

GEORGES DUHAMEL'S *L'HUMANISTE ET L'AUTOMATE*
PRACTICING A PHOTOGRAPHIC *JUSTE MILIEU* FROM 1929-1939

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GEORGES DUHAMEL

L'HUMANISTE
ET
L'AUTOMATE

EX PROPOSANT
DE
JEAN ROUBIER

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In 1933 Georges Duhamel, winner of the 1918 Goncourt Prize for his book *Civilization*, published what has been described as a moderate treatment of the problem of mechanization, *L'Humaniste et l'automate*.¹ The book is divided into four chapters, each addressing a specific realm affected by technology: *L'Humaniste et l'automate* (medicine), *Misère du Cinéma* (film), *Sans douleur* (education), and *Décadence de l'Éternité* (landscape). Twenty nine of Jean Roubier's photographs were used to illustrate the two hundred page book, approximately one image for every seven pages. Roubier was a little-known though widely published photographer. At the time of Duhamel's book, he was the sole illustrator for such deluxe book series as *La France illustrée* and *Tableaux de France*, put out by Les éditions Horizons de France.² Although the photographic portion of the book has received only sparse critical attention, and that only at the time of its appearance in the thirties, it was published by Paul Hartmann, an editor famous for its high quality photographic reproductions.³ Moreover, while critics were addressing the text's contradictions and retroactive stance, the photographs were seen to be an innocuous foil, which added to the book's precious and charming quality.⁴ They were described as «admirables photographies» by Henri Daniel-Rops.⁵ Ramón Fernández, writing in *Marianne*, which set a high standard for photographs in the press, described them as «fort belles.»⁶ The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between Roubier's photographs and Duhamel's cautionary stance toward technology. I examine the way in which photography—a medium which is a sign-post for modernity—can be used to repress its own mechanization. To do this, I explore Roubier's work in the context of what might be termed a photographic *juste milieu*.

¹ Comeau, Yvan, *Georges Duhamel et la possession du monde, jusqu'à la Chronique des Pasquier*, Montreal, Canada: LIDEC, 1970, 131.

² Marie de Thézy and Claude Nori, *La Photographie humaniste, 1930-1960: Histoire d'un mouvement en France*, Paris: Contrejour, 1992, 33.

³ Paul Hartmann was especially known for photographic albums on the country. The relationship between photography and the rural landscape is important to the sublimation of technology that I will discuss in Roubier's images. This sublimation is not specific only to Roubier, as photographic albums of the countryside were prevalent in many countries during this period.

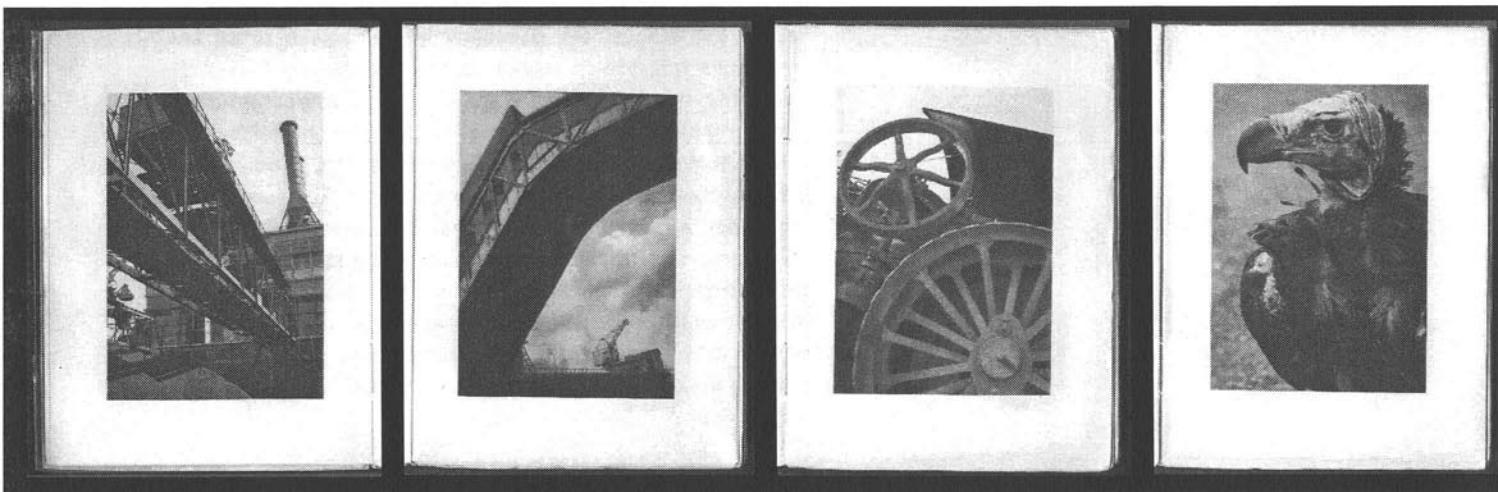
⁴ See Achille Ouy, «Sagesse et civilisation,» *La Revue internationale de sociologie* 41, July-August 1933, 427.

⁵ Daniel-Rops, «Humaniste ou automate,» *Le Journal des débats* 145, no. 164, 14 June 1933, frontpage.

⁶ Ramón Fernández, «L'Humaniste et l'automate par Georges Duhamel,» *Marianne*, 4 October 1933.

The relationship between Duhamel and Roubier was a collaborative one. Many of the photographs include Duhamel in deliberate poses and correspond to specific passages in the text. The photographs served at least two functions. The first was recognized at the time: to document the author's move toward a more reasoned and moderate view of technology. Duhamel himself promoted the book as a decision to deal with those aspects of modernity which had so strongly disturbed him in his 1930 *Scènes de la Vie future*. Even before the textual portion of *L'Humaniste*, a photograph on the title page shows Duhamel standing diagonally over hard metal machinery inside a stark white factory. Daniel-Rops in his 1933 review recognized Duhamel's conscious use of photography: «la première de ces images étant un portrait de l'auteur lui-même méditant devant une rotative, on peut voir une manière de symbole, j'imagine, dans l'expression soucieuse dont s'y pare son visage.»⁷ The presence of the photograph was to be a surrogate for all of technology in that it visually proved Duhamel's ability to live, albeit hesitatingly, with modernity. On the other hand, the photographs paralleled his desire to stop time. From the outset he explains to the reader: «Je vous propose de nous arrêter une minute, dans cette marche au progrès.»⁸ Unlike the «arts dynamiques» (radio and film), which the author so vehemently opposed, photographs did precisely what Duhamel's text was trying to accomplish: to excise a moment from the flow of modernity, to study it rationally and to contemplate it.

Duhamel's insistence on contemplation was translated into a longing for the eternal, the traditional, and the beautiful; all of which must be seen in direct relation to his profession as a doctor and to his experiences in World War I. In the first chapter of the book, Duhamel's discussion of the machine and the humanist center around medicine. The photographs for the main portion of this section begin with a frontal three-quarter image of Duhamel in his doctor's robes. His face is covered with a white mask and only his hard round rimmed glasses pear out to directly address the reader. To reinstate sympathy and humanism to medicine, Duhamel wants to return to the family doctor, «celui qui connaissait depuis des années toute l'histoire, tous les secrets, toutes les aventures d'un petit group.»⁹ The next photograph illustrates Duhamel's insistence on human contact by showing him consulting with a patient. Bemoaning the lack of touch in the modern sciences, he begins to recount his experiences of working as a doctor in the War's «climat du machinisme,»¹⁰ where doctors are transfigured into industrial workers and the products being assembled are the shattered pieces of a soldier's body. Increasing specialization combined with the constant demand for medical treatment turned traditional medical practice into rationalized labor. With this, the reader turns to a page which features a mid-range photograph of surgery. The white sheets are split open and the gloved hands of the doctor reaches in with his metal extensions. Here, the contradiction in Duhamel's book comes to the fore, both on the level of text and representation. The insistence on humanism, on a use of the senses, is forfeited here for the sealed armature of the doctor's uniform and the



⁷ Henri Daniel-Rops, «Humaniste ou automate,» frontpage.

⁸ Georges Duhamel, *L'Humaniste et l'automate*, Paris: Paul Hartmann, 1933, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

photograph's balanced composition and tonal range. Although the text consistently asks for a humanist approach to technology, these photographs are not about touch nor about exceeding the borders of the page's white border.

To help understand the political import of Duhamel's touch/not touch, I want to refer to Walter Benjamin's «Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.» Originally published in French in 1936, Benjamin refers to Duhamel on two occasions, both times in reference to the author's reflections on film in his *Scenes de la Vie future*.¹¹ Although Benjamin's direct comments on Duhamel are limited to brief passages, his metaphorical discussion of the magician and the surgeon is particularly relevant to *L'Humaniste*. Benjamin writes:

The magician heals a sick person by the laying of the hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself The surgeon does exactly the reverse Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.¹²

An elision between these two categories takes place in Duhamel's book whereby the surgeon is not separate from the magician. In other words, the doctor is still a magician, «maintain[ing] the natural distance between the patient and himself.» It is precisely this touch/don't touch which characterizes Duhamel's discussion of the humanist. Interestingly, what he mourns when describing the mechanization of medicine is precisely the magical quality of the practice: «La médecine y perd son caractère magique.»¹³

The desire for sympathetic magic is not limited to the text, but applies equally to the images. For Benjamin, the magician is comparable to the painter and the surgeon to the cameraman. If Duhamel in a sense wishes to embody both the magician and the surgeon, Roubier's photographs incorporate both the painter and the cameraman. Roubier's first camera was a Leica, which he bought in 1931, and it was probably what he used for *L'Humaniste*. Employing the tool of the cameraman, and the very symbol of modernity,¹⁴ his photographs are nonetheless in the service of the magician (Duhamel) and the painter (contemplation). What is apparently contradictory in this combinatio is that Roubier's images are not pictorial nor do they rely on any of the painterly qualities of such past academic photographers as Robert Demachy or Constant Puyo.¹⁵ From the cameraman, Roubier derives a specific photographic vocabulary that reads as modern.¹⁶ Despite their «straight,» unmanipulated qualities, Roubier does not penetrate the scene. He does not bring the viewer into the disturbing side of mechanization, medicine, or industry.



¹¹ The importance of this date to a broader discussion of *juste milieu* photography will be dealt with toward the end of this paper.

¹² Benjamin, «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,» *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 233.

¹³ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 58.

¹⁴ de Thézy and Nori, *La Photographie humaniste*, 18.

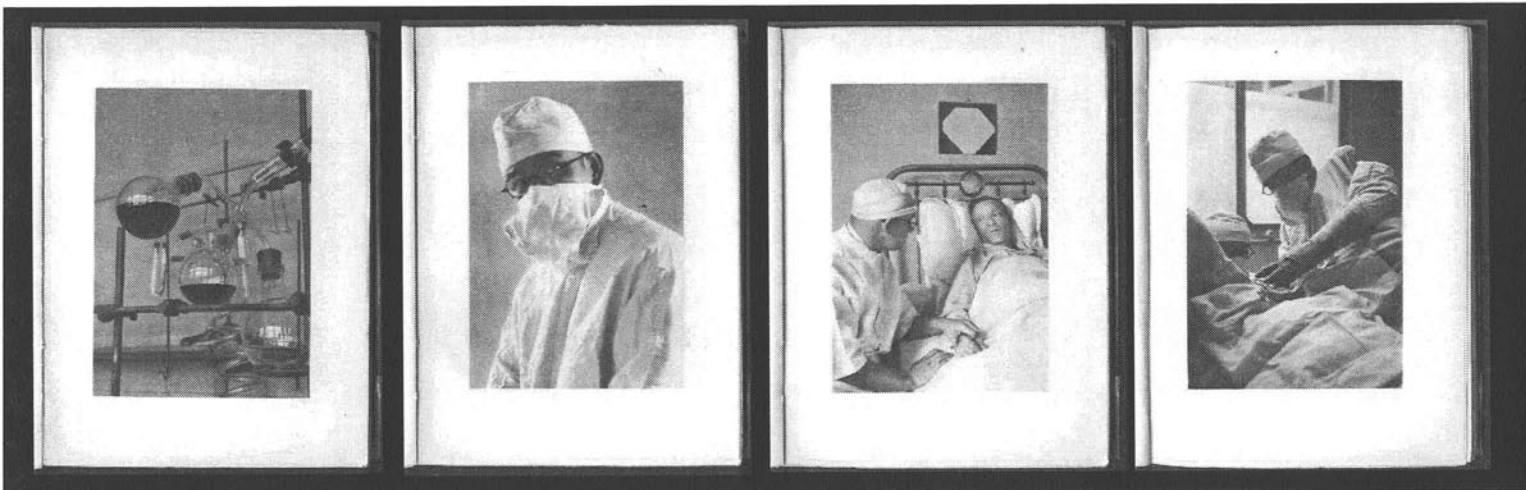
¹⁵ The one exception to this is a photograph of a picturesque rural scene in soft, grainy focus included in the section on Film. For more on Demachy and Puyo, see *Le Salon de Photographie: Les écoles pictorialistes en Europe et aux Etats-Unis vers 1900*, Paris: Musée Rodin, 1993.

¹⁶ Pure photography was first promoted as a modern art with official recognition at the «Salon de l'Escalier.» See Florent Fels, «Le Premier Salon Indépendant de la Photographie,» *L'Art vivant* 4, 1 June 1928, 445. Reprinted in Christopher Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989, 23-24.

Returning to Duhamel, this is all the more confounding since what he proclaims he wants to study in the book are precisely those «certaines modifications graves infligées à la personnalité humaine par l'usage des machines.»¹⁷ In addition, it is the absence of real life suffering in film that Duhamel criticizes: «le cinéma ne cherche pas à peindre la vie; il ne représente presque jamais, par exemple, un homme qui souffre, mai un homme en train d'imiter un homme qui souffre.»¹⁸ And it is the lack of work, the «anesthésie générale,» that he finds insupportable in the use of radio and film for education.¹⁹ There is the desire to touch, to break the barrier between work and life, but that break can not come at the price of fragmentation.²⁰ In other words, it cannot participate in what Benjamin describes as tactility. Distance, or following Benjamin, opticality, must be maintained, with the ultimate goal being contemplation rather than distraction. For if Duhamel were to participate in a tactile enterprise, he would also have to enter into the world of labor, or habit.²¹

In 1934 Ilya Ehrenburg wrote a biting essay on Duhamel's detachment from the world of labor in *L'Humaniste*. Part of a larger study entitled *Vus par un écrivain d'U.R.S.S.*, Ehrenburg sardonically titled the chapter dedicated to Duhamel, «Georges Duhamel, le machinoclaste.»²² The chapter begins with a story about Jean and Jacques Durand. Jean is an assembly line worker in a Citroën factory, who is going deaf from the hammering of the machines and has caught tuberculosis from assembling the metal parts. After working in the factory for a number of years, Ehrenburg writes: «ce sont des automates.»²³ But, Jean does not blame technology for his illnesses from the factory, instead it is Monsieur Citroën who is at fault for reaping tremendous profit from the workers' alienated labor. Jacques Durand, kilometers away from Paris, «n'est pas un ouvrier, sa situation sociale veut qu'il soit rentier. Mais, par inclination, c'est un philosophe [and a humanist]. . . Il voulait pêcher à la ligne et penser à l'éternité.»²⁴ Jacques Durand is a caricature of Georges Duhamel. Ehrenburg perceptively sees that Duhamel's criticism of technology is not grounded in its application, but in the disruptions it causes to his country solitude and personal routines. The last words in *L'Humaniste* are a meditation over the beauty of a tulip and the loss of eternity: «L'Éternité s'est retirée de notre cœur. Elle se retire de nos ouvrages et surtout de nos ambitions.»²⁵ Duhamel is not concerned with the fate of the worker or, as opposed to his initial statements, with the effects of technology on the mind or the body.

The removal of the traces of labor on the body in Duhamel's text finds a visual parallel in Roubier's photographs. About mid-way through the first chapter of *L'Humaniste*, Duhamel defends the power of the human



¹⁷ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁰ It is not inconsequential that Roubier also served in World War I, only on the other side of the operating table; he was wounded in 1915 and 1918.

²¹ "For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", 240.

²² Ilya Ehrenbourg, *Duhamel, Gide, Malraux, Mauriac, Morand, Romains, Unamuno: Vus par un écrivain d'U.R.S.S.* Paris: Gallimard, 1934, 104-126.

²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

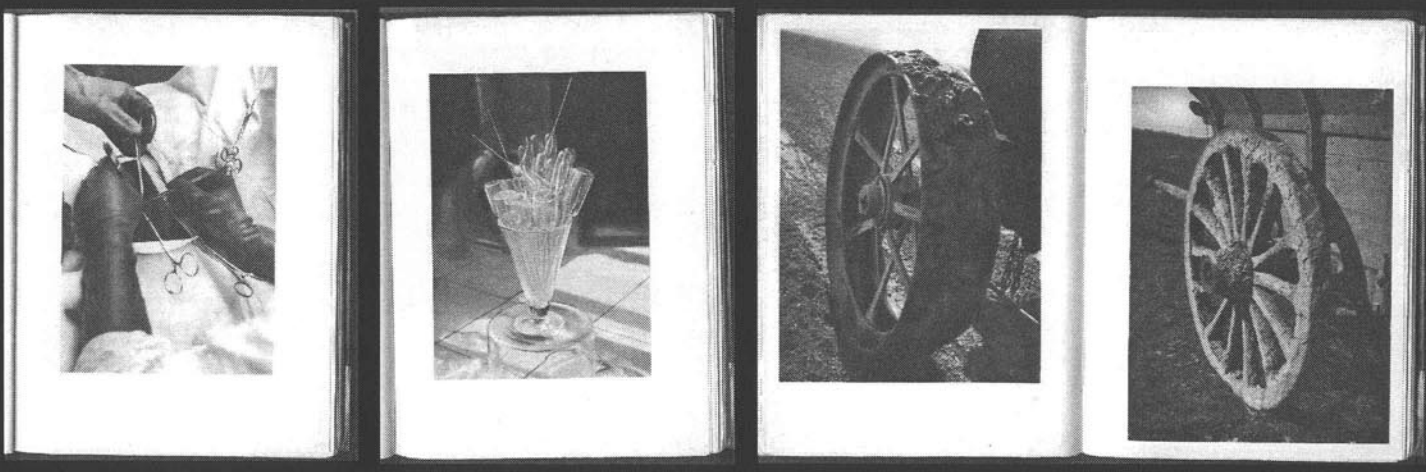
²⁵ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 201. Roubier's photograph is a perfect emblem for Duhamel's words. The final image in the book is a photograph of two solitary beautifully lit tulips in front of a backdrop.

senses over any form of technological prosthesis: «Il n'existe aucun appareil susceptible de suppléer le toucher, sens merveilleux qui suffirait à nous donner une représentation cohérente du monde.»²⁶ A photograph of a hand passing over a Braille text accompanies this section. A soft light brings the eye to the fingertips, which are elegantly poised over the raised letters. The hands are beautifully manicured and show no sign of work. They are not callused or knobbed. The kind of labor represented in this photograph is not industrial, but intellectual. Still, if Duhamel resists any device which extends or amplifies the natural capacity of the senses, Roubier's photographs certainly do not offer the complimentary view of a form of perception based on physical contact.

The awkwardness and contrivance of Roubier's photograph and its relation to Duhamel's disinterest in the real problems and physical consequences of labor is brought to the fore when it is compared with two of Roubier's contemporaries: Eli Lotar and Germaine Krull. Specifically, I want to compare Roubier's photograph of the Braille reader to a similar image by Lotar. Lotar's photograph appeared in the 1 August 1929 issue of *L'Art vivant*. I will discuss the specific relation of *L'Art vivant* to Roubier's practice and French photography later in this paper. For now, I want to compare the two images to see how their structural differences inform differences in the artist's relation to technology and labor.²⁷ Lotar's image is a close-up, already significantly different from Roubier's reliance on a mid-range distance. It exhibits an advanced use of the camera. Lotar is positioned right in front of the fingers, capturing not only the pressure of the tips on the Braille letters, but the dirty residue under the finger nails and

around the cuticles. The sharp contrast emphasizes the lines in the hand, the uncomfortable tilt of the finger and the work-worn skin. In Lotar's image, the effects of daily work—here of the mind and the body—on the senses is clearly shown to the reader. There is no question that this hand relies on its natural capacity of touch to decipher the raised Braille. In a 1931 photograph by Lotar's teacher, Germaine Krull, there is a similar display of the marks of life and work on the body.²⁸ This time it is not directed specifically at any kind of labor, but rather stands as an emblem. The woman in the picture brings her brown, sun colored hands up to her face. The arthritic knuckles are the central focus. Both of these images embody Benjamin's notion of tactility. No image this disturbing appears in Duhamel's book.

The paradox in the above comparisons is that Roubier's work incorporates a photographic vocabulary which referenced the work of Lotar and Krull. In fact, many of the photographs in *L'Humaniste* are citations of those photographers whose work was long accepted in such popular art magazines as *L'Art vivant*. Roubier began photographing in 1931 and forms part of what may be considered a second generation of French photographers.²⁹ As such, Roubier would have been familiar with the series of articles published in *L'Art vivant* under the general title, «La Photographie est-elle un art?» Begun in 1929, Jean Gallotti's articles featured a range of photographers that included, besides Lotar and Krull, Emmanuel Sougez, André Kertész, Maurice Tabard, and Man Ray. As the title suggests, the primary purpose of the series was to show the public why photography was an art. The photographers, no matter how different their artistic or political positions, were all brought in line with the general goal of *L'Art vivant*, which was «l'intégration des avant-gardes dans la conception esthétique moyenne.»³⁰ For



²⁶ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 47- 8.

²⁷ Although Lotar's political affiliations are unclear, he worked with many artists and writers who were committed to the cause of communism. These include Luis Buñuel, Joris Ivens, and Pierre Unik.

²⁸ Krüll's photograph appeared in the 1931 *Photographies*, put out by *Arts et Metiers* under the supervision of Emmanuel Sougez. Krüll was also featured in *L'Art vivant* and her images of machinery were highly praised by critics like Florent Fels and Jean Gallotti from the pages of that magazine.

²⁹ Christian Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle photographie en France, 1919-1939*, Poitiers: Musée de la Ville de Poitiers et de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1986, 19.

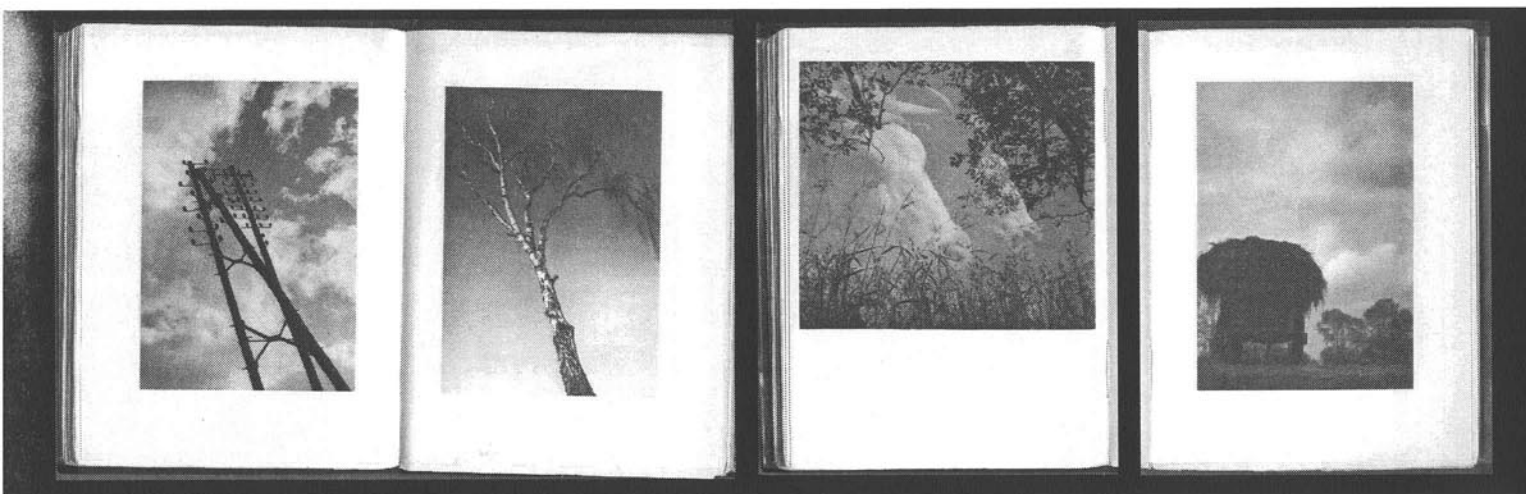
example, in the same year that Lotar's photograph of the Braille reader was featured as part of a two-page spread in one of Gallotti's articles, his other photographs were appearing on a regular basis in the dissident Surrealist journal, *Documents*. Under the general category of art, Gallotti was able to normalize the most challenging of photographic practices, ultimately disassociating photographic style from political content. Thus, Lotar's photograph of the Braille reader, which is so different from Roubier's, was nevertheless part of this photographic vocabulary, approved in the pages of *L'Art vivant* and ready for appropriation.

Instances of Roubier's images echoing those of other photographers promoted in *L'Art vivant* are prevalent throughout *L'Humaniste*. Krull's photographs of factories and laboratories, Sougez's still-lives of objects, and Nora Dumas or Roger Schall's photographs of the French country side were precedents for Roubier. In most of these cases, except perhaps with Sougez for reasons that I will discuss, Roubier takes the normalizing tendencies of *L'Art vivant* one step further. He domesticates modernity for a middle-brow public. In effect, he erases any deviant viewpoint, any disturbing subject matter and renders technology harmless for Duhamel (and for his readers). Domesticating these different styles also had another function: to bring photographers of different nationalities into the center. By erasing the particularities of the national backgrounds associated with each photographer's signature style, Roubier's images might have also appeased a xenophobic public.³¹ The implications of such a gesture would take on greater importance as the thirties progressed.

The promotion of modern photography in France accelerated between 1933 and 1936. Roubier's use of a

recognizably modern style in the book coincides with this general trend. *L'Art vivant*'s contribution to this process continued throughout the thirties. Indeed, photography was garnering a good deal of attention, with conscious efforts made to reestablish the medium's French genealogy. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death of Nicéphore Niepce, one of the inventors of photography, Jean Gallotti wrote an article titled «Une rétrospective de la photographie,» in which he traced the medium from Daguerre to the present, matching photographs by Nadar with those by Dumas, Schall, and Georges Saad.³² *Photographie* was one of many photographic publications to gain in stature during this period. *Arts et Metiers* began to publish the annual yearbook of photography in 1930 and it continued through the forties. Featured frequently in *L'Art vivant*,³³ Emmanuel Sougez had a leading role in compiling the annual's photographs.³⁴ Of the photographers to appear in these two publications, it is Sougez work that is most relevant to Roubier's.

Between 1936 and 1939, photographic innovations in France came to a relative stand-still.³⁵ At the same time that photography ceased to be a challenge to the artistic status-quo, Roubier's photographic activity and public exposure increased. In 1936 Roubier's photographs appeared for the first time in *Photographie*. They continued to be published in the annual for at least the next two years. Instead of the apparently modern style of the photographs in *L'Humaniste*, Roubier's 1936 photograph of a small French town is conservative in subject matter and style. His contribution to the 1937 and 1938 *Photographie* are almost the same, only here even the slight bird's eye angle is exchanged for a more pedestrian viewpoint.



³⁰ Yves Chevrefils Desbiolles, *Les Revues d'art à Paris, 1905-1940*, Paris: Ent'revues, 1993, 233. My emphasis.

³¹ For more on foreign photographers in Paris during the inter-war period, see Kim Sichel, «Photographs of Paris 1928-1934: Brassai, André Kertesz, Germaine Krull and Man Ray,» Ph. D. Thesis, Yale University, Department of History of Art, 1986; and Annie-Laure Wanaverbecq, «Les photographes étrangers dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres,» *Histoire de l'art*, 15 September 1991, 61-75. For a further discussion of the effect of xenophobia on the arts, see Romy Golan, *A Moralized Landscape: French Art and Ideology between the Two World Wars*, New York, 1992, 20.

³² Jean Gallotti, «Une rétrospective de la photographie,» *L'Art vivant* 9, 1933, 206-208.

³³ See Jean Gallotti, «La Photographie est-elle un art?: Sougez,» *L'Art vivant* 5, 15 November 1929, 877-879; and Jacques Guenne, «Sougez ou l'ennemi du hasard,» *L'Art vivant* 9, 1933, 405-408.

³⁴ de Thézy and Nori, *La Photographie humaniste*, 45-6.

³⁵ Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle photographie en France*, 11.

1936 is not only a marker in Roubier's career, but one which marks shifts in France's political scene and in the broader question of a French photographic *juste milieu*. Leon Blum's Popular Front government was established on May 5th. As Romy Golan has discussed, the Popular Front was not such a break from the previous years and the question of humanism, or rather *neo-humanisme*, which Duhamel had advocated in 1933 became an even stronger issue as realism became the preferred style of the socialist government.³⁶ A year later, Sougez lead a group of photographers to establish Le Rectangle: Association des photographes illustrateurs et publicitaires. The group was conceived in nationalist terms as an organization of professional French photographers. Jean Roubier was among the members of the Rectangle and was included in the group's first Salon in 1938. Sougez published a group statement in 1938 describing the origins and goals of the Rectangle. He was clear to point out its role in re-nationalizing the medium, writing that the Rectangle was a group «qui réclame et s'efforce d'obtenir pour la photographie française de justes droits et son maintien à la place qui lui est due.»³⁷ In light of such a strong anti-foreign statement, the appropriation and subsequent erasure of national styles which took place in *L'Humaniste* is disturbingly prescient. Likewise, the very characteristics that Sougez attributes to the group correspond to Duhamel's humanist approach to technology. For Sougez and other members of the group, the Rectangle stood for regularity, harmony, rigor, and discipline.³⁸ Duhamel believed technology, in particular film, should follow the rules of art. This included discretion, prudence, harmony, tradition, and beauty; all of

the qualities now being assigned to photography.³⁹ The timeliness of the Rectangle's program is witnessed by its critical success. The first gallery dedicated solely to photography, «La Chasseur d'Images,» was closely connected to the photographers in the Rectangle and might even be seen as a further extension of the articles in *L'Art vivant*—the name of the gallery was used in one of the magazine's articles on Sougez back in 1933.⁴⁰ The gallery opened with an exhibition of Sougez's work in 1937 and in 1938 was the chosen venue for the group's first Salon.⁴¹

Along with their support of a purely French photography and photographic heritage, the Rectangle resuscitated the practice of apprenticeship, guilds, and craft. As Sougez explained, «La photographie est un metier complexe et delicat, qui exige savoir et longue experience.»⁴² The repression of technology desired by Duhamel and present in the structure of Roubier's photographs is here made into the group's leading principal. It is with the Rectangle that French photography consolidated around the ideals of humanism. As Romy Golan has shown, this return to craft, or «Retour au metier,» was advocated with particular vehemence during this period by writers like Camille Mauclair and Waldemar George as an antidote to the ills of the over industrialization.⁴³



³⁶ Golan, *A Moralized Landscape*, 267-269.

³⁷ Emmanuel Sougez, «Le Rectangle,» *Photo-Illustrations*, no. 33, June 1938, 4-5. Cited in Dominique Baqué, *Les Documents de la modernité: Anthologie de textes sur la photographie de 1919 à 1939*, Paris: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1993, 447.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 128 and 169.

⁴⁰ See Jacques Guenne, «Sougez ou l'ennemi du hasard,» *L'Art vivant* 9, 1933, 405.

⁴¹ de Thézy and Nori, *La Photographie humaniste*, 66.

⁴² Baqué, *Les Documents de la modernité*, 448.

⁴³ Golan, *A Moralized Landscape*, 294.

The return to craft and the harking back to a decidedly French photographic tradition should be placed in the context of a more general recuperation of French photographic history not limited to conservative artists or writers. For example, in 1936 Gisèle Freund, another student of Germaine Krull, published her dissertation, *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle: Essai de sociologie et d'esthétique*. Freund's study on nineteenth-century photography relates to the historically focused articles in *L'Art vivant*. Moreover, her observations about the role of photography in society forms a commentary on this same recuperative tendency:

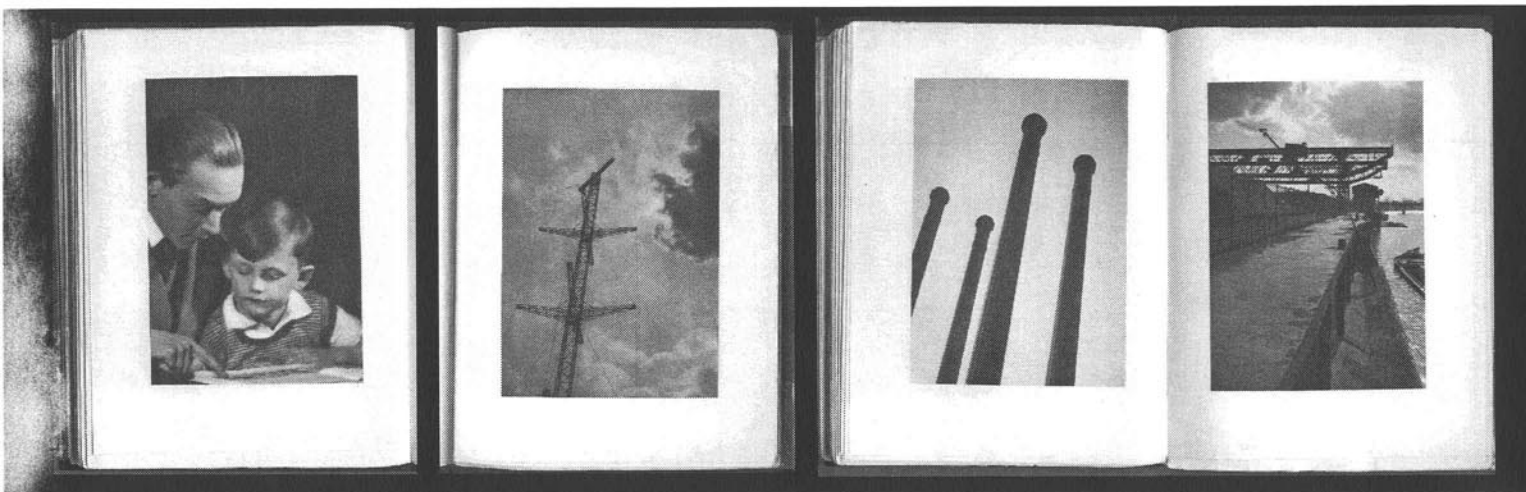
Chaque période de l'histoire voit naître des modes d'expression particuliers, correspondant au caractère politique, aux manières de penser et au goûts de l'époque. Ces modes d'expression se montrent concrètement dans les formes artistiques. La tâche de la sociologie de l'art est de mettre en évidence les liens qui existent entre l'évolution sociale et les modes changeants et divers de la création artistique.⁴⁴

Freund's thesis that photography can be read in light of sociology was essentially a reading that mapped the relationship of aesthetics to politics, one which is not so distant from Benjamin's essay of the same year. Where Freund differs from Benjamin and more closely approximates Theodor Adorno's criticism of the «The Work of Art» essay is telling.⁴⁵ Instead of interpreting photography's relationship to the masses optimistically, Freund tempers the activist potential of the medium. She closes the introduction to the book by restating the fact that photography serves the needs of the socially dominant. It is one of the most efficient means «de détourner les masses des réalités pénibles et de leurs problèmes.»⁴⁶ Recognizing the benefit of an art that hides or is disconnected

from the realities of labor, Freund's essay returns to the problem in Roubier's photographs: the erasure of the traces of work and the world of mechanization in *L'Humaniste*. In this way, her essay is much more attentive to the specific problems developing around middle-of-the-road French photography than Benjamin's.

Bringing photography into the fold of a moderate political and aesthetic *juste milieu* has been seen thus far in light of art photography. Up to this point, it was the avant-garde which needed to be brought into the center, which was done in large part through the efforts of *L'Art vivant* and critics like Florent Fels and Jean Gallotti. The Rectangle further legitimized photography's place among the arts by linking it back to craft. In 1936, to be a professional meant one had to study and practice for a long period of time in order to obtain mastery over the medium and official recognition. By removing art photography from the hands of the masses and relegating it to the few who had the adequate technical skills, the Rectangle accomplished what Duhamel had wanted. According to Duhamel, photography and film «doit se plier à la loi commune de l'art.»⁴⁷

With professional photography limited to a sanctioned group, magazines like *L'Art vivant* had to reconfigure a place for the practice of popular photography, which would at the same time complement the nationalist and humanist focus of groups like the Rectangle. *L'Art vivant*'s 1939 issue dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Daguerreotype accomplished both. In the first page of the multi-article section, the Duc de Gramont clearly situated photography as a French enterprise: «L'histoire de la photographie, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à nos jours, est jalonnée de noms français.»⁴⁸ The nostalgic tone of the



⁴⁴ Gisèle Freund, *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle: Essai de sociologie et d'esthétique*, Paris: La Maison des Amis des livres, 1936, 3.

⁴⁵ For more on the exchange between Benjamin and Adorno in relation to his «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction» essay, see Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, 183-197.

⁴⁶ Freund, *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle*, 7.

⁴⁷ Duhamel, *L'Humaniste*, 154.

⁴⁸ Duc de Gramont, «1839: La Photographie est née,» *L'Art vivant* 15, January-July 1939, 41.

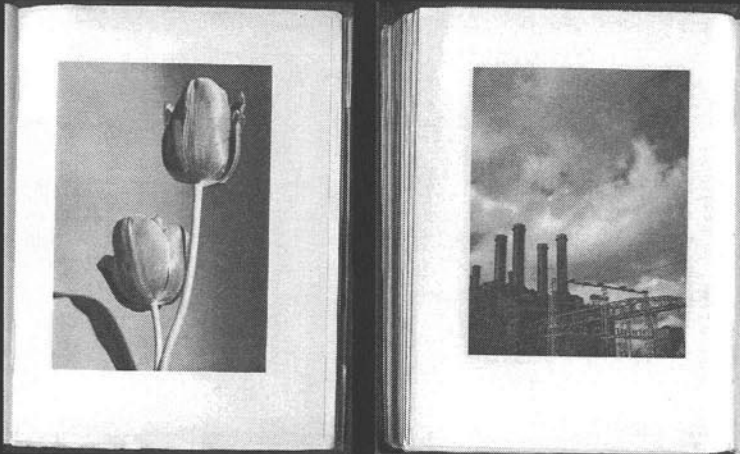
writers was further heightened by the use of nineteenth-century typography and photographs. None of the articles dealt with modern photography, with the exception perhaps of an article devoted to Atget written by Pierre Mac Orlan. The most telling shift from the magazine's previous promotion of modern photography is Jean Gallotti's article, «Souvenirs de Famille: Photographies sans pretension.» Gallotti, who was so adamant in his support of modern photographers in 1929, would now write: «la tres grandes majoritie des photographes n'a-t-elle aucune pretension a faire l'art.»⁴⁹ The terms of the family album are perfectly suited to the promotion of humanist photography. It is without pretensions, moderate, popular, and most importantly, it allows for technology to be domesticated, in all senses of the word. It is a conservative posture that looks back to the nineteenth century for authenticity, thereby resisting the innovations of the twentieth.

In his study on photography as a middle-brow art, Pierre Bourdieu writes, «photography affirms the continuity and integration of the domestic group and reaffirms it by giving it expression.»⁵⁰ The return to the family album as an emblem of French popular photography served precisely the function that Bourdieu attributes to amateur photography. It was the perfect companion to the Rectangle. Both endeavors provided a way of seeing photography as a national activity, which posed little threat to the status-quo. Professional photography was realigned with craft. It was to be practiced only by French nationals who were trained associates of the group. The family photograph could be practiced without infringing on the realm of the professionals. Indeed, as framed within the pages of *L'Art vivant*, there was no place for artistic or political deviancy.⁵¹

The family album was conceived as a national album, which for all purposes could include the work of photographers like Roubier. Indeed, Roubier's photographic activity continued to accelerate in these years. From 1936 to 1939 his photographs were the only illustrations used in about fifteen illustrated books put out as part of the series *Encyclopédie Alpina illustrée*.⁵² Because, as Bourdieu explains, technical bravura and experimentation are shunned within the context of middle-brow practice, Roubier's straight-forward, non pretentious photographs of France assumed a popular appeal. There is little chance for auspicious mechanization to enter these pictures.

The purpose of this paper has not been to recuperate Roubier's photographs or Duhamel's *L'Humaniste et l'automate*. Although I believe Roubier's photographs deserve attention, in particular in relation to both his and Duhamel's larger body of work, I have looked at the book as a way of showing how French photography in the thirties participated in a broader repression of technology and a call for a return to the ideals embodied in Duhamel's humanism. In light of the way in which Roubier appropriated the different styles of photographers from different national and ideological position, in effect disarming them of their disturbing elements, his project continued that of *L'Art vivant*. The idea of the family album which emerged in 1939 was a perfect antidote to photography's position between the humanist and technology.

Jordana Mendelson
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⁴⁹ Jean Gallotti, «Souvenirs de Famille: Photographies sans pretension,» *L'Art vivant* 15, January-July 1939, 53.

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A middle-brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 29.

⁵¹ On art photography as deviant photography, see Bourdieu, *Photography: A middle-brow Art*, 39-45.

⁵² Baqué, *Les Documents de la modernité*, 584.