In another example, Morgan plays with differing textures when a close-up photograph of corn stalks covered with silken tassels lies across the gutter from the face of a sea-lion covered with bristling whiskers (Figure 4.14).<sup>55</sup> Even in this early foray into book design, Morgan exhibits pairings of form and content that are highly reminiscent of *Summer's Children*.

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<sup>52</sup> Bennet, "Boom in Picture Books," 69.

<sup>53</sup> Henry M. Lester edited the publication. Henry M. Lester, *Leica 1937 Photo Annual* (New York: Galleon, 1936). Lester was Willard Morgan's partner in Lester & Morgan Publishers.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

After publishing *Sixteen Dances* in 1941, a gap of ten years ensued before Morgan completed *Summer's Children*.<sup>56</sup> Upon its publication, in 1951, the critics lauded her design work. *New York Times* critic Jacob Deschin wrote: "Because she also wrote the captions and designed the format, lay-out, typography, and jacket, the photographer had the unique opportunity to tell her story not only in the pictures themselves but in the presentation as well."<sup>57</sup> Berenice Abbot noted that "the creative lay-out simply fulfills and extends the meaning of the photographs."<sup>58</sup>

Due to the critical success of the book, the following year a selection of photographs from *Summer's Children* was organized into an exhibition at the New York Public Library. This led to two other shows, both sponsored by Kodak. In 1955, George Eastman House in Rochester, New York exhibited "Summer's Children" and the following year the same show appeared at the Kodak Photographic Information Center at Grand Central Terminal in New York City.<sup>59</sup> Due to the advantageous location of the second show in particular, this exhibition was likely viewed by many more people than the number who saw her book. However, Morgan still preferred the book itself. She wrote in *Aperture* that the book was her favorite form of thematic photography because "unlike TV or cinema, the intake is never arbitrary- you are never a captive audience- you can absorb from it backward or forward, and from the bookshelves feel its presence

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<sup>56</sup> *Summer's Children* was published by Morgan & Morgan, the family publishing business. It originally sold for \$7.50. "Distinguished Document," *Art News* 50, no. 5 (September 1951): 9.

<sup>57</sup> Deschin, "Pictures of Children," 105.

<sup>58</sup> Abbot continues: "It derives from the rhythm and mood of the pictures themselves. The variety of each double spread does not destroy the continuity and movement of the book as a whole but builds the necessary dynamic quality, convincing testimony that this is a genuine photographic book. It is also testimony to the ability of Barbara Morgan who designed the layout, typography, jacket, and format to best accommodate her pictures." Abbot, "*Summer's Children*- New, Refreshing, Affirmative," 679.

<sup>59</sup> Carter and Agee, *Barbara Morgan, Prints, Watercolors & Photographs*, 124.

as a treasured friend to be turned to for new insights.”<sup>60</sup> Morgan liked the more permanent and mobile aspects of the book, as opposed to the temporary and site-specific exhibition.<sup>61</sup> In turn, Morgan continued to work with book projects after *Summer’s Children*. In 1954, Morgan was credited with the picture editing and book design of *The World of Albert Schweitzer*.<sup>62</sup> Once again, this publication received rave reviews for its design.<sup>63</sup> After 1955, Morgan focused her design work on compilations of her own photographic career including her 1964 monographic issue of *Aperture* magazine, a 1972 monographic book, and a 1980 compendium of her photomontage work.<sup>64</sup>

When designing books of her own photographs, Morgan did not seek to garner critical praise strictly for the design or the photograph: she wanted the book to represent her career as an artist. She articulated this point in a 1972 interview, when she stated: “I

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<sup>60</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 16. In another comparison with the dramatic arts, Morgan compared her book design work to the rhythms of a play that is ordered by acts and scenes. She went on to write that “the photographic book is paced with divisions, to accent the visual sequencing. Such shifts are given by long shots and close-ups; by contrasts in meaning; by tonal contrasts.” *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Erica Anderson, *The World of Albert Schweitzer* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955).

<sup>63</sup> Dorothy Green of the *Washington Post and Times Herald* wrote “No matter how exceptional the photographs and how inspired the text and captions, the final results are determined by the manner in which the various parts are related to one another. Barbara Morgan has taken the parts and woven them into an effective and harmonious whole. This triumvirate has produced the best book of pictures to cross this desk in a great while.” Dorothy Green, “Four Great Men Make Up Schweitzer,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, January 30, 1955. Jacob Deschin of the *New York Times* wrote “The exceptionally good reproductions in photogravure and Barbara Morgan’s valuable contribution in editing the pictures and designing the book and typography succeed in presenting the pictures at their best.” Jacob Deschin, “Reportage in Covers,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1955.

<sup>64</sup> Additionally, throughout her career, Morgan served as an unofficial consultant in her husband’s publishing firm, Morgan & Lester Publishing, which produced its first book in 1935. Morgan & Lester primarily published how-to books on photography and was best known for publications that promoted the Leica camera. Anne Tucker, ed., *The Woman’s Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 96. Barbara and Willard Morgan would later co-found Morgan & Morgan specifically to publish books on photography. Ann Dils, “Barbara Morgan: Photographing Life” in *Dance, Culture, & Art-Making Behavior: Proceedings, October 31-November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997*, Morgan Archive, 139. When Morgan’s sons took over the business, she returned to the role of consultant in an unofficial capacity. Tucker, *Woman’s Eye*, 96. Doug and Lloyd Morgan were groomed for the family business when Willard bought a Civil War era printing press and historic type fonts and installed them in the basement. The boys started a little magazine, “The Fresh Egg,” soon after. Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 32.

design my own books because I feel that the structuring, the sequence, the juxtaposition of form and mood of the book, have to come from the person who makes the pictures. Otherwise it doesn't fully flower."<sup>65</sup> With *Summer's Children*, Morgan designed the book to be seen as a whole, not a series of photographs, but a single artistic object. In reviews of the book, both Nancy Newhall and Berenice Abbot noted Morgan's successful unification of all aspects of the book into an integrated whole.<sup>66</sup>

If the viewer is meant to see *Summer's Children* as an ensemble, then it is logical to ask what Morgan intended the book as a whole to convey. I would argue that the answer to that question lies in the contemporary history of the period. Morgan created this book in response to a difficult social and economic period in American history. To fully comprehend this book, one must be familiar with the influential events of the era.

In April 1945, the Allied armies seemed poised to claim victory both in Europe and in the Pacific. Nonetheless, when Franklin Roosevelt died abruptly on April 12, 1945, it shocked Americans and Europeans alike. Domestically, Roosevelt led Americans through the Depression and into World War II. He had been recently elected to his fourth term of office and many Americans considered him the only man capable of guiding the United States through such trying times. Roosevelt had risen to the level of a world leader in the fight against Germany and Japan. His passing caused great consternation and worry for the American people. The subsequent oath of office taken by Harry Truman exacerbated this concern. Truman was untested as a national leader.

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<sup>65</sup> She went on to note that any serious photographer must design his or her own books to ensure the intended message and meaning of the work. "Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues with the External World," *Bennington College- Quadrille* 5, no. 4 (1971): 14.

<sup>66</sup> Nancy Newhall, "Journey into Childhood," *Popular Photography*, October 1951, 146 and Abbot, "*Summer's Children*- New, Refreshing, Affirmative," 679.



While most Americans gave Truman the benefit of the doubt initially, skepticism quickly replaced optimism. Truman entered the White House with an astounding eighty-seven percent approval rating. By October, 1946, that number had sunk to a dismal thirty-two percent.<sup>67</sup>

While April 1945 appeared to hold great economic promise, numerous worrisome problems lingered. Would the Great Depression return as ten million war workers and twelve million soldiers looked for new sources of employment? Or would all their excess cash and domestic buying lead to inflation? War labor brought prosperity through overtime wages, thus organized labor was quiescent during the war. With an end to overtime wages would labor organizers renew the strikes and actions of the Depression?<sup>68</sup> Most of these worries soon became reality.

Truman's post-war economic policies brought him into direct conflict with organized labor within the first year of his presidency, and the United States was plagued by major work stoppages soon after. By seizing coal mines, threatening union leadership with congressional proceedings, and drafting striking workers into the military, Truman forced the unions to back down. But his relationship with organized labor, a traditional stalwart of the Democratic party, was permanently ruptured.<sup>69</sup> In November 1941, when a survey asked Americans "what is the most important problem facing the U.S. today?" eighty-one percent of those who responded answered foreign affairs. By August 1945,

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<sup>67</sup> Two perceived problems spurred Americans' loss of faith in their new president. First, Truman's inept political machinations quickly split the previously solid Democratic party. This rift ultimately caused the Democrats to lose control of Congress for the first time since 1930. Second, Truman's economic policies appeared outdated and ineffective. Truman attempted to extend the New Deal during a booming post-war economy that did not merit such actions. Thus, it was inflation, not depression, that needed to be addressed and Truman's policies lagged behind this economic reality. Gary Donaldson, *Abundance and Anxiety: America, 1945-60* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 1-8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

only eleven percent answered foreign affairs, whereas an astounding eighty-five percent cited economic concerns.<sup>70</sup> In other words, only a few years after the end of the Great Depression, Morgan and her fellow Americans foresaw the possibility of another major recession or worse.

As economic worries mounted, Americans confronted the atrocities of World War II as well. The Holocaust increasingly became public knowledge and Americans observed the aftermath of atomic warfare in Japan through a multitude of radio programs, newsreels, and magazine spreads. Americans faced tragedies on a scale beyond the scope of the imagination. The psychological impact of witnessing such horrors must have been considerable. Norman Mailer stated that the aftermath of World War II “presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it.” Mailer went on to say that in facing this mirror “one was then obliged to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation...and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?”<sup>71</sup> Barbara Morgan was no exception.

As Morgan confronted this appalling picture of humanity, it appears that she could no longer bring herself to present hopeful photographs of adult men and women. Therefore, she turned to children, the uncorrupted promise of the next generation and perhaps the only hope left in a violent and chaotic world. In *Woman’s Eye*, Anne Tucker noted that a radio bulletin detailing Germans burning the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw initially motivated Morgan to publish *Summer’s Children*. Morgan had been

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Niemi, John Mueller, and Tom W. Smith, *Trends in Public Opinion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1989), 39.

<sup>71</sup> William Tuttle Jr., “Daddy’s Gone to War”: *The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 231-32.

photographing children at Camp Treetops for years, but when she heard of the horrors occurring in Europe against the backdrop of children's laughter, she decided that the photographs could serve as a statement of courage and hope.<sup>72</sup>

Children who had grown up during the war, including her two sons Doug and Lloyd Morgan, particularly concerned Morgan. Adults were certainly inundated with the sickening reality of the war, but children were confronted with these same disturbing images of combat and its aftermath. William Tuttle, a scholar specializing in the history of the American home front during World War II, has argued that popular entertainment, including movies, comic books, radio programs, and cartoons, contained combat imagery and other references to war that "amplified the impact of the war, causing [children] to be both thrilled and terrified during the years from 1941 to 1945."<sup>73</sup> For example, Captain Midnight, one of the most popular radio adventure shows during the war, encouraged children to take the Captain Midnight oath in which they pledged to "save my country from the dire peril it faces or perish in the attempt."<sup>74</sup> These were heady words for small children to grasp.

*Life* magazine represented another major source of war imagery for children. Tuttle states that many children rifled through the pages of *Life* during the war, where they viewed pictures that highlighted the gruesome after-effects of battle and the

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<sup>72</sup> Tucker, *Woman's Eye*, 96.

<sup>73</sup> Tuttle, "Daddy's Gone to War," 148.

<sup>74</sup> It is surprising to learn how early children could be affected by popular culture. A 1940s study claimed that children begin to actively follow radio programs by the age of four. By the age of six most children were habitual listeners who could acutely imitate the characters. *Ibid.*, 148-49. It is worth noting that this was the approximate age range of Morgan's own two sons during the war.

Holocaust. The horrors that these children witnessed in the pages of *Life* only served to aggravate the great emotional strains already placed on their delicate psyches.<sup>75</sup>

While the atom bomb brought an end to war, it also instigated widespread insecurity among children who were presented with a weapon so deadly that there was nowhere to hide. In 1949, when the Russians first publicly detonated an atomic weapon, American children confronted a world in which they could die instantaneously and without warning.<sup>76</sup> When we view the laughing children of Morgan's photographs within *Summer's Children*, it would be appropriate to think of these children as escaping the psychic assault of their daily lives. In this light, summer camp was not merely a refuge from hot, crowded cities, it was a symbolic refuge from a hostile, frightening world in which horror and fear were the norm. While Morgan certainly wished that all children had such refuge, it was particularly important that she provide it for her own children.

To truly understand the broader personal implications of a project such as *Summer's Children*, one must look back over a decade to the reasons behind Morgan's adoption of the camera in the first place. In 1932, Morgan gave birth to Doug and three years later, a second son, Lloyd, followed. As a mother, Morgan had limited time to continue painting and printmaking. As the primary care-giver for the family, Morgan found herself increasingly confined to her home with little free time during the day. In this regard, the Morgan family followed a potent trend that began during the Depression. Women were encouraged to return to the traditional family structure in which the husband was the sole bread-winner and his wife remained in the home to take care of the

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<sup>75</sup> William Tuttle Jr., "An Era of War, Hot and Cold" in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 18.

<sup>76</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 22 and Tuttle, "Daddy's Gone to War," 232-33

children. In *Raising Baby by the Book*, Julia Grant states that many psychologists and sociologists of the era viewed the traditional American family as a “locus of stability” in an increasingly chaotic world.<sup>77</sup> The government promoted this agenda through New Deal measures that supported unemployed men, but discouraged married women from seeking employment.<sup>78</sup> Through the machinations of the United States government and a supportive business community, the number of married women who were employed fell to fifteen percent by 1940.<sup>79</sup> Unlike other married women who abandoned employment altogether in favor of child-rearing, Morgan sought a compromise. She ultimately found that photography, which could largely be accomplished at night when young children were sleeping, a better match for her as a mother.<sup>80</sup>

After Lloyd’s birth in 1935, the Morgans established permanent residency in New York City, where Willard lectured and promoted the new Leica camera. By 1941, however, Morgan’s misgivings about New York City were too strong to ignore and the family moved to the suburbs, where her boys could enjoy the fresh air, trees, and wildlife.<sup>81</sup> Also around this time Morgan first sent her children to summer camp. Each summer, Doug and Lloyd were driven to Camp Treetops in Lake Placid, New York. As a photographer, Morgan often snapped shots on these trips for the family album, but soon

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<sup>77</sup> Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 162.

<sup>78</sup> The entertainment industry supported this cultural shift as well with films such as *Blonde Venus*, *His Girl Friday*, and even *Gone with the Wind*. Each of these movies, and many others, suggested that a woman must accept subordinate roles in a marriage in order for the marriage to succeed. May, *Homeward Bound*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Sharon Ann Avery, “Photography as Performance” (master’s thesis, University of New Mexico, 1999): 38. Morgan made this statement on several occasions. Since she rarely, if ever, took photographs at night, one can assume that she referred to the developing and printing of photographs.

<sup>81</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 32.

this evolved into something more formal. “I began Leica sketching of children’s activities and moods, from dawn barn chores to evening bon-fire singing,” Morgan later wrote.<sup>82</sup> Over time, the Haskells and the Clarks, who directed the camp, allowed Morgan to listen in on counselor meetings in which the staff discussed how these activities affected the children. She learned that an activity might be conceived to encourage one camper to overcome his fear of swimming or another to befriend her tentmates. Once Morgan knew the intended outcome of an activity, she “followed up many such situations photographically, living along with the children, at camp or on the trail” in order to capture the triumphs and the growth of these children.<sup>83</sup> What began as a series of informal photographs soon took shape in Morgan’s mind as a book.

Although motherhood largely spurred Morgan’s career in photography, children did not enter her oeuvre as a subject until after World War II. The end of the war drastically transformed the lives of many American women. In *The Homefront: America During World War II*, cultural historians Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin D. Mitchell, and Steven J. Schechter quote interviews in which American women detail the abrupt changes they experienced in their lives after the war. Frankie Cooper was among the most direct in noting these changes when she said:

After the war fashions changed dramatically, you were supposed to become a feminine person... All this was part of the propaganda in magazines and newspapers to put a woman back in her ‘rightful place’ in the home. Go back now, forget all you’ve learned, be feminine. Go home and make your bread, raise your children. Forget you had them in a nursery and you were out there in pants. Like a lot of women, I responded to the articles and the newspapers

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

and the pressures from my family as well. I did what I thought was right. I went home.<sup>84</sup>

Historian Elaine Tyler May confirms that many women left the national work force due to post-war government policies, private sector employers, unions, and societal pressure.<sup>85</sup> Government policies were based on the recommendations of civil defense strategists who claimed that the traditional family structure could perform two important functions if the United States engaged the Eastern bloc in direct war: physical protection for American citizens either through shelters or evacuation and the inculcation of values and education that promoted self-help.<sup>86</sup> One can certainly see the influence of these ideas in the photographs of *Summer's Children*, in which children are taught vital survival skills such as camping, navigation, fishing, cooking on a fire, working with tools, tying knots, and others. Harried parents, with limited spare time, could send their children away for such important training. Thus, Morgan's book indirectly promotes summer camps as institutions of learning that stressed the values emphasized by civil defense planners.

Child-care strategies changed dramatically in the post-war period as well. In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, which marked a shift from regimented, stoic child-rearing practices as recommended by the earlier work of Dr. John Broadus Watson to a permissive, emotionally connected

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<sup>84</sup> In another example of this sentiment, Winona Espinose states that: "the end of the war was a real setback for women... The fellows came back home and everybody made babies. Women got into their homey-type thing and just stayed at home with their families...It was as if we'd forgotten everything we'd learned through the war years." Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin D. Mitchell, and Steven J. Schechter, *The Homefront: America During World War II* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1984), 249.

<sup>85</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 70.

approach advocated by Dr. Spock.<sup>87</sup> The book sold twenty-two million copies and greatly changed the face of child-care for decades.<sup>88</sup> It also launched a trend. According to Julia Grant, the early 1950s represented the era of the baby book. By 1955, baby books had become such a ubiquitous part of the child-rearing process that a *Newsweek* cover depicted a child resting on a stack of these books to illustrate a feature article titled “Bringing Up Baby on Books.”<sup>89</sup> Viewed through the lens of this cultural trend, *Summer’s Children* exhibits yet another dimension. The book can be seen as a new type of guide for parents: one that marks the changing relationship between adults and children of the period. This new permissiveness is apparent in *Summer’s Children* where the children appear free and happy in a loosely structured environment. Also, note the children hugging parents and counselors alike, whereas Dr. Watson had written in 1928 that a kiss on the forehead at night and a handshake in the morning were the only appropriate intimacies between parents and children.<sup>90</sup> The new warmth and intimacy between parents and their children seemed to act as a buffer between American families and the terrors of the atomic age.<sup>91</sup>

Although Morgan never directly spoke of the shifting societal norms after World War II, her career in photography made a notable shift during this period. After 1946, Morgan abandoned dance photography and, with a single exception, photomontage,

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<sup>87</sup> Dr. Watson disseminated his theories to the American public via popular magazines and *Infant Care* bulletins published by the Children’s Bureau. Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 42.

<sup>88</sup> Tuttle, “An Era of War, Hot and Cold,” 26.

<sup>89</sup> Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 201.

<sup>90</sup> Tuttle, “An Era of War, Hot and Cold,” 23. Signs of the new openness between adults and children appear in *Summer’s Children* most directly on pages 65, 66, 67, and 83.

<sup>91</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 23.



instead expending nearly all her effort to complete *Summer's Children*.<sup>92</sup> Morgan, like many American mothers of the post-war period, turned her attention inward toward her family. Morgan focused on the positive aspects of her children's lives; the time spent in the idyllic summer splendor of Camp Treetops, a place where the stresses of Cold War life rarely impinged upon a carefree atmosphere.

The Cold War played a prominent role in Morgan's life and career as it did in American popular culture as a whole. Morgan focused upon *Summer's Children* just as the Cold War began. The initiation of the Cold War directly resulted from the events surrounding the end of the Second World War. During the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, Truman learned that the development of the atomic bomb had succeeded. He immediately informed Churchill, but concealed the breakthrough from Stalin, a supposed ally. According to historian Gary Donaldson, the invention and the eventual usage of the atomic bomb cemented the inception of the Cold War.<sup>93</sup> By February 1946, in a public speech in France, Stalin proclaimed communism and capitalism incompatible in the new world order. In this same speech, Stalin presented a five-year plan to prepare for the inevitable war with the Western allies.<sup>94</sup> Two key surveys indicate the changing views of Americans during this period. In November 1946, only twenty-eight percent of Americans believed that the United States would fight another war within ten years. By July 1950, that number had increased to eighty

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<sup>92</sup> Between 1946 and 1951, Morgan created one photomontage, three portraits, a series of photographs that document abandoned automobiles, and the photographs for a book on James Prestini's woodwork titled *Prestini's Art in Wood*. However, with the exception of the Prestini photographs, which were published in 1950 as part of the book, none of the other photographs Morgan created during this period were published until 1964. The photomontage was published in 1980.

<sup>93</sup> Donaldson, *Abundance and Anxiety*, 30-31.

<sup>94</sup> Tuttle, "Daddy's Gone to War," 32.

percent.<sup>95</sup> A second survey asked Americans whether they believed the following statement: “Russia is trying to build herself up to be the ruling power of the world.” In May 1946, fifty-five percent of Americans voiced their agreement with this statement. By November 1950, eighty-four percent of Americans were convinced of its veracity.<sup>96</sup> Many American opinions changed when the communist-aligned North Korean army invaded South Korea in June 1950. The American people wholly supported a foreign policy in which the containment of communism remained the highest priority. Therefore, when North Korea attempted to expand its boundaries, Truman prepared a military response.<sup>97</sup>

American troops entered South Korea, pushing the North Korean army back to its original border. While the original pretext for this police action was a military campaign to re-establish the status quo in Asia, under pressure from conservatives, Truman elected to expand the war in an attempt to rout the communists and unify Korea as a democracy. The Chinese army responded by entering the war on the side of North Korea as soon as United Nations troops crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>98</sup> This led to wide-spread fear of a third world war.<sup>99</sup> In 1951, when *Summer’s Children* was published, U.N. troops were

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<sup>95</sup> In the second survey, the question asked to all participants was rewritten to suggest a world war. Niemi, Mueller, and Smith, *Trends in Public Opinion*, 52.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>97</sup> Donaldson, *Abundance and Anxiety*, 55. Although the Korean War was ostensibly a United Nations action, at no point did more than five percent of the U.N. troops consist of armies from countries other than the United States and South Korea. Of that five percent, over half were British. Perhaps for this reason, American general Douglas MacArthur commanded the entire force. *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>99</sup> When Americans were asked in a survey “In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Korea, do you think the United States made a mistake in deciding to defend Korea (South Korea), or not?” In August 1950 only nineteen percent of Americans replied “Yes.” However, by December 1950, forty-nine percent of Americans felt the U.S. entry into the Korean conflict was a mistake. Niemi, Mueller, and Smith, *Trends in Public Opinion*, 60.

actively engaging North Korean and Chinese troops roughly at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel dividing line between North and South Korea. The war was at a stalemate.<sup>100</sup>

The anxiety that many Americans felt regarding the conflict between the United States and communist countries was coupled by the perception of an increasing domestic menace— the spread of communism at home. Anti-communist firebrand Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities attempted to root out communism in the late 1940s. The resolve of McCarthy and his allies made most Americans edgy for one of two reasons. Some citizens were concerned that they would be accused and felt that the trials were not impartial. Other Americans accepted the rhetoric behind such actions at face value and worried that communist spies had indeed infiltrated American society.<sup>101</sup> Thus, whether an American supported or opposed McCarthy's agency, his political presence fostered waves of panic through all strata of American society.

In September 1950, with the passage of the McCarran Internal Security Act, all communist groups were required to register with the U.S. government. Under this act, anyone labeled a communist could be imprisoned if he or she was perceived as a threat to commit espionage. If an individual was simply accused of communist leanings, that accusation could cost the individual his or her career. The McCarran Act facilitated a large-scale shift to a common middleground in the American political spectrum, and homogeneity soon became the standard in American society. Gary Donaldson

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<sup>100</sup> Chinese forces staged massive attacks, gained some ground, then fell back to their previous positions, which led Commanding General Douglas MacArthur to call the conflict an "Accordion War." Donaldson, *Abundance and Anxiety*, 62.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-51. Fear of communist spies became rampant during the late 1940s and early 1950s after a Soviet agent in Canada defected to the West bringing evidence of a vast Soviet spy network with him. In time, fifteen spies were ferreted out including Julius and Ethel Rosenberg who became the focus of this hysteria in 1949. They were tried, found guilty, and finally executed in 1953. *Ibid.*, 47.

characterizes Americans of the period as “slipping into conformity.” Americans avoided items associated with Russia, including red neckties, vodka, and Russian caviar. Many Americans also denied past associations with communist groups and attempted to fit into the new mainstream. Conservatism became the norm in many university disciplines such as history, economics, and sociology. Dress codes were established in schools and businesses.<sup>102</sup> Big business supported homogenization because it promoted capitalism and the acquisition of material things as a badge of capitalist necessity. Furthermore, big business controlled the media and successfully excised all conflicting ideas from popular culture.<sup>103</sup> The government encouraged orthodoxy in many ways as well. The CIA infiltrated many intellectual groups, subsidized periodicals and publishing houses, and placed agents in university jobs in an attempt to control American thought.<sup>104</sup> Numerous polls indicated the success of these initiatives. College students grew increasingly conservative, both politically and privately.<sup>105</sup>

Most intellectuals failed to scrutinize the collective mentality of Americans during this period.<sup>106</sup> Cold War scholars Lawrence Wittner, George Mowry, and Blaine

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>103</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *Cold War America* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 121.

<sup>104</sup> The CIA covertly funded the National Student Association beginning in 1950. The NSA represented the largest and most influential student organization in the nation and the CIA provided up to eighty percent of its income in certain years. In return, the NSA provided information on foreign student leaders and operated an anti-communist student organization. Ibid., 125. Perhaps the most blatant CIA operation was its subsidy of the Congress for Cultural Freedom which published the British journal *Encounter*. Despite its name, the organization was actually run by a CIA operative and its mission was to rally artists, writers, and intellectuals behind the American Cold War position. Ibid., 128.

<sup>105</sup> Wittner states that “college girls told pollsters that they preferred having babies to careers, while bright young men asked corporate interviewers about pension plans,” meanwhile, professors agreed that these students worked harder than prior generations, but seemed intellectually dull. Ibid., 125.

<sup>106</sup> There were some notable exceptions. For example, David Riesman claimed that the average American had gone through a major personality shift during this period, moving from an “inner-directed” response to life toward an “other-directed” approach that favored the mass values of one’s peers to internal personal values. Erich Fromm, the noted psychiatrist, stated that Americans chose conformity in an effort to escape

Brownell have extensively parsed the literature of the era and find either an overt promotion of Cold War thinking or a sullen acceptance of current cultural standards.<sup>107</sup>

So where does *Summer's Children* fit into the intellectual landscape of early 1950s American culture?

I would argue that the theme of Morgan's book represents an acceptance of the cultural standards of the era, but with an important variation. Morgan responded to the horrors of the aftermath of World War II, as well as the fear and pessimism of the early Cold War era, by romanticizing the next generation. She focused both her efforts and her camera on children, the hope for the future. In the introduction to *Summer's Children*, Mary Fisher Langmuir, professor of child study at Vassar, noted the importance of protecting the next generation when she wrote that *Summer's Children* "renews our faith that we can help create a good life for children even in times of world stress and emergency."<sup>108</sup> During this difficult period, many Americans turned to two common themes: the past (which represented the established base for American culture) and children (who represent the future). These two themes meet in summer camps, which subsequently exploded in popularity during this period.

The concept of the summer camp was an entirely American institution with a relatively short history. Frederick William Gunn arguably established the first organized

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the difficult choices precipitated by individualism in favor of the security and regimentation of a mass society. George Mowry and Blaine Brownell, *The Urban Nation 1920-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 177.

<sup>107</sup> Wittner, *Cold War America*, 130 and Mowry and Brownell, *The Urban Nation 1920-1980*, 180-81.

<sup>108</sup> Mary Fisher Langmuir, "Introduction" in Morgan, *Summer's Children*, 8. In a review of *Summer's Children* for *American Photography* Berenice Abbot even goes so far as to indirectly chide parents who fail to provide such an opportunity for their children when she writes: "we cannot evade the sorrowful fact that all children do not have the same love, the same understanding, and opportunity. No doubt Barbara Morgan is well aware of this for she dedicates her book 'to children everywhere'." Abbot, "*Summer's Children*— New, Refreshing, Affirmative," 679.

camp in 1861 as part of the curriculum of his Gunnery School. He responded to a fervent interest in outdoor life fostered in his students by accounts of Union soldiers living off the land as they defended the nation. The first camp with a permanent location was not founded until 1881, however, when Ernest Balch set up Camp Chocorua in New Hampshire for affluent boys twelve to sixteen years of age. Balch's camp stressed the importance of morality, democracy, and capitalism in its eight-year run. While Balch's Camp Chocorua was short-lived, his concept of organized camping for children was essential for many camps that were founded later and Balch is often known as the father of the organized camping movement.<sup>109</sup>

Most of the early camps were experiments. Individuals established camps as a means of testing a variety of social, educational, philosophical, or religious ideas in a controlled setting.<sup>110</sup> However, two commonalities connected nearly all of these early camps: the promotion of healthy social interaction and the establishment of physical fitness in a natural (and therefore healthy) environment. Summer camps initially allowed urban children to retreat from the crowded, sweltering cities and enjoy open spaces and sunshine.<sup>111</sup> The realization of major differences between rural and urban lives lay at the heart of the concept of summer camp. Author George Donaldson states that preceding the mass migration to the cities, American children were raised in an atmosphere more homologous to camp life whether on the farm, ranch, or other locale, than to

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<sup>109</sup> The first organized camping expeditions for girls did not begin until 1902 when Laura Mattoon organized excursions into the New Hampshire wilds. The first year eight girls attended and each succeeding year that number increased. With time Mattoon was able to purchase land and set up Camp Kehonka as a permanent location. Eleanor Eells, *Eleanor Eell's History of Organized Camping, The First 100 Years* (Martinsville, IN: American Camping Association, 1986): 5, 8, 13.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 98.

contemporary urban living.<sup>112</sup> Thus, summer camp became a form of nostalgia for many parents who either grew up in an agricultural setting or learned of rural life from their parents.<sup>113</sup>

Morgan spoke to the importance of children experiencing an agricultural way of life when she wrote that camps that included tasks traditionally associated with family farms allowed children to “recapture a birthright of an earlier America.”<sup>114</sup> A natural bliss associated with a more pastoral era appealed to harried and fearful Americans during the difficult decades of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.<sup>115</sup> In turn, one of the strongest influences on camp life was early American history, particularly frontier life with its romantic tales of cowboys, explorers, trappers, and other self-sufficient men living off the land.<sup>116</sup> Educators also saw the value of outdoor education at the turn of the twentieth century as the value of play and entertaining activities were recognized as part of a child’s growth process.<sup>117</sup>

Camps served another important function for urban children as well. A three-month vacation from school in the summer had been necessary for an agricultural society in which the labor of children on family farms was vital. However, with the rise of urban life, children from urban or affluent backgrounds were left idle over the summer with no

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<sup>112</sup> George Donaldson, *School Camping* (New York: Association Press, 1952), 39.

<sup>113</sup> It is thus fitting that the organized camping movement was largely born in the Northeast, where urban living was most common at this time. Van Slyck, *Manufactured Wilderness*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Morgan, *Summer’s Children*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 24.

<sup>116</sup> Native American culture was infused into camp life as well. Ernest Thompson Seton is often viewed as the first camp founder to incorporate commonly perceived Native American values such as outdoor living, council fires, and metaphorical dance traditions. Van Slyck, *Manufactured Wilderness*, 170.

<sup>117</sup> Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 56-57.

agricultural responsibilities. Early summer camps attempted to fill that void.<sup>118</sup> The Fresh Air Movement, which held as its central belief that time spent in natural environments, such as a wilderness camp setting, promoted human health, gained popularity and accrued adherents at this time. By 1905, over 700 private camps with a variety of philosophies and purposes had been established.<sup>119</sup>

The founding of the Boy Scouts in 1910 and the establishment of the Girl Scouts two years later marked a shift in the growing outdoor movement. The Scouts were largely founded on the platform of organized camping. But the Scouts ultimately transformed the organized camping movement by utilizing a military-style structure and a fervent Christian morality. To illustrate how scouting captured the summer camp market, one only need view summer camp statistics of the 1920s. In 1923, approximately 500,000 boys and girls participated in summer camps. Children in Boy Scout camps accounted for half that number.<sup>120</sup> Critics of the Scouts and other modern large-format camps noted that this approach no longer bore any direct relationship to an actual backwoods experience. Instead, camping now resembled urban living or modern military life.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, this approach to organized camping dominated the market well into the Cold War era.

A small number of camps, however, provided an alternative to the scouting movement. The 1920s and the 1930s marked the height of the progressive education

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<sup>118</sup> Scholar Abigail Van Slyck argues that many Americans were concerned that boys had become effeminate due to the excessive time spent in the presence of overwhelming mothers during the summer. Thus, summer camps also served to foster a return to a traditional masculinity marked by time spent outdoors. Van Slyck, *Manufactured Wilderness*, 9-10.

<sup>119</sup> However, this was still primarily a Northeastern institution and nearly all of these camps were located in New England. Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 59.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-75.

<sup>121</sup> Donaldson, *School Camping*, 40-41.



movement in the United States and several summer camps were founded as progressive alternatives to the regimented organization of scouting-style camps during this period. The focus of the progressive education movement continually shifted. However, one can look to the Progressive Education Association that formed in 1919 to find the key ideological aims of many educators who were attempting to engender progressive change in education.<sup>122</sup> Patricia Graham, who extensively studied the progressive education movement, states that the one thing on which all members of the Progressive Education Association agreed, and most other progressive educators as well, was the prominent role of John Dewey's philosophy.<sup>123</sup> Dewey eschewed the traditional approach that forces children to acquire knowledge through rote memorization, favoring experience to engender learning.<sup>124</sup>

In 1925, the progressive education movement attempted to spread its influence to the growing summer camp movement.<sup>125</sup> That year the YMCA held its Third Assembly at Estes Park at which a multitude of prominent progressive thinkers, including Dewey, discussed the role that progressive education should play in summer camps. This

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<sup>122</sup> Patricia Albjerg Graham, *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), 1. While progressive education initially intended to improve education for working class children, after the first World War, many affluent parents sought the focus on individual expression and creativity that progressive education promoted. *Ibid.*, 8-9. From World War I until the 1950s, progressive educators generally aligned with a broader liberal viewpoint. Chapter five will discuss Barbara Morgan's strong ties to liberalism in detail.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Curtis Carter states that Morgan met John Dewey at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania while she was engaged with photographing the Barnes collection. Carter, *Faces of Modern Dance*, 21.

<sup>124</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1967), 17-23. Excerpted in James Hillesheim and George Merrill, *Theory and Practice in the History of American Education* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 250.

<sup>125</sup> There were already a few camps in the United States that followed the tenets of progressive education. However, in 1925, the leaders of the movement attempted to create formal ties between these camps and foster the establishment of additional progressive camps.

fostered an intellectual battle with more conservative camp directors that would continue until the advent of World War II.<sup>126</sup>

Camp Treetops, upon which Morgan would focus for *Summer's Children*, was among the first camps that formed under the rubric of progressive ideals. In viewing *Summer's Children*, it is important not only to focus on the images of summer camp, but likewise, what is absent. No suggestion of religion or hint of military organization in the way of uniforms are present. Clearly Camp Treetops promoted a different kind of camp experience— one steeped in the basic ideals of progressive education. Mary Fisher Langmuir explained how this worked at Camp Treetops when she noted that *Summer's Children* does not include photographs of campers in formation, nor does it portray “star” campers being rewarded while “poor” campers are punished. Instead, the children are directly involved in the process of making and evaluating rules. For example, they learn that broken equipment makes it impossible to complete a game, so it is important to be careful. Allowing the children to witness the possible consequences of their actions fosters a sense of “why rules are a necessary part of group living.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, the ideals of progressive education were upheld in conjunction with the law-abiding dictates of the Cold War era and the doctrine of learning self-help behaviors that civil defense planners believed were vital for American interests.

In 1920, Donald and Dorothy Slesinger established the camp in upstate New York. When Donald Slesinger wrote about the founding of the camp, he stated, “from its beginning Camp Treetops emphasized the importance of community feeling. Its program

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<sup>126</sup> Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 135.

<sup>127</sup> Langmuir, “Introduction,” 8.

played down competition, fixed schedules, and traditions.”<sup>128</sup> Morgan’s photographs of Camp Treetops manifest this ideal, in which learning and fun activities are intertwined. *Summer’s Children* illustrates the ties to Dewey’s educational philosophy in the third section of the book entitled “I Want To...” The title of this chapter notes a child’s urge to learn and the opposing page presents a list of activities. Thus, if read as an integrated whole, the text reads “I want to...go bird-banding, pass Canoe Safety, put a warp on the loom, build my one-match fire, go see the garter snake’s babies, glaze my clay horse for the kiln, decorate Tommy’s birthday cake.”<sup>129</sup> (Figure 4.15) The next ten pages depict children learning a variety of skills by completing a series of activities, often following the example of a counselor. The series of photographs on pages 98 and 99 represent a perfect example of this ideal (Figure 4.16). Morgan photographed children as they cooked on a fire, built a “tab tent,” constructed a cooking spit over a fire, and put the finishing touches on a canoe shelter. In this way, Morgan’s photographs of camp activities illustrate Camp Treetops’ strong allegiance to Dewey’s principles of progressive education.

Slesinger openly proclaimed his ties to the movement when he wrote that the progressive education philosophy, established by John Dewey, William Kilpatrick, and Joseph K. Hart, encouraged him and his wife to start the camp. “Idealistic young people, fresh from the period of the first World War, thought that the way to save the world was

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<sup>128</sup> Camp Treetops was first situated at a site in Wilmington, New York, not far from Lake Placid. It moved to its permanent location on Round Lake between the towns of Keene and Lake Placid, New York in 1923. While Donald and Dorothy Slesinger are credited with founding Camp treetops, Douglas and Helen Haskell, who joined staff of the camp five years after it opened, took over the directorship of the camp in 1928. It is often the Haskells that are incorrectly credited as the founders of the camp. Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 133.

<sup>129</sup> Morgan, *Summer’s Children*, 94-95.

by starting a magazine or a school. We founded a children's camp," he concluded.<sup>130</sup> Along with his obligatory citation of Dewey as an influence, Slesinger also mentioned William Kilpatrick. Many viewed Kilpatrick as the inheritor of Dewey's ideas and he became well-known for integrating Dewey's philosophy with the practice of outdoor education.<sup>131</sup> The third influence that Slesinger mentions by name is also quite revealing. By including Joseph K. Hart, Slesinger provided a link to the future of Camp Treetops. Hart came from a secondary branch of the progressive education movement that attempted to link democratic principles with educational reforms.<sup>132</sup> By the 1940s, Dewey supported these ideas as well and often cited freedom as a guiding principle in progressive education.<sup>133</sup> In *Education Today*, Dewey wrote that teachers and students should equally participate in educational activities. He believed that due to "greater maturity and wider knowledge," the teacher would naturally assume a leadership role in the eyes of the students.<sup>134</sup> Although this was strictly intended as an informal process that was not meant to be overtly discussed, in the Cold War period many saw a parallel to democracy in which experienced and intelligent citizens were naturally elevated to leadership roles. Therefore, progressive camps such as Camp Treetops towed the line in the post-war period by strongly supporting democratic ideology, which was a key component of American Cold War philosophy. Progressive camps provided affluent and liberal-leaning parents with an acceptable alternative to the militaristic nature of scouting

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<sup>130</sup> Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 133.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>132</sup> Joseph K. Hart, *Democracy in Education* (New York: Century, 1918), *passim*.

<sup>133</sup> John Dewey, *Education Today* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1940), 216.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

camps or the proselytizing character of religious camps, while still ultimately remaining in the Cold War fold.<sup>135</sup>

When the Morgan boys first attended camp, Helen and Douglas Haskell were the directors of Camp Treetops. Both stringently believed in the liberal tradition, the promotion of democracy, and the development of a strong work ethic in children. For a number of years, Helen Haskell taught in progressive schools in New York when Camp Treetops was not in session, although, in time, the demands of the camp commanded all of her attention. Douglas Haskell worked as a writer and editor in the off-season. When he wrote about Camp Treetops, he emphasized the importance of a community feeling. He strongly believed that the camp should be a social melting pot. Camp Treetops welcomed both children and counselors from a wide range of religious backgrounds. In 1946, the Haskells took the next logical step and began to actively pursue staff members and campers from varying racial backgrounds as well. Both of the Haskells approached the education and recreation of children from an intellectual standpoint and looked to the basic tenets of progressive education for inspiration.<sup>136</sup>

In the post-war era there were camps that catered to a wide variety of philosophies, including progressive education, and simultaneously maintained an allegiance to the American Cold War ideology. During this period the organized camping movement achieved general acceptance as a national practice. Although the percentage of children attending summer camp nation-wide never climbed above sixteen

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<sup>135</sup> Affluence was generally a necessity, however, for camp attendance. Summer camp remained an expensive activity in most cases. By 1958, Camp Treetops charged \$700 for a single summer session. *The Sargent Guide to Summer Camps and Summer Schools* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1958), 55. According to the Consumer Price Index, as published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the buying power of \$700 in 1958 is equivalent to \$5,303.33 in 2008. United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/CPI> (accessed June 25, 2008).

<sup>136</sup> Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 133-34.

percent, that still meant that between four and five million children attended summer camp each summer during this period. By studying the founding dates of all American summer camps, Eleanor Eels established that the post-World War II era saw the greatest growth in the number of camps and participants.<sup>137</sup> In the opening chapter of *School Camping*, which was published in 1952, just a year after Morgan's *Summer's Children*, George Donaldson indirectly explained the link between Cold War thinking and the subsequent popularity of summer camps. Donaldson lamented the modern, industrialized world and the problems it created including specialization of work, urbanization, disintegration of the family, commercialized recreation, and the loss of traditional gender roles.<sup>138</sup> While specialization of work and urbanization were cornerstones of Cold War industrial growth, they were commonly critiqued as damaging to the American way of life. One solution focused on children and a symbolic return to America's heritage. Morgan employed this psychological remedy in her art as represented by *Summer's Children*.

Morgan intended *Summer's Children* to act as a remedy to the dejection, fear, and hopelessness of a nation on the brink of economic and/or military destruction as well. She felt most intellectuals either wallowed in defeat or inspired bitterness and hatred.<sup>139</sup> While so many intellectuals during the Cold War period were pessimistic in their thinking and their art, Morgan sought more uplifting themes. She reacted not only to the time period, but to other intellectuals' responses to the era. While an aspect of indirect rebellion informs this reaction, it did not run counter to the Cold War promotion of

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 119-20.

<sup>138</sup> Donaldson, *School Camping*, passim.

<sup>139</sup> Tucker, *Woman's Eye*, 96.

family and thus it was lauded. In other words, summer camps and Cold War mentality were a natural match.

In this light, Morgan's *Summer's Children* can easily be viewed as a tool of Cold War propaganda. Its critical praise and commercial success indicate how the world of popular culture received this book. In the *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, Rosemary Benet's review of *Summer's Children* openly praised Morgan's book as a means of promoting the American way of life when she wrote, "if one were trying to explain to a foreigner what life in America is like, this book would be an excellent choice for showing an important phase."<sup>140</sup> Berenice Abbot's review of *Summer's Children* is titled "*Summer's Children*— New, Refreshing, Affirmative," and interprets Morgan's book as an effective means of affirming what remains good in the world: children.<sup>141</sup> Nancy Newhall also wrote of affirmation in her review. But, in a more telling segment of the piece, Newhall contrasts Morgan's book with the universal dread of the Cold War era and suggests the need to unite as a nation:

This book is all our childhoods, it is all children, and even more, it is that rare and difficult achievement in art, the actual look and feel of happiness...In this threatening age, we have been so drenched by the tragic and the cynical in art that we have almost forgotten that humanity has potentials for happiness. We have...ignored the fundamental fact that unless we believe in humanity and its potentials for solving the vast problems it has raised and achieving the wise equilibrium of a true society, we are helpless as a bird hypnotized by the snake of our own fear. In this book, there is the sound and the look of life, an affirmation and a promise. O brave new world, that has such people in it!<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Rosemary Benet, "Summer's Children (Book Review)," *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, October 1951, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Abbot, "Summer's Children— New, Refreshing, Affirmative," 678.

<sup>142</sup> Newhall, "Journey into Childhood," 147. It is worth noting that while all the reviews of *Summer's Children* were positive, many critics viewed the book in fairly simple terms. For example, a critic for the *Washington Post* described the book as an "absorbing record of the finest kind of camp life" and primarily

Such a dramatic response to *Summer's Children* reveals the passion that lay just under the surface of the American psyche. Morgan's book clearly struck a vital chord with the American mentality of the period. Morgan's own writing, however, portends even loftier goals. She wrote:

Perhaps our world's distrust-ridden nations are in unwitting agreement in their almost universal love for children. Acknowledged and acted upon, this love could unite humanity in one dedicated purpose: to prepare our earth for the nurture and survival of sound children. Life—its economic, political, social and educational factors—focused to this end could create mutual well being, the soil of peace. Children's camp life is one small contribution toward this world goal— an ideal not merely of an 'improved standard of living,' but of an improved quality of life.<sup>143</sup>

Morgan's statement suggests that she thought beyond the improvement of American lives. She proposed a renewed focus on children throughout the world as a tonic to Cold War enmity. Her book, *Summer's Children*, provides a road map of sorts— a path toward a better world in which all of mankind will benefit.

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focused the short review on listing many of the children's activities. "Camp Life Captured in 200 Photographs," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1951.

<sup>143</sup> Morgan, *Summer's Children*, 9.



## Chapter Five- The Late Montages

In 1970, Barbara Morgan fashioned a complex and enigmatic photomontage titled *Confrontation* that epitomizes a group of montages created in the latter stages of her career (Figure 5.1). The lower right quadrant of the composition presents a woman's face in three-quarter profile with her head tipped slightly to the viewer's right. Lit from the lower left so as to highlight the delicate musculature and tendons of her neck, her face remains largely in shadow. Her closed heavy-lidded eyes and passive full lips suggest an indeterminate emotional state. An apparently male hand and arm, largely cropped from the composition, appears to reach toward her, but has yet to make contact. Above the woman's head, in the center of the composition, one first sees a nebulous dark mass. Upon further scrutiny, an X-ray of a human skull materializes. The skull, still connected to its spine, enters the composition from the lower left corner. A number of abstract formal elements complete the composition including a segment of varying gray-scale stripes in the lower left corner, a thick white line overlaying a black mass in the upper left corner, and a triangle of pure blackness in the upper right corner. With the exception of the corners and the overlaid skull, the top half of the composition is primarily white and the lower half, which contains the woman's head, consists of rich dark gray tones. Without any background information it is an inscrutable image that is difficult to parse, but when placed within the artistic oeuvre of Morgan and considered in her personal and artistic timeline, the meaning of this photomontage begins to emerge.

After World War II, Morgan turned away from montage in favor of documentary photography. Then, in 1955, with both of her sons away in college, Morgan returned to

painting and printmaking.<sup>1</sup> For seven years, most of Morgan's artistic production eschewed the camera. When Minor White corresponded with Morgan in 1958, he wrote "keep up the good painting [and] congratulations on getting shown."<sup>2</sup> Morgan did not pick up her camera in earnest again until 1962. Two years later, Morgan wrote that "to be alive in light, I need the attributes of both pigment and silver halides, camera and brush."<sup>3</sup> Yet, over time, the photographic image dominated Morgan's artistic production once again.

In 1965, Morgan returned to photomontage as her primary artistic genre. This marked the beginning of a seventeen-year period of artistic production that would conclude her career. A reinvigorated Morgan created dozens of montages during this period that would later be published. In 1975, she received a National Endowment for the Arts Grant to sustain this industrious period.<sup>4</sup> As late as 1981, at the age of 81, Morgan stated that she continued to make new photomontages because exhibiting old work proved insufficient to sustain her artistically.<sup>5</sup>

The year Morgan returned to creating photomontages in earnest, 1965, also was the year doctors diagnosed Morgan's husband Willard with throat cancer.<sup>6</sup> After two years of fighting the disease, Willard passed away in 1967. Although Morgan never specifically mentioned her husband's illness as a factor in returning to photomontage,

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture* 11, no. 1 (1964): 35. A highly abstract aesthetic dominates the majority of paintings, prints, and drawings of this era.

<sup>2</sup> Minor White to Barbara Morgan, February 19, 1958, Barbara Morgan Archive, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York (Hereafter Morgan Archive).

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, "Barbara Morgan," *Aperture*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Deba Patnaik, "Barbara Morgan" in *Contemporary Photographers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 534.

<sup>5</sup> Robin Holland, "A Life in Movement," *Darkroom Photography* 3 (1981): 50.

<sup>6</sup> Janet Morgan, e-mail message to author, April 2, 2007.

several of her artworks from this period seem to address the themes of cancer and death. Among these works is *Confrontation*.

The skull is a time-honored artistic symbol of death, but in this photomontage the skull suggests a secondary meaning. Morgan placed the skull and spine in opposition to the head and neck of the woman, to present two opposite states of existence: life and death. A likely reference to the Asian concept of opposites, the Yin and Yang, appears as the primarily white upper half of the montage, the location of the skull, stands in opposition to the dark tones of the lower half, where Morgan placed the woman's head.<sup>7</sup> The specific negatives Morgan chose are relevant as well. The dancer Anna Sokolow is the woman who appears in *Confrontation*. Morgan utilized a 1940 photograph of the dancer performing "Slaughter of Innocents."<sup>8</sup> The suffering of innocent women during the Spanish Civil War inspired this 1939 solo performance.<sup>9</sup> A review of the performance in *El Popular*, a newspaper in Mexico City, described the dance as "a marvelous expression of human pain and agony."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the choice of this dance image certainly informs the overall emotional content of *Confrontation*. It is likely that this montage held more personal meaning for Morgan as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Morgan often wrote of her fascination with Asian culture earlier in her career. This interest did not fade over time. In a letter to her friend Wanda Hammerbeck in 1978, Morgan noted she planned to attend a Tibetan Festival on Staten Island the next Sunday and asked about Tibetans in Berkeley. Barbara Morgan to Wanda Hammerbeck and Greg McGregor, September 5, 1978, Morgan Archive. Furthermore, Morgan was clearly familiar with the concept of Yin and Yang as she created a montage titled *Yin-Yang in Flight* in 1956, which she described as "a whimsical simultaneity of opposite forces, [that] was inspired by thinking of the attraction-repulsion of a magnet and of the Yin-Yang idea of Chinese philosophy." Barbara Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1980): np.

<sup>8</sup> The image was created from negative 715 in the Morgan Archive. Janet Morgan, e-mail message to author, April 2, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Larry Warren, *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1998), 54

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Cited from *El Popular* (Mexico City), April 17, 1939.

In designing the montage, Morgan chose an image of a woman who looked remarkably similar to herself in her youth (Figure 5.2). Furthermore, Sokolow closes her eyes as if in a reverie. The ghostly, disembodied hand reaches toward her. It is a large, thick hand reminiscent of the hand of Morgan's deceased husband.<sup>11</sup> The specter of death, as represented by the skull, overlaps Sokolow's head. She turns away from the skull, but cannot escape it.<sup>12</sup> Although one cannot prove Morgan intended an association between the skull and her husband Willard in this montage, two years later Morgan created the photomontage *Inner and Outer Man* in which the same x-ray of a skull and spine is laid over a portrait of Willard, also presented in profile (Figure 5.3). Thus, *Confrontation* appears to suggest the duality of memory. Morgan at once envisions her husband's touch and yet the specter of his loss haunts her as well. Morgan is forced to confront the past and the present simultaneously, which also may explain the title of the piece.

In the first two years of this late period of montage work, Morgan created other works that might be seen as dealing with science, medicine, and illness. *Frolic in the Lab*, 1965, features a multitude of wires, springs, tubes, and electrodes (Figure 5.4). These scientific instruments are rendered all the more strange and foreign due to the inversion of light and dark that occurs in the photogram process. Among the objects appear two women. One of the women is blurred and the other's head is obscured by a glass tube. A close inspection of the montage hints at images of the same woman in two

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<sup>11</sup> Morgan indicated an interest in Willard's hands when she created the photograph *Willard's Fist* in 1942. She subsequently utilized the negative in the 1945 montage *Fist* and later published the photograph unaltered in her 1972 Morgan & Morgan monograph.

<sup>12</sup> Morgan flipped the negative to achieve this specific design. Janet Morgan, e-mail message to author, April 2, 2007.

different poses. As in earlier montages and dance photographs, a duplicated figure likely suggests movement through time. In this case, the woman appears to be “frolicking” in the laboratory among the scientific instruments. However, Morgan probably intended the word frolic to be ironic. The body language of the woman and the monstrous size of the objects may suggest a disturbed emotional state or a bad dream. As in *Confrontation*, it is probable that Morgan identifies with the woman and thereby signifies her own reaction to Willard’s recent cancer diagnosis. At once entranced and repelled by the state of the medical arts, Morgan, like the woman in the montage, is overwhelmed by the multitude of scientific terms and treatments.

One gets the same impression from *Artificial Life From the Laboratory*, 1967 (Figure 5.5). A negative image of a solitary, seemingly male, figure dominates the lower third of the montage. His right arm, torso, and head appear strange due to the reversal of light and dark. Morgan cropped his lower body out of the montage. The top two thirds of the image is almost entirely dark. An abstract light drawing vaguely reminiscent of a human face overlays the entire composition. Within the circular outline, two dots resemble eyes and a few squiggles below read as an abstracted nose and mouth. The overall effect of the montage is surreal and disturbing. As viewed through the lens of the title, Morgan appears to suggest that the scientific establishment could unwittingly let loose unnatural and perhaps dangerous lifeforms. Morgan seems fascinated by technological advances as she simultaneously worries about possible consequences.

Morgan was well aware of the dramatic changes in the world since her birth. In 1953, she expounded on this theme when she wrote about the changing way we see the world in the modern era. “Our viewpoint is through a windshield, through reflected

images on plate glass, blurred snatches through an elevator door. We watch quilted land patterns slowly shift form below our propeller blur, and the vibrating wing tip,” she wrote.<sup>13</sup> She went on to note that “Time is cogged, margins are tightened, spirit is pressured. Pavement is a child’s backyard and the moon is less familiar than a street lamp.”<sup>14</sup> As the Machine Age gave way to the Computer Age, Morgan’s simultaneous excitement and concern remained.

In 1973, she created *Computerized Manhattanites* (Figure 5.6). The scene depicts a Manhattan sidewalk with three pedestrians superimposed over a photograph of a monotonous skyscraper facade. The uniformity of the windows, in perfect rows and columns, suggests a punch card that represents the new digital world. By superimposing this structure over the human figures, Morgan may facetiously imply the emergence of a new version of mankind fashioned from bits and bytes. Although it is not her most visually dynamic montage, the utilization of skyscraper windows to suggest a digital world displays wit. It also indicates the shifting nature of the world around her. Even the buildings and streets of New York, to which she has become accustomed after nearly forty years, seem to be changing before her eyes in the Computer Age. The same year Morgan created *Computerized Manhattanites*, she stated that life in the Space Age and continuing technological progress will necessitate “multiple-awareness and synthesized comprehensions.”<sup>15</sup> In this context, Morgan believed that photomontage was an “increasingly necessary” medium to express this new “inter-disciplinary” world.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Kinetic Design in Photography,” *Aperture* 1, no. 4 (1953): 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Tucker, ed., *The Woman’s Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Morgan evoked this concept earlier in *Confrontation*, as her alter-ego looked to the past and the present simultaneously.

The role of nature in this new, ever-changing world concerned Morgan as well. In 1947, Morgan found a junkyard in which old automobiles were being invaded by weeds. For Morgan, this junkyard symbolized the “Nature-Machine hybridized society” of the post-war period.<sup>17</sup> She noted the way that plant forms mirrored automobile design. The rusting chassis and bodies of the cars returning to the soil fascinated her. Two decades later, however, Morgan was much less certain about the relationship between mankind’s creations and nature.

In her late sixties and seventies, Morgan became an active environmentalist. Her public and private correspondence frequently discussed the environment, pollution, nuclear waste, and conservation. In a letter to her friend Minor White, Morgan asks, “How far can man go interfering with nature before catastrophe [sic] takes place?”<sup>18</sup> Morgan attempted to invoke change through political channels. In 1966, she wrote to senators Robert Kennedy and Jacob Javits about her concerns that two hydroelectric dams in the vicinity of Grand Canyon would damage the area’s pristine ecology.<sup>19</sup> In a 1983 videotaped interview, Morgan says “I am terrified at the thought of the water pollution, the earth pollution. Will our children survive? Will they be deformed? To

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<sup>17</sup> Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> In a letter from Minor White, he quotes Morgan’s original question and then responds to it. Minor White to Barbara Morgan, May 19, 1964, Morgan Archive.

<sup>19</sup> Although Morgan’s original letters were not preserved, the Barbara Morgan Archive has the responses of both senators. Jacob K. Javits to Barbara Morgan, June 24, 1966, Morgan Archive & Robert Kennedy to Barbara Morgan, June 24, 1966, Morgan Archive.

me, that is the most urgent thing.”<sup>20</sup> Children are also the focus of a letter to ABC News, in which Morgan writes:

As a grandmother of 8 dear children- and thinking of the millions of children now live- and to be BORN-? I thank you deeply for your program ‘The Killing Ground’ about dumping POISON WASTE- and its lethal consequences!?! With LOVE CANAL and the THREE MILE ISLAND and countless other tragic polluters- I think we the PUBLIC must put a STOP to this and FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL!... I hope it is not ‘too late’? Sincerely- Grandmother Barbara Morgan.<sup>21</sup>

Morgan typically mentioned the future and children whenever she discussed environmental issues.<sup>22</sup> This was no less true when she discussed her photomontages with environmental themes.

*Fossil in Formation*, 1965, consists of a photograph of New York City, with the Chrysler Building as the central focal point, superimposed over a close-up photograph of an ammonite fossil (Figure 5.7). In a 1977 interview, Morgan stated she created the montage after a day in New York punctuated by “the sound of street digging, terrible sounds, smog, [and] vibrations.”<sup>23</sup> Although the rest of her explanation is somewhat difficult to understand, the very end of her statement is important. She said, “I’ve done

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<sup>20</sup> Barbara Morgan, VHS, Thomas Schiff (Cincinnati: Image Productions, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> The punctuation, capitalizations, and underlining were copied as closely as possible from the original hand-written letter. Barbara Morgan to “Channel 7, ABC, News Close-Up,” August 21, [1980?], Morgan Archive.

<sup>22</sup> In another example, Morgan writes in a letter to a friend “...I am, and always have been deeply attuned to children’s growth. I love children, and as a grandmother, I am deeply apprehensive of the ‘polluted world’ my generation is handing to them.” Barbara Morgan to Darwin Marable, April 17, 1974, Morgan Archive. Even as early as 1951, Morgan included a pro-environmental message in her book *Summer’s Children* when she wrote: “Only human short-sightedness and inertia retard better use of this beautiful and patient earth. The blue lakes and green forests of our planet merely await intelligent planning to yield their regenerative influences and restore the common heritage. The mute and glorious sun can still be unclipped by smoke, wires and buildings to shine upon all in daily rotation. Establishment of preserves for conservation of birds, elk, and buffalo elicits general approval. Should we do less for human beings, especially for children- our green crop?” Barbara Morgan, *Summer’s Children* (Scarsdale, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1951), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Casey Allen, “Camera 35 Interview: Barbara Morgan,” *Camera 35*, 22 (1977): 60.



lots of things like that which are comments on today's need for conservation. You think of what is the future for our children. I have grandchildren now and what kind of a world are we giving them?"<sup>24</sup> Given this quote, it appears that a day in New York filled with unpleasant sounds, smells, and sensations spurred the creation of this montage, but over time another theme developed as well. The title and her quote seem to suggest that without conservation the city of New York will become an outdated fossil.

Unfortunately, Morgan fails to clarify what kind of conservation she believed to be so important or what she believed would specifically happen to the city. The exact meaning of this montage for Morgan remains nebulous. In fact, several of Morgan's late montages express ill-defined concerns.

Morgan's frequent objections against the nuclear industry, however, are much more succinct. In 1956, before her full-scale return to photomontage, Morgan signaled her early concern about nuclear holocaust when she created *Incoming* (Figure 5.8). This montage combines a photograph of a window framing a field with a forest in the background and a scratched and smudged negative. Considered in conjunction with the title, the image may represent a post-apocalyptic future in which the scratches and smudges can be read as nuclear fall-out or as the cobwebs that have accumulated after mankind's obliteration. In this reading, the title *Incoming* indicates a prophetic vision of the future if the trend of nuclear proliferation continues— a future of incoming nuclear missiles, death, and destruction. The date of this montage is important as well. By the late 1950s, many American pacifist groups began to focus on nuclear weapons. Yet, activists were not alone in this endeavor. The Federation of American Scientists

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

proposed a ban on the testing of large nuclear weapons in June 1957. A few months later, the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, which quickly became known simply as SANE, advertised its formation in the *New York Times* and counted many prominent Americans among its early members. SANE and other groups later acknowledged that this advertisement shifted the antinuclear movement toward the mainstream. In less than a year, SANE had 130 chapters and 25,000 members.<sup>25</sup>

After the initial rush of antinuclear activity, the movement lost momentum and largely disappeared from American popular culture between 1963 and 1975, despite the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union rapidly expanded their nuclear arsenals throughout this period. Historian Lawrence Wittner believes well-publicized arms negotiations, treaties, and a perceived aura of *détente* distracted the American public.<sup>26</sup> Many activists focused instead on protesting the Vietnam War. The war's end, in 1975, reinvigorated the antinuclear movement. However, the focus of protest broadened to encompass concerns about the dangers of nuclear power plants such as the accidental release of radioactive gas and nuclear waste disposal. The 1977 announcement of an enhanced radiation weapon, commonly known as the neutron bomb, cemented this renewed fervor. Even the United Nations became concerned and held a Special Session on Disarmament in 1977. Several U.S. and foreign organizations worked to publicize

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb: Volume Two, Resisting the Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 50-53. Other prominent antinuclear organizations in the late 1950s and early 1960s included the Committee for Nonviolent Action, Women Strike for Peace, Student Peace Union, and Turn Toward Peace. However, SANE was by far the largest and best-known antinuclear group. In 1960, a SANE-sponsored rally at Madison Square Garden drew 20,000 supporters. Eleanor Roosevelt and Michigan governor G. Mennen Williams were among the speakers. Following the rally, popular singer Harry Belafonte and others led a march to the United Nations with an estimated 5,000 participants. *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb: Volume Three, Toward Nuclear Abolition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1. Treaties included the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty of 1972.

this special U.N. session. On May 27, the groups staged a march through New York City and a rally at the United Nations. Fifteen to twenty thousand people attended, making it the largest antinuclear street demonstration in American history. The years 1977 and 1978 marked a highpoint in American awareness of this movement as a multitude of bumper stickers appeared, buttons adorned clothes, and the term “nukes” became common parlance.<sup>27</sup>

Morgan’s artistic production followed these trends. After creating *Incoming* in 1956, Morgan did not address the nuclear industry for over twenty years. When she returned to the theme in 1978, the nuclear power industry became her target as much as nuclear weapons. *Ghost of the Accident*, 1978, is perhaps her most direct critique of the nuclear industry (Figure 5.9). For this montage, Morgan returned to her 1947 series of photographs from the rusting junkyard and selected an image of a dented and deformed automobile body with a heavily cracked window. She printed the negative through solarization, thus making the image difficult to read, then overlaid it with a photogram of a single hand. The effect is decidedly disturbing. Context and the title urge us to read it as a reminder of the aftermath of atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: not only the massive destruction, but the outlines of humans left on walls by the blasts. Yet, the title conjures an imagined nuclear accident, rather than deliberate nuclear war. This montage nearly seems prescient, in that the Three Mile Island nuclear accident occurred the following year.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Public perception of the nuclear issue changed as well. In 1977 and 1978, a poll found seventy-five percent of Americans approved of a nuclear test ban. In a different poll, fifty-two percent of Americans said it was morally wrong to use nuclear weapons in war, regardless of the circumstances. *Ibid.*, 21, 28-30.

<sup>28</sup> On March 28, 1979, the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant located on a small island in the Susquehanna River, south of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, experienced a partial core meltdown of the second reactor. J. Samuel Walker, *Three Mile Island: A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley:

Morgan frequently invoked victims of a future nuclear accident or war in the late 1970s. The 1979 series *Nuclear Fossilization* focuses upon this theme as well (Figure 5.10). Yet again this series anticipated Three Mile Island, in this case by only two weeks.<sup>29</sup> As she later wrote “I was shocked, but not surprised, when the disaster happened.”<sup>30</sup> The incident certainly concretized Morgan’s fears.<sup>31</sup> In this series, Morgan combined a portrait of Willard (the same portrait utilized in *Inner and Outer Man*) with the negative of the ammonite fossil. Each montage in this series utilized different techniques (solarization, photograms, overlaid negatives with abstract patterns) to change the overall appearance. However, the message remains clear; in the face of a nuclear explosion, man will be lost to time just like the dinosaurs. Morgan later wrote that she was contemplating “how life might be changed by nuclear radiation.”<sup>32</sup> The connection between fossils from the distant past and the creation of fossils in the present became a common theme that Morgan used to suggest the horrors of nuclear accidents or war.<sup>33</sup>

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University of California Press, 2004), 71. Over 200,000 people living within twenty miles of Three Mile Island were evacuated as a precautionary measure. Edward J. Walsh, *Democracy in the Shadows: Citizen Mobilization in the Wake of the Accident at Three Mile Island* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 37. The accident released lethal amounts of radiation onto the site, but subsequent monitoring found no evidence that radiation entered the area surrounding the facility. Further testing found normal levels of radiation among 721 persons living close to Three Mile Island. Nonetheless, the Three Mile Island incident is considered the worst accident to date in the American nuclear power industry. Walker, *Three Mile Island*, 3, 204-5.

<sup>29</sup> *The China Syndrome* opened in 600 American theatres on March 16, 1979, just twelve days before the incident at Three Mile Island. Based on a true story, the film depicted the dangerous conditions at a nuclear power plant. *Ibid.*, 1-2. However, Morgan never specifically noted that film as an influence for the *Nuclear Fossilization* series.

<sup>30</sup> Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np.

<sup>31</sup> Her home in Scarsdale, New York was located only 200 miles from the site of the accident.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np.

<sup>33</sup> Incidentally, *Fossil in Formation* appears to be an exception to this rule as Morgan never mentioned the threat of nuclear war or accident in conjunction with this montage. Furthermore, Morgan’s interest in fossils went beyond the metaphorical. She frequently professed an interest in archeology and the prehistoric world. In her *Aperture* monograph she wrote “For me, these two basic poles– the prehistoric and the space age– when juxtaposed, form a working threshold from which I am now trying to think and create.” Morgan, “Barbara Morgan,” *Aperture*, 11. She was also involved in promoting Dinosaur State

Morgan's concerns with nuclear technology and environmental irresponsibility largely fostered her anxiety about the health and welfare of children. However, her worries went beyond the effects environmental contaminants might wreak on children's bodies. The effects of cultural pollutants on children's minds equally troubled her. Two letters from 1974 highlight this issue. In one letter, Morgan directly compared environmental and cultural hazards when she wrote "we are awakened to the need of ecological defense against pollution of nature, but what about the more insidious pollution of human nature."<sup>34</sup> In another letter, Morgan praised a *New York Times* article titled "What Sort of Behavior Control Should TV Impose on Children: Violence or Harmony?" She continued "I wish it could be read by the gullible millions who are osmosing daily and nightly from TV over the world and being irretrievably affected (infected?) thereby."<sup>35</sup> She concluded "from my perspective as a grandmother, I am aghast at the poisoning violence that our dear children are absorbing into their empathetic nervous systems."<sup>36</sup> Morgan was not alone in this concern. Elected officials and the general public expressed concern over violence on television in the 1950s and 1960s. By the early 1970s, however, the debate concerning the effects on children who witnessed fictive violence became much more pronounced when the first major studies concluded.<sup>37</sup>

In 1970, a group of twelve academics formed the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory

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Park in Connecticut. In a letter, William F. Miller, the Chief of the Parks and Recreation Unit in Connecticut, thanked Morgan for her donation and noted that her request for thirty Dinosaur State Park information packets to be distributed to her friends and family had been sent separately. William Miller to Barbara Morgan, October 17, 1973, Morgan Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Is this same letter, Morgan cited television commercials, Watergate, and the movie *The Exorcist* as examples of cultural pollutants. Barbara Morgan to Martha Sternal, March 4, 1974, Morgan Archive.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Morgan to Caryl Rivers, August 23, 1974, Morgan Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Dale Kunkel and Lara Zwarun, "How Real is the Problem of TV Violence? Research and Policy Perspectives" in *Handbook of Children, Culture, and Violence*, ed. Nancy E. Dowd, Dorothy G. Singer, Robin Fretwell Wilson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 203.

Committee on Television and Social Behavior to extensively study violence on television and its effect on children. In its published report to the Surgeon General dated January 19, 1972, the committee concluded children's behavior was indeed affected by violence on television.<sup>38</sup> A study initiated by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1970 and carried forward by Dr. William Belson drew similar conclusions when published as *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy* in 1978.<sup>39</sup>

The effect of violence on the minds of children had concerned Morgan for years. In 1966 she created the photomontage *Brainwashed* (Figure 5.11). In her 1980 book, *Photomontage*, Morgan explained that this piece was catalyzed by a talk given by a local school teacher who claimed that "our children are being brainwashed." Brainwashing remained a alarming prospect in the 1960s. Yet, the origins of mind-control were decades old. The American government first suspected Russian Communists of utilizing mind-control techniques after the bizarre Moscow Show Trials in the late 1930s, in which a group of Russian defendants readily admitted to a series of elaborate and unlikely crimes. The defendants subsequently demanded severe punishment for their crimes.<sup>40</sup> American suspicions appeared grounded in 1948 when Josef Mindszenty, head of the Hungarian Catholic church, and his personal secretary were detained by the Hungarian government for several weeks and returned changed men. The American public first became aware of brainwashing during the Korean War when a number of American

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<sup>38</sup> This 279-page report summed up its findings by stating "First, violence depicted on television can immediately or shortly thereafter induce mimicking or copying by children. Second, under certain circumstances television violence can instigate an increase in aggressive acts." Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, *Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 11.

<sup>39</sup> William Belson, *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy* (Westmead, UK: Saxon House, 1978).

<sup>40</sup> Sergei Mrachovsky, Lev Kamenev, Richard Pickel, Edouard Holtzmann and Yuri Piatakov were the primary defendants of the Moscow Show Trials. Dominic Streatfeild, *Brainwash: The Secret History of Mind Control* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), 2-3.

soldiers captured by the North Korean army subsequently renounced the American government and their role in the war, then refused to return to the United States.<sup>41</sup> Descriptions of intense interrogation techniques and mind-altering drugs soon entered the American press as an aspect of the Cold War. The 1958 novel *The Manchurian Candidate* and the subsequent 1962 film of the same title cemented the concept of brainwashing in American popular culture.<sup>42</sup> Morgan's 1966 montage utilized the popularized notion of brainwashing to suggest the possibility of an indirect cultural brainwashing brought on by the desensitizing effect of watching violence on television and in films for years. To highlight this problem, Morgan photographed the teacher out-of-focus, then altered the image of her eye to symbolize distorted vision.<sup>43</sup> The resulting montage features a blurred and indistinct woman's head. A dark hole on the side of her face obscures her right eye, while the rest of her visage fades into the shadows.<sup>44</sup> Morgan also included a few abstract lines and dots of light around the woman's head, which suggest an aura of confusion and chaos. Once again, the effect is quite disturbing. Morgan gives visual form to the notion of brainwashing.

In considering the myriad problems in the world, including nuclear proliferation, environmental blight, and culturally sanctioned violence, Morgan offered no shortage of

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Hunter coined the term "brainwashing" in 1950 to describe a mind-control process utilized by Communist agents in China and North Korean prison camps. David Seed, *Brainwashing: The Fictions of Mind Control* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 27. The origins of brainwashing began three decades earlier with the pioneering work of Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov and American behavior specialist John B. Watson. Streatfeild, *Brainwash*, 13, 17.

<sup>42</sup> The novel and film depict an American soldier captured by the enemy and reprogrammed to become an assassin for his Communist controllers. Seed, *Brainwashing*, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np. Although the teacher intended to draw attention to the problem of brainwashing children, Morgan chose to portray her as a victim of the practice. It is possible that Morgan chose this woman as her model since she brought the problem to Morgan's attention.

<sup>44</sup> A second version of this montage, which is only slightly altered, was utilized as the cover image for the catalogue of an exhibition curated by Joan Harrison entitled "Montage," on view at the Hillwood Art Gallery at Long Island University in Brookville, New York from November 2 to December 18, 1988.

possible solutions. Global harmony ranked among the most prominent. Morgan believed international unity would be a panacea: all of the other problems of the world would naturally be solved if mankind could settle its petty differences. She publicly stated her view most elegantly in 1979 when she wrote that as astronomers record light from distant galaxies, “we, Earth’s people, on the third planet from the sun, are beginning to realize that we are only tiny specks in the cosmos, and that in coexistence, rather than competition, lies the hope for the future of our children.”<sup>45</sup> This theme abounds in Morgan’s writings after World War II. It appears in her public and private writing more prominently than any other topic. The question of how to achieve harmony for all mankind certainly proved more difficult. Morgan approached this quandary via multiple solutions. She joined the American Movement for World Government in 1971 by signing the “Declaration of Interdependence” and sending money for the cause. William H.D. Cox Jr. founded the organization in 1955 with hopes of fostering a new, democratic global government to help resolve social issues. The “Declaration of Interdependence” pledged that all signatories would “do their best to advance the cause of world federal government by contributions of money and effort...”<sup>46</sup> Morgan also wrote to the editors of *Soviet Life* in 1979 inquiring whether the publication sought to promote understanding

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<sup>45</sup> Margaretta Mitchell, *Recollections of Ten Women of Photography* (New York: Viking, 1979), 180. In an example from a private letter, in 1971 Morgan wrote “The interdisciplinary state of things today is incredibly moving and I hope we can find new spiritual unification that can improve our otherwise doomed planet.” Barbara Morgan to Phyllis Matchette, November 5, 1971, Morgan Archive.

<sup>46</sup> According to a letter from Cox, Morgan signed the pledge and donated \$15. He also added a handwritten note at the bottom of the letter that said “we very much appreciate your words of encouragement.” William H.D. Cox Jr. to Barbara Morgan, August 6, 1971, Morgan Archive. Strong ties existed between the world government movement and antinuclear proliferation activists at this time. In 1963, the United World Federalists and SANE even discussed a possible merger, although the talks failed. Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 60, 258.



among the societies of the world, indicating that she would support the publication if that were the case.<sup>47</sup>

Outside of her support of public enterprises, Morgan also advanced several book ideas she believed would serve to engender world unity.<sup>48</sup> In a letter to *Christian Science Monitor* critic, Diana Loercher, Morgan detailed the most fleshed-out concept in which she noted that pictographs and petroglyphs appear around the world and are remarkably similar.<sup>49</sup> To Morgan, this suggested that the human psyche maintained a universal need to convey information through visual means.<sup>50</sup> She believed a book that illustrated these pictographs and petroglyphs from around the world might help people to understand that we are all unified in our inherent humanity regardless of race, religion, or custom.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Morgan wrote “World understanding + global unity are deeply needed– rather than nuclear holocaust– so I wish you success. I hope it puts world sharing above politics– money and ego, for unless there can be world friendship and trust– there will not be SURVIVAL.” Barbara Morgan to *Soviet Life*, January 29, 1979, Morgan Archive. Before 1965, the Soviet Union published ninety-nine issues of *USSR Magazine*. In January 1965, the magazine changed its name and its mission. The American embassy of the Soviet Union published *Soviet Life* by reciprocal agreement with the United States government from 1965 to 1991. During this same period, the U.S. government published *Amerika* magazine in the Soviet Union. *Soviet Life* 1 (1965): 2. The magazines were designed to create trust and improve relations between the nations. The introduction page of the inaugural *Soviet Life* is titled “Path of Peace” and includes excerpts from the letters of American readers who were enlightened by the previous incarnation of the publication. The introduction clarifies that the publication will remain cultural, rather than political in nature. *Soviet Life* 1 (1965): 3.

<sup>48</sup> Most of these book ideas remained fairly nebulous. It appears Morgan believed that an international book might help unite the world, but with the exception of the letter to Diana Loercher she rarely gave specific details. For example, in a 1975 letter to Olcott Sanders she wrote that she believed a book of international student photographs could bring the world together and transcend differences. Barbara Morgan to Olcott Sanders, May 7, 1975, Morgan Archive. None of her global publications ever came to fruition.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan lists locations around the world. Barbara Morgan to Diana Loercher, November 3, 1975, Morgan Archive.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan includes an extensive list of common icons found throughout the world including “the sun, moon, man, woman, child, dwelling, tree, water, snake, bird, etc.” Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Specifically, Morgan wrote the book would be important “especially now, when so many racial antagonisms are so destructive to future survival. To see how basically all people have so much in common might inspire planetary respect for the people of all our different races, religions, and customs.” Ibid.

Apparent, but unstated in this particular letter, is the role that photography could play in uniting the world. Morgan often highlights photography as a tool of global inclusion. In an article for *The Encyclopedia of Photography: The Complete Photographer* titled “The Esthetics of Photography,” Morgan wrote: “global turmoil today teaches us that the frontier of conflict is no longer man’s struggle with nature as in Neanderthal days, but it is with ourselves.” She highlighted the role of photography, as she noted that “during war and in the effort to make a livable community for the people of the world, photographs will be a great common denominator beyond national quibbling.”<sup>52</sup> She believed she could personally help the world not only by promoting photography, but through her photographic artwork as well. Morgan wrote about the creation of her photomontages in 1980, “... I felt the obligation to express the increasingly complex problems of our world with the hope of inspiring affirmative change.”<sup>53</sup> In many ways, this statement sums up the entire impetus for Morgan’s return to photomontage in the twilight of her career.

Morgan appears to connect strongly with a new variation of American liberalism that evolved in the 1960s and 1970s. Often referred to as the New Left, this novel brand of leftist thought was rooted in the middle class. However, intellectual and education trends drove this ideology. Hostility toward the status quo emerged, as did shifting views

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<sup>52</sup> Barbara Morgan, “Esthetics of Photography,” in *The Complete Photographer* (New York: National Education Alliance, 1943), 1549. In another example, Morgan wrote “the photographer-artist has a great challenge open to him; to use the dynamic instrument of photography to create an international concept of the dignity of the human being— to project the kind of life we want our children to inherit.” Barbara Morgan, “In Focus: Photography, The Youngest Visual Art,” *Magazine of Art* 35, no. 7 (November 1942): 254. In the most specific example, Morgan explained she wanted to work as long as possible because her “hope is that photography will contribute to global harmony.” Mitchell, *Recollections*, 180.

<sup>53</sup> Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np.

on social and cultural mores.<sup>54</sup> Environmental awareness, a belief in racial and gender equality, opposition to warfare, and general distrust of the military-industrial complex united the New Left.<sup>55</sup> The politicized messages of many of Morgan's late montages reflect this shifting institution of liberalism.

Not all of Morgan's photomontages addressed social or environmental ills, however. She fashioned a number of more fanciful photomontages as well. In *City Sound*, 1972, Morgan sandwiched two negatives: a close-up photograph of a human ear and a photograph of the Empire State building and its surroundings at night (Figure 5.12). The finished montage suggests that each city retains its own unique soundscape and that a city can be richly experienced by non-visual means. Morgan never suggested that this montage communicated any deep personal meaning for her, nor was it intended to improve life as we know it. It simply manifested the visual expression of an idea she wished to explore.

The same could be said of *ESP Breaking Through*, 1969 and *UFO Visits New York*, 1965 (Figures 5.13 & 5.14). In *ESP Breaking Through*, Morgan combines the same scratched negative utilized thirteen years earlier for *Incoming* with an abstract light drawing.<sup>56</sup> When viewed without any contextual information, this photomontage appears completely abstract. The title, however, provides the logical framework to help the viewer understand. *ESP Breaking Through* suggests an imagined secondary plane of

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<sup>54</sup> Leonard Williams, *American Liberalism and Ideological Change* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>55</sup> However, many New Left thinkers abandoned the traditional liberal connection to the Democratic party and institutional participation in American politics in general. By the end of the 1960s, this shift became the norm in the United States, particularly in traditionally liberal East and West coast cities. Robert Booth Fowler, *Enduring Liberalism: American Political Thought Since the 1960s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 101.

<sup>56</sup> The scratched negative was cropped and turned ninety degrees clockwise from its position in *Incoming*.

thought in which extra sensory perception is possible. The abstract light drawing appears to represent the ESP signal, while the scratched negative could depict a human mind.<sup>57</sup> Here, Morgan entertains a conceptual challenge. She attempts to visualize that which cannot be seen. But it remains unlikely that Morgan intended anything more complex. She merely considered a current topic in American culture, the prospect of extra sensory perception.<sup>58</sup>

The possibility of extraterrestrial beings and sightings of unidentified flying objects represented another facet of popular culture during the decade of the 1960s.<sup>59</sup> Morgan explained that she created *UFO Visits New York* immediately following a conversation about the possibility of UFOs with a friend.<sup>60</sup> *UFO Visits New York* utilizes the same negative of the Empire State Building at night Morgan used in *City Sound*. That

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<sup>57</sup> In 1979, Morgan wrote “I still experiment, sometimes combining light drawings with other negatives, as photomontage, in which the rhythmic forms of the light drawings add dynamic meaning to express ‘visual metaphors’ for whimsical and/or philosophical commentary.” Barbara Morgan, “Light Abstractions,” (working manuscript for Jean Tucker’s *Light Abstractions*), [1979?], 42. Morgan Archive.

<sup>58</sup> The notion of extrasensory perception, in which a person obtains information about the world through the use of one’s mind alone, goes back as far as written history. However, J. B. Rhine revolutionized the field in the 1930s through a series of studies conducted in Duke University’s psychology department. Dan Burton and David Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 240-41. By the late 1960s, ESP attained status as a popular topic of discussion among both academics and the public at large. For example, at least 140 books published between 1968 and 1970, including both fiction and non-fiction, dealt with the topic of extrasensory perception.

<sup>59</sup> Science fiction novels such as the work of H.G. Wells popularized the notion of alien life before the turn of the twentieth century. However, the 1947 Roswell incident, in which a supposed alien spaceship crashed to Earth in New Mexico fostered an unidentified flying object craze. Toby Smith, *Little Gray Men* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), passim. Isabel L. Davis coined the term “Unidentified Flying Object” and its more common abbreviation, UFO, in 1957 as a moniker for skeptics. Incidentally, she stated that believers should use the term IFO or “Identified Flying Object.” Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell: Genesis of a Modern Myth* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1997), 133. By the mid-1960s, the U.S. government felt compelled to allay the concerns of the American public regarding alien visitors. Thus, in 1966, the University of Colorado received a half million dollars from the Air Force to study the possible existence of UFOs. Dr. Edward Condon led thirty-six investigators and analysts that ultimately found no evidence of alien visitation. Burton and Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science*, 276-77.

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np.

negative was then overlaid by an abstract light drawing, which has a vaguely “saucer” shape.

In 1965, when Morgan fashioned these photomontages, all of the negatives were located in Morgan’s “Photomontage Component File” that she maintained for decades. Morgan filled the file with the negatives she felt might have the potential to be combined into montages.<sup>61</sup> The fact that these photomontages and the majority of the others created in this late period of her career utilized negatives Morgan created much earlier remains worthy of further discussion.

At this late stage of Morgan’s career, it appears that she rarely engaged with a camera directly. In fact, with the exception of a few portraits from the early 1950s, Morgan never published any photographs taken after 1950. Morgan’s return to photographic work did not constitute a return to the camera; she instead revisited photomontage, photograms, and other darkroom-based photographic pieces. No written evidence suggests Morgan consciously chose to eschew the camera, but the body of work she created during the last three decades of her career suggests actual cameras no longer inspired her. It is possible, however, that another factor was at work here as well. Perhaps after Willard’s cancer diagnosis, Morgan began to consider her own legacy. Thus, when she returned to photomontage, the body of late work she created became a summation of her entire career and life up to that point.

*Confrontation*, for example, combines a 1940 dance photograph with an x-ray as well as experimental abstract photograms from the 1940s. The aesthetic of the piece, with its angular planes of light and dark, is highly reminiscent of the increasingly abstract

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

montages she created in the mid to late 1940s, such as *Use Litter Basket*, 1943. She took the theme from her current life, however. This mixing of periods, styles, and themes is the norm in this late period of photomontage. In another example, *Leaf Floating in City*, 1970, Morgan combined a photogram of a leaf superimposed upon an old photograph of a skyscraper in New York mirroring the aesthetic of *City Shell*, 1938 (Figures 5.15 & 5.16).<sup>62</sup>

Morgan also began to reconsider formal abstraction in this late period. In *Opacities*, a montage of photograms from 1968, Morgan employed only translucent objects such as glassware and light bulbs (Figure 5.17). She exposed many of the photograms two or three times on the final print creating a layered effect. The montage appears to be a purely formal exploration of the properties of light and photo-reactive chemicals.

Morgan also used photograms of glass in the 1970 piece, *Inner Strata* (Figure 5.18).<sup>63</sup> In *Photomontage*, Morgan wrote, “I enjoyed making visible, the invisible striations of glass via the photogram, and wondered how much of the world’s fabric is invisible?”<sup>64</sup> Here she returned to the theme of using photography to visualize that which cannot normally be seen. The result, however, remains largely abstract.

With these and other photomontages, Morgan possibly attempted to connect to trends in 1960s and 1970s-era abstract painting, while simultaneously revisiting her own exploration of abstraction decades earlier. When considered alongside the rest of the

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<sup>62</sup> *Leaf Floating in City* was published with two different dates. *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, 1980 cites the date as 1972, while *Barbara Morgan*, 1972 cites the date as 1970.

<sup>63</sup> In the caption for *Inner Strata* in *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, Morgan called this piece a “reflective-photogram,” but never explained what, exactly, that term meant. Morgan, *Barbara Morgan Photomontage*, np.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

photomontages of this period, which rely heavily, if not nearly exclusively, on her past body of work, one may assume that these exercises in formal exploration are indeed an homage to her earlier career. From 1965 until the end of her life in 1992, Morgan seemed obsessed with legacy. Her use of earlier negatives and styles, as well as her re-imagining favorite themes and concepts, as she created her last major body of work suggest this obsession. It was also apparent in another late obsession in Morgan's life, archival printing.

In 1969, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. hosted the Walter Clark-Eugene Ostroff seminar on print preservation, which the Institute for Graphic Communication sponsored.<sup>65</sup> Morgan attended this seminar along with many other art world figures as well as some of the world's top chemists.<sup>66</sup> Family friend Ansel Adams instigated Morgan's initial interest in archival printing. While Morgan's husband Willard worked on Adams' *Basic Photo* series for his publishing company, Morgan & Morgan, Adams frequently visited the house. Adams gave Morgan printing tips on each visit, until she finally convinced him to write down the entire archival printing procedure that he used.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Morgan was already utilizing an archival process when the Smithsonian seminar was held. Nonetheless, the latest techniques presented at the seminar affected her to such a degree that she became a spokesperson for archival printing. In 1971, Jacob Deschin, the former *New York Times* critic, wrote "Barbara Morgan: Permanence through Perseverance" for *Photography Annual*. The nine-page article included technical

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<sup>65</sup> Jacob Deschin, "Barbara Morgan: Permanence Through Perseverance," in *Photography Annual* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1971), 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> "Barbara Morgan: Inner Dialogues with the External World," *Bennington College- Quadrille* 5, no. 4 (1971): 14.

<sup>67</sup> Deschin, "Permanence Through Perseverance," 23-24. Morgan was quoted as saying "so it was really through Ansel that the whole procedure for archival processing developed for me." *Ibid.*, 24.

information about archival processes, questioned the ethics of non-archival printing, and recognized Morgan as a role model for all photographers who wished to convert to archival printing.<sup>68</sup>

The title of Deschin's article largely explains Morgan's obsession with archival printing; she was concerned with legacy. Worried that her vintage photographs might not stand the test of time, Morgan began to reprint most of her important photographs, photomontages, and light abstractions.<sup>69</sup> In some cases, she re-edited these older works for the art market. In other cases, Morgan reprinted photographs and immediately filed them away to be preserved for the future. Morgan's impetus to leave behind a legacy was not, however, limited to her latter years.

Morgan's long and distinguished career as a writer and critic constituted another important part of her legacy. As an avid writer throughout her life, she published several books and dozens of articles, made frequent contributions to technical manuals, and still found the time to maintain extensive correspondence as well. Morgan first published in 1927 in *Artland: A Magazine of the Arts*. Her article "The Meaning of Modernism in Art" set the tone for her career as a writer. This article, and the majority of prose that followed, proved that Morgan was a teacher at heart. Her first article attempted to extol the virtues of Modernism to a skeptical audience. Later pieces, often written for periodicals, encyclopedias, or technical manuals that targeted the world of photography, were frequently technical in nature or explored major issues in the world of photography. Among her many pieces, she wrote about the advantages of black-and-white

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> It is possible that Edward Weston and Ansel Adams influenced Morgan in this regard as well. Both Weston and Adams created master prints of their work late in life in order to preserve their legacy.



photography; rationalized the growing popularity of theme shows; explained her personal techniques for photomontage; wrote a twenty-page piece that aided nascent photographers with aesthetic issues; explained the basics of dance photography; wrote separate encyclopedia entries on abstraction, juxtaposition, and composition in photography; and explained how photography could be considered among the fine arts. In all these pieces Morgan sought to educate her audience.

Morgan's writing often employed a pragmatic approach to photography. She seemed to believe anyone could learn how to become a great artistic photographer. For example, in "Esthetics of Photography," Morgan attempted to teach her readers how to create a beautiful photograph. She presented a formula any photographer could use to create artistic photography. Each section of the article presented an element of this formula including light, lens, interpretation, focus, filters, etc.

Late in life, Morgan also embarked upon a massive book project in which she intended to use her own photographs as examples in order to teach the dynamics of composition. She sought to expand upon the 1973 piece "Dynamics of Composition" written for the *Leica Manual- The Complete Book of 35mm Photography*. In the original article, Morgan carefully explained and illustrated the principles of composition.<sup>70</sup> She also provided excellent descriptions of compositional terms including opposition, rhythm, proportion, transition, and symmetry.<sup>71</sup> As a whole, Morgan wrote the piece for nascent photographers learning the basics in order to achieve solid technical and compositional techniques. The book to follow intended to take the next step. In a 1979 interview,

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<sup>70</sup> Barbara Morgan, "Dynamics of Composition" in *Leica Manual- The Complete Book of 35mm Photography* (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Morgan & Morgan, 1973), 354-64.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

Morgan explained that this book was meant to be a pedagogical volume that would inspire people to express their deepest emotions or essence.<sup>72</sup> Once they learned the basics from the article, they could move to more advanced expressions of inner passions. Unfortunately, Morgan never completed this book project.<sup>73</sup> But the core notion of aiding photographers on their artistic journey was important to Morgan.<sup>74</sup>

Largely for this reason, Morgan passionately supported the *Aperture* project. Morgan not only acted as a founding member of *Aperture*, she frequently wrote for the publication. In fact, Morgan's most personal writing appears in *Aperture*. She often abandoned her role as a teacher and allowed her highly active mind to explore innumerable topics when she wrote for *Aperture*. Along with her first monograph, published as *Aperture*, volume 11, number 1, Morgan wrote articles on the theme show, "The Birth and Proliferation of the Photographic Image," "Kinetic Design in Photography," reviews of several exhibitions, and tributes to her good friends Edward Weston and Minor White. In her *Aperture* articles, Morgan seemed to allow free reign to her natural intellectual bent. She referenced the history of art freely and easily as she recounted philosophical ideologies of the moment. This is her most vivid, and I would argue, her best public writing. She often displayed that same spark in her personal

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<sup>72</sup> Barbara Morgan, interview by Jean Tucker, October 17, 1979, original tape copied to a compact disk, Collection of the University of Missouri, Columbia.

<sup>73</sup> As of 2006, the Barbara Morgan Archive continued to work with an unnamed individual to organize Morgan's notes for the book with the intention of publishing them in some form. Janet Morgan, e-mail message to author, January 29, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Along with her writing, Morgan also taught in classrooms on occasion. In July, 1977, Morgan acted as an instructor at the Friends of Photography Workshop held at the New School for Social Research. Linda Moore, "Now's the Time to Think About Summer Workshops," *New York Times*, April 17, 1977. She also taught classes at the Scarsdale Extension School according to Lloyd and Janet Morgan. Lloyd Morgan and Janet Morgan, in discussion with the author, July 9, 2006, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. She even worked with the public schools. In a 1974 letter, Morgan noted that she "worked with our local school and got all kinds of lecturers, puppet shows, etc., etc., going to bring creative action to the community." Barbara Morgan to Darwin Marable, April 17, 1974, Morgan Archive.

correspondence as well. Morgan wrote back and forth with many important photographers, artists, and curators in disparate fields. She also frequently wrote letters to politicians, writers, bureaucrats, and others.<sup>75</sup> This broad collection of written material is certainly part of her legacy. It indicates a woman closely engaged with the endeavors and problems of the world throughout her life. Yet, the critics frequently ignored her activism and intellectual engagement. Morgan is typically remembered strictly as an early photographer of modern dance.

In Morgan's 1992 *New York Times* obituary, written by Jennifer Dunning, the first line calls Morgan a "photographer whose portraits of Martha Graham captured the essence of that choreographer's art."<sup>76</sup> Although this is a fitting opening for any article about Morgan's career, only one line describes the bulk of Morgan's career, as Dunning writes "after 1945, Mrs. Morgan concentrated on photographing children, trees and plants, and designing photomontages and light drawings."<sup>77</sup> Just three years before, Vivien Raynor's *New York Times* review of a Morgan retrospective inaccurately stated that "dance has been her principal subject in photography..."<sup>78</sup> Morgan photographed dancers for seven years in a career that spanned from the late 1920s until the early 1980s.

These reactions to Morgan's body of work remained common throughout her career, especially in the popular press. In 1969, while Morgan actively created her late

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<sup>75</sup> When her son Lloyd and his wife Janet were asked about Morgan's letter writing, their first reaction was laughter. They noted she would write letters to just about anyone for any reason. Apparently, she had a reputation for being somewhat obsessive when it came to letter writing, especially in her latter years. Lloyd Morgan and Janet Morgan, in discussion with the author, July 9, 2006, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Dunning, "Barbara Morgan, Photographer of Modern Dance, Is Dead at 92," *New York Times*, August 19, 1992.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Vivien Raynor, "Retrospective: Barbara Morgan at 89," *New York Times*, September 24, 1989.

photomontages, Meryle Secrest wrote “A World of Whirling” in the *Washington Post Times Herald* that again stated the dance photographs represented Morgan’s best work.<sup>79</sup> In another example, an *Art News* review of Morgan’s solo exhibition in 1961 that highlighted her work in painting and drawing, noted that Morgan is best known as a photographer of dance and goes on to consider her non-objective paintings in terms of movement under the assumption that her background in dance photography heavily influenced her work with the brush.<sup>80</sup>

A few writers in the world of photography attempted to expand the public’s perception of Morgan’s oeuvre, however. Hal Fischer called Morgan uniquely American due to the innovative spirit she brought to photography. He acknowledged the multitude of media that Morgan explored and applauded her “technical expertise, intellect, unceasing creativity, exploration, and most importantly energetic pluralism.”<sup>81</sup> Jacob Deschin acknowledged Morgan’s dance photographs as her best known work, but then wrote she was equally “a master of the photogram, the photomontage, light drawings, and experimental forays in several other directions.”<sup>82</sup> A 1999 article by Vicki Goldberg accurately portrayed Morgan’s career as well. She acknowledged Morgan’s early dedication to photomontage, but then wrote “her major contribution was to have preserved, in elegant form, the pioneering works of American modern dance...”<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the most extensive publication of Morgan’s work was Curtis Carter and William

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<sup>79</sup> Meryle Secrest, “A World of Whirling,” *Washington Post*, November 2, 1969.

<sup>80</sup> “Barbara Morgan,” *Art News* 60 (1961): 16.

<sup>81</sup> Hal Fischer, “Barbara Morgan— Individual Innovation with an American Spirit,” *Artweek* 11 (November 22, 1980): 11.

<sup>82</sup> Jacob Deschin, “Museum Samples Atget— Week’s Events,” *New York Times*, November 30, 1969.

<sup>83</sup> Vicki Goldberg, “Transfixing Motion and Emotion in a Shutter’s Blink,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1999.

Agee's 1988 book *Barbara Morgan: Prints, Drawings, Watercolors & Photographs*. The authors based this monograph on an exhibition that incorporated all aspects of Morgan's oeuvre. However, both Deschin and Carter were friends of Morgan.<sup>84</sup> The general press consistently tied Morgan's legacy to dance photography. On the rare occasion that other writers mentioned the rest of her body of work, they were either dismissive or even critical.<sup>85</sup> For example, in Daniel Wolf's 1982 *Art News* review he called Morgan's photomontages and light drawings quaint in their mid-century embrace of technology for the sake of technology.

It is fair to say that Morgan is largely known today for a single photograph of Martha Graham: *Letter to the World (Kick)*. A 2004 United States stamp featured this photograph.<sup>86</sup> Andy Warhol used this image to create a screenprint. Chinese artist Wang Dongling overlaid this iconic photograph with calligraphy.<sup>87</sup> The picture even appeared in a series of 2006 Americans for the Arts advertisements promoting art education.<sup>88</sup> As of 2007, *Letter to the World (Kick)* represents Morgan's legacy. And it is unfortunate because Morgan's career and life were too rich to be judged by a single photograph.

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<sup>84</sup> Deschin and Morgan were known to strategize about promoting photography in the art world as is apparent in a 1955 letter to Minor White, in which Morgan recreates a phone conversation with Deschin. Barbara Morgan to Minor White, September 29, 1955, Morgan Archive. Curtis Carter was a close friend of Barbara Morgan. Morgan met Carter at a New York City opening at the beginning of his career and the two would become quite close. Janet and Lloyd Morgan stated that Carter became like a third son to Morgan. Lloyd Morgan and Janet Morgan, in discussion with the author, July 9, 2006, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Wolf, "Barbara Morgan," *Art News* 81 (1982): 224. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland wrote that while Morgan's feelings for children were profound, her pictures of children were trite. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image, the Genius of Photography* (London: Pavilion Books, 1989), 173.

<sup>86</sup> The photograph was utilized in the 2004 "American Choreographers" stamp series.

<sup>87</sup> Yiguo Zhang, *Brushed Voices: Calligraphy in Contemporary China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>88</sup> Advertisement, *Art News* 105, no. 3 (2006): 135.

## Illustrations

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