A New Woman's Exile in Buenos Aires

Grete Stern's Photomontages between Feminism and Popular Culture

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The focus of this article will rely on the work of the photographer Grete Stern, who had to flee Germany in 1933 due to her Jewish background, and later emigrated to Argentina. Special attention will be given to her photomontage series *Sueños* (*Dreams*) for the women's magazine *Idilio*, which the artist produced between 1948 and 1951, and which played an essential role in the modernization of Argentinean photography. Moreover, today these photomontages are known for having had a fundamental influence on the dissemination of psychoanalysis in Argentina, as well as on feminist art in general. As these photomontages were published together with the psychoanalytic column "El psicoanálisis te ayudará" and negotiated different aspects of psychoanalytic theory, they were often interpreted within the tradition of surrealist photography.[1] In this article, however, I would like to propose an alternative, perhaps complementary reading of these images and embed Stern's *Dreams* in a broader context—the context of her experience as an exile in Argentina, the context of the magazine, and the context of Peronist visual culture. As I will argue, this allows these photomontages to be read as multilayered aesthetic, political, and feminist interventions in a time when more and more restrictions dominated artistic practices in Argentina. In the following, I will provide an insight into Stern's formation and work in Germany, and the ideas of femininity that influenced her art before and after emigration. After that, I will discuss the politically enforced changes in the field of Argentinean visual culture. And finally, I will analyze Stern's

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photomontages in the context of the magazine and their impact beyond, on the modernization of photography in Argentina.

New Women and New Vision

In 1929 something remarkable happened in the Berlin art scene: Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach, two young women in their early twenties, founded a photo and design studio called ringl+pit. Yet it was not the fact that they were female photographers—in fact, they joined the ranks of Lucia Moholy, Ilse Bing, and Marianne Brandt as some of the many female photographers in the 1920s and ’30s—rather, it was their innovative approach to photography that made their work exceptional. Stern and Auerbach, or Ringl and Pit, as they were called when they were kids, developed such a strong way of collective seeing, designing, and practicing photography, that later they did not even know whose finger had operated the camera and whose hand had been photographed.[2]

This approach to photography was probably a result of their years of studying with Walter Peterhans, who in 1929 was appointed professor of photography at the Bauhaus University in Dessau.[3] As Stern described Peterhans’s teaching methods later, “We didn’t have any books, but he made us see the things—Er lehrte uns das Sehen [He taught us to see].”[4] And so Stern and Auerbach, equipped with their cameras, began to study their surroundings, movements and perspectives, forms and bodies and, above all, the dominant gender norms of their time. Circulating in film, photography, magazines, or advertisements—almost all the media channels of popular culture in the 1920s and ’30s—the figure of the New Woman became a recurring protagonist in ringl+pit’s work. Yet, despite the New Woman’s independent, modern, and sexually emancipated character as it was developed and distributed by the media of popular culture, Stern and Auerbach preserved in their artwork a critical distance to this figure. Even though as working women for whom photography became the basis of their economic and personal independence—they themselves represented the emancipative ideals of the New Woman—Stern and Auerbach frequently criticized at least some of the female stereotypes that this viral and popular figure still kept reproducing.

A photomontage that shows ringl+pit’s playful, yet analytically precise visual approach to the New Woman very well is *Pétrol Hahn* (1931) (fig. 1), a commissioned advertising work for a beauty products supplier, through which Stern and Auerbach positioned their art right in the center of popular culture. The photomontage shows a young, smiling woman with a pixie cut, dressed in rather conservative nightclothes, who holds a bottle of shampoo in her hand. As the famous Dada artist Hannah Höch did in her photomontages, Stern and Auerbach also combined body elements of dolls with human limbs.[5] The large-eyed

Fig. 1. ringl+pit, *Pétrol Hahn*, 1931.

mannequin with its particularly feminine countenance, as it is incorporated in *Pétrol Hahn*, raises not only the question of beauty ideals but also of socially acceptable forms of femininity. While the mannequin's short-cut hair alludes to the emancipatory character of the New Woman, it is contrasted with prudish clothing and a feminizing floral wallpaper in the background. Even though the figure of the New Woman was quite progressive for that time, her visual appearance was not yet completely freed from a male gaze and conservative gender norms. [6] This, of course, affected her emancipation process. *Pétrol Hahn*, by introducing exaggerative elements, such as the widely opened, dreamy eyes and floral patterns, parodies an old-school stylization of sensitive and beautiful femininity. And, in pointing out the contrast between new and old gender norms, both of which still defined the New Woman, *Pétrol Hahn* articulates a critical commentary on the visual representation of this figure in popular culture. But interestingly, through the technique of photomontage the artists added an important activating element to the static mannequin: a human hand, which can be read as a subtle suggestion to explore other forms of female agency—a concern that would remain central in Stern's oeuvre, including during her years of exile.

Dis/mantling a Happy World

Due to National Socialism's rise to power in 1933, many Jewish and left-wing artists were forced to flee Germany. Grete Stern and Ellen Auerbach were among them, and so the collective project ringl+pit came to an end. Auerbach emigrated first to Tel Aviv and later to New York. Stern, on the other hand, spent two years of exile in London before settling in Buenos Aires, together with her husband, Horacio Coppola (an Argentinean photographer who had come to Germany to study at the Bauhaus). Despite being forced into exile, both Stern and Auerbach managed to continue their photographic work in their new surroundings.[7]

A shift in style and photographed subjects can already be recognized in Stern's London work. While in Germany the artist mainly worked in advertising, in London she dedicated herself more to portrait photography. Stern's portraits are not only fascinating because of the remarkable sensitivity and the emotional directness they transmit but also because they are an astounding photographic collection of faces and people that were forced into exile, and who remained in London for longer or shorter periods. These portraits show, for example, Bertolt Brecht, Helene Weigel, Paula Heimann, Karl Korsch, and many other artists and intellectuals, and in this way became a photographic archive of exile that allows us some insight into Stern's surroundings in London.

After leaving London, Stern's quick social and professional establishment in Buenos Aires definitely benefited from the fact that Coppola was already well connected in the local art scene. Yet it was also Stern's expertise on modern art and her formation in Germany that facilitated her arrival in

Buenos Aires, where she faced an environment that was not only culturally diverse, as artists from all over the world participated in it, but also very receptive to new ideas and movements. Already in London, as can be recognized in her portrait series, Stern's work became more serious and showed deeper intimacy, while the experience of exile seems to have caused her to turn away from the lightness and cheerfulness that ringl+pit once captured in their art. In addition, her feminist agenda became more and more relevant, and began to follow other priorities, especially when she moved to Argentina. This, too, might have been a result of her experience of exile and the social changes she lived through in leaving a rather progressive city with emancipatory ideals, as the 1920s and early '30s Berlin was, and settling in a relatively conservative country where, even though there existed a strong feminist movement, patriarchal order and macho culture still dominated large parts of society.

In her essay "Notes on Photomontage" (1967) the artist describes how in this process she had drawn on her Berlin experience in Buenos Aires, and how not only surrealists but above all Dada artists had influenced her work. Of course, as this article was published in 1967, more than thirty years after Stern's arrival in Argentina, it has to be understood as a retrospective discussion of her own work, a reflection on how she used certain techniques and aesthetics to express herself and create artistic and political action spaces in her new exilic environment. Still, it is a fascinating source that illustrates how Stern, through her own experience of exile, by crossing borders and by practicing art, became a mediator between different artistic traditions as much as a cultural translator[8] by introducing, transforming, or dismantling certain techniques, motives, and aesthetics.[9]

In this text, Stern clearly highlights the Dadaist's political motivation in Berlin, as well as their entanglement with the media of popular culture.[10] Artists like John Heartfield, George Grosz, Hannah Höch, and Raoul Hausmann played a central role in the politicization of the arts after World War I. They pursued the goal to create a visual counterpart to the rationalizing aesthetics of capitalist society through the techniques of collage and photomontage, and later revolted against emerging nationalist movements. It was strategies like satirical exaggeration, parody, and gestures of rejection that the movement of Dada filtered through the art scene, in order to decipher circulating myths and notions and to induce a more analytic view on social and political developments.[11] A matter that, as I argue, Grete Stern also pursued in her photomontages for *Idilio*, even though, considering the threat of censorship, she could not be as explicit as Dada artists in Berlin once were. Complementing this with her feminist approach and modifying it due to her exile experience, in the Dream series Stern created a visual counterpart to the Peronist image propaganda and introduced the technique of photomontage to an Argentinean audience as a promising visual and political tool.[12]

While large parts of Argentinean society applauded Peron's presidency (1946–1955) with euphoric enthusiasm, others, especially left-wing, anti-fascist artists and intellectuals such as Grete Stern, remained skeptical and worried about announced reforms and searched for forms of resistance to react to the emerging restrictive and reactionary developments.[13] Especially the state's actions to monopolize Argentinean image production and the establishment of a wide-ranging propaganda apparatus led oppositional thinkers and artists to develop alternative spaces to create independent art.[14]

Already in 1943, during a provisory military government, the Subsecretaria de Informaciones y Prensa (Subsecretary for Information and Press) was founded as part of the Ministry of the Interior. This new subsecretary later, under Peron, employed a team of photographers whose primary task was to visually document the government's work, events and celebrations and, above all, the official appearances of Juan Domingo and Eva Peron. In so doing, the work of the Subsecretaria de Informaciones y Prensa led to a massive increase of visual material, photography, and film that, for the first time in Argentinean history, was extensively used for propaganda purposes.[15]

The emerging Peronist image propaganda pursued primarily the goal to visualize progress and economic growth and to stage the "shirtless worker" (*descamisado*) as a key figure in this process. Besides that, the creation of a harmonic framing was of central importance, because by visualizing harmony the propaganda apparatus intended to silence ongoing social and political conflicts and let oppositional thinkers become invisible. Even though the political contents transmitted via the propaganda apparatus can be easily decoded, the visualization of these aims was derived from a complex composition of absolutely diverging visual traditions, ranging from fascist to Soviet elements, from religious to anarchist motives, etc. Besides the arising cult of personality around Juan Domingo Peron, the intentional iconization of First Lady Eva Peron was of particular importance and had a drastic impact, especially on the construction of femininity and gender norms. Yet the Peronist image propaganda did not just copy traditional macho culture images. Especially the visual representations of women and families remind more of the American tradition of the New Deal, which, even though it presented economic progress and modernization, still kept reproducing conservative gender norms.[16]

Paradoxically, one of Peronism's earliest legal reforms was a fundamental and past-due change to the electoral system, through which women would obtain the right to vote in 1947. However, it was frequently criticized that the introduction of women's suffrage was used as a strategy to establish a broader Peronist electorate. More than that, the already existing political debates around female suffrage were taken over by Peronism while systematically making invisible pioneers in the fight for women's rights that had been

mobilizing in that area for decades.[17] Without doubt, the introduction of women's suffrage was a very important achievement; still, taking a closer look at the political developments, especially within the frame of visual culture, it becomes evident that the Peronist regime showed no further interest in supporting female emancipation than that. Female action spaces, especially those created within the image propaganda, were reduced to the private sphere. Domestic, charitable activities and motherhood became the main topics that women should be concerned with. Even in cases where women chose to have a career (e.g., in care work professions, as a nurse or a teacher, which were the female equivalents to the male *descamisado*), their real purpose was to raise and educate the future generations of Peronists.[18]

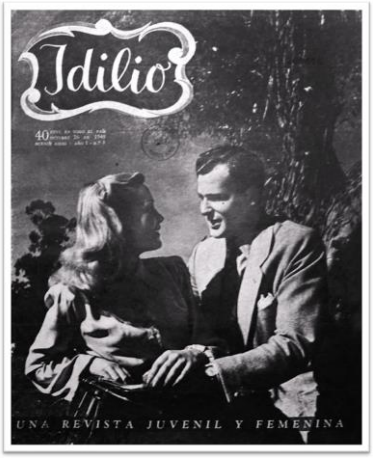

Fig. 2. Cover of *Idilio* no. 1, October 26, 1948.

In 1945 Grete Stern joined the anti-Peronist and anti-fascist arts collective Madí,[19] whose founding member, Gyula Kosice, particularly appreciated Stern's knowledge on modern art movements.[20] Besides Stern, many other émigrés participated in Madí, such as Martin Balszko, Estéban Eitler, Marie Langer, and Renate Schottelius. By providing her house in Ramos Mejía, a suburb of Buenos Aires, as a work and exhibition space, Grete Stern became a central figure in this émigré and migrant circle of artists and intellectuals.[21] Her position as a hostess for cultural gatherings and as an established artist with broad knowledge on modern art might have been a factor as well in the offer to collaborate in the column "El psicoanálisis te ayudará" in 1948—an opportunity that the artist again would use to create a visual counterpart to the state-driven propaganda and its restricting ideas of femininity.

Feminist Interventions in Popular Culture

On October 26, 1948, in the middle of the ongoing political and artistic debates, the newly founded women's magazine *Idilio* (fig. 2) appeared on the market. The name says it all: *Idilio* (translates as "idyll" or "romance") was the content line through which the magazine turned to its audience. But as harmonious and peaceful as the pictures in the magazine might seem, there was at least one disobedient counterpoint among them: Grete Stern's photomontages, which accompanied the psychoanalytic column "El psicoanálisis te ayudará" ("Psychoanalysis will help you").

César Civita, an Italian émigré who had lived in Buenos Aires since 1941, was the founder of *Editorial Abril*, a prestigious Argentinean publishing house of international reputation or, as Paula Bertúa described it, a "cultural embassy."[22] Civita, as well the publisher of *Idilio*, invited several anti-fascist and anti-Peronist exiles to participate in the *Editorial Abril*, including Grete Stern and Gino Germani, who together with Enrique Butelman were responsible for "El psicoanálisis te ayuradá."

As of *Idilio*'s first edition, the column formed a fixed component and was received with great interest by the magazine's readers. This, to some extent, can be explained by a general interest in psychoanalysis in Argentina since the early 1940s, which led to the foundation of important institutions like the Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina (APA) in 1942. In parallel to this official institutionalization process of psychoanalysis, an increasing presence of self-help literature, psychological tests, and psychological health counselors could be recorded in the media of popular culture as well. The publishers of *Idilio* also jumped on this bandwagon, and with "El psicoanálisis te ayudará" they successfully introduced a format that offered textual and visual dream interpretations combined with basic information on psychoanalytic theories.[23] The production procedure was as follows: each week, *Idilio*'s female readers would send narrations of their dreams to Dr. Richard Rest, the pseudonym used by the column's author duo. Then they selected the "case of the week" and offered an elaborated interpretation that was illustrated by one of Stern's photomontages. Other letters were answered briefly, and Richard Rest's advice was printed next to an information box that explained psychoanalytic terms or concepts (e.g., Ego, Id, repression, etc.).

Even though Germani and Butelman were responsible for the psychoanalytic dream interpretations, Stern's visualizations themselves offered an analytic approach that often went beyond the writers' analysis. Her Dream photomontages in this sense cannot be understood as a mere illustration, but much rather have to be read as a complementing element of the column that not only recognized the female specificities of these dreams but also approached them from a feminist standpoint. Interestingly, through her photomontages Stern not only managed to raise the dreams' topics to a collective level that goes beyond an individual experience, to a level on which it was possible to debate gender norms and ideas of femininity during Peronism, but also to create a visual space to share her own experience of exile and let it become part of the Argentinean visual culture. As I will elaborate in the following analysis, Stern includes in these pictures several elements, motives, and aesthetics that refer to her former life in Germany, her experience of crossing geographical and artistic borders, and of being an exile in Argentina who struggles with the restricting gender norms in her new surroundings.

It was strategies like parody, alienation, and shock effects, as much as the technique of photomontage, that Stern used to create for herself a scope for action in exile, to approach the topics of the Peronist propaganda, and through which she, as mentioned before, intended to induce a more analytic view on social and political developments. Same as the Peronist propaganda in general, *Idilio* also often reduced female agency to marriage, motherhood, and domesticity, and framed these topics in a peaceful and happy atmosphere. This framing was of fundamental importance in the Argentinean image propaganda, because in contrast to other forms of propaganda (e.g., Italian Fascist or German

National Socialist), the Peronist model was based on the principle of harmony that, more than on the degradation of enemies, built on the complete exclusion and occultation of such others.[24] Yet Stern's photomontages disturbed this harmony by visualizing far-reaching collective fears and women in situations of crisis and, in this way, revealed it as an illusionary construct. Embedded in the rather superficial, almost trashy women's magazine *Idilio*, which in general reproduced traditional female stereotypes and focused on housework, relationships, and beauty, the *Sueños* photomontages marked a strong contrast to the visual mainstream of that time.

Los sueños de encierro (*The Dreams of Imprisonment*) introduces this propagandistic harmonic frame as a leitmotif and relates it with the question of female agency (fig. 3). The photomontage parodies not only the idyllic romanticism distributed by the Subsecretaria de Informaciones y Prensa, but also the magazine's reproduction of such representations (fig. 4). As Linda Hutcheon argues, parody emerges from an ironic repetition that, in so doing, exposes a difference.[25] Following this argument, *Los sueños de encierro* allures to the widely circulating image of the sensual woman who gets lost in her thoughts and remains in this status of passivity. The snail shell as a metaphor for the limited space of domesticity, however, is contrasted by the openness of the beach and the vastness of the ocean. This contradictory juxtaposing in a way creates a counterpoint to other images in the magazine that reduce female agency to the intimate circle of the family in a domestic setting, and stage women fulfilled by these tasks.

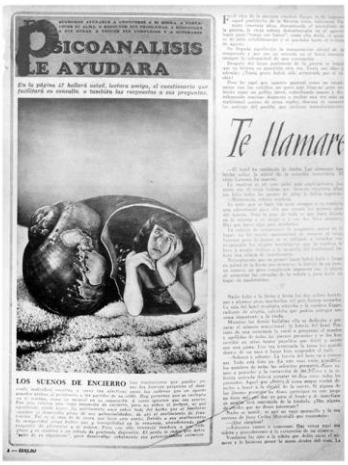

Fig. 3. Grete Stern, *Los sueños de encierro*, *Idilio* no. 72, April 4, 1950.

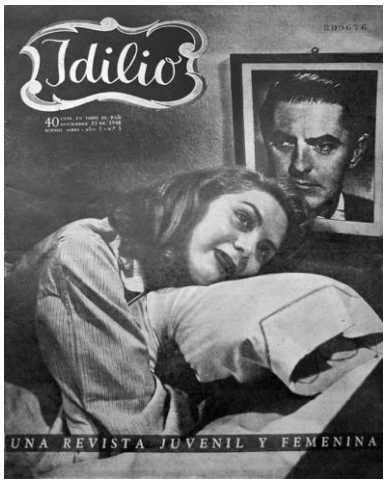

Fig. 4. Cover of *Idilio* no. 5, November 23, 1948.

Though including the beach and the ocean, *Los sueños de encierro* leaves a widely open space, which might be interpreted as a space to explore alternative modes of action for women. But it should be mentioned, too, that Stern frequently situates her protagonists in such open, yet isolated spaces, which through the lens of exile allows other readings as well. While in *Los sueños de encierro* the dreamer seems to be stranded at the beach, in *Los sueños de desorientación* (*The Dreams of Disorientation*) a woman carrying suitcases stands in the middle of nowhere, in front of a signpost, seemingly not knowing which direction to follow. In *Los sueños de trenes* (*The Dreams of Trains*) as well, the protagonist is waiting on a station platform, again carrying suitcases, but realizes that the arriving toy train will not bring her anywhere. These pictures implicitly allude to something that lies far away, to distant places, and refer at the same time to here and there and, in this way, transmit a feeling of fragmentation, possibly between the country of origin and the host country. Moreover, motives such as suitcases, trains, or signposts are often indications that exiles use to speak about their own experiences, about their forced migration and former geographical and individual movements. But as Stern's photomontages simultaneously suggest, such forced movements can also lead to a sensation of immobility in the present situation, of social isolation, or even of imprisonment—something that many exiles experienced and, as Hamid Naficy elaborated in his

study on *Accented Cinema*, is frequently expressed visually.[26]

Nevertheless, Stern and her *Sueños* protagonists elude this situation by "(re)organizing social space." [27] Stern's photomontages create a disturbing relation between photographed subjects and the space that surrounds them; her protagonists are "obstinately unintegrated, often shadowed by a dark outline that preserves a boundary between their body and the space around them."[28] By (re)organizing the image's space (e.g., by implicitly including spaces that allude to something local and far away at the same time, in one single photomontage), Stern, though using parody, transmits a feeling of isolation or a sensation of loneliness. Yet, at the same time, the artist leaves room for change and progress, for example, by offering alternative images of femininity that are not restricted to the domestic sphere, which might be a visual expression of the desire to politically participate as a woman or as an exile.

Interestingly, *Los sueños de encierro* offers another level that refers to the exile's sensation of being torn between two places, and relates to Stern's former participation in avant-garde circles in Germany and the changes in her art evoked by exile. The snail shell has already been a recurring motif used by female Dada and surrealist artists in the 1920s and '30s. While Dora Maar (*Sans titre*, 1934) and Hannah Höch (*Siebenmeilenstiefel*, 1934), for instance, combined in their photomontage snail shells with a human hand or legs, Stern focuses on her protagonist's facial expression and provocatively stages her in a bored state of complete inactivity. Keeping in mind that Stern started to focus on portrait photography after her forced migration to London, it is interesting that here she again chose to stress the woman's face. In this way the artist not only articulates a critical commentary, especially on the male-dominated surrealist movement, which frequently reduced women to their bodies or to a passive existence as a muse and inspiration source, but also implicitly refers to her own artistic experience, to the changes within her work caused by exile. *Los sueños de encierro*, in this sense, offers a variety of different influences, all of which merged in this picture: the technique of photomontage alludes to the Dada movement, the use of the snail shell motive refers to 1930s feminist art, the facial expression recalls her London portrait work. And finally, by using parody, Stern's photomontages not only ironically play with and critically approach the images of the Peronist propaganda, but become themselves part of Argentinean visual culture. As Linda Hutcheon argues, parody "seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within*."[29] In other words, through the use of parody, and even though she is speaking implicitly about her exile experience, Stern does not speak as an outsider, but participates actively in the discourses about female agency and gender norms during Peronism.

Stern's exploration of alternative modes of action for women cannot only be reduced to the fact that Stern already used to work on this topic in Berlin, but has to be contextualized in its exilic dimension as well. The photomontages for *Idilio*, in this sense, might better be read as an exploration of ways of expression of a female exile in Buenos Aires. As a modern woman who was used to having economic and individual independence, her forced migration to Argentina and its rather conservative gender norms have to be taken into consideration as factors that influenced her work, too. This intersectional situation of Stern as a Jewish woman in exile was most certainly an aspect that changed the aesthetics, motives, and techniques the artist chose, or that radicalized certain elements of her work. Her critical approach to Peronist as much as to other concepts of femininity (such as surrealist ones) therefore must be understood as an artistic struggle of an exiled artist who aims for independence, self-determination, and political and aesthetic sovereignty.

Frequently, parody and alienation effects go hand in hand with Stern's photomontages. Using these artistic strategies to express her wish for political inclusion of women and exiles, the artist again draws on her work in Berlin and her knowledge of modern art. It was Bertolt Brecht, whom Stern knew personally from her years in London (1933–1935), who further developed the concept of alienation in his theater work and inspired many artists, directors, cinematographers, painters, and photographers, including Grete Stern. But the Dada movement also made extensive use of alienation effects and connected it to the techniques of collage and photomontage. John Heartfield described in an interview how he used photomontages to respond to the propaganda during World War I, and to circumvent censorship. Cutting out parts of photographs and combining them with others, using photomontage as a political tool, as Heartfield argues, allowed him to create something new, a contradiction or a counterpart.[30] Brecht's reflections on alienation offer interesting points that can be of use in understanding the political dimension of photomontages, especially when he suggests introducing instructional or interfering elements to a familiar scenario that consequently should provoke a critical perspective on one's own perception.

> *The instructional elements… were, so to speak, installed; they did not result organically from the whole, they stood in opposition to the whole; they interrupted the flow of the play and its events, they thwarted sympathetic understanding, they were cold showers for those who wanted to sympathize.*[31]

Similar to what Hutcheon describes for parody, montage and alienation can be understood as modes of representation that reveal a difference. But more than that, they are able to create shock effects, which "should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind."[32]

Again, it is the sharp contrast between the photomontages and the rest of the magazine's pictures that enhances the alienating effect of Stern's work. Yet alienation and shock

effects arise inside Stern's *Dreams* as well, for example, from the separated relationship between bodies and space, or form a disturbing, yet ironic play with proportions, as *Los sueños de renacimiento* (*The Dreams of Rebirth*) illustrates (fig. 5). The photomontage ironizes the aforementioned glorification of motherhood during Peronism and parodies the reduction of female agency to this one and only purpose by staging an over-proportionate egg in the center of the picture. The woman who looks enthusiastically at the egg, and her body language which suggests excitement, create an exaggerated gesture of happiness that should lead to a reflection of this extensive stylization of motherhood. While the wrongly proportioned egg seems to instill a positive feeling in Stern's protagonist, at the same time it provokes an alienation effect as it interrupts the audiences' visual memory and contradicts its expectations.

Fig. 5. Grete Stern, *Los sueños de renacimiento*, in: *Idilio* no. 29, June 7, 1949.

The figure of the mother appears in several of Stern's photomontages, which was a new development in regard to her feminist agenda, and most certainly a result of the extensive presence of motherhood in the Peronist propaganda. In contrast to the Peronist stylization of happy and caring mothers, which in this function even fulfilled a national obligation, mother-child relations in Stern's photomontages are mostly combined with shock or alienation effects. Yet it might also be mentioned that this was not only a way to speak about difficulties and struggles that mothers live through, but that motherhood and exile were closely connected in Stern's private life as well. Stern's daughter Silvia was born during her years of exile in London, and the girl's head even appears in one of her mother's photomontages, *Los sueños de pinceles* (*The Dreams of Brushes*), later renamed *Made in England* by the artist—a clear statement on her own biographical experience.

While the pieces that I have analyzed thus far pursued an ironic and parodic approach, many other of Stern's photomontages create a much bleaker atmosphere, as they stage women in threatening situations of crisis (e.g., *Los sueños de muñecos* [*The Dreams of Dolls*], *Los sueños de ambición* [*The Dreams of Ambition*], or *Los sueños de evasion* [*The Dreams of Evasion*]). They still include the topics of the Peronist propaganda, but disrupt the harmonic frame through their shocking or disturbing compositions. They stage women trying to escape the embrace of a huge doll that seems to harass the protagonist, fleeing a washbasin in order not to drown in it, or growing literally beyond the limited space of a salon while fearing to suffocate in it. In other words, Stern created in these photomontages, as mentioned before, prison situations from which the protagonists try to escape, and which might again be understood as an expression of exile experiences. The "natural" female surroundings introduced by the propaganda apparatus transform into spaces of danger in these pictures, and in this way the artist reveals them as a paternalistic construct, realized through the politics of Peronism.

Conclusion

In summary, Stern's photomontages cannot be reduced to a mere psychoanalytic or surrealistic analysis, but must be contextualized in a broader historical, art historical, political, and exilic context. The Dream series not only created an important disobedient counterpoint within the magazine *Idilio*, but also within the Argentinean visual propaganda of that time, and was an early representation of exile experiences in popular culture.

Parody, shock, and alienation effects are aesthetic strategies that Stern applied in almost all of the 140 *Dream* photomontages, through which she called for female self-determination and forms of participation for other marginalized groups, such as exiles. In this sense, Stern's work was not simply an answer or a reaction to the cultural and gender-related restrictive developments during Peronism, or the often quite isolated situation as an exile in Argentina. They discussed different points of view and perspectives, questioned forms of representation, asked about internalized modes of perception, and searched for ways of expression for migrants and exiles. Stern's pictures thus became active players in the debates on Argentinean image propaganda, its ideas of femininity, and exile art.[33] Drawing from her experience in Germany and her artistic work on the New Woman, Stern knew to use the media of popular culture as a platform to debate political developments. Yet she did not force any predetermined concept of femininity on the Argentinean audience—she offered them her ways of artistic expression and visual strategies as tools, in order to create their own approaches.

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1. See recent studies on Grete Stern: Paula Bertúa*, La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible. Grete Stern y la revista Idilio, 1941–1951* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 2012); Paula Bertúa, "Los Sueños de *Idilio*. Los fotomontajes surrealistas de Grete Stern," Boletín de estética, año III (August 2008): 6–32; Anna Corrigan and Susana S. Martins, "Feminism, Laughter, and Photomontage: Comedic Effect and Grete Stern's Sueños," in *Photography Performing Humor*, eds. Mieke Bleyen and Liesbeth Decan (Lueven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 126–141; Rachel Greenspan, "Dreaming woman: Image, place, and the aesthetics of exile," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 98, no. 4 (August 2017): 1047–1073; Roxana Marcoci, "Photographer Against the Grain: Through the Lens of Grete Stern," in *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern*

and Horacio Coppola, eds. Roxana Marcoci and Sarah Hermanson (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 21–36. Even though Stern's photomontages can be interpreted as surrealist art and, as Bertúa correctly points out, the editors of *Idilio* asked the artist to create surrealist pictures, I would like to suggest an alternative reading that is closer connected to the concepts of Dada, because Stern herself focused in her article "Notes on Photomontage" on Dada artists like John Heartfield and George Grosz. This does not necessarily mean that Stern's photomontages have to be understood exclusively as Dadaist works, but that they were influenced by the techniques and ideas of this movement. As David Foster accurately observed, Stern later changed all the titles of her photomontages and did not use the original column's names. Following Foster, this might as well be an indication of her creative distance from a mere psychoanalytic or surrealist interpretation. See David Foster, *Argentine, Mexican, and Guatemalan Photography: Feminist, Queer, and Post-Masculinist Perspectives* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 16.

2. As was the case with *Pétrol Hahn* (1931), which will be analyzed later in this text.
3. Similar to many other female artists, Stern and Auerbach were originally trained privately or in schools of Applied Art, because women at that time were mostly excluded from classic Arts Universities. When the Bauhaus allowed equal access of women, it provoked a lot of resistance. Still, the school even managed to offer a female master from 1927 to 1931, the weaving workshop. But as Stern and Auerbach illustrate, there were women in all the different workshops (photography, metal, sculpture, mural painting, etc.) who significantly influenced the school's aesthetics. See Ulrike Müller, *Bauhaus-Frauen. Meisterinnen in Kunst, Handwerk und Design* (Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2009); Patrick Rössler and Elizabeth Otto, *Frauen am Bauhaus: wegweisende Künstlerinnen der Moderne* (Munich: Knesebeck, 2019).
4. *Ringl and Pit*, DVD, directed by Juan Mandelbaum (New York: New Day Films, 1995).
5. Alejandra Uslenghi's article "A Migrant Modernism: Grete Stern's Photomontages" offers an interesting reading of Stern's artistic and theoretical work with/on the technique of photomontage and provides further information on certain overlapping elements with the work of the Dada artist Hannah Höch. In this article, Uslenghi also suggests that, by introducing the technique of photomontage, Stern trained the readers of *Idilio* in in the "visual language of modernism." Even though I agree with the author on this point, I would argue that it was not only training in the visual language of modernism, but also training in analytical seeing (as she learned from Peterhans), in order to dismantle the Peronist propaganda and create spaces of action for women and other marginalized groups, such as exiles. See Alejandra Uslenghi, "A Migrant Modernism: Grete Stern's Photomontages," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 173–205.
6. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–62.
7. The title of this subchapter refers to Marcela M. Gené's classic on Argentinean visual culture during Peronism: Marcela M. Gené, *Un mundo feliz. Imágenes de los trabajadores en el primer peronismo 1946–1955* (Buenos Aires: FCE-Universidad San Andrés, 2005).
8. For the concept of *cultural translation,* see Doris Bachmann-Bedick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Hamburg: Rothwohl Taschenbuch Verlag, 2014), 144–183.
9. As Sabine Eckmann points out, there is little research on exile arts that goes beyond biographical and iconographic aspects and instead focuses on aesthetic dimensions. Yet it is visual migration studies such as John Clammer's *Vision and Society: Towards a Sociology and Anthropology from Art* that offer very promising perspectives and should be taken into consideration

as well for historical exile studies. See Sabine Eckmann, “Exil und Modernismus: Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zum künslterischen Exil der 1930er- und 1940er Jahre,” in *Migration und künstlerische Produktion: Aktuelle Perspektiven*, ed. Burcu Dogramaci (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 25; John Clammer, *Vision and Society: Towards a Sociology and Anthropology from Art* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 120–138.

10. Grete Stern, “Notes on Photomontage,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 271.
11. For further information on Dada techniques, see Hanne Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik. Dada Berlin – Artistik von Polaritäten* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000); Anna Schober, *Ironie, Montage, Verfremdung. Ästhetische Taktiken und die politische Gestalt der Demokratie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009), 118–147.
12. Other than in Europe, where photomontage became a popular artistic technique after World War I at the latest, in Argentina it did not quite enter into the art world until Grete Stern established it as a promising visual tool. Of course, photomontage was already used as an artistic technique before Stern’s *Sueños*, but photomontages were not really exhibited in museums or galleries. It was only Victoria Ocampo, publisher of the literature magazine *SUR* and supporter of Stern’s career, who (re)printed photomontages already in the 1930s, mainly of European artists, in *SUR*. Also related to the SUR group was the famous writer Jorge Luis Borges, who defined the characteristics of *ultraísmo* already in 1921, a Spanish and South American literature movement that was strongly influenced by the techniques of Dadaism. While Borges was a very important representative of *ultraísmo* in literature, and therefore a multiplicator of the collage as an artistic technique, the most important visual artists of *ultraísmo* were not active in Argentina, but in the neighboring countries of Chile (Vicente Huidobro) and Uruguay (Joaquín Torres-García). See Judith Hossli, “Lateinamerika. Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires,” in *Dada global*, eds. Raimund Mayer, Judith Hossli, Guido Magnaguagno, Juri Seiner, and Hans Bolliger (Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 1994), 75–78.
13. Flavia Fiorucci, “El antiperonismo intelectual: de la guerra ideológica a la guerra spiritual,” in *Fascismo y antifascismo. Peronismo y antiperonismo. Conflictos políticos e ideológicos en la Argentina (1930–1955),* ed. Marcela García Sebastiani (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006), 161–194.
14. Grete Stern, for example, participated in the art collective *Madí*, which was composed by several concrete artists, including Gyula Kosice, Carmelo Arden Quin, and Rhod Rothfuss. See Andrea Giunta, “Todas partes del mundo,” in *Catálogo Verbomérica*, ed. MALBA (Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Latinoamericano, 2016), 74–82.
15. Luis Primaro, “Fotografía y Estado en 1951. Archivo de la Subsecretaría de Informaciones de la Presidencia de la Nación en el Archivo General de la Nación,” in *7. Congreso de Historia de la Fotografía 1839–1960* (2001), eds. Congreso de Historia de la Fotografía (Buenos Aires: Federación Argentina de Fotografía, 2003), 173–176.
16. Gené, *Un mundo feliz*, 29–64
17. Julia Silvia Guivant, “La visible Eva Perón y el invisible rol político femenino en el peronismo: 1946–1952,” in *Notre Dame: Helen Kellog Institute for International Studies* (1986), 13–25, accessed May 11, 2019, http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/060.pdf, 02.11.2013, 18.15.
18. See Gené, *Un mundo feliz*, 130–140; Andrea Giunta, “Eva Perón: imágenes y público,” in *Arte y recepción*, ed. AA.VV (Buenos Aires: Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte, 1997), 177–184; Barbara Potthast, *Madres, Obreras, Amantes. Protagonismo femenino en la historia de América latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2011).
19. *Madí* was a movement of concrete artists, including Gyula Kosice, Carmelo Arden Quin, and Rhod Rothfuss, that was

formed from the dissolution of the group around *Arturo* magazine. The meaning of the name is uncertain; it may have originated from the first syllables of the words *materialismo dialectico* (dialectical materialism), although it is also possible that it is a simple play with sounds. *Madí*, which was mainly a group of Jewish and/or political immigrants and refugees, intended, by means of their Marxist-inspired art production, to create an anti-fascist and anti-Peronist counterpart to the state-driven propaganda. See Andrea Giunta, "Todas partes del mundo," in *Catálogo Verbomérica*, ed. MALBA (Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Latinoamericano, 2016), 74–82.

20. Gyula Kosice, *Kosice. Autobiografia* (Buenos Aires: Asunto Impreso Ediciones, 2010), 39.
21. Due to its function as a meeting place for migrant and exiled artists and intellectuals, Stern's house in Ramos Mejía, also known as "the factory" in the Buenos Aires art scene, can be understood as a *contact zone* (Pratt). As Burcu Dogramaci elaborated, artists' studios were often central spaces for exiles where cultural exchange could take place. See Burcu Dogramaci, "Migrants, Nomad, Traveler – Towards a Transnational Art History," in *The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity: Concepts for the Study of Culture (CSC)* vol. 6., eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Birgit Mersmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 55. For further information on the concept of the *contact zone* in artistic contexts, see James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219; Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 33–40.
22. Paula Bertúa, *La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible. Grete Stern y la revista Idilio*, 1941–1951 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 2012), 22.
23. For further information on the psychoanalytic column and the relation between text and image, see Bertúa*, La cámara en el umbral de lo sensible* (2012); Greenspan, "Dreaming woman: Image, place, and the aesthetics of exile," 1047–1073.
24. Gené, *Un mundo feliz,* 143–145.
25. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985), 32.
26. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 188–221.
27. Greenspan, "Dreaming woman: Image, place, and the aesthetics of exile," 1057.
28. Ibid.
29. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 35.
30. "John Heartfield in einem Gespräch mit Bengt Dahlbäck vom Moderna Museet in Stockholm" (1967), in *John Heatfield*, ed. Akademie der Künste Berlin (Cologne: DuMont, 1991), 14.
31. Bertolt Brecht, "On the Experimental Theatre," in *The Tulane Drama Review* 6, no.1 (1961): 8.
32. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Grey Room*, no. 39, *Walter Benjamin's Media Tactics: Optics, Perception, and the Work of Art* (Spring 2010): 32–33.
33. Here I refer to the German term *Bildakt* (image acts), introduced by the art historian Horst Bredekamp, who argues that pictures have to be understood as independent and powerful historical actors. See Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts. Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2007* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010).