The Dialectical Object: John Heartfield 1915 – 1933

Diana M. Bush

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ABSTRACT

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In 1933, after the election of the National Socialists in Germany, John Heartfield fled Berlin for Prague, leaving behind the significant intervention in contemporary cultural and social discourses that his photomontages for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* comprised. While this body of work, produced from 1930, has been understood as Heartfield’s master work, it has also often been understood as straightforward “popular front” propaganda and the accomplished embodiment of the “dialectical” method that were significant aspects of the cultural policy of the official left. There have been few attempts to work through the formally innovative aspects of Heartfield’s particular “dialectical” method, and more broadly speaking, little critical consideration of the complex engagement of social realism that characterizes the *A-I Z* photomontages.

Taking as a point of departure Heartfield’s presence in institutional and scholarly discourses, and adopting an approach that is thematic rather than chronologically exhaustive, this dissertation investigates his collaborative engagements of performance, theatrical production, film, and the newly-emergent “photo book” to argue for a more nuanced treatment of the *A-I Z* photomontages than has been the case. Critical writing focused on the decade between Heartfield’s Berlin Dadaist affiliations and his work for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* has been conspicuously absent, and his work with film and theater have not been considered in relation to his
photomontage practice of the later 1920s. Drawing on the theorizations of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze regarding subjectivity and aesthetic engagement, the formation of cultural collectives, and processes of meaning production, this dissertation will argue that Heartfield’s involvement in specifically performative cultural formations is central to understanding the advanced photomontage practice he developed, even as this orientation also rendered his intervention in the modes and institutions of cultural production incomprehensible to the various historical paradigms, left and otherwise, of modern art.

In my conclusion, I draw Heartfield back into the present to consider the import and resonance of his interventions for contemporary interests and practices. Bringing recent theorizations of the public sphere in relationship to investigations of subversive subjectivities and models of meaning production formed around the “event,” my dissertation argues for an expanded notion of aesthetic reception, critical realism, and “political” art.
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... the function of enunciative analysis is not to awaken texts from their present sleep, and, by reciting marks still legible on their surface, to rediscover the flash of their birth; on the contrary, its function is to follow them through their sleep, or rather to take up the related themes of sleep, oblivion, and lost origin, and to discover what mode of existence may characterize statements, independently of their enunciation, in the density of time in which they are preserved, in which they are reactivated, and used, in which they are also — but this was not their original destiny — forgotten, and possibly even destroyed.

Michele Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972

Representation has only a single center, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilizes and moves nothing.

Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

In a discussion of the relationship between social conditions and the reception of aesthetic objects, Dick Higgins associates the subversive force of John Heartfield’s photomontages with his strategic positioning in an “intermedia” realm in terms of material, object, and institution. Higgins observes that art objects often presence themselves as static and limited entities that combine statements of ostentation with purely decorative effects. Truth to media, he argues, indicates the application of deterministic matrices that provide only fixed sets of experiences. Rigorously applied categorical logic generates rules for interacting and understanding and a true dialogue between aesthetic object and encountering subject is thereby disallowed. But, Higgins writes, stillness and
contemplation are meaningless to an era whose lived, social reality is changeable and fluid, and whose world therefore does not correspond with the world within those frames. Conversely, the "intermedium" object refuses to situate itself in any one category of materials, practice of representation, or institutional identification. It retains the capacity for dynamic (and thus meaningful) function that inheres in the procedures of its production, and that refuses to limit the possibilities for the engagement of the object itself.¹

Higgins thus understands medium as a single symptom in a broader system that circumscribes the productive capacities of aesthetic objects. Circumscription results from the capture of an object from the realm of infinite interaction and possibility, and from the working of the object into a kind of secondary representation, a still image, that signifies only within the boundaries of a specific precinct. Final capture and fixing are accomplished through closure in terms of meaning and historical context, and a passive spectator is confronted by the isolated cultural artifact that results. If an object falls between media, between institutions, and between modes of representation, however, a suspension of familiar systems, strictures, and paradigms follows. The occasion for a significant re-thinking is presented.

¹For the characterization of Heartfield as an "intermedia" artist see Dick Higgins, foewsombwhn (New York, Barton, Cologne: something else press, 1969): 17. In the way of a conclusion Higgins asks, "Is it possible to speak of the use of intermedia as a huge and inclusive movement of which Dada, Futurism and Surrealism are early phases preceding the huge ground-swell that is taking place now?" Higgins' interest lies in the particular resonance of a much older medium specificity/intermedia problematic within the histories of modernism. As regards pre-modernist art, this problem may reveal itself given interpretive strategies, actual historical contexts, or a combination of both. Truth to materials as regards a statue produced in classical-era Athens is related to the content we ascribe to the statues ourselves -- originally they were painted, and medium likely played a very different role. Bernini's Ecstasy of St. Theresa (Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome) is a kind of multi-media object. It exploits aspects of painting and sculpture, incorporates the area of the chapel, outside sun, marble, etc., and therefore posits a dynamic, interactive relationship with the viewer. In this case, one might situate these observations in a specific historical context. The counter-reformation church was interested in making a real appeal to the viewer, which demanded an
Higgins realized that the power of Heartfield’s imagery derives from a series of appropriations that allowed him to inhabit the interstitial rather than substantive within the realm of cultural production. In the years just before World War II, Heartfield produced a series of photomontages that attempted to expose the operative mythologies specific to bourgeois, Fascist, and capitalistic cultural formations. The organization of fragments of visual reality in a created context was not a new practice for Heartfield, but the A-I- Z images differ significantly from his earlier productions in several ways. Heartfield’s earliest collage method, which characterizes Sonniges Land and other Grosz/Heartfield collaborations, involved a dismantling of the pictorial surface that provided an analogy to the dismantling of structures of order and certainty in contemporary life (figure 1). In the early-1930s, however, Heartfield moved beyond abstract deconstruction and the limits of two-dimensional space. He began to order photographic and textual fragments that he drew from specifically documentary sources by recourse to perspective and scale, in other words, the coded, pre-iconographic devices that provide a foundational matrix for the reading of an image. In the environment of a projected three-dimensional space, the contours of figures and objects were respected, and these components of pictorial exposition were related to specific sites and episodes by the presence of clearly present horizons. Gesture and scale in turn both related the figures to each other and initiated the play of instances and actions that indicate the operations of a narrative mode. With these appropriated markers of pictorial illusionism as well as the reality effect inherent to the photographic image, Heartfield introduced narrative realism into the high modernist project of innovative procedure, precisely because the narratives that had underwritten its authority had been shaken.
collage. A second aspect of Heartfield’s realism, also a return to older aesthetic practices, is the seeming reliance of these images on iconographic rather than experiential modes of comprehension, on active reading rather than passive visual pleasure. At the same time, his use of the iconographic supposes the paradoxical impossibility of such in the modern world.²

In what follows, I will consider the position Heartfield has occupied in particular attempts to theorize and historicize the conflicted terrain of modern art. The positioning of Heartfield in various critical and historical narratives that have attempted to engage the complex intersection between modernity and aesthetic practice experienced several significant shifts, and it is thus important to set this broad horizon. In a schematic view of the representation of Heartfield in scholarly and exhibitionary contexts, Social Realism and its interests, high modernism and the Cold War, and post-Cold War aesthetic and critical practices provided three very basic contexts. It is for this reason that a central text of the inter-Marxist “expressionism” debate of the 1930’s is the most productive place at which to begin.

The engagement of advanced art with lived conditions is a general interest of this body of writing, and the various viewpoints on the respective merits of realism and abstraction that the debate drew together -- Lukács, Bloch and Brecht on the one hand, and Benjamin and Adorno on the other -- attempted to formulate the terms that would serve cultural production in modernity while also perpetuating Marxist ideals of

²In “The Philosophical Brothel,” Leo Steinberg locates a definitive evidence of the narrative mode in the way in which all included subjects appear to respond to the same signal and are therefore united in the same narrative space. Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon has been disturbing for viewers, Steinberg asserts, precisely because this narrative element is missing, therefore placing the burden for meaning production on the
emancipation. The debate is representative, therefore, of the struggle between various aesthetic practices that generated Heartfield's project. At the same time, Heartfield's strategic use of photomontage implicated him in the debate as an object of criticism as well.³

Perhaps unintentionally, Georg Lukács initiated a canon of cultural practice under Marxism that was to prevail for some time. Arguing against the abstraction of "modernist" art practices, Lukács insisted that an accessible system of cultural production must derive its formal organization from traditional cultural forms while also positing innovative content. He believed, therefore, that if the social and economic structures and habits of the bourgeoisie must be rejected, the noblest aspects of their cultural practices should be retained. It is only an aesthetic implicated in narrative realism, Lukács contended, that could counter capitalism's disjunctive fragmentation of modern life with closure and totality. He dismisses photomontage given its emphasis on innovative form and its discontinuity, therefore, with the classical tradition prerequisite to significantly "popular art." Lukács understands "popular culture" to consist of "high culture" that has attained familiarity, that is to say, cultural structures that have accomplished familiarity over time and that are therefore understood by many. His arguments rest on the affirmative acceptance of traditional cultural forms (easel painting, the nineteenth-century novel) that raised objections, and he thereby extended the boundaries of the debate to encompass questions of autonomy, cultural

distribution, and the relationship between tradition and innovation in cultural reception and practice.\(^4\)

In a fundamental sense, Lukács contended that total reification had reduced cultural objects to mere surfaces, and that a kind of philosophical penetration was required in order to approximate the visual or literary to “real” life. The labor of the true realist, Lukács argued, begins with intellectual activity that, if sufficiently objective in nature, would allow the author or artist to discover the true social relationships that lie buried beneath the veneer of socially realized existence. The realist could then transcend abstraction and give these bits of reality shape, representing them to their original population in a significantly altered state. This two-fold process is mediated through form, Lukács stated, and allows “essence” to glimmer visibly beneath. Logically enough, Lukács thus understood aesthetic object and artist as continuous entities. If the artist understands the correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence, he wrote, instances of created beauty will follow and self-evidence their own relevance and transcendental aesthetic worth.

Lukács condemns Expressionism as a presentation of immediate experience in a literally abstract pictorial language, and he is critical of practices that collapse the subjective images that are created in the mind with objectively existent “things in themselves.” Significantly, Lukács situates himself in an old debate about representation and mimesis by arguing the importance of transcendental essences that guarantee the real existence of subjects and objects, and by extension, the very images that would presence these in a pictorial realm. Lukács implies that the veracity of images is potentially independent of observation and relies on

\(^4\)Peter A. Zusi, “Echoes of the Epochal: Historicism and the Realism Debate,” Comparative...
an encounter with a constant, unmediated substance that has been abstracted from social existence. This interest is evident in his analysis of naturalism, which he distinguishes carefully from true realism. The authentic ideological avant-garde, he writes, which is comprised of realists, depicts

... the vital, but not immediately obvious forces at work in objective reality. They do so with such profundity and truth that the products of their imagination receive confirmation from subsequent events -- not merely in the simple sense in which a successful photograph mirrors the original, but because they express the wealth and diversity of reality, reflecting forces as yet submerged beneath the surface ...⁵

A true avant-gardist must locate and adopt a superior perspective in order to observe and express the greatest truths and ideals specific to the culture of which he or she is a part. In the formal sense, existing apparatuses of production and distribution must not be challenged because these guarantee continuity between depiction, subject, and universal life.

In a very broad sense and paradoxically, Lukács’ system is founded on an esoteric and largely unknowable essence that supplies a kind of enduring humanistic certainty transcending the passage of time or enactment of social class. The particular “realism” that Lukács proposes and Expressionism therefore share a fundamental fascination. The Expressionist interest in the concept of Geist – which Richard Sheppard describes as a “rational, ethical spirit that is viewed either as a purely human faculty or as the transcendentental power behind Creation as a whole” -- perhaps offered an escape from modernity, and a perspective from which humankind

⁵Aesthetics and Politics, page 48. Lukács' theory of naturalism demonstrates that it would be a tragic oversimplification to accuse him of simple contentism. His thesis that the
could rediscover an “Archimedean point” and “re-gain control of an anomic modernity.”

Utopianism and escapism are also implicit in Lukács’ writings, and these are often expressed in analogous ways. Another shared tendency is a drive for closure, which differentiates Heartfield from both trajectories in an absolute sense. Given Lukács’ basic assumptions, it is not surprising that he does not discuss aesthetic distribution or reception. Timeless values and significance are intrinsic to the aesthetic object of true realism, and its existence thus represents a constant across time.

In summary, the relationship that Lukács forges between representation and socially actualized existence is of particular interest as regards Heartfield’s project. In an essay entitled “On Realism in Art” [1921], Roman Jakobson writes that a particular sort of realism may consist in challenging conventions and codes, which tend to cohere into “style,” in order to accomplish the spontaneous moment that is roughly analogous to experience in life. However, Lukács’ definition of realism corresponds more neatly to a very different, nearly opposite practice that Jakobson also describes. Realism as often understood by the theoreticians of art, he explains, is collapsed onto verisimilitude and believed, therefore, to accurately portray life. Although in practice the painted image functions as a kind of ideogram, Jakobson continues, supplying an indication that we must use the conventional language that we have learned in order to “see” or to engage a given painting, realism that is equated with unmediated verisimilitude denies this contiguity relationship with preceding painted

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accumulation of meticulous detail present in naturalism mimics the operation of reification demonstrates his interest in the structures of meaning production as well.  

images and claims instead a relationship of similarity to the world beyond its frame.⁷

Lukács’ convictions and definitions founded the institutional framework that supported Social Realism as an officially sanctioned cultural practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany, and beyond. Much as Heartfield’s photomontage procedure stood in opposition to the ideas Lukács expressed in the later 1930’s, his project would continue to stand at odds with their subsequent expression in the official realm as well. At this historical juncture, the problem of representation, of the definition of a validly realistic, anti-mythifying aesthetic practice, was subordinated to the broader issue of the structures of cultural distribution. In a 1934 conversation with Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht referred to the convictions of Kurella, Gábot, and Lukács:

They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what’s going to come out. And they themselves don’t want to produce. They want to play the apparatchik and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.⁸

Brecht refers here, on the one hand, to the specific productivism of Benjamin’s “The Author as Producer” (among other writings). On the other hand, though, he seems to register an effect of the broader imperatives

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⁷Roman Jakobson, “On Realism in Art,” in eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Language in Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987): 19-27. Of additional and quite particular interest here is Jakobson’s idea that realism is related very closely to metonymy, rather than to similarity, as Lukács implies. Historically, the “metonymic skid” has been curtailed by careful framing. I am interested in the ways in which particular content has coincided with the operation of these devices. They are merely another aspect of the learned “ideogram” that directs reception, and Heartfield moves between these in interesting ways -- again, appropriated and subverted conventions.

⁸Walter Benjamin, “Conversations with Brecht,” in Aesthetics and Politics, 97. In a strange way, Social Realism as an institutionalized cultural practice was rather business as usual. It is merely the contention that a “better” and “improved” cultural apparatus is in place.
that institutionalized cultural practice was imposing from without. One might recall Higgins’ assertion that Heartfield’s photomontages enter into a dialogue with the viewer, and the association that Higgins makes between the operation of transcendental givens and a resulting slippage between representation and lived experience. If the “formalism” and “Americanism” of Heartfield’s narrative realism disqualified his project at the level of representation, as was contended, the signifying economies that his procedures set in motion could not be accommodated in the structures of institutionalized left culture either.⁹

Until the death of Stalin in 1953 and the relative relaxation of official cultural policies, Heartfield was therefore operating at a disadvantage. A final factor in Heartfield’s initial rejection by official left culture and society was his association with Willi Münzenberg, and the treatment of this important relationship in scholarship produced from the later 1950’s represents the first move from historical reality to object of historical discourse. Münzenberg’s Union of Worker Photographers of Germany (VdAFD) had been a source of imagery for Heartfield’s photomontages, and his Neue Deutscher Verlag had published, among other things, the group’s critical journal the *Arbeiterfotograf*, the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, and the text and photograph collaboration by Heartfield and Kurt Tucholsky entitled *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*.¹⁰ Münzenberg had actively resisted incorporation to the official left, and he fell drastically out of favor as a result. Even at a remove, this association continued to compromise Heartfield’s chances for an immediate return to the DDR. Brecht

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⁹It is tempting to locate an analogy between an “intermedium” and allegory as a signification practice. Consider that “uni-medium” could, in many ways, have a close relationship to symbol. Heartfield, however, rather confounds this either/or structure, and presents a third possibility instead.

¹⁰*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1929).
would support Heartfield and argue for his re-instatement in the Party and Akademie, but he did so by reference, ironically, to his achievements as “one of the most important European avant-garde artists.” Brecht did not mention Münzenberg or Heartfield’s ties to this figure.

In 1956, Heartfield returned to the DDR, where his professional history continued to be edited until all officially objectionable associations had been purged. On the one hand, later postwar writing on Heartfield originating in the DDR and related contexts presented him primarily as an anti-capitalist, and secondarily anti-Fascist, realist, with little theorization of the latter term. His project was presented “realistically” and unclouded with interpretation, and the images, captions, and related texts were required to speak for themselves. Logically enough, therefore, in a significant portion of this writing, a documentary interest prevailed. As scholars attempted to draw into a cohesive body the images and contemporary writings whose consideration is indispensable to further work on this under-examined figure, an implied relationship of transparency suggested the possibility of decoding object by simple recourse to text. Accounts preserving the timeliness and documentary value of Heartfield’s imagery include “evidence” in the form of contemporary texts and literal readings, but they lack historical and critical perspective on Heartfield’s narrative realism and they were persistently methodologically vague.

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On the other hand, a second tendency posits Heartfield as the originator of a specifically left avant-garde. After the mid-1950’s, Heartfield was exported by the German Democratic Republic as an exemplary artist, a move that is particularly ironic given his dismissal by the German left in the era immediately after the war. The working of Heartfield into a figure for export was undertaken most notably by his brother, whose 1962 monograph entitled *John Heartfield: Life and Work* includes images that Wieland Herzfelde chose very carefully. In fact, Herzfelde’s presentation of Heartfield’s project is very significant, and it would influence writing and exhibition practice for several decades.¹³

Herzfelde presented the photomontages with unique and updated captions, and these often resonate oddly with the original functioning of the image-text combinations in the context of *A-I -Z* and *V-I*. Paradoxically, the re-captioning attempts to identify an enduring characteristic particular to each image, and to limit the location of this eternal characteristic within the images; without recourse to an “outside.” Consider, for instance, Herzfelde’s re-publishing of Heartfield’s “Meaning of the Hitler salute” (figures 42-45). The text “motto” -- “Millions stand behind me” -- had once stood in the charged air between Adolph Hitler and the Rhineland industrialist and succinctly defined, therefore, the true origin and impetus for the emblematic gesture, its capturing in photographic media, and the equally significant text. Words did not function there to explain the image, nor did the image claim pre-rhetorical authority or attempt to illustrate the text standing adjacent or on the

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previous page. Word and image were instead equally evidential fragments of socially actualized information, they were linked in the process of reading, and both required a move beyond the world of the image, text, and page.

In Herzfelde’s re-working, a different text-image relationship neutralizes the realization of the “motto” and its relationship to the act between the two protagonists. The boundaries of the image-as-object are fixed by the title beneath, and while text and image continue as equivalent entities within the picture, they do so only within the confines of this frame. Moreover, because the phrase “Millions stand behind me” no longer functions in the context of a specific act or relationship, content re-situates itself in the more transcendental realm of theme. The text does not move the viewer of the image outside, but fixes the image inter-pictorially by identifying it as an illustration of events firmly located in the historical past. A second interesting and similar re-working dramatically changes Heartfield’s appropriation of the painting *Krieg* by Franz von Stuck (figures 46). Whereas Heartfield’s original photomontage, published in the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* in 1933, exposed the specificity of von Stuck’s idealized concept within lived politics and existence, Herzfelde moves the image back into universality by first omitting the original text, and then by entitling the image, very simply, “War” (figure 47). Herzfelde’s aim was perhaps to secure Heartfield’s place in a canon of (modernism’s) cultural artifacts, and it may be for this reason that he, like Brecht, avoids a specific discussion of Willi Münzenberg and the social specificity that this would entail.

In a sense, the photomontages presented in this volume and in its translated version, entitled *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, stand closer
to the collages produced by Braque and Picasso in the 1910’s than they do to Heartfield’s project of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Herzfelde’s selective presentation fails, therefore, to present a comprehensive historical account. However, an interest of this monograph is its working of Heartfield and his project into the art historical categories that were required for intelligibility in the Cold War era, non-Communist world. In Western writing and exhibition practice related to John Heartfield, three fundamental strands of aesthetic practice and discourse would prevail: Art history, German and American modernism, and contemporary art. These tendencies are not independent, and very often aspects of all three exist in a single written account.¹⁴

In the first place, art historical inquiry into Heartfield's project has imposed the categorical designations (artist, work, oeuvre) that are familiar in traditional writing, and these have precluded consideration of Heartfield's appropriation and dismantling of aesthetic autonomy, modes of representation, and aesthetic worth. The art historical survey (monographic, thematic) has functioned as an ordering framework, and Heartfield’s critical engagement of the interstitial in terms of material (photography/collage), object (event/finite image), and institution (avant-garde/mass culture) has been neutralized in surveys that submit isolated photomontages and contemporary writing to the functional limits of biography, for instance, or “political art.” In summary, the re-packaging of Heartfield’s project by institutionalized art history and a related exhibition practice has not produced a satisfactory critical account.

Heartfield’s photomontages for A-I Z and the Volks-Illustrierte have been understood, if implicitly, as a body of masterwork, and these were the basis of a retrospective exhibition in 1992. An essay in the related catalog carefully establishes historical context, but written commentary runs parallel to the extensive body of images without a model to create the necessary bridge between. Image and created context are further distanced by the structure of the essay, which moves from subject to subject rather than chronologically -- it is the latter that organizes the photomontages. The body of images moves without interruption and sequentially, and threatens to function as an entity unto itself. Within this body, each image is confined to a two-page unit, and appears to exist simply as an illustration of the explanatory paragraph that stands at its left.

The unexamined and therefore unresolved problem of Heartfield’s dialectical realism, the narrativity of the A-I- Z photomontages, has persisted, continuing to lend a kind of malleability to the images themselves. A significant shift in Heartfield scholarship evidences an important change in the definitions of realism and representation, and relatedly, a shift in the relationship between historical object and its presentation in museum discourse and praxis. As I suggested above, a significant portion of earlier post-War writing on Heartfield attempted to preserve his particular practice of realism by disallowing the interpretation inherent to art historical discourses, which were in turn located in the unchecked development of capitalism and the related cultural practices of the West. After the later 1970’s, several important studies and exhibitions attempted a realistic presentation of Heartfield’s project by internalizing his procedure, in other words, by themselves adopting a

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montage technique. This was not an entirely new direction, likely receiving an important impetus from the account produced by Sergei Tret’iakov in 1936—contemporary with Heartfield himself. Tret’iakov had contended that the project of an “operative artist,” such as Heartfield, could only be accurately presented in scholarship that utilized this methodology as well. This specific kind of faithfulness to historical object was also of interest to Eckhard Siepmann, whose 1977 study entitled Montage: John Heartfield vom Club Dada zur Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung; Dokumenten-Analysen-Berichte juxtaposes images and contemporary texts to essays indebted to structuralist linguistics and narrative theory.¹⁶

Siepmann’s essay, entitled “Structural analysis of the ‘Millions’ montage,” was equally interested in the iconography and content of the images, however, and it is here that the more recent exhibition practices of the larger cultural institutions distinguish themselves. The traveling retrospective exhibition organized by the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin (1991-1994) submitted the diverse body of objects that Heartfield produced to the genre categories, such as Dada photo-collage, journal, book cover, and photomontage, that have dominated subsequent accounts. The exhibition’s catalog draws together essays that discuss, for example, Heartfield’s early training in applied art, his contributions to the Film und Foto exhibition in 1929, and his involvement in exhibitions and publications in the Soviet Union during 1931.¹⁷ The essays abstract and distill specific imagery from the journals and illustrated papers that were their original context, and once re-framed, the images are re-mobilized by captions drawn from

¹⁶Sergei Tretjakov and Solomon Telingater, John Heartfield (Moscow: Ogis, 1936) [Translation by John Hammond]. Siepmann is cited above, n.3.
contemporary writing. In the end, the juxtaposition of these de-contextualized text-bytes to the imagery establishes a kind of subsidiary “montage effect.” In structure, the historical text thereby replicates the very object it would purport to explain.

In Heartfield’s photomontage practice, form and content stand in a symbiotic relationship and it is impossible to emphasize form at the expense of content without dismantling both. Nonetheless, within the created montage structure of the exhibition, attention is moved from the plane of content in a number of ways. The conceptual organization of the catalog is reliant on a biographical metaphor, and in fact, the catalog takes as origin and founding premise several photo-portraits of Heartfield himself. In addition, images where Heartfield’s hand can most obviously be seen are a focus. The first reproduced autograph image is a self-portrait photograph from 1920, and the second a photograph pair with a clearly visible hand script (dating from 1917 or 1918). From the beginning of its historical narrative, the catalog therefore re-presences an artist, whereas a shift from this aesthetic designation to “operative artist,” as was suggested above, may be more relevant to a consideration of Heartfield’s project. The imposition of the designation “artist” forces this body of work into a register that also harbors aesthetic autonomy. The existence and inherent value of an aesthetic object before its historical realization in a concrete subject-object dialectic is grounded in this realm.

In a fundamental sense, traditional tropes of mastery and aesthetic creation instigate a fatal series of metaphysical moments, and these are enacted in the exhibition process. If an interest in subsuming Heartfield to a greater German avant-garde motivated the translation of his project into workable terms, at the same time it is the case that the first
catalog, as most German literature on Heartfield, attempts to address the complex nature of his project in a way that American scholarship has not. A useful comparison may be drawn between the original catalog and the translated [American] version, whose format and conception is reliant on the narratives particular to American museum discourse and exhibitionary practice at that historical moment. This second version of the exhibition’s catalog excludes, for instance, an essay discussing the differences between Kurt Schwitters and Heartfield, and a discussion of Heartfield’s historical position in the German traditions of the apocalyptic and the grotesque. The latter omission is more significant, because the essay’s author conjectures a relationship that would locate Heartfield in a trajectory specific to histories of specifically German modernism and avant-garde art.

The German and American contexts do not operate at odds with one another, however, and in fact may rest on very similar fundamental philosophical and ideological grounds. The reception of Heartfield in post-war America differs fundamentally from the engagement of his project by the American photographers who, interested in social realism in the generic sense, took his project and methods quite seriously in the years before America’s involvement in the war. The specific boundaries between high art and mass culture had not yet precisely been defined, and the conditions for socially responsible, valid representations under advancing capitalism had not been completely set. This broad context, and more importantly its ultimate resolution, are specifically evidenced in the body of writings by Clement Greenberg, whose 1939 conviction that social and historical

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contexts were central to understanding the experience of cultural objects would fall victim to his gradual retreat to the more silent world governed by the "conventions of media," "flatness," and "the delimitation of such."

The relationship between Abstract Expressionism and Cold War cultural and political ideologies has been extensively explored. The optimistic conviction that advanced art, in this case abstraction, would accomplish recognition in the higher regions of an invisible and collective psyche required a shift in the definition of realism and socially relevant art. A move to abstraction was necessary, perhaps, in order to best preserve the functional power of Westkunst, which evidenced in the cultural realm the free thought, speech, and action that representative democracy embodied in opposition to the (perceived) circumscription and control imposed by communist ideologies. Klaus Honnef, among others, locates the operation of Westkunst in both German and American contexts, and while the actualization of this cultural ideology was specific in each culture, in a fundamental sense its interests and values were shared.

Returning to the specifics of Heartfield's project, a necessary re-working of his A-I-Z and V-I images in particular was begun in the first catalog of the retrospective exhibition and completed in the version connected with the Museum of Modern Art. The leveling of Heartfield's project into a two-dimensional representation and its incorporation into existing trajectories did not escape critical notice, however. In 1994, a collection of essays was published in response to the apparent interests and ideological commitments that have directed Heartfield scholarship. The

19 Heartfield had exhibitions at the Photo League and Pat Henry Club in New York (1938). Elizabeth McCausland wrote a review of his exhibition, and this suggests specific interests regarding his project.

objections and comments that the volume poses are not limited to a specific instance in the historical representation of John Heartfield, though, and in fact they are of broad and quite significant import. In the introductory comments, Klaus Honnef and Hans-Jürgen von Osterhausen credit the traveling exhibition for exposing Heartfield's project to a large number of people, and they point out the impact of his diverse practices on generating the strong public responses that were a result. At the same time, they state, John Heartfield stood alone in the context created by museum and art historical discourse. As has often been the case, with the exception of histories of caricature, Heartfield appeared as a kind of foreign body in the histories of the avant-garde and advanced art.21

Honnef developed these observations in the critical analysis that followed. In an essay appropriately entitled “The New Enters the Form of the Old: John Heartfield and the Avant-Garde,” Honnef comments that on the one hand, as socialist ideas were put into practice immediately following World War II, Heartfield lost his standing as a specifically critical artist. On the other hand, Cold War ideological interests and cultural practices excluded (by necessity) the anti-capitalist content of Heartfield’s images, and it was not until his project had been “translated,” quite literally, and re-packaged that the significance of his photomontage procedure could accomplish recognition of any kind.

Heartfield has not been subjected to historical analysis, Honnef states, and he continues to be viewed through the constantly shifting lens of contemporary interests. Broadly speaking, the authors presented in this...

21Eds. Klaus Honnef, Hans-Jürgen von Osterhausen, Michael Krejsa, and Petra Albrecht, John Heartfield, Dokumentation: Reaktionene auf eine ungewöhnliche Ausstellung (Koln: DuMont, 1994). Ironically, Honnef was a participant in the retrospective exhibition as well, and
volume share hostility at the appropriation of Heartfield by western discourses informed by capitalism and modernist interests. Had it not been for the contemporary artists who “meddle in social concerns with increasing influence,” Honnep points out, Heartfield’s project would “perhaps vanish to dust” and, “unfairly done for,” endure permanent storage in the “historical warehouse” that separates unruly objects from those of “art historical worth.”

Critical in particular of American engagements of Heartfield’s project, Honnep points out the important connection between Heartfield’s interest in American mass culture and his appeal for contemporary artists. American artists may see a return to a kind of pre-“culture industry” America, he suggests, and in consuming this myth they construct a “bridge built of air.” The practices of contemporary artists in America, Barbara Kruger, for example, as well as Sherri Levine and Jenny Holzer, have aestheticized the procedures of appropriation, subversion and critique, and Heartfield is only visible in this context as an exemplary practitioner of these neo-avant-garde strategies. At the same time and more importantly, Heartfield’s visibility is reliant on the fact that these strategies themselves have rendered him subsumable to contemporary exhibitionary complexes.22

The observation that prevailing perspectives have produced a series of translations rather than usefully historical accounts is valid. In summary, American scholarship excluded Heartfield’s relationship to German modernism, and this omission allowed an emphasis on his positioning and


\[22 \text{Honnep proposes an engagement of Heartfield’s project that includes both a return to careful documentation and “context,” and a valuation of his standing as a great and accomplished avant-garde artist. This volume does reproduce, among other things, essential documents related to Heartfield’s film work. However, critical models are needed to}\]
relevance within contemporary American art on the one hand, and as a member of the European avant-garde on the other. As exemplary member of the historical avant-garde, Heartfield functioned within a critical narrative related to the American neo-avant-garde. Recent scholarship and smaller exhibitions that examine the iconography and political content of Heartfield's photomontages take subject matter as single focus, and do not consider the conditions and structures of the contemporary viewing context. Finally, contemporary critical pre-occupations do not always produce a helpful re-thinking of Heartfield’s project. In an essay situating Heartfield in opposition to the Degenerate Art exhibition organized by the National Socialists, for example, Neil Levy argues that the “abject” content of Heartfield’s images disqualified him from the exhibition. Levy’s assumption that Heartfield would have been a candidate at all for inclusion in this exhibition draws Heartfield back into “art” -- as its “abject” -- the particular realm that he had attempted to abandon and critique.

interpret the complex functioning of Heartfield’s images, I think, rather than repetitions of documentation and accumulations of evidence.

The powerful “intermedia” tendency that Higgins observed has also become part of recent museum and aesthetic discourse, and as I commented above, the shift from “artist” to “reporter” may be relevant to practices within contemporary art. The relationship of Heartfield’s realism and narration and the existence of these in the space of the museum is an interesting problem and one that I have not yet resolved.

In his essay entitled “The cultural politics of pop,” Andreas Huyssen points out that “political art” was of interest after the student protests in Germany. In connection, see März, Roland, Daumier und Heartfield: politische Satire im Dialog exhibit cat. (Berlin: Staatliche Mus., 1981); John Heartfield: Der Sinn von Genf, Wo das Kapital lebt, Kann der Frieden nicht leben! (Berlin: Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, c. 1981) For the characterization of Heartfield as a “political” artist in an American context, see the following exhibition catalogs: David Evans and Sylvia Gohl, Photomontage: A Political Weapon (London: Gordon Fraser, 1986) and Beth Irwin Lewis, Grosz/Heartfield: The Artist as Social Critic (Minneapolis 1980). For Huyssen’s essay, ed. Paul Taylor, Post-pop Art (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989):45-77. In 2004, the Getty presented “Agitated Images: John Heartfield and German Photomontage, 1920-1938.” Curated by Andrés Mario Zervigon, the symposium convened around the exhibition. The related papers were published much later in the New German Critique 107, volume 36, no. 2 (Summer 2009). Several of the essays are exceptionally interesting and useful.

Neil Levy, “‘Judge for Yourselves!’ -- The Degenerate Art Exhibition as Political Spectacle,” October 85 (Summer 1998):41-64. See also Andrés Mario Zervigon, who introduces Heartfield’s film work along an analysis of his Dadaist affiliations: “A “Political Struwwelpeter”? John Heartfield’s Early Film Animation and the Crisis of Photographic Representation,” New German Critique, 107 (Summer 2009): 5-51.
In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the procedural aspects of Heartfield’s photomontages -- which are opaque to iconographic analyses -- embody his political act, and that this act was only completed in the historically specific realm of cultural distribution that he created. Iconographically focused interpretations, which would seem appropriate given Heartfield’s consistently specific use of vocabularies specific to his contemporary world, are important, but I will look to these to mobilize his project in various registers rather than allow them to provide a frame. I will contend that the significance of Heartfield’s radical gesture of opposition should not be sought merely in thematics, but in the challenge this gesture posed to the structures and operative circumstances of cultural production and distribution themselves.

The procedure most central to Heartfield’s project involved a strategic engagement of a specifically public sphere of cultural distribution. Stated otherwise, the content or subject matter of Heartfield’s photomontages was enabled by both inter- and extra-pictorial form. Individual chapters will examine the development of Heartfield’s project, including his work in the context of Berlin Dada and Piscator’s Political Theater, before his flight from Berlin in 1933. In the course of this investigation, I will develop a theoretical model of Heartfield’s “dialectical realism” with montage and performance practices and develop the complex reading of Heartfield’s A-I-Z photomontages that will enable an expanded notion of “political” art. In my conclusion, I will draw on theorizations of the public sphere and of resistive subjectivity to situate Heartfield, once again, as an object in the present.

As I suggested above, the humanism and utopianism of Lukács’ position in the Expressionism debate position resonates oddly in modernism as a
cultural practice. Fredric Jameson has argued that realism and modernism are equally a-historical, and that if realism is inextricable from the development of commerce and capitalism, which took “desacralized, post-magical, common-sense, everyday reality is its object,” modernism represents a mere re-working of its conventions.\footnote{Fredric Jameson, “Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism” (1975), in The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Volume 2, The Syntax of History (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989):115-132.} Modernism provides an escape from specific realities, even as these realities themselves provide a point of departure. Significantly, Dick Higgins, writing in 1969, was a part of a re-thinking of modernism that has also generated a new interest in John Heartfield. Higgins suggests a relationship between the possibility of powerful signification [“dialogue“] and the occupation of a kind of neither-nor area between media, between signs, and between cultural discourses. Taken together, then, the essays are suggestive that a third position or possibility would establish a very different relationship between representation and social praxis. Heartfield occupies this anti-dichotomous position, and it may be for that reason that a relationship of unease between historical object and art historical methodology persists.
Chapter 1.

Between *Die Sphäre der Poesie* and Media Culture:

Berlin, 1913-1918

The sphere of poetry does not lie outside the world, as the fantastic impossibility of a poet’s mind: it seeks to be the exact opposite, the unvarnished expression of truth, and this is precisely why it must cast off the mendacious veneer of that ostensible reality of the cultural human being. The contrast between this authentic truth of nature and the cultural mendacity that poses as the sole form of reality is similar to that between the eternal core of things, the thing in itself, and the totality of the phenomenal world.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872

In the metaphysical, we have fought hard to obtain a true view. Now we must strive to grow beyond this lifeless site in our worldview. We must tear ourselves from the inherited ideas of this atrocious, pathless, and infinite void of deadness in order to create space for a new picture of the mountaintop, from which our gray cope of heaven will pierce through.

Wieland Herzfeld, “Die Ethik der Geisteskranken,” 1914

In a letter to the writer Else Lasker-Schüler, dated 30 November 1913, Wieland Herzfeld wrote:


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27 *Die Sphäre der Poesie liegt nicht ausserhalb der Welt, als eine phantastische Unmöglichkeit eines Dichterhirns: sie will das gerade Gegenteil sein, der ungeschminkte Ausdruck der Wahrheit und muss eben deshalb den lügenhaften Aufputz jener vermeinten Wirklichkeit des Culturmenschen von sich werfen. Der Contrast dieser eigentlichen Naturwahrheit und der sich als einzige Realität gebärdenden Culturlüge ist ein ähnlicher wie zwischen dem ewigen Kern der Dinge, dem Ding an sich, und der gesammten Erscheinungswelt.*

Ich werde ihn damit überraschen, wenn Du mir antwortest oder wenn Du ihn schon überrascht hast. Helmut ist ja 5 Jahre alter als ich, aber er ist schüchtern, denn seine Jugend war hart und einsam ... Ich weiß, mein Bruder ist ganz, ganz allein in dieser großen Stadt und sehnt sich nach einem Menschen, der ihm nicht fremd ist. Sei Du dieser eine Freund. Ich weiß, mein Bruder liebt Deine Dichtungen mehr als alle anderen und er wird mir nicht böse sein, wenn er erfährt, daß ich Dich um etwas bitte, was er sich selber niemals zu hoffen gewagt hätte. Er wird verlegen sein, aber Briefe sind nicht so plötzlich wie Menschen ... 

I entreat you on behalf of my brother, who could not wish for himself anything more from me ... He knows nothing of my letter ... Helmut is just five years older than I, but he is shyer nonetheless, because his childhood was hard and solitary ... I know that my brother is completely alone in the large city and that he yearns for a person who is not foreign to him. Would that you were this friend. I know that my brother esteems your poetry more than that of any other poet, and he would not be angry if he knew that I had written to ask you something for which he himself would never have risked asking.

Until 1912, John Heartfield, then still known as Helmut Herzfeld, had studied in Munich at the Königliche-Bayerische Kunstgewerbeschule with Maximilain Dasio, Julius Dietz, and Robert Engels. Wieland Herzfelde would later recall that his brother had been particularly influenced by the poster work of Ludwig Hohlwein, an architect who embraced poster design as his favored media after 1906, and whose most important creative phase is usually situated between 1912 and 1925. It is perhaps significant that at the moment around and just before 1906, design reform in Germany was not entirely focused on socialist ideals, as had been the case elsewhere. In Germany, design workshops focused on the integration of industrial production and commercial interests to aesthetic considerations. In the proto-collage technique he developed, Hohlwein was indebted to the British design firm known as the Beggarstaff Brothers, who, against the prevailing Art Nouveau tendencies in design, had adopted a collage technique that left

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Correspondence reprinted in Wieland Herzfelde, John Heartfield: Leben und Werk. Dargestellt von seinem Bruder (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1962): 325. While the biographical details are true enough, it is interesting that Herzfelde emphasizes
the viewer to decipher the relationship between figure and ground and to
determine the precise operations of contour and mass in the pictorial field
(figure 2). These were novel formal strategies at the time, and with them,
a certain dynamism and contingency of the formerly decorative or simply
narrative image were obtained.³⁰

After working as a designer at the paper plant of the Bauer brothers
in Mannheim during 1912, Helmut Herzfeld had moved to Berlin to study with
Ernst Neumann at the Kunst- und Handwerkschule in Charlottenburg.³¹ Several
weeks later, Wieland Herzfeld wrote Lasker-Schüler again, perhaps in
response to a correspondence he had received:

… Wie mein Bruder aussieht? … Sei bitte damit zufrieden, wenn ich
ihn Dir schildere, wie ihn auch ein Fotograf oder Zeichner für die
Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung sieht. Du hast ihn ganz sicher während
der letzten 8 Wochen gesehen in den Ausstellungsräumen des “Sturm”
und vielleicht auch in den Vortragsabenden der “Aktionen.” Ich will mir
Mühe geben, das folgende Bild von brüderlichen Beobachtungen
unbeeinflußt zu lassen.

… Er hat vielleicht nur einen durchschnittsmäßig kritisches Verstand,
aber eine kritisches Gefühl von solcher Stärke und Sicherheit,
Eindeutigkeit und Empfindsamkeit, daß es sich in jeder Bewegung,
jedem Blick, jeder Stellung widerspiegelt. Ich glaube, die Bewegungen
der Hände meines Bruders, wenn er in Betrachtung versunken ist, wenn
er einen Gedanken faßt oder gar, wenn er jemandem etwas zu erklären
versucht, würden wundervolle Futuristenbilder schaffen, wenn es
möglich wäre, diese Bewegungen zu übertragen, etwa wie Temperatur-
und Luftdrucksschwankungen. Diese Hände sind … abgehärtet … feinnervig
… die Hände eines Zeichners, eines Schwarz-Weiß-Zeichners … sehr
klein, beinahe linkisch gefühlvoll.

… What my brother looks like? … Please be content when I give an
account of him to you as though he might appear in a photograph in
the Berliner-Illustrierte Zeitung. You have surely seen him during

³⁰ See Jeremy Aynsley, Graphic design in Germany, 1890-1945 London: Thames and Hudson,
Ltd., 2000): 26; and ed. Kathryn Bloom Hiesinger, Art Nouveau in Munich, Masters of
Hohlwein did not formally accept students and was therefore not Heartfield’s teacher.
³¹ In 1912, Heartfield would design what was perhaps his first book cover, for a volume of
his father’s poems.
the past eight weeks in the exhibition room of Der Sturm and perhaps also at the lectures and events of the Aktione. I will take pains to let the following picture be uninfluenced by brotherly observations.

... He has perhaps only an average critical intelligence, but a critical instinct of such strength and certainty ... that it reveals itself in every glance, every action. I believe the hands of my brother, when he is sunk in thought, when he is fixed on an idea, when someone or something has given him something to think through, would make a wonderful Futurist picture, if it would be possible to portray this activity ... These hands are ... careworn, sensitive, the hands of a designer, a black and white designer.

... Worthy of mention is perhaps, that he not at all conveys the customary impression of an artist ...  

Significantly, in his attempt to presence his brother, Herzfeld juxtaposes two very powerful, if rather opposed, modes of cultural production. The Berliner-Illustrierte Zeitung, founded in 1891 and published by the Ullstein Verlag, was a particular manifestation in the growing ubiquity of photographically illustrated weeklies. The B-I Z was increasingly significant in (re) presenting the turn-of-the-century urban subject of bourgeois culture to itself, and this project would continue far into the twentieth century. While including text, the Berliner-Illustrierte Zeitung relied heavily on the evidential quality of the photographic image, and on seamless transitions between these images, to create coherent and affirming presentations. Herzfeld’s use of this motif in his letter to a significant member of the avant-garde group around Café des Westens, where Lasker-Schüler was well known as the organizer of literary events (Stammtisch), implies a certain irony. Herzfeld suggests that the hegemonic function of B-I Z, document of bourgeois identity, renders any sort of realization of actual contemporary identity impossible. At the same time, without recourse to this increasingly powerful archive of contemporary subjectivity a clear “picture” of his brother would be impossible.
Yet, Herzfeld continues, the hands of his brother, “when he is fixed on an idea, when someone or something has given him something to think through, would make a wonderful Futurist picture.” Here, Herzfeld situates his discussion in a contemporary debate about the merits of the recently exhibited Futurist program as compared with the indigenous (German) Expressionist projects that had set this particular horizon. Wassily Kandinsky perhaps best set forth the terms in “Über die Formfrage” (“On the Question of Form”), where he contrasts “the soulless, materialistic life of the nineteenth century” and “the spiritual life and art of the twentieth century.”

In 1912, an exhibition of Italian Futurist work had been held in the galleries of Der Sturm, and related to this occasion, Alfred Döblin published a review essay entitled “Die Bilder der Futuristen.” Döblin’s first evaluation of Italian Futurism distances itself from bourgeois “matter-of-fact-ness,” perhaps Kandinsky’s “soulless” materiality, in favor of the transcendence and subjectivity that, he believed, would retrieve “art” from the vicissitudes of contemporary post-industrial life to mobilize something more significant around the cause of the human condition. At this early moment, Döblin found that possibility in Futurism. He wrote enthusiastically:

Futurism is a great step forward. It represents an act of emancipation. It is not so much a direction as a movement. Or more accurately: it is the artist’s movement forwards. It is not a matter of the individual works. It is deplorable that the land of "inwardness" has to receive its inspiration to be courageous from abroad. It is from the land of colours and beautiful people that the message comes to us that “the soul is everything.” [...] I am no

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friend of big words and inflated sentiments. But I support Futurism wholeheartedly and unequivocally give it my seal of approval.\textsuperscript{34}

For Döblin, the significance of Futurism was not its dialectical integration of advanced technology into a streamlined aesthetics of form, but its anti-bourgeois and expressive subjectivism, its potential for transcendence beyond appearance ("not a matter of the individual works"), and the possibilities he observed for meaningful collective reception. Döblin positions himself against contemporary critics that understood Futurism as the latest moment in Impressionist aesthetics, and he praises Futurism for its expressive and dynamic self-situation in the aesthetic field.

Acceptance of Italian Futurism was not unequivocal at this early moment. While two issues would be devoted to Futurist objects and literary creations (1916), \textit{Die Aktion} at first rejected many of the ideas of the earlier Futurist manifestos, in part given the very set of ideas that Döblin enthusiastically endorsed, and in part given an observed tendency to, in the words of Arthur Segal, "retreat back into the concrete and the representational."\textsuperscript{35} In the fall of 1912 and early in 1913, Herwarth Walden published Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" and "Supplement to the Technical Manifesto," and critical reception would experience a significant shift. In his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," Marinetti provided a series of stylistic rules for the production of properly Futurist literature, arguing for the concrete and material at the expense of transcendence and expression. The modern writer should abandon syntax and infinitive verb forms, Marinetti wrote, because

these limit the potential for flux and dynamism, thereby creating nothing but an aesthetically self-referential text. Objecting to Marinetti’s arguments, his collapse of reality onto series of material objects, Döblin would raise several important criticisms, which he would develop in correspondences to Marinetti without, however, receiving a response.

Herzfeld implies a sophisticated understanding of these debates and he implies a position within. Herzfeld’s evocation of a Futurist-informed mode of subjectivity suggests that he understood the potential power of their deconstructions of classically conceived, and therefore metaphysically bound, modes of aesthetic production, and he suggests a contrast of this possibility with the collective experience of identity formation specific to B-I Z. Even at this early moment, the dismantling of stifling traditional culture was also of interest to Herzfeld and Heartfield, and Herzfeld’s mention of Futurism is therefore not surprising in this context. At the same time, a tension was building between the collective, institutionalized subject, the product of Bildung who had been established and was maintained by the repetition of norms and imperatives, and the individual subject, whose “inwardness” was asserted in the context of Expressionism as a moral and epistemological authority. The latter was proving insufficient for the task of creating a new social collective.

As Michael Töteberg has pointed out, the interest of Herzfeld’s correspondence lies less in their biographical import than in the testimony they imply for Heartfield’s early interest in Expressionism and his complex relationship with the writers and painters associated with Expressionism in Berlin in the years just after 1910. Through a close reading of several

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35White, op. cit.
primary source documents important to understanding Heartfield’s interests during this time period, and through a close reading of the literary and visual productions with which he and his brother associated themselves at this early moment, this chapter will establish the complexity of their involvement with various avant-garde movements of the 1910s and situate the founding of the Malik Verlag, Wieland Herzfeld’s revolutionary publishing venture, in the midst of these involvements.

Herzfeld seeks for his brother camaraderie in the Expressionist circle even as he suggests that Heartfield’s presence there was already a given; indeed, he suggests that Lasker-Schüler may have already met Heartfield at one of the events connected with this group. Heartfield’s involvement with Expressionism has not been the subject of focused scholarly consideration, an omission perhaps the result of Heartfield’s own vehement and public rejection of painting and sculpture, and specifically German Expressionist aesthetic production, by 1916.

However, an investigation of these early associations is interesting for their value in understanding those aspects of the cultural production and reception that the two brothers, at that point still known as Helmut and Wieland Herzfeld, would reject, and against which they would situate themselves. The projects taking shape around Expressionist culture of a particular sort set the parameters for the deterritorialization of the subject of aesthetic and political experiences that would prove

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37 Lasker-Schüler was married to Herwarth Walden, founder and leader of the periodical and publishing house Der Sturm, and was an accomplished author in her own rights. In 1915 Lasker-Schüler would write a poem, “Es war eine Ebbe in meinem Blut,” dedicated to the “two dear brothers, Helmut and Wieland Herzfelde.” Peter Chametzky, Objects as History in Twentieth-Century German Art: Beckmann to Beuys (University of California Press, 2010): 54.
foundational in the founding of the Malik-Verlag publishing house, and they are essential to understanding many aspects of Heartfield’s later work.38

By **Aktione**, Herzfeld perhaps refers to the evenings of readings and performances that originated in those organized by Franz Pfemfert and Kurt Hiller under the auspices “neo-dramatic club,” or simply Der Neue Club. While the last performances of Der Neue Club were held in 1912, the group around Die Aktion participated in similar gatherings, which would feature literary readings and discussions that, if cast around a general dismantling of the foundations of Wilhelmine and bourgeois culture rather than a sort of *reportage*-informed consideration of concrete political realities, did provide a venue for a dynamic and interactive performance, rather than a stultifying framing, of literary texts and political essays.

Herzfeld had a first-hand knowledge of the radical presses that featured critical reviews of the German avant-garde, and he considered with interest the critical writing and graphic works produced by their various members and supporters.

**Die Aktion** published Expressionist texts and objects (including Henri Matisse) and, after 1916, Italian Futurist graphic work and critical writings, fiction, and poetry by, for instance, Carl Einstein, Hugo Ball, Gottfried Benn, Egon Schiele, and Richard Huelsenbeck. It is a commonplace of scholarship that **Die Aktion** might best be understood in several stages of development and here, the years just following the journal’s founding and into period of the war are of the greatest interest. After working at

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38 The writings of the Der Neue Club are published in ed. Richard Sheppard, *Die Schriften des Neuen Clubs, 1908-1914*, 2 volumes (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1980). Hiller and Erwin Loewenson, who were fellow students at Kaiser Wilhelm University in Berlin, had founded Der Neue Club in 1909 in response to their own intellectual dissatisfaction with Die Freie Wissenschaftliche Vereinigung. In March 1909, Hiller was president and among the founding members were Loewenson, Jakob van Hoddie, and Erich Unger. By 1910, Der Neue Club was holding an evening of lectures and readings under the designation Neopathetisches Cabaret. Admission was by tickets that Karl Schmidt-Rottluff created. Else Lasker-Schüler
Der Kampf, Das Bluebuch, and Demokrat, Franz Pfemfert had founded the periodical Die Aktion, with Georg Zepler, in 1911. The first issue is dated February 2, 1911, and the subtitle is suggestive of the ultimate goals of the publication: “[A] Magazine for Liberal Politics and Literature.” In 1912, the subtitle would be expanded to read: “[A] Magazine for Liberal Politics, Literature, and Art.” The liberal intention of Die Aktion, which would also be embraced by Herzfeld for Neue Jugend, is indicated in its all-inclusive, anti-censorship format.39

In this context, “liberal” indicated a committed anti-censorship stance that would allow a variety of informed, anti-bourgeois, progressive perspectives. This would change after the start of the war, when Pfemfert would refuse to publish any author who had not absolutely opposed the war from the start, but before this, Die Aktion would publish any viewpoint as long as it stood itself in opposition to the existent and dominant culture. Urban life is a common theme, as is the open satirization and disparagement of those cultural values that would have been understood as bourgeois as well as all cultural forms standing in close connection.40 There is often a suggestion of concern for political and social reform, and certainly this was a broad goal, but even the critical essays are universal and rather non-partisan in character. Fiction writers and poets presented types rather than particular, “real,” situations and characters, and their agents engaged (and enacted) existentially-interested dramas that examined the

39 See the interesting discussion by Dagmar Barnouw. Barnouw begins his essay with a mention of the importance of Die Aktion, in its earlier years, for Erwin Piscator, a very important figure for Heartfield. This relationship will be a central topic in the following chapter. Dagmar Barnouw, “Literary Politics in World War I: Die Aktion and the problem of the Intellectual Revolutionary,” The German Quarterly, vol. 52, no. 2 (March 1979): pp. 227-247.

bases for human existence in the modern world in order to expose the paradoxical position of the individual in relationship to collectively understood, socially-defined, life. “Collisions” were recurrent, with increasing urgency, between the traditional institutions of both “official” and “popular” culture and government, and the increasingly complex and alienated subject of modern life. That said, however, the ambitions of the journal should not be understood as supplying an antidote to lived existence in the (re) presentation of auratic objects and texts. In the first issue of Die Aktion, Pfemfert set forth its program:

Die Aktion speaks up for the ideas of the broad German left-wing ideology, without attaching itself to any particular political party. Die Aktion wants to encourage the significant thoughts of an ‘organization of the intelligencia,’ and to help recapture the importance of the long frowned-upon words Kulturkampf (and, admittedly, not only in the clerical-political sense). In the areas of art and literature, Die Aktion is looking to create a counterbalance between the sorry habits of the pseudo-liberal press, which simply value new movements from a business standpoint and attempt to hush them up.\footnote{This oft-quoted and discussed passage is reproduced in Franz Pfemfert, I set this magazine against these times, ed. by Wolfgang Haug, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 195, pg. 21. Seth Taylor offers a slightly different translation in his important study. Taylor implies the need for a more nuanced study of Expressionism and its aims than has been the case, and my own discussion in the following pages is quite indebted to him. Seth Taylor, Left-}
of consumer culture, in other words, a visible and knowing subject only from “a business standpoint,” an entity reduced to the means-end rationality of industrialization and unexamined, if advancing, technology. At this early moment in the journal’s history, Die Aktion took as focus the broad, metaphysical underpinnings of culture rather than the particular manifestations of oppression in every day life, and its pages frequently included examples (often woodcuts) of the model of culture that had been developed in the context of Die Brücke, known from its founding in Dresden and rejected before the first years of the war, that is to say, just several years after their 1911 arrival in Berlin.

As is well known, the name Die Brücke was suggested by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and adapted to the uses of the group. The passage from Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche’s 1883-85 text, states: “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: What can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under. I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over…” The Die Brücke group, founded in 1905 by Schmidt-Rottluff and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, and Erich Heckel (Nolde and Bleyl would abandon the group in 1907-1908), saw the importance of a complete break with the modern past for the individual subject, and they attempted the “revaluation of all values” that Nietzsche had called for in his preface to the Twilight of the Idols, published in 1889. Nietzsche’s words resonated with its members, educated in Jugendstil architecture at the Königliche Technische Hochschul, Dresden, and observant of the need for the re-foundation of culture, through a re-working of the contemporary subject, that would provide the basis for concrete social and political change. Thus, their 1906 statement, likely

written by Kirchner and presented in woodcut form on the occasion of their first exhibition: "With faith in evolution, in a new generation of creators and appreciators, we call together all youth. And as youths, who embody the future, we want to free our lives and limbs from the long-established older powers. Anyone who renders his creative drive directly and genuinely is one of us."  

In order to circumvent the moribund modes of reception that were a given in contemporary life, Die Brücke looked back to older, pre-modern models of cultural production and cultural distribution. Members of the group could be art-producing or passive members, and the passive members supported the activities of the art-producing members through financial donations, for which they were compensated by the portfolios of graphic work, most often and significantly woodcuts, that the group produced. The woodcut medium was chosen deliberately for its importance in the history of German visual culture; Kirchner would later comment that his encounters with the work of Albrecht Dürer were among the important in his artistic career. The woodcut medium was suited to the group’s interests in direct expression, their rejection of artistic convention and academic mastery, and their refusal, in the original group, of traditional modes of cultural reception.  

The original mission of Die Brücke would be summarized by Paul Fechter in the first study of the movement, entitled Der Expressionismus and published in 1914. In his analysis, Fechter discusses the nationalism that would be a fatal component for many of the early supporters of

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43 A recent and interesting exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art juxtaposed woodcut prints depicting the bohemian activities of the artists (and their companions) to
Expressionism, understood against French painting to be a specifically German cultural formation:

The Gothic has become fashionable again for good reasons, after it was first recognized, obscured within Jugendstil’s decorative experimentations, at the close of the nineteenth century. Expressionism, in all its different guises, is basically only the liberation of inherent spiritual energies of the soul from the bondage of narrow-minded, crude intellectualism. This intellectualism, too weak to rise to a genuine spiritualization, dragged its victims into literary or academic pursuits and paralyzed the truly productive powers ... 

For some members of the generation of writers and artists after 1905, the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche embodied a set of ideas significant, they thought, in accomplishing a “liberation of inherent spiritual energies of the soul from the bondage of narrow-minded, crude intellectualism” that was the cultural context upheld in bourgeois dilettantism and imposed on the individual through education and other socialization processes. His Birth of Tragedy, published in 1872 and then again in 1886, would prove especially influential for several reasons. The Birth of Tragedy contained, relatively speaking, Nietzsche’s most important discussion of aesthetics, what one recent author has termed “a paradigmatic modernist transvaluation of Classical German aesthetic theory.” Nietzsche’s distinction between the Apollonian mode, a kind of “semblance of semblance,” second-order

Kirchner’s Street: Dresden, with the result that the revolutionary and critical intention of the painting retrieved it from the realm of mere “Expressionist masterpiece.”

44 Ed. Washton Long, 84.

45 See Ed. Neil H. Donahue, A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism (Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture) (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2005); pp. 38ff. This very important study draws a more specific relationship between Nietzsche and Expressionism, specifically Die Brücke, than has been the case. Donahue comments that while mentions of the influence of certain key ideas in Nietzsche are often made in discussions of Expressionism and the literary and artistic productions surrounding it, focused examinations that attempt to work through the reception and impact of Nietzsche ideas during this time period, including a systematic working-through of Nietzsche’s ideas themselves, remain limited. It is interesting that the time period, our own, that finds Heartfield’s work of increasing interest has also taken Nietzsche as a philosopher of great interest. In what follows, my discussion often borrows from Donahue’s apt and succinct wordings.
presentations that stand in a double remove from life, and the Dionysian mode, “immediate mimesis” that stands at just one remove, provided the basis for a systematic study of aesthetics, as well as a kind of prescriptive plan, perhaps an antidote, for the failures and cultural consolidations of late nineteenth-century and Wilhelmine culture. Nietzsche understood these to be the failures of what he termed the Bildungspilister. Most significantly, Nietzsche’s insistence of the importance of art for life suggested the possibility of subjective redemption through aesthetic practice, which would then undermine, if not dismantle, the hegemonic authorities of science, systematic reason, and the resulting structures of conceptual thought.

While the paintings, sculptures, and literature of this moment of expressionism do not “illustrate” Nietzsche’s ideas, they often take them as a kind of founding condition, which demonstrates their close involvement with his texts. In his 1913 painting entitled Street: Berlin, for example, Kirchner locates the operation of “narrow-minded, crude intellectualism” in the public sphere, in this case a city street, and he implies a commentary on the social impact of the conceptual structures of culture, which are materialized in the street architecture and the structures of the store windows, on modern, lived existence (figure 3). As is the case in his earlier Street: Dresden (1907/1908) (figure 4), Kirchner’s figures are indeed “paralyzed,” and they are paralyzed in the public spaces that

46Between 1913 and 1915, the period under consideration, Kirchner created a number of street scenes in Berlin. Die Brücke artists would become accepted figures, an assimilated set of styles, in the Weimar Republic’s art world, representing Germany at international art exhibitions and embraced as a particularly “German” style. After 1933, the Third Reich identified Die Brücke with the detested Weimar Republic, and it was condemned as “degenerate,” the unfortunate relic of a chaotic and troubled time. In the post-war years, the art of Die Brücke was appropriated as iconic of a democratic Germany, an ideal existing before the World Wars and horrors of the Holocaust, and it was resurrected. Perhaps significantly, the few members of the group who survived the world wars and their aftermath chose to live in West Germany.
tradition had promised would create the surety and certainty of shared experiences, assumed histories, and stable identities. In both paintings, disjunctive color and abrupt formal transitions interrupt, quite literally, any sense of coherence or continuity between human subject and social container. Kirchner locates his urban subjects in physically inhospitable, even threatening cityscapes that are metaphorical of actual disconnections between subject and public sphere, and between the subject of the urban streets and the self.

Differing from the earlier work, however, the inhabitants of Street: Berlin are carefully located in particular social classes, immediately identifiable as prostitutes (plumed hats and fur collars) on the one hand, and upper-bourgeois clients (black suit and top hat) on the other. Pairs or small groups of figures are isolated, rather than united, by the architecture of the very streets and store windows themselves. At the top left, for example, the sidewalk appears to rise, containing a small group of men and compelling them to proceed on their pre-ordained walk toward the locus of commerce established by the prostitutes on one side, and the seductive shop window on the other.

Die Aktion was a frequent publisher of Nietzsche’s texts, an interest that probably originated with the founding members of the Neuer Club and Neopathetisches Cabaret, founded in March 1909: Kurt Hiller, Erwin Loewenson, and Jakob van Hoddis. In his speech on the opening evening of the cabaret, Hiller drew on Nietzsche’s concept of pathos (“increased psychic temperature” and “universal merriment”) to develop a “new pathos,” drawn from Nietzsche’s Ecce Homo: “I estimate the value of men, of the races, according to the necessity by which they cannot conceive of the god
apart from the satyr."47 While in favor of dispensing with "mathematized old-morality," as Nietzsche phrased it, Hiller was opposed to the complete abandonment of the Apollonian dimension in favor of what one recent author has aptly termed "undifferentiated anticerebralism." Instead, Hiller counseled, "Let mind become master." Hiller’s "New Man" was not subsumed by vitalism, as was the case for others in the group. Hiller understood Nietzschean vitalism as a powerful deconstructive tool, but he advocated the use of reason, carefully chosen, alongside this: “… action guided by reason in the name of love.”48

Wieland and Helmut Herzfeld were both witness to and active participants in these debates and discussions that were forming around the Kulturkampf and the possibility of a “New Man.”49 In April 1914, Die Aktion published Herzfeld’s essay entitled “Die Ethik der Geisteskranken” (“The Ethic of the Mentally Ill”), and this essay provides a succinct and lucid record of the careful thinking-through to which Herzfeld subjected the questions of his day. Herzfeld’s essay takes a particular and strong position in the Kulturkampf that Pfemfert mentioned in his statement for Die Aktion, and the answers Herzfeld sought would be significant in the projects he would initiate, with his brother Helmut Herzfeld, in the years immediately following.

More specifically, and as its title states, Herzfeld’s subject was the ethic of the insane, or otherwise stated, the set of values, rules, and standards that direct the conduct of the mentally ill individual. Herzfeld

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48 For “undifferentiated anticerebralism” and the quotes of Hiller’s speech, see Aschheim, 70.
49 Meant here in a more generic sense, I discuss Huelsenbeck’s important contribution, which introduced an ethical and social dimension, in the chapter that follows. Huelsenbeck’s "Der Neue Mensch" would be published by the Malik Verlag.
discusses the expression of this ethical system in the particular
vocabulary and syntax of an individual that he understood to exist outside
the bounds of specifically normative cultural identification. For Herzfeld,
these rules and values are not random, as one might have supposed, but
cohere into a system. Our judgment that their thoughts and actions are
incomprehensible is no more than the result of the inevitable clash of very
different systems on the one hand, and incompatible realms of being on the
other: Our error lies in a failure to conceive of a “god” who is also a
“satyr.” Herzfeld describes the circumstances for this clash, always a
discordant interaction between the imperatives of “rational” (bourgeois)
society and the mentally ill individual, and he suggests that this crisis
is one of language, of a failure to signify, given very different
conceptual structurings of the mind and the resulting projections of vastly
different worlds. Herzfeld wrote:

Geisteskrank nennen wir Menschen, die uns nicht verstehen oder die
wir nicht verstehen. Nur von letzteren sei die Rede.

Gemeinheim macht man diese Unterscheidung nicht. Die Kranken einer
Irrenanstalt sind verrückt; das genügt. Wenn man von Geisteskranken
spricht, stellt man sich Größenwahnsinnige, Tobsüchtige, religiös
Irrsinnige usw. vor.

We call people insane who do not understand us, or whom we do not
understand. Let us speak, in what follows, only of the latter.

Generally speaking, we do not differentiate between the two. The sick
of the lunatic asylum, the [population] of the mad house, are crazy
(verrückt); that suffices. When one speaks of the insane, one
positions oneself steadfastly, sensible and judicious, against raving
madness, religious lunacy, and so on ...

50Wieland Herzfelde, “The Ethic of the Insane,” Die Aktion, April 1914: 298-302; 298. All
translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I have placed in brackets those words that
I added given my own understanding of given passages.
Herzfeld makes an important distinction between the *Geisteskranken*, a word best translated as systematically “mentally ill,” the perhaps unwitting participants in an alternatively totalizing system, those suffering from what would later be categorized as specifically psychotic disorders (Herzfeld mentions megalomania and religious mania as his own examples), and those individuals that might be identified as *verrückt*, which can imply momentary madness, a moment of mental anguish, or a single anti-social act. In modern life both are residents of the *Irrenanstalt*, the “mental institution,” that often appears in colloquial terms as the “loony bin,” “nut house,” or “cuckoo’s nest,” places where bedlam reigns triumphant and little order is retained, whether in the sense of “natural” order, a result of the operation of instinct, or in the sense of man-made order, where manufactured laws and social norms are obeyed by consensus, compulsion, or a combination.

Herzfeld intends to elevate the specific perceptual and cognitive capabilities of the distinct people he terms *Geisteskranken*, distinguishing them from the simply *verrückt*:

Man bedauert diese armen Unglücklichen, lacht sie aus und graut sich vor ihrem Schicksal.


One pities these poor unfortunates, [perhaps] laughs at them, and feels horror and aversion at their fate and lot in life.

This conventional understanding is unfounded. The *Geisteskranke* is [different], surely capable of greater happiness than we: He is more uninhibited, [therefore] more human, than we. He deals with intuition (*Gefühl*) and instinct, not with logic. His conduct is effective and
direct. I call [this] madness "Religion of the Will": Only the will can educate (erziehen) intuition to power.

In the last sentence of the passage above, Herzfeld adopts a critical stance toward institutions of socialization, in this case education, and he implies that education, in its attempt to develop (erziehen) the individual, can and often does corrupt. Moreover, in identifying the Geisteskranken, s/he whom “we cannot understand,” as simply verrückt, we identify ourselves as complicit members of a system, long defunct, that does not draw on the truth of careful discrimination, but on the facile rejection of those things that, in the system, fail to cohere into something resembling “sense.” That “sense” is the product of culture rather than a transcendental given is a central argument of this essay.

Herzfeld understands the Geisteskranken, perhaps given this existence outside the culturally established bounds of intelligibility, to have particular abilities:

Der Geisteskranker ist künstlerisch begabt. Seine Arbeiten weisen einen mehr oder minder ungeklärten, doch ehrlichen Sinn für das Schöne und Bezeichnende auf. Da aber sein Empfinden vom unsrigen abweicht, muten uns die Formen, Farben und Verhältnisse seiner Arbeiten meist fremdartig, bizarr und grotesk an: wahnsinnig.

… Er nimmt nur in sich auf, was mit seinen seelischen Wallungen in Einklang steht …

The Geisteskranken has a natural gift for the arts and aesthetic understanding. His works [will always] refer to a more or less unelucidated but nevertheless frank sense for beauty, and for significance [itself]. There, however, his senses deviate from ours; the forms, colors, and formal organization of his work will strike us as quite unfamiliar, and very heterogeneous [fremdartig] in character: bizarre and grotesque; insane.

… and s/he assimilates only that which stands in unison, in accord, with his/her [own] mental, psychical, and emotional ebullition …
The *Geisteskranke*, Herzfeld continues, has a similarly singular engagement of language, the use of which creates a site for cultural integration and adherence (or more importantly, a failure to adhere) to a social contract:

Seine Sprache behält er bei: sie ist seelischer Ausdruck, doch Rechtschreibung, Zeichensetzung, auch Wörter, Redewendungen, die nicht in seinem Empfinden wurzeln, vermeidet er; nicht aus Vergeßlichkeit, sondern aus Unwillen. Der Irre ist nicht vergeßlich. Was sich in seine Seele einmal eingeprägt, bleibt in seiner Erinnerung.

The *Geisteskranke* adheres to his/her style vernacular: They are spiritual expressions, therefore s/he escapes spelling, punctuation, and therefore turns of speech, which are not grounded in that perceiving or sensation - not from forgetfulness but from displeasure; animosity. The *[Geisteskranke]* is not forgetful. What once impressed itself on his/her spirit remains in his/her recollections.

For Herzfeld, the *Geisteskranke* enjoys an engagement and understanding of the outside world that is not tainted by the long-standing, venerated institutions that organize every aspect of life, and that are performed in the engagement of language. Moreover, the *Geisteskranke*, "not forgetful," produces a world from these experiences that, while in origin entirely interior to him- or herself, functions to originate something larger than the self of the individual subject. In the passages that follow, Herzfeld comments that in his or her "singularity," the *Geisteskranke* "articulates words differently than we, not from inability, but from artistic initiative: The power of invention, and the [freedom] that permits randomness, arbitrariness, and a highhandedness of choice." Indeed, Herzfeld argues, a true ethics of the insane exists.

Herzfeld therefore suggests that the *Geisteskranken* should be understood not as subjects analogous to, if vastly different from, the "socialized" citizens of the modern world, but as contributors to an
entirely different social collective altogether. In closing that section, Herzfeld makes brief but specific mention of two very important cultural institutions, both founded under the rubric of Enlightenment rationality, and both, therefore, evoking the organizational imperative under which the *Geisteskrank* labors to be understood. Herzfeld mentions first Konrad Duden, the headmaster of a Thuringia Gymnasium who authored a definitive dictionary of the German language, setting forth the fundamental rules and regulations for pronunciation and for proper word use in a denotative sense. Herzfeld would have been familiar with the version published in 1880: *The Vollständiges Orthographisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (*Complete Orthographical Dictionary of the German Language*). This work was considered an official source for spelling and usage in administrative departments of the government. The second important figure, if also mentioned in passing, is Adolphe Freiherr Knigge (d. 1796), whose support for human rights placed him in a position at odds with most members of his eighteenth-century aristocratic circle. Knigge’s interest in human rights led him to author a kind of quasi-philosophical meditation on the method for proper human relations, entitled *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (*On Human Relations*), that rapidly gained acceptance as a primer for good manners and polite discourse — otherwise put, a set of rules for interaction in the public realm and implicated in the performance, therefore, of bourgeois identity.51 Here, Herzfeld juxtaposes “shared” and compulsory social subjectivity and institution (Duden’s dictionary; Knigge’s rules for social engagement) to a kind of existence outside these strictures that enables, nonetheless, a coherence and validity that persists in spite our own

51 To the present day, “Knigge” indicates a discussion of or instruction in the rules of polite behavior. For example, placemats designed by Ilot Ilov, called “Kniggerich placemats,” instruct the user on the proper placement of dishes and silverware, and therefore aid in the proper performance of table manners.
failures to understand, and in spite of efforts to control and curtail. The crisis lies not in the Geistesgekranke, Herzfeld states. He lives “like a king,” enjoying “the world of dreams” while we know only a reality created and maintained through a compulsory obedience to law and to the customs and traditions that were relics, if powerful ones, of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture.

While Herzfeld’s emphasis on an instinctive, pre-cultural subject of modern life would seem simply derivative of Expressionist culture, the specific relationships he observed between subject and institution, and between language and structures of meaning, surpassed the more generalized critical stance of Die Brücke. It was not the possibility of individual will, often marshaled as a powerful force in Expressionist writing, that Herzfeld rejected, but the possibility that existent cultural formations, even those of the avant-garde, were insufficient in creating that dynamic subject of modern life that might dislodge long-standing institutions and disable their functionality in maintaining a particular sort of shared culture; a truly collective sphere. In his critical stance, Herzfeld was not unique. Die Brücke had abandoned its originally collective organization and system of distribution once it moved to Berlin, relying instead on the more usual methods for exhibitions and patronage. Simply stated, Die Brücke, as a movement, had rapidly become “style.” Dagmar Barnouw comments, in an essay examining the problem of the “intellectual revolutionary” in the World War I period, that in its early years, Die Aktion hovered, sometimes uneasily, between notions of “the intellectual revolutionary whose social imagination is sufficient to project an ideal mankind,” a notion perhaps embodied in Pfemfert himself, and the impossibility of this ideal to project or produce a “real,” a “particular,” in this case
evidenced by the “uncertain and unpredictable social behavior of individual human beings.” Wieland and Helmut Herzfeld were committed to initiating a folding out of the individual into a larger social collective. The necessity for a deterritorialization of the bourgeois subject – Nietzsche’s Bildungsphilister – remained evident, and the imperative that this new subject contribute to a more specifically productive, radically re-thought common culture, also remained.52

The First World War seemed to offer the context for this large-scale dismantling of traditional culture. After the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, Helmut Herzfeld was selected to serve in the Kaiser-Franz-Josef-Regiment, just outside Berlin. Wieland Herzfeld volunteered immediately and served as a medic on the Belgian front. Four months after his enlistment, he was dismissed from military duty and would comment later that although many had been in favor of the war, once he returned, there was a consensus in the group around Lasker-Schüler, at the Café des Westens, that something would need to be done about the war.53 The tide had turned, and many in the circle surrounding the two brothers embraced vehement opposition to war, whether as pacifists, or in protest to what they understood to be the growing military-capitalistic industries and their impact on culture and life. In 1915, Heartfield faced being sent to the front lines, and his friends convinced him to enact the nervous breakdown that would render him unfit to serve. Lasker-Schüler may have been the source of this idea, which was ultimately successful. Heartfield served the rest of the war by delivering mail. Herzfelde was charged with assaulting an officer and discharged later that year. In any case, for

52Barnouw, 227.


Herzfeld and his brother, the growing military-capitalistic industrial complex would increasingly be a focus.

In 1916, Wieland Herzfelde [my emphasis] and John Heartfield, as they were then formally known, having recently changed their names, as did George Grosz, whose acquaintance they had made the previous year, approached the publisher of an existing youth magazine in the hopes of gaining his assistance in acquiring a publishing venue without needing to obtain the officially required license.\(^5\) This was very difficult during wartime, and all new ventures required this licensing. Herzfelde had intended to begin publishing anti-war (and anti-bourgeois) essays and literature, along the lines of Die Aktion but in a more modest format and without the history of that journal – a new venture. Neue Jugend, whose publisher was a student, Heinz Barger, was a youth magazine. Barger had suspended publication, but he agreed to Herzfelde’s request and he agreed, as well, that his name would continue to stand as publisher on the masthead. If necessity had dictated this move, Herzfelde’s appropriative gesture was meaningful and it embodied an important intervention. Herzfelde’s Neue Jugend was not a new publication, but represented, in its very founding condition, the re-mapping of an exiting terrain; the occupation of existent culture with the intention of transformation from within.

Herzfelde’s Neue Jugend was at first monthly, a broadsheet format, and the first issue was number 7, July 1916. A broadsheet is a long, vertical, single-page, usually around twenty-two inches, that includes political satire and other “popular” material. Not a “high” cultural

product, from the first publication (Holland, 1618) they nonetheless remained the most important source for the dissemination of various forms of information, including poetry. Among the contributors to the first issue were George Grosz, Johannes Becher, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Else Lasker-Schüler, who contributed segments of her allegorical anti-war story entitled “Der Malik.”⁵⁵ Significantly, Herzfelde, Heartfield, and their collaborators sponsored evening events that included readings and discussions in connection with the various literary and critical endeavors that were featured in the current issue. During the fall of 1916, Herzfelde and his contributors traveled to various venues including Dresden, Munich, and Mannheim.

In early 1917 the publication was officially banned, but Herzfelde began publication again with number 1, dated May 23, 1917, in a newspaper format (figure 5). The June 1917 issue of Neue Jugend boldly proclaims its title, and beneath, that it is an advertisement for the Kleine Grosz Mappe – the Small Grosz Portfolio. At the lower left, a second text informs the reader that this is, indeed, “A Prospekt zur kleinen Grosz-Mappe” – a brochure for the Small Grosz Portfolio. Beneath the horizontal title block and a second horizontal block beneath, the page is divided into four columns, with a reproduction of the Flatiron Building (stamped with the legend “advertising advice”) standing prominently in the third. The basic layout is therefore orderly, but the typography and design of the type layout are not. Titles and text are not featured in consistent typefaces.

⁵⁴After 1916, Wieland Herzfeld was known as “Wieland Herzfelde,” and Helmut Herzfeld was known as John Heartfield.
⁵⁵James Fraser and Stephen Heller, The Malik-Verlag: 1916–1947, Berlin, Prague, New York, exhib. cat. (New York: Goethe House, 1984): 20–21. This small but well-researched catalog is valuable in that it treats the earlier publications, such as Neue Jugend, as interesting in their own rights. Often, publications before the Dada period are discussed very briefly and identified as belonging to Heartfield’s “pre-Dada” phase. The important moment of the founding of an alternative institution is therefore eclipsed by the nascent avant-garde movement.
and different typefaces randomly assert themselves within the various
texts, interrupting the flow of reading and creating a discordantly formal,
rather than a simply communicative, effect. Language, present here in the
type that only coheres momentarily into a flow of narrative, begins to
assert itself as something other than a transparent and instrumental entity
that works to accomplish a communicative event. Herzfelde and Heartfield
would have been well aware of similar experiments in Italian Futurism, and
Heartfield's layouts here, and in the interior of the paper, exhibit that
influence.

In March 1917, and in response to the first banning of *Neue Jugend*,
Herzfelde had applied for and obtained permission to found the Malik-
Verlag, a publishing house that, he intended, would circulate and
disseminate those authors (and graphic works) that had received little
attention given censoring and restriction. The intention was to work within
the existing publishing industry and to bring about changes through the
insinuation of literature and critical writing that challenged the
industry’s missions and imperatives. Permission was granted given the
necessity to complete the public circulation of Lasker-Schuler’s “Der
Malik,” a circulation that had begun in *Die Aktion* and would be completed
under the auspices of the Malik Verlag. The word “Malik” may best be
translated as “rogue king,” and several of the characters around the
central character are apparently modeled on Herzfelde and Heartfield. In
his prospectus for the publishing house, a pamphlet entitled simply “Der
Verlag,” Herzfelde describes a state of culture that had worsened given the
war. In spite of efforts, Herzfelde states, a determined separation between
art and everyday life has created a significant cultural crisis:
Verfolgt man die Entwicklung unserer Literatur seit etwa zehn Jahren, so wird man rasch erkennen, daß sie sich von der Absoluten Dichtung, vom l’art pour l’art Standpunkt fortentwickelt hat. Diese Einsicht veranlaßt z.B. Spengler zu der Behauptung, jede Literatur müsse im Journalismus, also in ihrer praktischen Verwendung für die Anforderungen des Tages enden. Sicher ist, daß trotz vieler Versuche dies heutige literarische Produktion im allgemeinen nicht mit dem Tempo des modernen Lebens Schritt hält.

If one traces the history of German literature over the last ten years, one quickly understands that it developed itself from [the idea of] absolute poetry, from an “l’art pour l’art” standpoint. This insight brought Spengler, for example, to maintain (Behauptung) that literature [as such] must end in an involvement in journalism, and therefore also in its practical use for the requirements of the day. Certainly, and in spite of many attempts, high literary production, in general, holds little with the tempo of modern life.

Herzfeld’s mention of Oswald Spengler, whose much-debated and discussed first volume of Decline of the West would be published and widely available by 1918, is interesting. Briefly stated, Spengler argued for a close relationship between cultural decline, which he observed at the endpoint of various cultures around the world (most notably including his own), and “civilization,” which he understood as the final coherence of a given cultural and social system into the “finished” product that portended its ultimate demise. Cultural decline, Spengler argued, was the result of the inception of high civilization, a stifling force that would always fatally compromise the dynamic force and initial impulse that originated cultural production and allowed, in its products, an essential kind of vitality and life. Rather inevitably, Spengler suggests, with the inception of “civilization” performativity ends and decline follows. Culture would not be saved by involving modern devices, motifs, or institutions, including “the journalistic,” in its production. Indeed, the presence of “the journalistic,” marker of the particular and the everyday, was a definitive sign of decline. While Herzfelde understands the “decline,” he
fundamentally disagrees with Spengler’s suggestions, arguing for the transformation of the modes of production and distribution that would produce a different audience and locating this transformation precisely in “the journalistic” that Spengler condemns.

In the passages that follow in his text, Herzfelde locates the problem of contemporary culture in a disconnection between the artist, producer of the contemplative aesthetic object (l’art pour l’art) and his/her public, an entity whose coherence and structures had been challenged by the tragedies and traumas of the First World War and further compromised by the most tenacious remnants of Wilhelmine culture. It is at this point that Herzfelde adopts a new and quite nuanced terminology, and one that would be significant for both the Malik Verlag and the later interventions of his brother. The current cultural crisis is, Herzfelde states, the result of a radical disjunction between Öffentlichkeit and an individual subject who was increasingly fragmented in crises that were simultaneously epistemological and ethical in origin.56

This moment was the occasion, much discussed, of Heartfield’s destruction of the auratic art objects, his own, that he felt were implicated in the maintenance of the l’art pour l’art sphere that his brother condemns. Heartfield would later identify his gesture with his growing friendship with George Grosz. Grosz, who had studied at the Dresden Art Academy and the Berlin College of Arts and Crafts, volunteered for military service in 1914 and was discharged shortly after for medical reasons. It is significant that one of the first graphic projects published and distributed by the Malik Verlag was Grosz’s Erste Grosz Mappe, a small

56 In his text, Herzfelde, indicates the relative unfamiliarity of this term by including quotation marks: “Öffentlichkeit.” At the same time, Herzfelde retains the utopian notion that cultural production can structure, produce, and redeem.
portfolio of nine photolithographs that were generated from original drawings (figures 6-14). This portfolio provides an interesting example of the sort of cultural production that Herzfelde advocated in the construction of the new culture that would, he suggests, resolve cultural decline.57

Grosz’s Erste Grosz Mappe retained Die Brücke’s critical interest in the changed social conditions of modern urban life, but the photolithographs presented this content in the dramatically different form that suggests an interest beyond a crisis of the individual subject. While reliant on the fractured spaces and tilting, often shrieking perspectives that characterize Die Brücke and Grosz’s contemporary paintings, less accurate “descriptions” than sets of refusals to disallow the discordance and alienation of modern, urban, and emphatically post-war life into the painted realm, the photolithographs embody a set of challenges to Expressionism on the one hand, and to the confidence of the painted or photographic image to (re)present and organize significant aspects of modern life on the other. As reproducible images, Grosz’s lithographs refuse the auratic status of the Expressionist painting, which exists for one viewer, in one location, and at a single moment in time. At the same time, distinguishing themselves from Expressionist woodcuts, also a graphic and reproducible medium, they disallow the insinuation of individual, unique subjectivity, maintained in the woodcuts by their primitivizing stylistic tendencies and private settings and subject matters (children and adolescents; the artists’ private retreats; highly sexualized encounters).

57 Grosz met Herzfeld and Heartfield in Berlin after his short tour of medical duty, and just after the production of the drawings on which the lithographs were based, he attempted suicide. Confined in a military hospital, it was determined that he suffered from sever “shell shock,” perhaps similar to our own post-traumatic stress disorder, and that he should be executed as a danger to himself and to others. He was saved from this fate by Count Kessler, his patron and friend.
Grosz's figures are posed in city squares, against familiar cityscapes, or in publicly-oriented interiors (figures 9 and 10), and they stand or flee their constructed contexts, their entrapment in the linear medium that is metaphorical of a more literal and lived entrapment, with the signs of their social identities in hand. The series has in common an absence of framing as regards pictorial space, which is simultaneously, if paradoxically, as limitless as it is limiting. There is seldom a ground line; the lines that describe figures or buildings cease abruptly, without transition, at each image's edge.

Grosz's cityscape, the plight of the worker or common man in the chaotic and constructed dystopia of the urban landscape, evidences an ongoing and universal condition. The first plate in the series, entitled "Memory of New York" (figure 6), features the barely-contained figure of a worker, identifiable by his cap and uniform, who poses for a moment at the limit of an aggressively unfolding metropolis where architecture, signage, the insistent banners of nationalistic sentiment, and the varied members of the populace are trapped together in the prevalent linearity of the presentation. The windows of the tilting and towering buildings are opaque, perhaps a reference to the current impossibility of mitigating the opacity of cultural objects to their intended audience.

While fitted with social markers, the figures in Grosz’s portfolio refuse to present themselves beyond “type.” In contrast to the private individuality of the Expressionist woodcut, Grosz’s figures are the contemporary “every man” of northern literary (and graphic) tradition.

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58 Grosz would not spend significant time in New York until 1932, when he was invited to teach at the Art Students’ League. His enthusiasm for America in part originated in an early exposure to American literary figures, James Fenimore Cooper among them. This enthusiasm does not mitigate his skeptical and derisive posture in this series.

59 Pieter Bruegel the Elder often feature “Elk,” or “Everyman,” in the series of engraving he completed for the growing humanist audience of sixteenth-century humanists.
Their interest lies not in retrieving the individual, but in the discordant relationship between the individual as s/he is produced and situated, often violently, in the existing institutions and venues of the contemporary public realm. Grosz does not model the figures beyond the merest indication of a contour line, and this renders affirmative identification, as might have been possible given the development of volume, impossible. Disconcerted, the viewer is left to reconstruct the subjectivity of this receptive experience on his or her own. Once the presence of the figures fails decipherment, the viewer moves to construct the broader social and cultural “reality” of the world in the picture by recourse to setting; the viewer moves to context. This is not established by the towering buildings, the winding path of the street, and the somehow menacingly authoritative horizon of the canal. Nor can figures and context be easily related or understood. A consistent hierarchy between figures, or between figures and architecture, is absent, as are a coherent system of perspective and a sense of the scene as a series of legible (and readable) planes. In Grosz’s metropolis, figurative site of the founding of the Malik Verlag, the reconstructed interiority of the Expressionist individual has endeavored and failed.
Chapter 2.

From Performance to Performative:

John Heartfield, Berlin Dada, and Piscator's Political Theater

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together.' This is why Utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; [but] heterotopias ... desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 1970

How can the unliberated and unknowing man of our century, with his thirst for knowledge and freedom, the tortured and heroic, the misused and inventive man of our terrible and great century, himself changeable and yet able to change the world, how can he be given a theater which will help him to be master of his world?


Writing in 1920, after the suppression of the November 1918 to April 1919 revolution by Noske's Freikorps, Pol Michaels characterized the lingering post-revolutionary sentiment and the environment this created as *Lächerlichkeit* (laughable; ridiculous). An appropriately entitled "Cautious Revolution" and published in *Der Gegner* (Malik Verlag), Michaels continues: "... what was left over was a revolution of German disgrace, of primarily

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German grotesque ridiculousness.”61 When Dada arrived in Berlin during 1917 in the figure of Richard Huelsenbeck, a deconstruction of reigning cultural and political subjectivity was an urgent necessity. Wieland Herzfelde would later describe the post-Expressionist and post-revolutionary shift from the individual to the collective sphere: “With the Revolution, our goal became clear. We no longer addressed ourselves to the young and rebellious artists and intellectuals, we wished to help ensure that the half-hearted bourgeois revolution in Germany should develop into a proletarian revolution as it had done in Russia.”62 In the first issue of Der Dada from 1919, edited by Huelsenbeck, Johannes Baader, and Raoul Hausmann, the need for a reorientation of Dada toward the specifically political was both specific focus and recurrent theme.

Richard Huelsenbeck’s essay entitled “Der New Mensch,” “The New Man,” published in the May 1917 issue of Neue Jugend, might best be understood as a manifesto rather than a prose musing on the rather counter-utopic and utterly revolutionary figure Huelsenbeck actually understood under the rubric of “the new man.”63 Certainly, Huelsenbeck intended that this piece of writing, in its historical context, would be radically performative without theatricality, without cohering into the kind of re-presentation, the belatedness, that would be the fate of much radical writing once it had gained wide reception and circulation; once it had been awarded a relationship, if dialectical, to the very culture it had purported to critique. But to inquire about the “authenticity” of Huelsenbeck’s

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61 Eds. Sascha Bru, Laurence Nuijs, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum, Hubert van den Berg, Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011): 107.

manifesto, perhaps one of the major markers in the founding of Dada in Berlin, may be less productive than questioning the many references, locations, sites in history and of subjectivity, that he brings together in his "new man." Huelsenbeck evokes an apocalyptic figure, a figure snared in history at the expense of nature who presents a paradoxical simultaneity of immanence and radical particularity. In his reconsideration of Huelsenbeck’s writing, Sascha Bru describes the “new man”: “Universal only by grace of the particular, experiencing his singularity only within very concrete and momentary situations (a ‘Gott des Augenblicks’).”  

Huelsenbeck’s “… ‘new’ man foreshadowed what life could be like: something man could create for himself, a space in perpetual change beyond petty morality and regardless of teleology.” In Huelsenbeck’s essay, remnants of the Nietzschean vitalism of Expressionism, of Huelsenbeck’s own often primitivist stance from the context of Zurich Dada (evident, for example, in his Phantastische Gebete of 1916), stand in uneasy relationship with an emerging sense of the “citizen,” the inhabitant of and participant in a new sort of civilization. Huelsenbeck argues that each person has within themselves those things needed to challenge the hegemony of western reason and rationality, whose origin he locates in classical thought and in the Renaissance:

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64 Scholars have been critical of Huelsenbeck’s overt religiosity in the work; the rather religious-apocalyptic tone he adopts. This was not rare, however, in Zurich Dada in particular. Richard Sheppard points out the sense that spirituality was lacking, along with the understanding that “repressive governments supported meretricious philosophers who preached the autonomy and divinity of human reason … and left people exposed to the depredations of their material nature.” See Richard Sheppard, Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000): 182.  
The new man is not new, because time wills reorientation — he is not the underground source for which the axes of the barbarians wait to find a use — he is not new, because ... he is the god of the moment, the affect of the blessed, the Phoenix from the good opposition, and he is always new, the homo novus of his own nobility, because in his heart, in his every minute, the alternative is already there: man or not-man. His root draws strength from Mycenae, from the thyrsos dancers — he lives a day as Lucian, as Aretin, and as Christ — he is the all and nothing — not today, not yesterday.

Everything Magister embodies is foreign to him, he knows not a system for living, chaos is as welcome to him as a friend because he is the order in his [own] soul.66

Challenging the very basis of western civilization, Huelsenbeck’s “new man” draws his power from pre-classical sources: The Mycenaeans, who were themselves, ironically, organized by western Enlightenment rationality in the form of Heinrich Schliemann, excavator of the Mycenaean cities at Mycenae and Tiyrins; and the followers of Dionysos, who are evoked in the thyrsos, the giant staff of fennel and ivy, topped with a pine cone, that was carried by Dionysos and his followers. While Euripides recognized the

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66Here, with Magister, Huelsenbeck surely means to touch on the origin of the modern study of the liberal arts and the university in general. Magister was a title in the Middle Ages, given to one having a license to teach philosophy and the liberal arts. Thomas Aretin was the translator into Latin, in the 15th century, of St. Chrysostom on St. John.
thyrso as an attribute of the cult of Dionysos, the origin of the symbol is pre-classical and fundamentally connected to the cultic and religious origins of Greek tragic drama.

Caught in the heterotopia of contemporary life, history, tradition, and civilization though he is, the "new man" can overcome these challenges to forge a different existence, and by extension a different organization and engagement of civic life. Huelsenbeck sets the terms forth clearly, alongside carefully chosen images of the pastiche-existence that is the current plight:

His voice rings over the marketplace – the bells of Ave, Ave Maria. Neither for nor against, the bells of polarity are alien to him, nationalities have lost their meaning, nationalities are no longer antagonists for him. 'They are all in error,' he says, 'those who believe in aristocracy, an aristocratic order of life. All aristocrats are worthless, even the aristocracy of education, of wealth, of name … "

... the new man changes the poly-hysteria of his time into an honest knowledge, into a healthy sensuality. The new man prefers to be a good academician, instead of grasping the opportunity to be a bad revolutionary. The example of the antique maiden remains, the antique maiden who said: "I've not come to hate with you, but to love with you." All that is problematical, every sentence, every thesis, can – say, must – be an interpretation of this attitude …

Everything shall live, but one thing must end – the burgher, the overfed philistine, the overfed pig, the pig of intellectuality, this shepherd of all miseries.67

Huelsenbeck’s suggestions of sensual pleasure as a productive force and the possibility of love structuring community ("I've not come to hate with you,
but to love with you ... " are remnants of Die Brücke and of his association with the group around Die freie Straße, which was founded in 1915 and, edited by Franz Jung, took anarchism and the innovative, perhaps extra-Freudian, psychoanalytical convictions of Otto Gross as significant influences.68 It was in the context of this group that Huelsenbeck first encountered Raoul Hausmann, and Herzfelde and Heartfield, if not consistently involved, were quite aware of their interests and writings.

Although Huelsenbeck returned to Berlin in January 1917, the first "official" Dada performance, what Huelsenbeck termed a "reading," marking the onset of Berlin Dada historically speaking, was not held until January 22, 1918. The event took place at I.B. Neumann’s Graphisches Kabinett and included the delivery of Huelsenbeck’s "First Dada Speech in Germany" and a recitation from Huelsenbeck’s Phantastische Gebete.69 Huelsenbeck was required to submit his literary work to government censors before the evening. In the course of the evening, Huelsenbeck identified the Cabaret Voltaire as "an experimental stage" before moving to recite examples of his lautgedichte and “imitative African,”70 at which time the audience began to participate, voicing objections and exhibiting outrage, which increased when Huelsenbeck shouted that the Dadaists had been and were in favor of war, that, in fact, one war "was not enough." Neumann was in the process of telephoning the police. Huelsenbeck would recall: “Horror! An invalid with

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68 Matthew Biro, The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2009): 29. Biro states, “Central to Gross’s theories were the ideas that the structures and contradictions of capitalist societies were directly related to the repressive nature of the patriarchal bourgeois ego and that a sexual revolution had to take place before a true revolution could occur.” He points out: "Through Hausmann, these ideas became important aspects of the Berlin Dada Ideology." I do not entirely disagree, but take a different path of investigation. While Heartfield knew Franz Jung and Otto Gross, the psychoanalytical trajectory was not, in my opinion, a defining factor for him.


70 Gordon, ibid. 115.
a wooden leg got up and accompanied his exit with applause ... The audience not merely rose to their feet but moved toward the rostrum in order to hurl themselves at me. But as usual in such situations (I went through many like it in my Dada time), public fury was checked by a kind of awe [my emphasis]. The performance had stunned the crowd to the point that their responses themselves exceeded the capabilities of cultural structurings: They moved from anger and fury to literal and unmitigated “awe.”

The most significant performance in the positioning of Berlin Dada at this moment was, perhaps, the group’s first exhibition. In his introduction to the catalog (a folded sheet of newspaper) for the Erste internationale Dada-Messe, which was held in Berlin in the rooms (Lützow-Ufer 13) of Dr. Otto Burchard (“Finanzdada”) between June 30 and August 20, 1920, Wieland Herzfelde wrote:

The past remains important and authoritative only to the extent that its cult must be combated. The Dadaists are of one mind: they say that the works of antiquity, the classical age, and all the “great minds” must not be evaluated (unless in a scientifically historical manner) with regard to the age in which they were created, but as if someone made these things today, and no one will doubt that today not a single person, even if he were, to use the jargon of art, a genius, could produce works whose condition of possibility lie centuries and millennia in the past.

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71 In Gordon, op. cit., and in Memoirs of a Dada Drummer, which remained at press when the Gordon essay was written.
That advanced militarism was an immediate “condition of possibility” was
demonstrated in the uniformed mannequin with the pig’s head, the
Preussischer Erzengel, contributed by Rudolf Schlichter and John
Heartfield, that hung from the ceiling of the first room (figure 15). As
Hanne Bergius has pointed out, the group’s use of the word Messe, rather
than Auststellung as might be expected for an exhibition of art objects, is
significant and oriented the presentation by reference to long-standing,
and somewhat varied, traditions in German culture: Messe bears connotations
that can signify a trade fair or a mass in the religious sense, but never a
presentation of aesthetic objects.73

The exhibition, which included 174 objects, diverse in their origins
in purely textual sources, posters (“Dada ist politisch,” and “Die Kunst
ist tot / Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst TATLINS”), illustrated weeklies,
and what might be understood as objects of “painting” and “sculpture,” in
fleeting presence if not quite in genre, included several works that, if
not precisely portraits, took John Heartfield as subject. That these are
illustrated in the catalog with descriptive captions suggests their
importance in the exhibition: George Grosz’s “Daum marries her pendantic
automaton ‘George’ in May 1920. John Heartfield is very glad of it and
George Grosz’s “The Convict” Monteur John Heartfield After Franz Jung’s
Attempt to Get him up on His Feet, also dating from 1920 (figures 16 and
17).74 These painting/collage combinations are significant in Grosz’s
oeuvre, significant in the shift they embody regarding the impact of World

73 In his review of the traveling exhibition Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, New
York, Paris as it stood in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (February 19 –
May 14, 2006), Michael White summons Bergius’ comments, rightfully seeing them as
significant in understanding the shift between Zurich Dada and Dada in Berlin, as well as
its recreation in the exhibition space in our own time. See Michael White, Dada, and:
Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, New York, Paris (review), Modernism/Modernity,
74 Herzfelde, ibid., 102-103.
War I on the collective psyche of the citizen in contemporary Berlin, and, finally, significant in the changed relationship between private and public identities that are, to recontextualize the apt terminology of Herzfelde himself, formative in the “condition of possibility” that comprised the context for the reception and reading of these complex works. It is therefore not surprising that they have been discussed extensively in relationship to the project of this exhibition, to Heartfield’s radicalization of himself, and to his relationship to the process of specifically politicized cultural production that he would be central in initiating. Conversely, in what follows, moving from the critical perspective that Herzfelde’s mention of “condition of possibility” provides, I will investigate Heartfield in the broader context of Berlin Dada’s positioning of itself in the historical trajectory of aesthetic production and reception in order to consider the operation of a specifically performative object-productive and receptive aesthetic experience that would be further informed, in the course of the 1920s, by his work in Piscator’s Proletarisches Theater, and that would prove formative for his projects in early 1930s.\(^{75}\)

Herzfelde’s urging for the distancing that would allow critical perspective on art of the “centuries and millennia in the past” proved expansive in the exhibition itself, where a rather scathing evaluation of art of the quite recent past co-existed with Herzfelde’s past-as-present as both assumption and organizational metaphor. This scathing evaluation included an attack on the bourgeois cult of beauty and related fetishization of the aesthetic object, as has been extensively discussed.

\(^{75}\)At this juncture of things, it is important to draw a distinction between performance, which is a generic terminology and therefore applicable to varied productions and experiences, and the performative, which provides the occasion for considering the
Of greater interest here, however, is the systematic dismantling of conceptualizations that informed the coherence of the aesthetic object at this moment in time, and that embodied the origins of a shift in subjectivity and collective reception, the latter most resonant in the formation of a “civic” self. Two of the series of works designated by the term *Korregierte meister Bilder*, “corrected masterpieces,” which were organized under the manufactured and collaborative authorial presence “Grosz-Heartfield mont,”\(^7^6\) are included in the exhibition catalog: Pablo Picasso: *La Vie Heureuse* (Dedicated to Carl Einstein) (figure 18) and Henri Rousseau: *Self-Portrait* (figure 19). Both date from 1920, and both are preserved only as reproductions in the catalog itself.

Pablo Picasso: *La Vie Heureuse* (Dedicated to Carl Einstein) appropriates Picasso’s 1913 oil on canvas and charcoal work entitled *Head of a Girl*, currently in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, Musée d’art Moderne, Paris, that is itself an exploration of the potentially anamorphic presence of objects in space (in this case, the concurrent [if not quite simultaneous] head of a girl and a guitar) and that, superficially stated, allows free play between literal and figurative meanings, if only within the frame of the picture. The title dedication (*Dedicated to Carl Einstein*) is appropriate to this work as it acknowledges Einstein’s important reading of cubism as well as the important body of art criticism he produced, most specifically productive (in opposition to the transcendent, enduring, and so on) and potentially unstable aspects of social and cultural performances.

\(^7^6\) Herzfelde would comment that the designation “mont” derived not necessarily or entirely from a critical interest regarding the artist-as-subject, but originated in the fact that Heartfield habitually wore overalls, the uniform of the machinest; the worker. See Jennifer Valcke, *Static Films and Moving Pictures: Montage in Avant-Garde Photography and Film* (Norderstedt, Germany: GRIN Verlag, 2011): 65ff. Valcke points out that the designation “montieren” was not necessarily coincident with the beginning of Heartfield’s montage practice. Heartfield’s *Preisausschreiben*, she states, “can be compared with a similar layout of a fan of faces rendered conventionally in an anonymous drawing taken from the newspaper which appeared in *Der Sturm* in 1912 (as part of the rebuttal of criticism of Kandinsky’s ‘pictures without things’). Heartfield was ‘the enemy of the picture’ to the extent that he attempted to ‘paint with the means of film’: he so disrupted scale and unity in *Life and Work in Universal City*, 12:05 Noon that “it is best
notably for the Malik Verlag publication *Blütige Ernst*.77 A reproduction of Picasso’s *Head of a Girl* was first reoriented and a new ground line established, something emphasized in the inclusion of the caption *Vollendete Kunst* (“Completed Art”) along the bottom of the picture’s former left side. Alphanumeric type in inconsistent typeface (“Grosz”; “A67”) and decontextualized fragments of photographs (a male figure in soldier’s uniform; a fragmented reproduction of a painted woman’s head) were pasted onto the work, and a plastic eyeball was added. Located on a fragment of what would have functioned, for Picasso, as a site of ambiguity, a pictorial play between figure and ground, in the “corrected masterpiece,” the eye merely stares back blankly at the viewer, locating the source of ambiguity within the picture but its elaboration, if not complete resolution, firmly on the outside: The realm of the viewing subject, and by extension, the politicized realm of society, context, and lived history. Otherwise stated, the dialectic between figure and ground of Picasso’s original is overturned and a third term is insinuated, without, however, a closure that is interior to the work. This tendency is evident in every aspect of the “corrected masterpiece.” Grosz and Heartfield’s “corrections” begin a process where resemblance, present in the original work and complicated by Picasso (the contour and profile of the head provide a ground for the ear, which in turn share a contour with the curve of the guitar), is evoked but fails. On a conceptual level, the remnants of resemblance, which provided a kind of closure, a set of frames, in the original work, are pried open—quite literally. The material existence of the “corrected masterpiece” also references this “outside,” through the

to walk 40 steps back through the wall (mind the step!), as Herzfelde advised in the Dada-Messe catalog.” This quote from page 66.

inclusion of a diagonal line that locates the origin of figure of the soldier, affixed over the "head" itself, to the world beyond art.

Similarly, in a photomontage also dating from around 1919, George Grosz and John Heartfield present Der Weltdada Richard Huelsenbeck in the guise of a figure both confident and apparently self-present, while also folding out into the infinite structures and imperatives of the two-dimensional picture plane (figure 20). Metaphorically, perhaps, the cipher identified as "Huelsenbeck" in the work's title exists in the work even as he folds into the shifting cosmos of the politicized and dynamic world of post World War I Berlin. Lacking a physical body of flesh and bone, Huelsenbeck nonetheless dominates the world of the picture. His presence is established by accessories, a suit and tie, and by the strings of words that read without cohering into a linguistic system. "da da dada dadadada..." moves diagonally across the picture, presumably to infinity, and functions to create a paradoxical termination for Huelsenbeck's otherwise absent extremities. Word and image are collapsed in the picture, signifying not a utopic realm somehow beyond categorical distinctions between text and language, identical to lived experience around 1920 in Berlin except purged of disjunctions, contradictions, and strife, but a mode of productivity where language has been stripped of its authority, its transparency, and its privilege to mask itself under the pretense of a merely instrumental function. Firmly associated with the cultural realm, language is here a tool, an accessory rather than an ordering metaphor, whose authoritative assumptions have been challenged (and lost). 

The most relevant and important discussion here is David Joselit, "Dada's Diagrams," in ed. Leah Dickerman with Matthew S. Witkovsky, The Dada Seminars, CAVSA Seminar Papers 1, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art in association with Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2005): 221-239. Joselit suggests then operation of language, once retrieved from instrumental and/or symbolic functions, as a
language, and its re-situation in the material realm, was a product of earlier performances and theoretical art production in Zurich with, for example, the “tonal” poem *L’amiral Cherche Une Maison à Louer*, written and performed at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916. The performance was simultaneous, with the three voices reciting in three different languages. Here, however, analogous deterritorializations are juxtaposed to subjectivity and a problematics of geography, perhaps by extension a summoning of Grosz’s politicized civic space.

The “torso” of the figure is contained in a circle whose lowest portion sits slightly below a provisional horizon, which itself folds into a triangle that is formed by two additional lines extending below the horizon-of sorts, and that, at first glance, seems to indicate a ground upon which the figure stands—perhaps metaphorically, a Cartesian point, the “where you are” that provides an origin and definitive staring point for thought, speech, action, and deed; an origin of the human subject, and an insistence that this subject has an essence that exists across time.

The rereading of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) that Deleuze proposes in his book entitled *The Fold* is useful at this juncture of things, if standing in complex relationship to the discussion at hand. Leibniz was working in a time of upheaval and redefinition, in a world that had lost its certainty and center, the Baroque era, a condition that is resonant with conditions of the historical period under consideration here. The Cartesian insistence on numerical values, precise locations, and

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kind of performing machine that runs with “discursive possibilities,” and a strong connection of this with the revolutionary politics.

79Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, foreword and translation by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): 53. Deleuze’s systematic and critical re-readings of philosophy often produce models quite productive in writing about vastly different eras. An exception may be his work on Kant (1963), about which Deleuze himself said: “My book on Kant’s different; I like it, I did it as a book about an enemy that tries to show how his system works, its various cogs – the tribunal of Reason, the
absolute divisions between res cogitans (conceptuality) and res extens (materiality), and, in particular, the functioning of these to support a kind of unquestioned and mathematically situated human subject, are understandable in this context as they reflect a desire for certainty in a century that is closely identified with scientific revolution. Descartes posited a revision that would dispel, in spite of the preceding century of "Renaissance," the persistent remnants of Medieval thinking: Animism, superstition, and, relatively speaking, the understanding of the Divine as an ultimate ordering principle of history and of life. To state that the seventeenth century, the century of scientific revolution and origin of what would become positivist thinking, was the necessary foundation for the Enlightenment would be to belabor a rather pedestrian point. A pre-recognition of the disastrous failure of Enlightenment epistemologies and ethical systems was one of the targets for Dada broadly speaking and for Heartfield and Grosz in particular.

In a discussion appropriately entitled "Sufficient Reason," which situates Leibniz as regards Descartes' comprehensive subject-object-context philosophy, Gilles Deleuze describes a distinction between the two and offers a critique of Descartes:

When Leibniz uses the attributive model, he does so from the point of view of a classical logic of genres and species, which follow only nominal requirements. He does not use it in order to ground inclusion. Predication is not an attribution. The predicate is the "execution of travel," an act, a movement, a change, and not the state of travel. The predicate is the proposition itself [original emphasis]. And I can no more reduce "I travel" to "I am a traveling being" than I can reduce "I think to "I am a thinking being." Thought is not a constant attribute, but a predicate passing from one thought to another.80

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80Deleuze, ibid., 57.
Here, Deleuze differentiates between “attribution,” the notion that characteristic components of identity are added on, that is to say, to an already existing and stable identity in a teleological process that “grounds inclusion,” and the operation of predicates, which are both essentially operative in establishing identities (“The predicate is the proposition itself … ”) and that can change as the state of a being changes over time. It is significant that Deleuze marshals, in his example, the idea of travel. Never implying an immanent or already-present subject or a transcendental state, “travel” is evocative of the accumulation of “outside time” experiences and reliant on successions of provisional and temporary sites. Throughout The Fold, and later, in Foucault (1988), Deleuze draws on his concept of the fold to explore the “becoming” of a human subject as a process where an “outside” is folded in: An immanently political, social, embedded subject, and a subject that posits “traveler” to Cartesian notions of locus, intrinsic ontological unity, and the ordering principle of presence and specific time.

For Deleuze, the human subject is always derived from a without, a political and social outside, rather than from a within, an inside that is immanent to the presence of the subject in lived existence and that transcends time, space, and history: A collection of attributes and predicates, much like Huelsenbeck’s suit and tie; a subject who simultaneously intervenes in and folds out, “becomes” rather than “exists,” standing and embodied at one point in time, within processes of history that “become” and unfold simultaneously. Provisionally situated on shifting ground lines and in a “perspective” that suggests the possibility of “multiplicity,” Grosz and Heartfield’s figure, perhaps a Deleuzian subject,
is poised to fold out as well. He need not control all spheres, represented by the Cartesian *cogitans* and *res extens*, because their division is no longer an assumption.

Formally and experientially, the objects produced in the context of Berlin Dada were overwhelmingly resonant with the performance–events, perhaps "proto-happenings," in which Heartfield, Herzfelde, Grosz, Huelsenbeck, and others were both participants, instigators, and audience members, should circumstances demand. Remembering the *Schall und Rauch* (*Noise and Smoke*) evenings of the group, Grosz would later write:

When we weren’t swearing at the public, we were indulging in so-called “art.” That is, we deliberately staged our “artistic” acts. For instance, Walter Mehring would pound away at his typewriter, reading aloud the poem he was composing, and Heartfield or Hausmann or I would come from the backstage and shout: “Stop, you aren’t going to hand out real art to those dumbbells, are you?"

Walter Mehring’s cabaret, aptly named *Schall und Rauch*, originated in an evening he staged entitled *Conference provocative*. The cabaret took place in the basement of Das Grosse Schauspielhaus, which housed Max Reinhardt’s theater on its upper floors. The Dada group also performed several matinees at the left-oriented *Die Tribüne*, which, as its name suggests, functioned as kind of platform that took as focus not theatrical expression, but the very act of theatrical persuasion itself — thus, “its socio-political applications.”

A review in *Vorwärts* would describe an evening: “A patchwork of questions, sounds, words, and gaudy spectacle … After outlining the evening’s program the MC began the fireworks: ‘The worse the world, the better our jokes!’ This sentence lays bare the entire Dada-

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81 Gordon, ibid. 120.
activity. For the bourgeois culture has overshot its mark ... The MC proclaimed, 'We are not an art movement, we are a pure movement, movement incarnate ...'\(^{83}\) Not quite situated within the static realm of pure idea ("we are pure movement ..."), and not completely in the real of lived, material existence ("we are movement incarnate ..."), the participants in the performances and "readings," and the "objects" they produced during those evenings, were performative. Refusing the grounds of "art," "culture," "society," and "history," as such, they hovered amidst these designations, parasitical on all but respecting none, to rest in a kind of "in between."

The group returned to Schall und Rauch for Mehring's production of *Simply Classical – an Oresteia with a Happy Ending*, which presented a satire on contemporary political events, a clear alternative to Reinhardt's production of the *Oresteia*, which was held upstairs in the main theater proper, and a productive point of departure for the discussion of Heartfield's work in Piscator's *Proletarisches Theater* that will follow below. Mehring was the author for the play, the music was composed by Friedrich Hollaender, and Grosz and Heartfield created the puppets that "performed" alongside the human performers in the chorus and elsewhere (figures 21 and 22). The presence of the puppets was significant in that they functioned as simulacra of the humans that accompanied them on stage, therefore accomplishing an important reversal. Rather than gaining anthropomorphic authority or potential (if fictive) "identity" from the human actors, the puppets posited a similarity between their own constructed-ness and the constructed-ness, at one remove, of the human actors whose spotlight they shared. The caricature-esque form of the puppets, similar to the urban identities created and presented by Grosz in

\(^{83}\)Gordon, ibid., 121.
his graphic works, instigated a set of questions in the viewer that occasioned productive and critical, rather than contemplative, processes of meaning production. Satire opened a space that allowed a series of paradoxes to co-exist, and for a parallel between the past and present to emerge. Mel Gordon wrote:

Using two-foot marionettes designed by Grosz and executed by Heartfield and Waldemar Hecker, the Mehring play ... satirized the economic, political, and military events that led to the founding of the year-old Weimar Republic ... It was more concerned with current politics than any re-working of Classical mythology. Except for a few Attic props, the marionettes were dressed in contemporary costume and given the facial and body characteristics of Grosz’s Weimar types ...

... Divided into three parts, the War, “The Dawn of Democracy,” and “The Classical Abscending of Funds” – the last about the Kaiser’s flight to Holland – the puppet play contained many thematic and technical innovations that would later appear as stock devices in the theaters of Piscator and Brecht. An alienating Gramophone/Greek chorus interrupted the action of the play with political songs like “The Oratory of War, Peace, and Inflation” ...84

The presentation was thus not merely a re-working, in the sense of a re-presenting, of the tragedy, but a critical appropriation of the play and its authoritative structures, which allowed a re-orientation of both, much like Grosz and Heartfield’s critical appropriation of Picasso’s Head of a Girl but moving along a different fold. The Oresteia, a trilogy of Greek tragedies written by Aeschylus, recounts the end of the curse on the House of Atreus. More symbolically, the tragedy embodies the foundational movement of Athens from barbaric culture (blood vengeance) to civilization (civilized justice for all citizens): The move from primitivist to rationalist modes of regulation and coincident with the birth of “High Classical” culture in Athens – in western civilization, a founding moment

84 Gordon, ibid., 122. See also Peter Jelavich for an image of one of the puppets: Berlin Cabaret (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
of culture, society, and citizenship as such. The parallel between this unfolding of events and the events of recent history that had led to the founding of the Weimar Republic would have been unmistakable. Under critique in Berlin Dada were that perfect melding of form and content, of the universal and particular, of subject and object, of the real and the ideal, that accomplished the disappearance and therefore naturalization of both. *Simply Classical – an Oresteia with a Happy Ending*, was exemplary in the positing of evocations alongside sets of refusals.\(^{85}\)

In 1919, Erwin Piscator, who had met Wieland Herzfelde while participating in an army theater group that presented popular comedies, arrived in Berlin. In his 1982 study of the engagement of key theatrical directors with the traditions that preceded them, Edward Braun observed that Erwin Piscator, in his endeavor “to create a dialectical relationship” between audience and theatrical presentation and to thereby “accelerate the transformation of society,” accomplished a goal of importance to specifically “Marxist” views on art and culture.\(^{86}\) Piscator had been trained in classical and traditional theatrical production at the Court Theater in Munich, and he had staged Expressionist plays, perhaps most notably Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata*. But his experience in the wartime theater troupes demonstrated to him the utter clash between the transcendental and emotive quality of classical drama and the unthinkable and visceral violence of the trenches. For Piscator, the tragic juxtaposition of these initiated a play of paradoxes that, if unexamined, could prove fatal to the possibility of vital and relevant cultural production. Moreover, when he arrived in Berlin and contacted his friend

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\(^{85}\) See the discussion in Biro, *ibid.*, 51.

Wieland Herzfelde, he encountered John Heartfield, as well as George Grosz, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Walter Mehring. While it may not be entirely true that, as one author put it, Piscator “took a minor part in Dada demonstrations,” he was radicalized by his encounters with the Dada performances and constant political discussions, and his realization grew: “A deep chasm, far too deep, separated art from life.” Increasingly, Piscator would locate the production of this chasm in the outmoded structures of theatrical production itself.

In several important productions, Piscator used film and montage to expand theater’s aesthetic vocabulary, to expand the capacities of history telling, and to combine protest with advanced capacities for vision in the viewing subject. This may have had its origin in the Dada cabarets staged on December 7 and December 13, 1919, when Piscator was a participant and is credited with the opening cry at the first evening: “Don’t start the show until the money is in the safe!” With this statement, Piscator situated the performance that would follow outside the bounds of aesthetic autonomy. Using one of Huelsenbeck’s sketches, Piscator made the first “living photomontage,” a photomontage that joined the flow of life in its mobilization within the action, accomplished by the parody-driven dialogue and by the active participation of the audience.

In 1920, Hermann Schüller and Piscator founded the Proletarisches Theater, which was from its origins an agitprop group whose participants intended to expand working-class consciousness and to occasion working class solidarity in the form of a genuinely proletarian public. In the 1920 issue of Der Gegner published by the Malik Verlag in recognition of the

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87 C.D. Innes, Erwin Piscator’s Political Theater: The Development of Modern German Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972): All quoted material from page 17.
88 Gordon, ibid., 121.
founding of the Proletarisches Theater, Piscator described the specifically political intention of his theater in the context of a final structural and technological intervention in theatrical practice that he intends:

It will not always be necessary to choose plays on account of an author's political bias. On the contrary: as soon as both theater and public, in the course of their work together, have decided that they want revolutionary culture, it will be possible to make every bourgeois play, whether it expresses the decay of bourgeois society or whether it clearly shows the capitalist principle, into an instrument to strengthen the concept of class struggle ...  

Piscator warns against the influences of Expressionism and of "naturalism," which he associates with a certain practice of the photographic:

In view of the urgency of present-day problems the products of Naturalism seem like bad photographs taken indiscriminately by bourgeois amateurs. Their effect is like when a spotlight picks out a tree or a church tower in the night ... [i.e., presents an object in abstraction; an isolation] ... and then sweeps on leaving behind a darkness more impenetrable than before. There are descriptions of milieu. But no attempt is made to understand the social implication of events, no attempt to evaluate, no attempt to settle the account ... They avoid a sober discussion of these things, taking refuge behind trite concepts of life and fate; if they ever go into the attack, then it is in terms of the other world, the ideal, the emotional, of psychology and philosophy; thus everyone and no one need feel that it refers to him.  

Piscator's lack of faith in the ability of the photograph to represent, under suggestion in this passage, was not comprehensive. He states, in the same essay, that until the time when audiences would have internalized a more productive set of frames, however provisional and contingent, for the reception of cultural objects, "documentary" guidance in the form of

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90 op. cit.
speeches, captions, and other directives would be helpful, and perhaps even necessary. In his production of "documentary" fragments in the form of photomontages, maps, and other reproductions, and in his incorporation of these into the theatrical performance through design, Heartfield would contribute this guidance and critical commentary, beginning with the founding of the Proletarisches Theater.

In 1920, just following his work with Piscator in the cabaret performance, Heartfield worked on a presentation in Piscator's production of a trio of plays: The Cripple, At the Gate, and Russia's Day. The three worked together in response to the looming and urgent possibility of counterrevolution to expose the lived oppression of the most victimized in different national contexts.91 Piscator himself played the cripple for the opening performance, which presented a victim of the war, an amputee living on the streets, as an unexamined connotative circumstance of nationalism and national aggression. While neither scenery nor extensive documentation exist of this performance (figure 23), the surviving photograph and Piscator's later comments (1929) suggest that Heartfield's contribution was a map on fabric, and that it was used in connection with the first play. Piscator's recounting of Heartfield's contribution is worth consideration here:

John Heartfield, who had agreed to produce a backdrop for The Cripple, was as usual late with his work and appeared at the back of the hall with his backdrop rolled up under his arm when we had reached the middle of the first act. What then happened might have looked like a director's gimmick, yet it just happened. Heartfield: "Stop, Erwin ... I'm here!" All heads turned in astonishment toward the little man with the red face who had just burst in. We could not simply go on, so I stood up, abandoned my role as the cripple for a

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moment, and called down to him: "Where have you been all of this time? We waited almost half an hour for you (murmur of agreement from the audience) and then we had to start without your backdrop."

Heartfield: "You didn’t send the car! It’s your fault! I ran through the streets, the streetcars wouldn’t take me because the cloth was too big. When I finally managed to board one I had to stand on the platform at the back and I almost fell off!" (increasing amusement from the audience) ... I interrupted him: "Calm down, Johnny, we have to get on with the show." Heartfield (highly excited): "No, the cloth must be put up first!" And since he refused to calm down I turned to the audience and asked them what was to be done, should we continue the play, or should we hang up the backdrop? There was an overwhelming majority for the backdrop. So we dropped the curtain, hung up the backdrop and to everybody’s satisfaction started the play anew. Nowadays, I refer to John Heartfield as the founder of Epic Theater.92

This seemingly anecdotal account is actually quite revealing regarding Piscator’s aims for his theatrical practice and the role that he envisioned for visual aids in his productions. Piscator frequently mentioned the importance of dismantling the professional authority that designations such as actor, director, and designer had traditionally held, expressing the conviction that this authority increased the distance between cultural producer and audience, and that this distance was a part of bourgeois, rather than popular, cultural reception. Here, Piscator’s self-presentation, both actor and director, reveals an attempted erosion of these traditional distinctions. That the act destabilized his own role as director of the theater is significant in another sense as well. Piscator advocated collaborative production, allowing the participation of the audience to breach the frame of the presentation and overturn the traditional relationship between audience and action. In this way, Piscator refused experiences associated with commodity production and consumption: contemplation on the one hand, and popular entertainment on the other.

Piscator's understanding of the visual presentation supplied by Heartfield, the map depicted in the photograph, suggests the centrality of these for his productions and the kind of experience he intended to create. For Piscator, visual additions to his productions would not be presented to the audience as neutralized illusionistic effects in mimicry of the bourgeois aesthetic experience he warned against. Instead, audiences would be provided with the occasion for critical understandings of the origination of these additions (here, the designer on a street car) and they would play a role in the integration of visual presentations with each other, into the greater structure of the dramatic performance, and into the increasingly "visual" landscape of life itself.

In a fundamental sense, by inserting his entrance performance into the flow of the play, and by inserting his visual presentation into the action with the consent of the audience, Heartfield had opened the frame of both picture and production. Piscator would write about the backdrop, still present during the presentation Lajos Barta's Russlands Tag that followed, identifying its operation as a provisional site and describing the result:

In Russia's Day there was a map which made the political meaning of the play's setting clear from the very geographical situation. This was no longer purely "decor," but also sketched in the social, politico-geographical and economic implications. It had a part to play. It obtruded into events on the stage and came to be an active dramatic element. And at this point, the performance began to work on a new level, a pedagogic level. The theater was no longer trying to appeal to the audience's emotions alone, was no longer speculating on their emotional responsiveness — it consciously appealed to their intellect. No longer mere élan, enthusiasm, rapture, but enlightenment, knowledge and clarity were to be put across.\(^9^3\)

The production was not well received by members of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD), of which Heartfield, Herzfelde, and Grosz had
been members since January 1918. Most notable among the critics was Gertrud Alexander, who wrote under the pseudonym “G.G.L.” Although indicating an awareness that the Berlin Volksbühne (“People’s Theater”) was, in fact, “keine Volksbühne,” Alexander chastised Piscator for presenting a proletarian theater that was not, in fact, art, but limited itself to the merely propagandistic. Failing to adhere to the structures of high art, Alexander continued, meant that the proletarian was deprived of that higher functioning, that beauty and edification, that were the privilege of the higher classes and that, she concluded, should not be withheld from Piscator’s audiences.  

Alexander’s objections, that Piscator’s production failed to adhere to the structures and strictures of “high art,” were related to the inclusion of the visual presentations, mere “propaganda,” and to a failure to cohere under the powerful rubric of “art”: Heartfield’s instigative and performative interruption.

The Proletarian Theater would produce five plays before its license was revoked by the (socialist-appointed) police president and the theater was closed. In 1924, at the request of the KPD and working with Felix Gasbarra, Piscator formed the Revue Rotter Rummel, the Red Revue, which was a direct continuation of his earlier practice but staged productions in the meeting halls of Berlin’s working class. Portable stages, lighting, projection slides, and music were important in that these functioned to

93Piscator, ibid., 49.
introduce the dynamic element that worked against the coherence of the performances into spectacle or high-cultural event.  

In 1924, Piscator began to direct productions for the Volksbühne, and in 1925, he and Gasbarra were awarded a commission from the KPD for Trotz alledem !, intended to commemorate the Berlin meeting of the party at a crucial moment. A revue-format presentation that included twenty-four scenes, numerous film sequences, and more than two hundred performers, Trotz alledem! exploited the potential of simultaneity to expose the failures of linearity to establish “realistic” histories or responsible recountings of contemporary events. Piscator would describe the production:

“The whole performance was a montage of authentic speeches, essays, newspaper cuttings, appeals …, pamphlets, photographic, and film of the War and the Revolution, of historical persons and scenes …”

Neither script nor list of actors survives, and the program provides only a very basic view of the presentation: “Historical Revue from the years 1914-1919 in 24 scenes with interspersed films.” It is known that Heartfield was the production’s designer, developing, John Willet reports, its basic framework: “ ... a plain construction of steps and platforms ... on a huge revolve.” Heartfield also supplied, and perhaps managed, the introduction of documentary film footage of World War I that was projected onto existing scenery and that re-oriented the spoken words, actions, and visual aids into a constantly becoming and unfolding continuum.

Two performances took place at the Grosses Schauspielhaus in July 1925.

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96 John Willet would note that the decision of the KPD to nominate Piscator for this task was probably due to his association with Grosz, in the IAH and Red Group of Artists. For this discussion see pages 50-1.
97 Kahn, John Heartfield, 49.
98 Willet, ibid., 53.
“Trotz alledem!” were words written by Karl Liebknecht, a lawyer who had been central in the founding of the KPD on December 31, 1918, and who was involved, if at first reluctantly, in the Spartacist uprising on January 1919. After the uprising was brutally repressed by Friedrich Ebert, the Imperial Army, and the Freikorps militia, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg were captured and executed with the knowledge of both Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Noske.100 The title stands as an emblem uniting discrete scenes, both moments in the actual life of the communist martyr and events directing the ultimate actions that were usually withheld. After the succession of scenes, the viewer understands that the actual story involves the origins of the current political crisis, the fundamental collusion between right wing and social democrats, and in particular, their tacit agreement regarding war. Unfolding from the particular circumstances of Karl Liebknecht, who had become a martyr figure for the left, the broader ideological issue appears in direct relationship to the facts and events of contemporary life, and the message, that urgent action is needed, arises from the interaction of both. The gradual revelation of content, a strategy in opposition to simple representation and imposition, lent itself well to the revue format that Piscator preferred here because he could change, add, or take away the content-emblems without disturbing a broader, more abstract, unifying structure – which did not exist. The structure of the performance evolved, in its entirety, as a product of the scenes included, the projections shown, the music, and audience participation. None were

100Hannah Höch had included Ebert and Noske, as well as Karl Liebknecht (who urges the viewer, “Join Dada!”), in her collage and watercolor work entitled Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany from 1919-1920, and she appropriated the photograph of the two in bathing trunks, ‘Ebert und Noske in der Sommerfrische’ from the Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung, 24 August 1919 for her work Dada-Rundschau from 1919. In 1923 the photograph was satirized in the Malik Verlag’s Die Pleite, which depicted Ebert and Noske standing in water in which corpses floated and skeletons clamored for attention. The caption read: “Bald brauch’n se keine badehosen mehr.”
constants, and none cohered into a larger framework that existed apart from the actual components. Technology, present here in the film sequences and projections, had released the spatial and temporal frames of theatrical practice, which allowed a combination of documentary (evidence) with total theater (the audience participation) with an epic result.

In 1927, Piscator moved from the (socialist) Volksbühne to the commercially financed Theater am Nollendorfplatz that, as Sheila McAlpine points out, actually gave him more freedom in production than had previously been the case.¹ In a 1929 photomontage, Sascha Stone captured Erwin Piscator on his way to rehearsal at his theater on the Nollendorfplatz, and its montage technique embodies something of the sophistication that Piscator’s theatrical productions, with Heartfield’s film and photomontage contributions, would attain (figure 24).² Piscator pauses on the pedestrian walk of the Nollendorfplatz, not quite the corner most famously depicted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in 1912, and he appears both sunk in thought, an interior and self-searching moment, while oriented, simultaneously, to the urban fabric of the city beyond himself. Piscator prepares to enter the theater that, built in 1905, had also functioned as a concert hall and (after 1911) as a cinema.

At first glance, Stone’s depiction is quite straightforward. While Stone uses the advanced technique of montage, the cropping, detail, and layered-montage technique function to establish the impression of readily available subject matter and theme. While there is a refusal to allow a single and consistent system of scale or perspective to order the pictorial

² Regarding the title, on the photograph’s reverse is the inscription “Eröffnung der neuen / Piscator-Bühne / Piscator geht ins Nollendorf Theater.” Piscator and the Austrian actress Tilla Durieux had opened the Theater am Nollendorferplatz in 1927.
space, a remnant of the critical deconstruction of spatial and temporal logistics that Dadaist photomontage had accomplished a decade earlier, Stone accomplishes smooth transitions through his layering process. This procedure directs the content of the presentation in significant ways. The founder of the Theater am Nollendorfplatz looms above and beyond, providing direction, foundation, and perhaps more essentially, the artistic vision that would finally resolve the contradiction between agitprop propaganda on the one hand, and aesthetic merit on the other. As Piscator would later put it, "... [My interest is] ... a political theater, not theatrical politics, which apart from anything else are nothing new."¹⁰³

Indeed, a closer consideration of the photomontage suggests an implication in something resembling Piscator’s “new.” Although slightly taller than his theater and aligned with the strong vertical of the tower at left, Piscator does not control the structure in an absolute or authoritative sense. Both figure and structure are permeable to each other, and by extension, both are available to what might have been previously understood as mutually exclusive realms. The theater is in a state of construction and reconstruction, and the scaffolding and makeshift signage dissolve the façade of the Art Nouveau building into a provisional architectonics of presence and absence, material and form, within the dynamic context of urban life. It is precisely that area of the façade that overlaps the figure of its director that also appears, paradoxically, to come into clearest focus. Piscator’s transparency to his theater, and the theater’s transparency to him, suggests a coming-into-being of both, a simultaneity that transcends the idea of a subjectivity that is immanent to

both site and time. At the same time, Stone’s superimposition of Piscator’s figure on the architectural structure of the theater, the transparency of the figure to the materiality of the building, adds to the sense of provisionality and mutual dependence for both – a challenge to absolute object and absolute space, to fully “present” subjectivity and the notion of irrevocable presence across history and within the passage of time. Both figure and structure are lent a kind of reliant three-dimensionality by their superimposition; none are produced for the viewer inside the world of the picture. Here, the pictorial elements are sent in the service of active meaning production, and to initiate this process, the viewer is directed to the world outside.104

For his first production in 1927, Piscator staged Ernst Toller’s Hoppla, wir leben! The designers were Traugott Müller, George Grosz, and John Heartfield. A collaborative production in terms of design and design production, it is difficult to isolate the specific work that Heartfield contributed but it is important, nonetheless, to situate him in the context of this innovative and influential project. Traugott Müller’s stage set was a four-story scaffolding built on a revolving stage. While other theatrical productions took the proscenium arch as literal and conceptual framing element, allowing the division of space to lend ease in changing scenes or lighting, Piscator adopted this “free standing structure,” which had been under experiment in the stage assembly that Heartfield created for “Trotz alledem!”, and he allowed its dynamism to function in the place of

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Note: The text contains footnotes and references relevant to the context of the narrative.
historical frames. Otherwise stated, here, the innovation is mobilized it in the format of a full-scale theatrical production. The freestanding structure allowed the audience to view scenes and action that were not usually seen in literal juxtaposition, and it was responsible for the fundamental anti-linearity that organized the (nonetheless) historically oriented production. Similarly, the play included a cross-section of society, and this was literalized in the scene design, as were the social structures of class division, which were conceptualized in provisional divisions between the different acting arenas.105

The production used film to incorporate specifically documentary history, otherwise only available to theatrical discourse in the service of second-hand representations, as documentary “reality effects” working to establish illusion. Here, Piscator introduced “documentary” into a narrative taking shape around the eight-year incarceration of a political prisoner, thereby translating his “subjective” experience into a greater objectivity that identified the protagonist’s experience as relevant and meaningful to all. McAlpine describes the interrelated functionality in this narrative process:

… [The] … juxtaposition in time and place of actions not normally seen together gave the audience a … point of view from which to perceive more about the workings of society than they could from a single experience of reality where the witness is confined to one time and place. The use of film and projections … could extend this almost limitlessly. There was no longer any technical limitation on the topographical or historical material the stage could bring to bear on the action to ‘frame’ it and thus put it into the context desired by the production.106

106McAlpine, 76.
Critics would point out the poor quality of the films Piscator included, making comparisons with operatic productions that had also used film to create the kind of “total theater” that, for Piscator, in combination with aspects of documentary and elements of epic productions, were his aim. The very different function of film for Piscator should not be compared to illusionistically inclined productions, however, and the criticisms may in fact indicate the success, in the sense of its consistent refusal of illusion, of the production. Allowing the process of re-presenting to occupy the foreground of the presentation, Hoppa, wir leben! allowed the production of meaning, the coherence of content, to locate itself in the experiencing and reading subject, overturning the aesthetic-object and perceiving-subject dichotomous opposition that characterized bourgeois “high” and “low” cultural formations. Summarily stated, Hoppa, wir leben! did not draw on an exterior set of social conditions in order to symbolize (or allegoricize) the lived realities of the spectator. On the contrary, lacking frame and closure in a fundamental sense, the viewer of the production never abandons or “escapes” the lived social reality of his or her “outside.”

Hoppa, wir leben! remains the most comprehensive expression of Piscator’s interest in combining film and the theater experiences. Perhaps ironically, Piscator would himself supply a qualifying commentary in response to this production, and a brief consideration of his self-criticism is revealing in terms of the accomplishment the production actually represented as well as Piscator’s position in contemporary debates. Piscator would distinguish between three types of film: “

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107 For extensive passages from the relevant reviews, see McAlpine, ibid., 91-122.
108 McAlpine, ibid., 91. I agree, but with qualifications, as I state.
Lehrfilm," "der dramatische Film," and "der Kommentar film." It was the latter that Piscator most closely associated with epic theater, through the operation of Verfremdungseffekt, which Brecht described as a device that "... prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer."\(^{109}\) Piscator would later comment that Hoppla, wir leben! did not embody Verfremdungseffekt to the extent that Rasputin would, for example. That Rasputin accomplished this, and therefore accomplished a move to specifically epic theater in radically different and more successful ways, meant that Rasputin was a more successful production.\(^{110}\)

Turning for a moment to the model that Benjamin puts forth in “The Author as Producer,” a potential difference between the positions implied by Brecht and by Piscator, respectively, emerge. One might ask, at this juncture of things, about the particular turn given the “operative writer” in Brecht. For Benjamin, the “operative writer,” the true “author as producer,” will take a position from inside the means of cultural production, from within the very structures and productive forces themselves. For Benjamin, this is a necessary, indeed an ethical, move: "... we are faced with the fact – of which the past decade in Germany has furnished an abundance of examples – that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of


\(^{110}\)It is the case that Piscator would further develop this technique: In 1931, for example, he presented Tai-Yang awakens, written by Frederich Wolfe and produced as an alternative to Klabund’s version of the Chinese classic, Circle of Chalk, directed by Max Reinhardt. Heartfield, as the designer, filled stage with banners that bore political and statistical inscriptions, "facts" that also served as screens for his film projections – grounds dissipated, signifying that the people always have a choice and must be active. Judith Malina, The Piscator Notebook (Routledge, 2012): 8.
revolutionary themes ... "¹¹¹ That this presents a difficulty does not escape Benjamin’s notice. In the text just above this passage, he is critical of Döblin, who had urged the writer to occupy a position “beside the proletariat.” Benjamin responds: “But what kind of place is that? That of a benefactor, of an ideological patron – an impossible place. And so we return to the thesis stated at the outset: The place of the intellectual can be identified, or, better, chosen, only on the basis of his position in the process of production.” Just below, Benjamin points out that Brecht would develop the notion of Umfunktionierung (functional transformation), “the first,” Benjamin adds, “to make of intellectuals the far-reaching demand not to supply the apparatus of production without, to the utmost extent possible, changing it in accordance with socialism.” Benjamin quotes Brecht: “The publication of the Versuche ... occurred at a time when certain works ought no longer to be individual experiences (have the character of works), but should, rather, concern the use (transformation) of certain institutes and institutions.”

Yet, Brecht’s notion of Verfremdungseffekt implies a set of devices that are put in motion by a purveyor of cultural production in the form of the theatrical director, and as such, threaten to compromise the collaborational aspect, the sense of incipient mutual implication, that is present in Benjamin’s “operative writer” and present, from an early moment, in the aims and interests of Piscator as well. Hoppla, wir leben! was unique in that it was a first attempt to produce, in the viewer, the particularity and actuality of class difference. The production accomplished this literally rather than through the metaphor, allegory, and reified thematics that were inherent in classical theatrical practice, that

¹¹¹Benjamin, ibid., 228.
cohered into “entertainment,” and that supplied experiences central to the bourgeoisie. This collaboration between Piscator and Heartfield, Hoppla, wir leben !, is significant in establishing techniques that would result in dynamic spaces and productively unstable processes that were simultaneously resistive and constructive; the production of a meaning event.
Chapter 3.

Performative into Photography:

Documentary, Archive, and Deutschland, Deutschland über alles

The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all of these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents ... Far from being that which unifies everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse, far from being only that which ensures that we exist in the midst of preserved discourse, it is that which differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration.

Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1972

... [In Renger-Patzsch] ... we have a flagrant example of what it means to supply a productive apparatus without changing it. To change it would have meant to overthrow another of the barriers, to transcend another of the antitheses, that fetter the production of intellectuals, in this case the barrier between writing and image. What we require of the photographer is the ability to give his picture the caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary useful value. But we shall make this demand most emphatically when we – the writers – take up photography ... only by transcending the specialization in the process of production that, in the bourgeois view, constitutes its order can one make this production politically useful; and the barriers imposed by specialization must be breached jointly by the productive forces that they were set up to divide.

Walter Benjamin, The Author as Producer, 1934

So I came to live among the Germans. I expected little and was prepared to expect even less. I came humbly, the way homeless, blind Oedipus came to the gate of Athens. But beautiful spirits received Oedipus in the mystic grove, while those who received me were of another kind.

Hölderlin, Hyperion, 1797-1799

In his 1968 book entitled Difference and Repetition, Gilles Deleuze identifies a fundamental paradox at the origin of philosophical understandings of processes that produce thinking (and sensing) subjects and corollary, if not at all necessary, sets of viewing (and consuming)
experiences. Simply stated, his interest lies in the sets of frames that function to create the conditions for intelligibility, and the subjectivity that is created, perhaps mandated, as a result. Deleuze questions logical evaluations that take shape around identity and analogy as criteria for “authenticity,” which establishes the relationship of copies to always-present and immanent models, pointing out that this evaluative discrimination actually works to create the very grounds upon which subjectivity, aesthetic experience, and by extension, agency, identity, and political life, for example, will be originated and maintained. Against notions of “authentic” and immanent subjects, representations, and, by extension, ethics, Deleuze posits the eternal return, which “affirmed in all its power, allows no installation of a foundation-ground.” He continues:

On the contrary ... [the eternal return] ... swallows up or destroys every ground which would function as an instance responsible for the difference between the original and the derived, between things and simulacra. It makes us party to a universal ungrounding. By ‘ungrounding,’ we should understand the freedom of the non-mediated ground, the discovery of a ground behind every other ground, the relation between the groundless and the ungrounded ... Every thing, animal, or being assumes the status of simulacrum; so that the thinker of eternal return – who indeed refuses to be drawn out of the cave, finding instead another cave beyond, always another in which to hide – can rightly say that he is himself burdened with the superior form of everything that is, like the poet ‘burdened with humanity, even that of the animals.’ These words themselves have their echo in the superposed caves.112

Deleuze would connect these arguments to the singularity and primacy of specifically humanist ideologies, central to western epistemologies, interpretations, and theories of cultural production, for example; to theories of the subject across many different platforms (quite literally).
In the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), perhaps their greatest theorization of the event in the coherence of subjectivity and meaning production, Deleuze and Guattari state:

For Freud, when the thing splinters and loses its identity, the word is still there to restore that identity or invent a new one. Freud counted on the word to reestablish a unity no longer found in things. Are we not witnessing the first stirrings of a subsequent adventure, that of the Signifier, the devious despotic agency that substitutes itself for signifying proper names and replaces multiplicities with the dismal unity of an object lost? ... Who is ignorant of the fact that wolves travel in packs? Only Freud. Every child knows it.  

In the context of the eternal return, Deleuze argues for a critical and productive reinstatement of the simulacrum, describing the struggle between signs for realization that admits agency, a consensual and performative basis for identity, and the possibility of change: "... difference does not lie between things and simulacra, models and copies. Things are simulacra themselves, simulacra are the superior forms, and the difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum, to attain the status of a sign in the coherence of the eternal return." Deleuze suggests a productivity that is useful for thinking through political and revolutionary reception in the aesthetic realm:

The identity of the object read really dissolves into divergent series defined by esoteric words, just as the identity of the reading subject is dissolved into the decentered circles of possible multiple readings. Nothing, however, is lost; each series exists only by virtue of the return of the others. Everything has become simulacrum,

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114 Op. cit. The writing on art and the simulacral, especially as regards contemporary art, is extensive. Most notable here are Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson, who understand the simulacral as a negative symptom of the hegemony of consumerism in contemporary culture, an indication of loss of significance (Baudrillard) and dissociation from history (Jameson).
for by the simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned. The simulacrum is the instance which includes a difference within itself, such as (at least) two divergent series on which it plays, all resemblance abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy. It is in this direction that we must look for the conditions, not of possible experience, but of real experience ... 115

As Rosalind Krauss has argued, if drawing on a different set of writings, Deleuze’s theoretical working-through of the simulacral is especially relevant to considerations of the photographic in that both embody a critique of the fundamental contradiction at the origin of representing, and by extension subjectivity (as I will argue), itself. Krauss points out: “... at a certain point photography, in its precarious position as the false copy ... served to deconstruct the whole system of model and copy, original and fake ... photography opened the closed unities of the older aesthetic discourse to the severest possible scrutiny, turning them inside out.” 116

These ideas are specifically useful for discussing the presence of photography, perhaps a register of meaning- and subjectivity-production that might be termed “the photographic,” during the Weimar Republic. The return of a more documentary use of the photograph in the 1920s, most notably in illustrated weeklies and photo essay books, in the social and cultural contexts of political unrest on the one hand, and artistic innovation and argumentation on the other, occasioned unease regarding the reality value of the photograph as well as skepticism regarding its function and aesthetic value for its intended audiences. A certain instability of the photographic image created suspicion, perhaps a result

115Deleuze ibid., 69.
of the experimental photomontage practices of the decade prior, and contemporary authors differed in response. Consider Siegfried Kracauer’s much-discussed essay, entitled “Photography,” published in 1927:

The aim of the illustrated newspapers is the complete reproduction of the world accessible to the photographic apparatus … Their method corresponds to that of the weekly newsreel, which is nothing but a collection of photographs, whereas an authentic film employs photography merely as a means.

… Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense. Most of the images in the illustrated magazines are topical photographs, which refer to existing objects. The reproductions are thus basically signs which remind us of the original object that was supposed to have been understood. The demonic diva. In reality, however, the weekly photographic ration does not at all mean to refer to these objects or ur-images … the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits.

… In the illustrated magazines, people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. The spatial continuum from the camera’s perspective dominates the spatial appearance of the perceived object; the resemblance between the image and the object effaces the contours of the object’s history. Never before has a period known so little about itself.117

Kracauer faults the photograph not in its failure to communicate the truth, but in its tendency, given distance from “ur-images,” the identity of which is repeatedly eroded by the “resemblance,” repetition, and circulation, to be mobilized in the creation of illusory mythologies; false histories and tragically misunderstood events. For Kracauer, the fault of the photograph lies not in its indexicality itself, but in the actualization of photographic indexicality and its availability to capricious and irresponsible recontextualization.

Bertolt Brecht understood the documentary power of the photograph, using photographs himself in the creation of *mise-en-scène* and in his "model books," but he was potentially suspicious of photography used as more than a tool, at one point cautioning readers against the photo essays featured in *A-I-Z*. "The images that are spewed daily from the printing presses," Brecht wrote, "and that would appear to have the character of truth are, in reality, only representative of a darkening of the facts. The photographic apparatus can deceive as much as, say, the typesetting machine." In *Threepenny Lawsuit* (1931), Brecht continued:

The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses these relations. So there is indeed 'something to construct,' something 'artificial,' 'invented.'

While this unease is often interpreted as specifically directed toward the photographic and its specific claims to present, or to represent, something of the "real" and documentary aspects of lived existence through the presence of objects, whether cultural objects specific to rather newly-founded discourses, such as the history of art, or social objects, such as "workers," "citizens," and so on, the unease expressed by these critics is one more productively examined in the context of a crisis of the terms of representation itself. Refusing to collapse "crisis of representation" and a crisis that was specifically photographic is not a

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118 Reprinted in Matthias Uecker, "The Face of the Weimar Republic: Photography, Physiognomy, and Propaganda in Weimar Germany," *Monatshefte*, volume 99, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 469-484. The quote on pages 470-471. Uecker comments that the critical discourse forming around the photograph at this time was not the experience of the general public, who consumed photographs in earnest — thus, critical interest and debate.

minor distinction. A broader view allows consideration of cultural discourses and the formation of subjectivity, and therefore potentially counter-discourses, without summoning, perhaps re-positing as origin of “crisis,” a prior and mythical moment when a photograph functioned merely to “present.”

Writing critically about Neue Sachlichkeit in 1934, Walter Benjamin suggests that the “revolutionary content” of Heartfield’s photomontage practice, “whose technique made the book cover into a political instrument,” represents a moment in the past to which some photographic projects of the late 1920s and 1930s might lend consideration. In the broader context of his interest in the relationship between tendentiousness (the “political”) and form (“aesthetic quality”), Benjamin continues, describing the post-revolutionary, perhaps post-photomontage, photographic practice he observes:

But now follow the path of photography further. What do you see? It becomes ever more nuance, ever more modern, and the result is that it can no longer depict a tenement block or a refuse heap without transfiguring it. It goes without saying that photography is unable to say anything about a power station or a cable factory other than this: What a beautiful world! A Beautiful World — that is the title of the well-known anthology by Renger-Patzsch, in which we see New Matter-of-fact photography at its peak. For it has succeeded in transforming even abject poverty, by recording it in a fashionably perfected manner, into an object of enjoyment.  

Otherwise stated, for Benjamin, there is a danger that a potential aesthetic inherent to the photographic will intrude to compromise

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120 Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, ed. And intro. Peter Demetz (New York: Schoken Books, 1986): 231. Regarding “quality” on the one hand, and “tendentiousness” on the other, Benjamin states above: “Of course, the connection can be asserted dogmatically. You can declare: a work that shows the correct political tendency need show no other quality. You can also declare: a work that exhibits the correct tendency must of necessity have every other
“revolutionary content,” that to “supply a productive apparatus without changing it” would only fail to “breach ... the barriers” created by the enforced specialization of bourgeois culture, which subsumes even the most revolutionary of cultural production.

From 1921 to the end of 1920s, Heartfield’s use of photography in specifically documentary projects, or the reorientation of his photographic practice away from the temporal and spatial spontaneity of his earlier photomontages and toward an interest in relatively ordered and illusionistic spaces and potential, if openly constructed and critical, narrativity, creates a set of questions regarding his relationship to Neue Sachlichkeit, often defined as a kind of melancholic response to Expressionism and Dada and one that is itself a contested and much-discussed set of cultural practices. While a superficial analysis might situate Heartfield himself adjacent to or within these practices, especially given shifts in understandings of those artistic procedures deemed specifically revolutionary in intention and import, the relationship of Heartfield’s work to these contemporaneous bodies of work in particular, and Weimar culture broadly speaking, is complex.

From 1921, as Benjamin points out, Heartfield’s most important engagement of visual culture found expression in the book covers that he created for various publishers and writing projects. Heartfield’s book covers and related projects, both little-discussed and more complex than

quality.” In essence, Benjamin’s set of deliberations in this essay takes shape around these questions.

has been the focus of critical literature on Heartfield, evidence the innovative design principles that would culminate in his well-known collaboration with Kurt Tucholsky, the appropriative archive presented in Deutschland, Deutschland über alles (1929), and that would accomplish institutional recognition at the Film und Foto exhibition, also in 1929.

In 1921, Heartfield produced his first book cover designs and executions. They include complex layouts of photographs, text, and graphic elements that laid the foundation for his experiments toward the end of the decade. The earlier cover for Upton Sinclair's 100%. Roman eines Patrioten (100%. Novel of a Patriot) (figure 25), for example, evidences a shift from the earlier photomontage practice of Dadamerika while also differing from the montaged stage sets he would produce for Piscator’s theater. The volume was first published by the Malik Verlag in the Red Novel Series (volume 2), and it included ten illustrations by George Grosz, as the front cover proclaims.

In terms of formal composition, the covers were intended to be easily read and understood while also embodying a critical aspect that would be as readily grasped by their audience. In this first version of Heartfield’s design for the cover of 100%. Roman eines Patrioten, focus is on the front cover of the volume, which exists as an appropriation of traditional pictorial spaces that intended the support of illusion and the creation of a world beyond the literality of the picture plane. Here, the possibility

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122 Herzfelde’s frequent collaborations with Grosz in productions for the Malik Verlag and other publishing houses are a topic of Chapter 2, above. One of Heartfield’s first layout and design productions may have been for the translation of Alphonse Daudet’s Die Abenteuer der Herrn Tartarin aus Tarascon, translated by Klabund and published in 100 numbered copies by Erich Reiss (Berlin), in 1921. This volume included 97 illustrations by Grosz and design and layout are credited to Heartfield. Franz Jung’s Proletarier. Erzählung, which was published in 1921 by the Malik Verlag in the Red Novel Series (it was volume 1), features a cover drawing by Grosz. Jung’s Die Rote Woche in this series (volume 3), an examination of the violent confrontation of two working class groups – soldiers on the one hand, and workers in revolt on the other – as mandated within the capitalist system, includes 9 drawings by Grosz and a cover developed by Heartfield. He chose a news photograph from the uprising itself.
of pictorial illusion is marshaled self-consciously, regulating access to
the world beyond that would be realized in Sinclair’s text while also
contributing to the establishment of the book as an object. Failing to
fully operate as a “window,” the scene is framed by the name of the author
(“Upton Sinclair”) at the top and by that of the publisher (“Der Malik-
Verlag. Berlin”) at the bottom. The title stands in the middle of the main
composition, a photograph, which at first glance presents a panoramic and
very populated urbanscape, the access to which is mediated by the
nineteenth-century lamp post in the right foreground, and by the small
group of figures and by the signature of the artist (“John Heartfield”),
both of which stand in the left foreground. The small group of figures is
subtle, but suggestive that the crowd in the center will build as more
citizens move to join.

Notably, situated above the throng of humanity that is the focus of
the photograph, steep buildings rise from the equally steep and tiled
ground of the street that temporarily houses the figures. The street is a
site that establishes a disjunctive relationship between the urban
residents and the vaster and suggestively oppressive culture that is
presenced, if without human affirmation, in the buildings above. The
buildings truncate all but an irregular and uneven access to “nature,”
which is fleetingly present in the form of the sky at the very top of the
composition. “Humanity” and “culture” are quite literally at odds in the
space of the picture, an effect created by the vantage point of the
photograph. At the same time, although thronging the street, the crowd is
orderly, not the effect of a greater spatial unity in the world of the
photograph but as a result of the disjunctive perspective between figures
and urban context itself. Dignity and a kind of order are imparted to the
group of human figures, but Heartfield does not complete the metaphorical authority of pictorial convention to create this effect. Instead, pictorial coherence develops from the framing of the presentation by the circumstances of distribution: The author, “Upton Sinclair,” and the book’s title, 100%.

100%. Roman eines Patrioten, originally published by the author himself, is often associated with a tendency to create fictional accounts that evidence the Sinclair’s particular set of social and political inclinations. At the same time, however, the story embodies a critique of American social and political life after World War I that exceeds the limits of biography, and in a fundamental sense, Heartfield’s cover communicates something of the force of the text that lies between the covers. The very first lines might stand as a textual representation of Heartfield’s cover, juxtaposing the cultural and the political, the broad and the mundane, in the context of Sinclair’s “American City.” The protagonist is Peter Gudge, a young man of poverty who, finding himself hungry on the streets and with few prospects, disillusioned with and distanced from modern, urban life, represents a type that will be realized in the context of Sinclair’s story. Heartfield’s throng of humanity, a throng that could include any number of readers, stands at a similar crossroads:

Now and then it occurs to one to reflect upon what slender threads of accident depend the most important circumstances of his life; to look back and shudder, realizing how close to the edge of nothingness his being has come. A young man is walking down the street, quite casually, with an empty mind and no set purpose; he comes to a crossing, and for no reason that he could tell he takes the right hand turn instead of the left ... where would you be now, and what would have become of those qualities of mind which you consider of importance to the world, and those grave affairs of business to which your time is devoted?
Something like that it was which befell Peter Gudge; just such an accident, changing the whole current of his life, and making the series of events with which this story deals. Peter was walking down the street one afternoon, when a woman approached and held out to him a printed leaflet. "Read this, please," she said.

It is significant that Sinclair understands national identity, "those grave affairs of business," to be accidental rather than inherent to a mythical and shared humanity. Gudge’s accidental turn would lead him to revolutionary incitement, to espionage, to counter-patriotism, and in the end, to a grand redemption through another chance meeting with the Daughters of the American Revolution. At the end of the story, when asked whether he was an American, Gudge would reply: "You bet! ... 100%!" — hence Sinclair’s title, and its equally ironic subtitle: *Novel of a Patriot*. Sinclair’s text traces the subsumption of a citizen subject under the rubric of patriotism, a consequence of World War I perhaps as violent as the events of the front of the war, and Heartfield establishes the terms of this problem in his formal presentation of the literal site of its enactment.

Sinclair’s *100%*. *Roman eines Patrioten* was published a second time, in 1928, in two versions, with significant changes in the relationship between photographs, text, and design elements (figure 26). These changes evidence Heartfield’s more subtle and sophisticated use of text-image relationships in particular. In the later versions of Heartfield’s design for *100%*, presentation of photographs, text, and graphic elements are carefully sequenced; front cover relates to spine and then to the back cover, and all relate in complex ways to the text within, unchanged from the earlier versions. Heartfield’s intention to control the book cover as a
whole, to understand cover, front, back, and spine as coherent and successive entities and frame for the text, may have been indicated in a slightly earlier work captioned as a “close-up“ (Großaufnahme) of his montage for Sinclair’s Nach der Sintflut (After the Flood) (figure 27), a book also published by the Malik Verlag. In the “close-up,” Heartfield himself stands before an enlarged version of his cover, in the act of cutting to create a montage, and the book itself, with a fully realized cover, hovers in the right foreground. Under suggestion in the “close-up” are the conceptual grounds of Heartfield’s practice. Considering the book cover as an entire unit comprising front cover, back cover, and spine, simultaneously, would change the viewing experience dramatically, producing a subsidiary object in the form of the book cover. Conversely, front cover, spine, and back cover are best understood in the progression of a series where photograph, text, and design are engaged simultaneously.

The 1928 version evidences a radically changed relationship between viewer and cover. Heartfield used a slightly more closely cropped photo for the front cover of his 1928 design, as is most evident in the right foreground, where a single figure formerly seen in his entirety is now subsumed by the world past the picture’s frame. The relationship between the text and the world of the picture is radically changed. In his 1921 design, 100%. Roman eines Patrioten asserted the literal face of the picture plane, emphasizing that the world of the picture is precisely that—a picture, whose contexts of “realism” and facts of circulation would be elaborated by the novel’s text. Here, picture and text occupy the same register. Heartfield omitted his own name and the subtitle, “Novel of a Patriot,” instead situating the novel’s title, here simply 100%, and a

123Upton Sinclair, 100%: The Story of a Patriot, first edition, published by the author
subtle presencing of the author’s name, along the steep orthogonals that order the fictive city space. It would seem that the text is here given an authoritative role, ordering the presentation and a significant participant in the development of the hegemonic urban space itself. Yet the legend 100%, quite literally a cipher for the nationalism that Sinclair’s text would investigate, remains at the level of emblem, accessory, and cultural symbol. Sherwin Simmons locates the origin of this critical and deconstructive use of text and typography in juxtaposition to imagery in Heartfield’s design training. In the context of ideological struggles between the National Socialist workers’ party and the Communist Party, which Simmons locates in the symbol of the swastika, an increasingly abstract and primitive style of typography functioned to posit the claims of National Socialism as both conceptual valid (abstract) and inherent to German identity in an originary and primitivist sense.124

A second photograph stands on the back cover, mediated by the spine, which presents a graphic presentation of the author’s name in very large type and the book’s title. Here the book’s title is presented in the full text (“Hundert Prozent”) that suggests the repetition and reduplication of a type in superficially varying forms and styles. Depicted in the back photograph is a group of klu klux klan members, in full costume, grouped around a table that stands to the right. The table is draped in an American flag and a book, presumably a book of membership or other founding document. To the left, behind the group, a cross rises; to the right the stripes of a raised and waving American flag are visible. A figure on the right, standing just before the raised flag, raises his hand in a gesture

of allegiance and pledge, presumably (parodically) the Pledge of Allegiance, given the prominence of the flag behind.\textsuperscript{125} The back cover photograph quite literally evidences both an aspect of nationalistic identity, a consequential performative gesture as well as its result, the mindless allegiance that would prove its gravest consequence in Heartfield’s Germany. The gesture of the robed participant is resonant with the Hitler salute; by 1926, two years before this book cover, the party had made the \textit{Heil Hitler} a compulsory greeting, a gesture of allegiance, and a mandatory accessory of respect.\textsuperscript{126} Heartfield therefore situates the struggle that is the subject of Sinclair’s novel in a broader global context, and through the layout of photographs and text, he establishes an obviously constructed coherence between text, photograph, typography, and design that points to nationalism as an equally constructed ideological force.

In 1928, the \textit{Neuer Deutscher Verlag} (NDV), a press organization directed by Willi Münzenberg, commissioned Heartfield to collaborate with the author, critic, and satirist Kurt Tucholsky on a text and photograph combination, a kind of early photojournalistic essay that would eventually be entitled \textit{Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles}. Tucholsky had reviewed several books of photographs with documentary intention, including \textit{Krieg dem Krieg} (\textit{War against War}) (1924), a production that in its innovation, Brecht would also praise. \textit{Krieg dem Krieg} was first published by Ernst Friedrich, a union and progressive politics activist who had, in fervent

\textsuperscript{125}It is interesting that the author of the Pledge of Allegiance (in 1892), Frances Bellamy, was a Christian socialist, and brother to the utopian socialist writer Edward Bellamy. Just five years before the creation of this book cover, The United States had changed the wording of the pledge from “I pledge allegiance to the flag...” to “I pledge allegiance to the flag of America...” to avoid confusion on the part of immigrants between their own flags and the American flag. In any case, Heartfield was likely aware of this change, and the importance of the associated gesture, as his strategic inclusion of the picture indicates.
anti-militarism, refused service in World War I. Friedrich was imprisoned and after his release, coincident with the November Revolution in 1918, he worked to develop literature educating children and young people away from the militarism and other violence that he understood as a growing problem.

As a unified work, *Krieg dem Krieg* was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a critical ordering and juxtaposition of photographs that was aimed toward maximum impact. In a broader sense, as an early work that organized un-authored, appropriated photographs, and/or those photographs whose authorship would not function as organizational metaphor, *Krieg dem Krieg* was less interested in organizing representations into a comprehensive narrative or moment of totality than it was in presenting the fragmented and partial evidential fragments that would cohere, along with the memories and impressions of the contemporary viewer, who contributed the "history," as it were, into a kind of figment that could represent the unrepresentable: The actual horrors of World War I. In a work resonant with his book cover productions, Heartfield produced a yearbook for the Malik Verlag entitled *Platz dem Arbeiter!* (also 1924), which combined text and photographs in critical ways that challenged the merely explanatory. Projects that introduced a kind of explosiveness and innovation regarding narrative structure, those projects that questioned the possibility of narrativity itself, would be important in radical discourse from the mid-1920s.

Kurt Tucholsky was not an uncontentious figure. Benjamin would write, expressing his dismay at the commodification of revolutionary discourse and situating Tucholsky precariously therein:

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I spoke of the procedure of a certain modish photography whereby poverty is made an object of consumption. In turning to New Matter-of-factness as a literary movement, I must take a step further and say that it has made the struggle against poverty an object of consumption. The political importance of the movement was indeed exhausted in many cases by the conversion of revolutionary impulses, insofar as they occurred among bourgeoisie, into objects of amusement that found their way without difficulty into the big-city cabaret business. The transformation of the political struggle from a compulsion to decide into an object of contemplative enjoyment, from a means of production into a consumer article, is the defining characteristic of this literature. A perceptive critic has explained this, using the example of Erich Kästner, as follows: ‘With the workers movement this left-wing radical intelligentsia has nothing in common. It is, rather, as a phenomenon of bourgeois decomposition, a counterpart of the feudalistic disguise that the Second Empire admired in the reserve officer. The radical life publicists of the stamp of Kästner, Mehring, or Tucholsky are the proletarian camouflage of decayed bourgeois strata. Their function is to produce, from the political standpoint, not parties but cliques; from the literary standpoint, not schools but fashions; from the economic standpoint, not producers but agents. Agents or hacks who make a great display of their poverty, and a banquet out of yawning emptiness. One could not be more totally accommodated in a cozy situation.’

Setting aside Benjamin’s criticisms for a moment, it is helpful to consider Tucholsky’s admittedly inconsistent position in the debates and projects taking form around the photographic in order to draw out those aspects most relevant to his collaboration with Heartfield in Deutschland, Deutschland über alles. Tucholsky had written cultural criticism that included, many years earlier (1912), a brief essay entitled “Mehr Fotografieren!” that argued for an innovative method of presentation in order to expand, rather than to restrict, the single photograph’s potential to influence (wirken) the viewer. Tucholsky understands wirken as a function of a normative and fundamental human condition, but, at this moment in time, he also posits a

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move that would function to mitigate the totality of this condition and its directive authority in the reception of the single photograph. When encountering a photograph of a slum, which Tucholsky describes as "foul, in disarray, [with] polluted air," he adds: "Why not take this image, [then] photograph bourgeois high society, [perhaps] a dance, and place them next to each other? ... It must be shown systematically ... with contrasts and comparisons. And with a little text."129 Tucholsky does not suggest an ordering procedure in which "disarray" and "pollution" would be resolved by the juxtaposition of more ordered realities, but a movement between cause and effect, with the viewer situated somewhere in between.

Indeed, Tucholsky had a specific sort of procedural juxtaposition in mind. In 1925, Die Weltbühne published Tucholsky's "Die Tendenzfotografie," where he is critical of the layout procedures he observed in the contemporary popular press, opening his discussion with a question: "Why can't one read Simplicissimus any longer"?130 Tucholsky suggests that the popular press creates juxtapositions that only deplete the potential power of single photographs within a given framework rather than mobilize this power in the interests of the development of critical interaction between images and viewer. Tucholsky again develops his own idea of critical contrast and comparison, of productive juxtapositions of image and text, as a way to control the instability of the single photographic image, to momentarily arrest the flow of connotation that, in the absence of a denotative function, would exceed even the documentary photograph's ability

to "represent." At the same time, he concludes, critical juxtapositions of image and image, of image and text, would open aspects of the documentary to broader questions of culture, society, and the political.

In Willi Münzenberg’s newly founded Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung, a periodical previously known as Sichel und Hammer that Tucholsky would praise as the locus of the emerging “Tendenzbild,” Tucholsky published his Bildgedicht, a series of versions of the “Tendenzbilder,” perhaps a sub-set of such, that posited a possible orientation whose authority was shared with something outside the world of the visual: The inclusion of literary texts, most notably poetry, the juxtaposition of which accomplished a kind of “superimposition” that defied a unified process of reading. P.V. Brady would write, summarizing the potential of Tucholsky’s Bilgedichter aptly:

Tucholsky’s Bildgedichte are inseparable from their setting. That setting provided photographic display ... devoted both to positive propaganda and to the exposure of social ills, squalid inequalities, and the like. A recent analysis has suggested that each issue of the A-I-Z should be seen not as a random grouping of items, but as ‘Agitation aus einem Guß’ ['Agitation from a work']. On this argument a Bildgedicht would gain extra momentum from its setting and at the same time contribute its own particular momentum. On the same argument, poetry, in losing autonomy, gains an unambiguous role in the overall propagandist scheme.

Furthermore, Brady describes the important functioning deriving from the “superimposition” of photograph and text, and suggests an accumulative process that accomplishes a subjectivity in relation to the work:

131 Interestingly, 1925 was also the year of the release of the Leica, the first 35 millimeter camera, and the initiation of a related process that would be important in photography for the next half century. Photographers using a 35mm camera would create contact sheets, which were literal “film strips,” and they would choose from many similarcroppings and vantage points to select the best image. The Leica was originally developed as a way to re-purpose unused movie film.
In the marriage of poem and photograph there lie clear possibilities of a rudimentary truth to life beyond the reach of poetry in its more usual, wholly verbalized setting. Thus — and most obviously — photographs make visual a speaker or speakers whose words then make up the poem which accompanies the picture. Thus too the person portrayed may be addressed by the poet [my emphasis].\textsuperscript{133}

A seeming text-image archive of German identity, social custom, and German tradition as these stood at the end of the Weimar Republic, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles is a scathing indictment of citizen subjectivity in the waning years of the Weimar Republic that, through its appropriative practices, situates the formation of its “archive,” to the extent that this is present at all, in a realm exterior to the work itself. A Hölderlin text opens the presentation, reminding readers of the time in German history outside the fundamental social depravities of the capitalist system. As Lukács would put it in 1934, “Hölderlin … takes no notice of the limitations and contradictions of the bourgeois revolution …”\textsuperscript{134} The presentations are organized into 97 sections of varying length, entitled, for example, “Forward, or, it is impossible to write captions for photographs,” “The harmfulness of civilian dress,” “Animals looking at you,” “As the twig is bent,” “Charity,” and “German movies.” Many of the photographs, in spite of the disclaimer in the “Forward,” are captioned as well. In the original publication, Tucholsky and Heartfield selected their texts by recourse to both content and typography, retaining the latter original states. Potentially explanatory, as regards their juxtaposition to


\textsuperscript{133}Brady, ibid., 860. The phrase ‘Agitation aus einem Guß’ is quoted from Peter Gorsen “Das Auge des Arbeiters – Anfänge der proletarischen Bildpresses,” Aesthetik und Kommunikation, 3, Heft 10 (1973): 7-41; this quote on page 8.

the photographs, or communicative, as regards the texts themselves, expected functionality is thereby curtailed, and a focus on the texts as functional in a process of representing is allowed.135

With a notable exception, a section entitled “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” that is situated just before halfway through the presentation and includes only two photographs, each section contains a poem (rarely) or a text of narrative prose juxtaposed to at least one or two photographs. The design of the book developed the powerful effect of “superimposition,” which Brady described, from the procedure of juxtaposition that Tucholsky had advocated in his writings, and that Heartfield developed, moving from his subject-object deconstructions and explorations in photomontage and incorporating the conceptual aspects of both in his layout design.

In a 1929 review of Kurt Tucholsky’s Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, Herbert Jhering wrote:

Man unterscheidet nicht mehr zwischen Allgemeinem und Persönlichem, zwischen öffentlichen und privaten Angelegenheiten. Man glaubt: nun dürfte es nichts Geheimes, nichts Verborgenes mehr geben, und alles, was zwischen vier Wänden gescheiht, ware Stoff für die Raubiger der Öffentlichkeit. Alles wird photographiert, alles wird ans Licht gezogen. Kein Wunder, daß diese Nachrichtengier auch den kämpfenden, den polemischen Schriftsteller angesteckt hat.

One no longer distinguishes between the general and the personal and unique; between public and private affairs. One believes: Now, nothing secret is permitted, there is nothing more of the distorted to reveal, and all that was segregated between four walls would [now] be substance for the rapacity of the public. Everything is photographed, everything is brought to light. No wonder that this news avarice, this greed, has infected even the struggling, the polemical writers.136

135Deutschland, Deutschland über alles exists in three versions. The first is the original publication, dating from 1929; the second was published in 1972 and included translations, which have inspired debate. A third is a small facsimile version, published by Rowohlt in 1973.

136Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. Herbert Jhering, Das Tagebuch, October 12, 1929: page 7; discussed in Brady, ibid., 858.
A recognition of an element of the "new," which informs Jhering’s review, is not surprising. Deutschland, Deutschland über alles was unique in its combination of text and photograph, in its critical juxtaposition and sequencing of photograph with photograph generally speaking, and in its organization of these elements by recourse to a coherence apparently at odds with a specifically holistic, post-Imperial and post-World War I German identity. Here, with a rather cynical suspicion, Jhering draws into the realm of consideration several of the most important aspects of the work of early photojournalism that Tucholsky produced with Heartfield in the last years of the 1920s, and that, mixed reviews notwithstanding, would prove important in the post-allegorical and post-archival procedures that inform Heartfield’s photomontages of the 1930s for A-I-Z: The potential documentary power of the photograph, newly popularized after the introduction of the hand-held Leica in 1925; the power of the photograph to engender a different “public” than had previously been the case; and the development of a very different sort of “political” image-making, which Jhering somewhat disparaging associates with “polemical writers.” The photograph, Jhering implies, and by extension the photographic, has the potential to dispel the artifice and mythological capabilities of objects: The “everything,” previously hidden and “private,” which a photograph can potentially bring “to light.” At the same time, this counter-mythologizing of objects and sites, to which Jhering opposes the documentary power of “news,” has an equally powerful function for the subject of modern life – a function that Jhering evaluates negatively.

In spite of its significance in navigations between avant-garde projects using or exploring the photographic and post-expressionist Neue Sachlichkeit, explored by Gustav Hartlaub in a much-discussed exhibition of 1925, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles has
Heartfield’s role in the assembly of the book included cover design, the selection and organization of the photographs, which was a collaboration with Tucholsky, and in the case of ten photographs, the creation of photomontages. With the exception of the cover that frames the volume, in the body of photographs, photomontage is not an overwhelming presence, asserting itself rather scantily amidst the 181 photographs that are included. At the same time, a fragmented and dynamic “montage” principle orders the book itself, establishing movement that is structured along a set of resistance rather than the incorporations and inclusions that might create a stable sense of “German” identity in the Weimar Republic.

The book cover, the frame for the interior presentation, presents a melding of militaristic and civilian authorities (figure 28). The cover is continuous, with meaning developed through movement from front to back. The gold color that suspends the motifs in a kind of continuous (if contingent) present also unites them under the rubric of an identical operation of culture and politics. On the front, the bust of a man wearing the top hat of the upper bourgeoisie and a hybrid outfit including, on the left, the suit and tie that signify the civilian authority of the banker and successful businessman, and on the right, the uniform of a career militarist, stands against the monochrome background that suggests a suspension of particular time and space, perhaps the assertion of the figure as a type to which the viewer might adhere (or not).

Graphic and photographic elements are combined in the face of the figure, and in the process of reading, they imply a unification among these ostensibly differing registers of meaning that opens all to exposure,

received relatively little attention, and has been all but ignored in English language scholarship.
critique, and an informed process of assembly. The face of the figure functions, therefore, to establish a point of entry and method for engaging the book. Below the top hat, a combination of sculpture fragments, not quite identifiable, and a machine part, which functions as an ear, provide the support for broad swathes of black, white, and red, part of the black-red-gold tricolor that were part of the German national flag adopted in 1919 with the onset of the Weimar Republic. Gold is missing in the facial physiognomy of Heartfield’s citizen, but provides the background for the figure, the environment from which he emerges and from which his identity obtains tenuous support. Graphic elements complete the eyes of the figure, and with a kind of shorthand, they assert the nose that coheres only in juxtaposition to the mustache and grotesque mouth that stand just below.\(^{137}\)

From the mouth of the head emerge the words “Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,” “Germany above all,” a conjuring of the national anthem that had been in use since 1922. This text, and indeed the title of the volume, represents a further appropriation, and one that draws German history into the realm of contemporary life. The text was written in 1841 by the poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fellersleben to the late eighteenth-century music of Joseph Haydn, with the intention of expressing liberalism and republicanism in the context of the March Revolution of 1848. The original song was written in the Gothic font, and Heartfield preserves that format with a twist: The letters fail to perform their usual organizing function, slipping undisciplined from the mouth of the figure and morphing into a stylized and discordant version of their traditional selves. Within the phrase, the second repetition of “Deutschland” fragments mid-word to launch “land” in a fundamentally unrelated direction. The German Gothic typeface

\(^{137}\)Significantly, black, and red with white, here used to describe the central part of the
is significant. "Gothic" as terminology was first developed during the Renaissance, when specifically Italian humanism first found its voice, as did German humanism as well — by default.\textsuperscript{138}

The back cover of the book features hands in identical postures, with both of them grasping weapons, significant given that the origins of the hands are the military (top hand) and the civilian (the hand below). Just below the motif, Heartfield has added the caption "Brüderlich zusammen halt," "We stand together as brothers," another fragment from the national anthem. Aligned with the military arm, the legend reveals German nationalism ("Brüderlich zusammen halt") as a function of the military, and the resonant poses of the arms and weapons, carefully created by Heartfield, incorporates this sentiment into the cover's design. The frame of the book is this unified presentation, where the German citizen-subject, whether overtly military or a member of the upper bourgeoisie, is performed in the context of nationalism and militarism, a "produced" rather than the "natural" identity that would increasingly comprise the claims of the National Socialists just at the time of the book’s production and beyond.

Inside the book, just short of halfway through, two still photographs, each occupying a page and organized under the title "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," re-state these social productions (figure 29). At the left, a photograph depicts the marshalling of a military crowd and the gathering of their flags; the picture captures a confusion of bodies and regalia against the hovering architecture that is defined by its doorway motto, mostly obscured to the viewer by the picture’s cropping. Indefinite yet present, the submission of the individuals to civic identity is scarcely differentiated from the equally

\textsuperscript{138} face of the figure, would be the colors of the flag instituted by the Nazis in 1933.
uncertain insistence of the flags. On the right side, officials presiding at the ritual, presumably also that of the gathering at the right, salute as they gaze toward a reality not quite the privilege of the viewer, but one that might comprise the actual meaning of the photographic juxtaposition. Below, a crowd of top-hat wearing citizens gathers their own flags and banners, seemingly unaware of the authorities above. A vertical awning that absorbs a quarter of the picture space functions to separate the two; even the tallest banners cannot breach this distance between the two groups. This space is metaphorical of the conceptual space that separates the juxtaposed photographs. Asserting itself interstitially, it is both void and site of the production of meaning. Moving from the appropriated text that functions as caption and then between the two photographs, meaning is created and subjectivity is founded.

The significance of interstitial spaces in the book exists in text and photograph juxtapositions as well. As is the case with Heartfield’s cover, typography functions critically throughout the text, and Heartfield takes this as subject in the photomontage he produced for the section entitled “German Judges” (figures 30–32), which is one of the lengthier text passages in the book and includes three photographs: A still photograph depicting revolutionary citizens behind impromptu barricades of illustrated weeklies; Heartfield’s photomontage, which evokes “judge” through the trappings of robe and the nonsensical, not-quite letters that spill from his hands and mouth; and the close-up image of a working class woman, her face contorted with pain and grief. The prose text is openly critical of the German judges, stating, for example:

138Indeed, historically, “Gothic” was a kind of indicator of “barbaric.”
The German judge views the world through distorting spectacles: his point of view is that of the middle and upper bourgeoisie. Life above or below this line of vision is not represented among the judges and has little chance of being understood in court. And further, the judge usually conforms to a particular type inside the middle bourgeois group – that is, the frozen, wooden, constricted type who is surrounded by hundreds of taboos, hemmed in by the boundaries which he has erected for his own protection ...\textsuperscript{139}

That identity is framed by boundaries is a fundamental theme of the book, and selections are edited to critique the decreased agency that is a fact of those outside the judges’ mandated social class. A section entitled “German Sport” (figure 33) quite sarcastically describes an “industry” in the most corporate of terms. It is dominated by a “Board of Directors,” the “German Soccer Association” (and later, the “German Bobsled Club”) an “Executive Committee,” and the “German Automobile Club emblem.” Appropriately, Heartfield presents participants as headless puppets in their structured leisure time. Simultaneously disembodied and disconnected from lived existence, the decontextualized figures hover in the de-realized space of manufactured identity – the site of myth. In Weimar Germany, the production of myth was comprehensive, drawing all into its neutralizing and ever-shifting realm. The text below a photomontage incorporating decontextualized fragments of performances and performers of both genders, captioned “Theater in Berlin,” states: “Berlin first-nighters want Goethe, plus Dante, plus Brecht, plus Bruckner, plus Claudel; at the fiftieth performance the audience wants the follies with a shot of folk-lore. So go and do a show in Berlin” (figure 34).\textsuperscript{140}

Brady notes a certain unease in Tucholsky’s position, a tendency that he explains as “a problem of imbalance peculiar to the early years of

\textsuperscript{139}Translation in Kurt Tucholsky and John Heartfield, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, translation by Anne Halley, afterword and notes by Harry Zohn (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972): 151.
photojournalism, when documentary photography ... a recent addition to the socialist armory, still retained the penetrative power of a new weapon."¹⁴¹

He describes Tucholsky’s reaction to the controversy that arose over one of Heartfield’s photomontages as a kind of distancing, and while his comments are useful here, Tucholsky’s “distancing” may also have an explanation in his shift of conviction in view of an acceleration of contemporary events. Heartfield had created a photomontage of German officials, providing the text, “Tiere sehen dich an” (“Animals looking at you”) (figure 35), and this particular image had attracted a great deal of negative criticism. Indeed, Tucholsky would later claim that Heartfield had added the text to the image on his own, that he had not played a part in that juxtaposition – a disclaimer that suggests a more comprehensive set of concerns. In 1932, writing under the pseudonym “Peter Panther,” Tucholsky would speak sarcastically about Heartfield’s photomontages, expressing a certain disapproval for the very procedures that Heartfield developed in Deutschland, Deutschland über alles:


If I were not Peter Panther, I would like to be a book jacket from a publication of the Malik Verlag. This John Heartfield really and truly is a small wonder of the world. What does he not think of! What he does for enchanting things! I could let myself be framed by one of his photomontages, and I would like to keep almost all [of them]. The envelope of the dream factory of Ilya Ehrenberg looks just like a gilded cookie jar.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Brady, 868.
¹⁴¹Brady, ibid., 867.
¹⁴²Brady, ibid. 868. The translation is my own.
Tucholsky refers critically here to Heartfield’s book cover for Ehrenburg’s reportage work entitled Die Traumfabrik: Chronik des Films and he suggests a parallel between Heartfield’s work and the ideas set forth by Ehrenburg. On the surface, this would seem a positive move, but one that situates Tucholsky’s critical sarcasm in the realm of the yet more obscure. Ehrenburg offered a critically Marxist view of Hollywood, Eastman, the Kodak camera, and other aspects of the specifically American industrialization of cultural production and reception. At the same time, Ehrenburg scarcely represented a consensus of the left community, which understood his critique to be simplistic and carelessly worked through, and therefore doomed to be fundamentally ineffective. In a recent study entitled Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory, Jörg Schweinitz discusses the ambiguous attitude of many toward commercial film production and he describes a specific critique of Ehrenburg’s analysis: “Kracauer’s insightful assessment in 1932 of Ehrenburg’s Traumfabrik reads: ‘Visions of dark grandeur’ that neither penetrate the heart of the circumstances criticized’ nor ‘reveal the constructive forces perhaps present in Europe and America beneath the surface ... ’”

In some ways, Heartfield situates himself against the Hollywood film’s mode of industrial production and hyper-rationalization, perhaps that mode of cultural production generally speaking, that is to say, in Europe, as well. Industrialized film’s production and reduplication of “fixed schemata,” or emblems adhering to fixed sets of pre-developed, formulaic constructions that structure the world of narrative in automatized and conventionalized

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fragments of evidence, would seem to be a target of Deutschland, Deutschland über alles. Heartfield had himself worked in film production, however, and his engagement of what might be termed “the filmic” is complex. 144

Tucholsky’s growing skepticism toward the creation of revolutionary and specifically left art, and toward Heartfield in particular, may have had an origin in lingering humanism and rather heroic and romantic perspective, perhaps an impetus for his unease at the identification of human beings as animals in Heartfield’s critical photomontage. 145 But Tucholsky watched the rise of the National Socialists, and Hitler in particular, with increasing alarm, and it is as likely that Tucholsky had become cynical regarding the possibility of changing the inevitable even as he felt the necessity to retrieve something of humanity, in the form of a humanistic impulse, as a counter to this reality. More broadly speaking, in the end, when Tucholsky considered the completed volume, he may have found the volume’s structure, the disruptive, appropriative, and therefore incoherent picture it presents, to exceed the bounds of the human(ist) subjectivity that he felt might function as an antidote to the irrationalism, brutality, and complacent acceptance that characterized the

144 Heartfield had experience in commercial film production. But while in his A-I-Z photomontages Heartfield would marshal many emblems, perhaps the “fixed schemata” of the Hollywood film-machines, he did so to explode their very borders. This area of Heartfield’s work remains to be carefully theorized, a challenging task given that many of the short films Heartfield designed and produced are no longer extant. See Andrés Mario Zervigón, John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

145 Sergei Tret’iakov, “From the Photo series to the Extended Photo-Observation,” October 118 (Fall 2006), Soviet Factography: A Special Issue, ed. Devin Fore; 71-77. Quoted text on 72-3.


147 For the problem of Tucholsky’s biography and cult of personality and the impact of these on Tucholsky scholarship, see Vera Middelkamp, “Wir haben die Firma gewechselt, aber der Laden ist der alte geblieben:” Kurt Tucholsky and the Medialized Public Sphere of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005.
Weimar Republic in its last years – even as he regretted the ineffectuality of the revolutionary aspects of the book to function as he might have hoped. In this sense, for Tucholsky, the Hölderlin text might have stood for a somewhat compromised and ideal “German-ness.” Standing as an introductory motif, the text functions ironically and critically, another appropriated fragment that resists the coherence needed to represent. At the same time, however, the text stands as a rather melancholic reminder of a time far past.

Regarding the question of narrative in relationship to the kind of counter-archive that Tucholsky and Heartfield put forth in the register of the photographic, George Baker aptly identified two modes of photographic production, narrativity and stasis, in a close consideration of the work of August Sander, more specifically the typology of Weimar identity presented in Sander’s *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*. Broadly speaking, Baker intends to theorize specific tendencies in late Weimar photography that, situated past the deconstructive experiments of photomontage, returned to the kind of naturalism that characterizes *Neue Sachlichkeit* in Germany and *retour à l’ordre* in France. Baker draws on Alan Sekula’s well-known discussion of the archive, an ordering and organizational structure that both imposes and maintains epistemological frameworks and that most often uses the photographic as documentary evidence in support of its powerful epistemological claims. Baker states:

> Inasmuch as Sander’s *Citizens* depends upon an archival representational structure, it replicates the bourgeois stratification and hierarchy of knowledge, a stratification that was under attack at the very moment and historical location of Sander’s

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146Michael Hepp, *Kurt Tucholsky: Biographische Annäherungen* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999). Once in power, the National Socialists closed down the *Weltbühne* ("World View"), whose publication Tucholsky had directed from 1926, burning Tucholsky’s publications and depriving him of his German citizenship.
project – through the increasing rationalization of modern industrial life and through the increasing collectivization of modern social life, and the latter through the dual operations of communism on the left and fascism on the right.¹⁴⁷

In the above passage, Baker sets up a series of “either/or” propositions that were specific to the late Weimar Republic; indeed, this set of propositions, and others Baker does not mention, were a major force of actualization even in seemingly disparate registers. At this point, however, it may be useful to inquire into the terms between which Baker would situate Sander’s project. Regarding narrativity, Baker states:

Benjamin insisted … that Sander’s work included photographs of faces that were no longer portraits, but instead he stressed their organization into illuminating series. Here … we begin to see how sympathetic critics of Sander’s work have immediately caught on to what could be called a narrative element operating in his project (or at least an element of movement, of serialization), and have portrayed this aspect of the work as the project’s most important property.¹⁴⁸

If Benjamin does identify a serialization process in Sander’s project, he does not suggest that movement, serialization, and narrative are synonymous terms. Moreover, if the logic of Baker’s narrativity and stasis might be extended to incorporate the insistent interstitiality, the insistence on the critical coexistence of incommensurability, the unresolved contradiction and differences, of Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, I would argue that August Sander’s project stands at a distance from narrativity properly speaking, if not in the way that Baker defines this terminology.

¹⁴⁸Baker, ibid., 80. Interestingly, Benjamin does not identify Sander’s portraits, or the series, as specifically “narrative” presentations.
The interstitial self-positioning that characterizes Deutschland, Deutschland über alles is complex, as is its relation to narrativity. As Matthias Uecker wrote, in an essay entitled “The Face of the Weimar Republic: Photography, Physiognomy, and Propaganda in Weimar Germany”: “Rather than presenting a coherent argument constructed out of neatly fitting sections, the collection seems to pursue a number of random ideas and observations which only gradually coalesce into an overall picture of what the editors believe to be the state of Germany.”

In thinking about the specific movement, if not quite narrative movement, that characterizes this book, it is helpful to consider here the writing of Sergei Tret’iakov, who would be Heartfield’s first biographer and who wrote on the “serial,” photography, and cultural production both within and outside a kind of archival understanding of the history of art:

The face is the mirror of the soul,” proclaimed idealist art, and generations of painters mastered the technique of condensing the comprehensive image of the entire person into a single face by breaking down all of the facts and of his psychology, biography, profession, public activity, daily life, into his wrinkles, eye color, locks of hair, and the zig-zag of his profile.

It is significant, under this rubric, that Deutschland, Deutschland über alles included only one still photograph approximating this “ideal” notion of the human character: The working woman whose face is contorted with pain and grief (figure 32).

Tret’iakov continues, taking as a point of departure the canon of traditional art:

Naturally, there was no room for movement. And within the portrait, it was the subject’s dominant temperament that found expression over
everything else. One could only speculate about the kind of ties that integrated him into society and about the extent to which he himself was a product of his surrounding environment.

... Furthermore, the idealist portrait searched for the one moment that would express what was “universal and eternal” in the individual. Hence the relation of this kind of portrait to the iconic representations of saints who are preserved for all eternity. And hence the expression on the face that is removed from any real action ...

This frozenness, this isolation from the surrounding environment, this reduction to a single face ... is also characteristic of the monument.

... The dialectical-materialist method sees the person as a product of the reality that surrounds him and as a force that transforms this reality. It examines him in a state of flux, in contradiction.

... Composed only of individual photographs, books such as Deutschland, Deutschland über alles by Kurt Tucholsky and John Heartfield emerge as stunning documentary indictments of their age, as concrete evidence of the crimes of capitalism that rivals the most talented novels ...

“Dialectical materialism,” Tret’iakov states, can retrieve the agency that had been eroded in traditional cultural production.

The archive created in Deutschland, Deutschland über alles was entirely appropriative and accomplished an anti-accumulative movement that presented and re-presented the “particular” without the emergence of any presence of an “ideal”: A Foucauldian refusal of “unbroken linearity.” Under suggestion in Tret’iakov’s writings is the capacity for this failure to release the contemporary subject from the oppressive conditions of culture, history, and class relations. Exposing the manufacture of “German-ness,” of the German political and civic subject, as an artificial and culturally constructed entity, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles moves consideration to the functioning of the archive, and its operations, in the creation of German identity in the context of contemporary culture itself.
Moving between the "documentary" and the "novelistic," as Tret'iakov points out, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles exposes the "universal and eternal" structurings of the archival as just another argument, and one that might be lost.

Chapter 4:
The Dialectical Object:
John Heartfield and the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*

Myth tells us that it always involves a further task to be performed, an enigma to be resolved. The oracle is questioned, but the oracle’s response is itself a problem. The dialectic is ironic, but irony is the art of problems and questions. Irony consists in treating things and beings as so many responses to hidden questions, so many cases for problems yet to be resolved. We recall that Plato defined the dialectic as preceding by ‘problems,’ by means of which one attains the pure grounding principle — that is, the principle which measures the problems as such and distributes the corresponding solutions.

Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and repetition*, 1968

To the extent that within Heartfield’s project one might create a division between innovative formal practices and the unfolding of content, it is helpful to preface a discussion of his work for *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, his production of images by recourse to a critically narrative social realism, by situating him among the rather varied filmic and photographic practices that stood, by the end of the 1920s, under the rubric “New Vision.” An interest in formal innovation, perhaps at the expense of content, would suggest comparisons between *Deutschland*, *Deutschland über alles* and Werner Gräff’s *Es kommt der neue Fotograf* (1929), the latter published in Berlin in connection with the exhibition *Film und Foto*, as was Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold’s *Foto-Auge*. Objective

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151 The importance of this moment for projects stretching well into the realm that might be considered contemporary is an argument of the recent permanent-collection installation at The Museum of Modern Art, entitled *The Shaping of New Vision: Photography, Film, Photobook*. In the first gallery, the “New Vision” is represented by Moholy-Nagy, as might be expected, by Sheeler and Strand, and by Man Ray. Films accompany the still photographic presentations, suggesting the rupturing of indexicality by montage that would be evident in avant-garde projects of the next room (including Heartfield) and the remobilization of this “compromised” image in the context of book production, performance, and conceptual art, as subsequent galleries explore.
in voice and near-manifestos of the “New Vision” moment, the books use the essay-picture format, the careful inter-dependent placement of text with photograph, that also characterize Deutschland, Deutschland über alles. The projects differ vastly, however, from the collaborative project of Heartfield and Tucholsky. Whereas Deutschland, Deutschland über alles fails to cohere into the stable body that would also project a stable and conclusive viewing subject, the projects forming around the designation “New Vision,” formally innovative though they were, grounded themselves in a technological utopics that, if not a fatal compromise to Heartfield’s interests, represent an alternative trajectory; a different path from a similar fork in the road. Werner Gräff’s Es kommt der neue Fotograf differs from Deutschland, Deutschland über alles not on formal grounds, but in the very different ways in which design principles, uniting photograph and text, direct vastly different content. While Es kommt der neue Fotograf has as unifying principle the idea of innovative visual experiences, Deutschland, Deutschland über alles uses visual innovation as a vehicle for content. In Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, content is never submerged beneath form.

The range of projects and orientations of the “New Vision” might perhaps best be understood by recourse to the theories of László Moholy-Nagy, who was also influential in the organization of the Deutscher Werkbund’s Film und Foto exhibition. In 1925, Moholy-Nagy, working in the context of the Bauhaus, would develop ideas for a (socially) innovative image-productive and design practice, and he would publish these ideas in a series of books entitled Bauhausbücher. His ideas regarding the mutual operation of text and photograph in a given context are significant in situating Heartfield’s own intervention at the same time. Regarding text
and photograph juxtapositions, perhaps the most important point of comparison between Deutschland, Deutschland über alles and contemporaneous text-photograph endeavors, Moholy-Nagy’s discussion of “typo-photo” is central. Moholy-Nagy suggests the potential of an operative register where principles regarding “normal” regulation and ordering would be disabled, allowing the pure formality of both letter and photograph to emerge. Freed of both denotative and connotative imperatives, letters become material emblems and therefore the material components of design. Similarly freed from the requirements of “reading,” a photograph presents impressions of light, shadow, and reflection, expanding the sensory capabilities of the viewer and accomplishing, eventually, the particular “visual literacy” that Moholy-Nagy understood as necessarily central to his time. Moholy-Nagy’s photograms are exemplary in this sense. At the same time, Moholy-Nagy does not intend to (re)evolve a specifically idealist realm, describing “typophoto” in entirely materialist terms. He writes: “What is typophoto? Typography is communication composed in type. Photography is the visual presentation of what can be optically apprehended.”

In a section of Painting, Photography, Film (1928) entitled “Dynamic of the Metropolis: Sketch for a Film, also Typophoto,” Moholy-Nagy provides important definitions:

The intention of the film ‘Dynamic of the Metropolis’ is not to teach, nor to moralise, nor to tell a story; its effect is meant to be visual, purely visual. The elements of the visual have not in this film an absolute logical connection with one another; their photographic, visual, relationships nevertheless, make them knit together into a vital association of events in space and time and bring the viewer actively into the dynamic of the city.

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As did Heartfield when he designed Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, Moholy-Nagy understand a dynamic, becoming-oriented cultural apparatus, one that is defined and re-defined provisionally by the addition and presence of “elements.” For Heartfield, these elements were textual and photographic; for Moholy-Nagy, they are light, reflection, and shadow.

No work (of art) can be explained by the sequence of its elements. The totality of the sequence, the sure interaction of the smallest upon one another and upon the whole are the imponderables of the effect …

Aim of the film: to take advantage of the camera, to give it its own optical action, optical arrangement of tempo – instead of literary, theatrical action: Dynamic of the optical.153

Here, an important difference. While Heartfield’s “dynamic” is mobilized in the social register, Moholy-Nagy’s remains in the register of pure visuality and mobilizes optical effects. The operation of Moholy-Nagy’s Light-Space Modulator, captured in his slightly later experimental film, Light Play: Black White Gray (1930), posits a kind of transcendentalism of material and technology, a very different sort of productivity for (aesthetic) subjects and objects, than would be the case in Heartfield’s projects during the end of the 1920s and early years of the 1930s.

The Deutscher Werkbund’s Film und Foto exhibition, which was held in Stuttgart during May and June of 1929,154 was innovative in its distinction between various nationalities of practitioners, but all were submitted to

the guiding vision of the endeavor, which attempted to capture and to express the shared and underlying definition of photography and film. Heartfield occupied an entire room in the exhibition (figure 36). Over the doorway hung “Benutzte foto als Waffe,” “Use photography as a weapon,” a text whose objectivity was restated in the matching typefaces of the designations that identified different aspects of Heartfield’s project: “Foto Plakat,” “Foto Satire,” “Foto Montage,” and so on. These aspects are presented as documentary evidence, as the captions support. “Benutzte foto als Waffe” differs from the categorical identifiers, however, in that it mobilizes the viewer, the reader, in a communicative realm, which differs fundamentally from the more stasis-bound mode of designation and organization. In juxtaposition to the installations to the left and right, a still photograph displaying working-class solidarity in the form of a small group of determined workers, fists held high, and a small selection of posters with Heartfield’s “A hand has five fingers” in five incarnations, “Benutzte foto als Waffe” is retrieved from the mere designative. Photograph, posters, and motto instigate that which they presence in the exhibition space. The poster advocated the communist party in Berlin, urging citizens to vote, thus the caption, from which it drew its title: “The hand has five fingers, and with all five, we can crush them all ...” (figure 37) The logic of this text-photograph presentation is re-enacted, rather than represented, on the gallery wall.

This installation is significant in two regards. Heartfield would travel to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, an occasion when, as Maria Gogh argues, he reoriented his photomontage practice from the active resistance that had been a significant part of his own national

155 See also Leah Ollmann, Camera as Weapon: Worker Photography Between the Wars: An
circumstances to the more constructively-interested endeavor that image production, indeed cultural production, in the newly-founded Soviet Union demanded.156 Heartfield’s visit coincided with local arguments regarding formalism in specifically left-oriented art. Criticisms were directed against members of the Octyabr group, including, if not limited to, Rodchenko, Vertov, Eisenstein, Lissitzky and Klucis. The charge of “technicist formalism” did not apply to Heartfield, who relied on human gesture to control and drive meaning in his photomontages, perhaps reflective of the origin of his practice in Dadaist performances and Piscator’s political theater.157 The importance of gesture to Heartfield’s photomontage practice is upheld in the juxtaposition of two powerful human gestures on the gallery wall, the determined workers to one side and the hand, presented and re-presented, on the other.

Heartfield’s insistence on including five versions of the political poster has another significance. If the representation of his contribution to poster design had been the only objective, a single exemplar would have sufficed. But Heartfield included five reproductions of the poster, which was itself the reproduction and appropriation of a deterritorialized sign: a displayed repetition of the simulacral, which draws its impetus not vicariously, not through the validity of a model, but in actuality, in the process of reproduction itself. In this sense, exploring conditions specific to the photographic, Heartfield’s varied projects fit into the exhibition’s stated intentions. At the same time, the import of


157Gaughan, ibid., 257. Tagirov in particular, for example, defended Heartfield’s work against that of Klucis.
Heartfield’s reproductive practice is mobilized in the process of circulation, in the creation of meaning in public spheres of reception, rather than through technologies specific to the photographic itself. Not quite at odds with the “New Vision” projects that surrounded him, Heartfield nonetheless rests uneasily in the context of technological formalism and the assertion of universal languages of photography that were significant aspects of “New Vision” photography and film.

The body of photomontages that Heartfield produced for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, beginning in 1930, represent a culmination of the techniques and strategies that he had developed in his projects of the decades prior. The *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung, A-I-Z*, was the weekly illustrated paper of the Workers’ Party that began publication in 1924, when it absorbed the primary functions of the radical *Sichel und Hammar* and expanded to assert itself in the growing body of illustrated weeklies that originated in the political upheavals prior to the establishment of the Weimar Republic, during the Republic, and in the years beyond. The *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* could trace its origin to a humanitarian impulse. After a 1921 famine in the Soviet Union, Lenin appealed to the international working class for assistance. Willi Münzenberg formed a group known as the International Workers’ Aid (IAH) and created a publication, *Sowjet Russland im Bild (Soviet Russia in Pictures)*, an important predecessor of future publications such as the *USSR in Construction*, which was published from 1933 and like *Sowjet Russland im Bild*, worked to create a world impression regarding life, culture, and society in the newly-founded socialist state. After 1926, the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* was published on a weekly schedule.
The *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung* included literary and editorial content and was perhaps unique in allowing a consideration of gender, its involvement in proletarian life and identity and its connection with the formation of class identity in both capitalist and socialist ideologies. Several issues considered the operation of race and class in America, including pictorial layouts of African American migrant and industrial workers. *A-I-Z* included, of course, news of interest to the working class and to readers of other classes whose political sympathies were not at odds.

As a specifically illustrated weekly, *A-I-Z* made broad use of photography, and of sophisticated text-image layouts, in which Heartfield played a significant role. In 1926, Münzenberg brought together a group of worker-photographers, working-class members who created “amateur” photographs and shared these as documents of their mutual experience, under the formal auspices of the *Vereinigung der Arbeiter-Fotografen Deutschlands*. Funded by Münzenberg’s publishing house, *Der neue deutsche Verlag*, the *Vereinigung der Arbeiter-Fotografen Deutschland* originated the formation of many similar organizations on an international scale, including the Workers’ Film and Photo League, which would be founded in New York in 1930. The Workers’ Film and Photo League would become the Film and Photo League, a pedagogical and creative workshop organization that developed under the direction of Berenice Abbott and Paul Strand and that would organize its photographers in projects formed around various locations, such as Harlem and the Chelsea districts of the working poor. With Ralph Steiner, Strand would continue film work under Frontier Films. Strand and Abbot would rename the photographic component of the group, dropping the designation “workers” for understandable reasons. The New York
Film and Photo League had common sponsorship with European organizations, most notably Münzenberg’s IAH. This foundational truth would prove devastating during the years of the McCarthy committee, when the League was immediately identified as “communist” and with subversive intent, against the fact that not a single Communist Party member remained in the group. In 1938, Heartfield presented an exhibition of his A–I–Z photomontages at the Photo League.\textsuperscript{158}

Like Strand, Münzenberg had a comprehensive ambition for working-class based culture, perhaps in response to Alfred Hugenberg’s media initiatives under the auspices of the Deutschnationale Volkspartei, the German National People’s Party, which preceded the formation of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei in 1933. Münzenberg would write, failing to mention the German National People’s Party:

\begin{quote}
We really are attempting to establish an economic undertaking, a large red enterprise. We are not utopian – we do not believe that we can beat capitalism through economic competition. However, we do think that it would be criminally negligent to allow, without a fight, the bourgeois and social democratic organizations the monopolization of mass influence. We believe that everything must be done to break this monopoly, be it in the area of film, the daily paper, the illustrated journal, or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

In late 1926, Münzenberg initiated the publication of Der Arbeiter-Fotograf, for which he served as editor and director. Through both critical writing and practical columns, the Der Arbeiter-Fotograf intended to produce an educated working-class photographer who could critically engage, and by implication provide visual commentary on, the created relationship

\textsuperscript{158} For the Film and Photo League in New York, see, in particular, Nancy Wynne Newhall, \textit{This Is the Photo League} (New York: The Photo League, 1948), and Anne Tucker, \textit{This Was the Photo League} (Chicago: Stephen Daiter Gallery, 2001).

\textsuperscript{159} Quoted in Siepmann, ibid., 147; and in Matin Ignatius Gaughan, \textit{German Art 1907–1937} (German Linguistic and Cultural Studies) (Peter Lang, 2007): 254-5.
between the particular (observation) and an ideal – specifically, perhaps, photographic “truth.” In an essay entitled “Das Auge des Arbeiters,” Edwin Hoerle cautions his “dear fellow-photographer” regarding the socially grounded conditions of observation. A “factory owner” traveling to America, on a visit to the “Ford works at Detroit,” would organize the particulars of his own observations by recourse to the body of truth specific to his own social class position. Photographers should be aware of this and refuse to adopt that totalizing scheme of things that was the privilege of the bourgeoisie. Instead, Hoerle advises, drawing on the nuanced possibilities of their own class experiences, they should refuse the cultural imperative to internalize the bourgeois world-view, which was, in fact, radically opposed to their best interests. He wrote, indicating his understanding of the originary connection between the production of subjectivity and the performative power of image formation:

Almost all bourgeois cultures, whether ‘artistic’ or vulgar, reflect the cult of leisure and idleness. This is represented in the theater and films, in illustrated papers and novels, in newspaper reports and commercial advertisements; and when the proletarian and his girl go to ‘have their picture taken’ they choose a more or less elegant leisured pose like that of a clerk in the firm of Tietz or the wife of a Krupp general manager … And if the proletarian gets himself a camera on hire-purchase, in nine cases out of ten he will start off, exactly like his bourgeois neighbor, by snapping some ‘beautiful view’ or ‘romantic nook’ … something as remote as possible from the class struggle … [and therefore from]… the sordid miseries of everyday life.¹⁶⁰

Lacking a true “picturing,” Hoerle concludes, the world of the proletariat is not simply denied existence, but negated: “The workers’ world is invisible to the bourgeoisie, and unfortunately to most proletarians also.

If the bourgeoisie depicts proletarians and their world of suffering, it is only to provide a contrast, a dark background to set off the glories of bourgeois ‘culture,’ ‘humanity,’ ‘arts and sciences,’ and so forth … Our photographers must tear down this façade.” For Hoerle, it is not simply a matter of circulating images of the proletariat. Indeed, he suggests that this strategy would be ineffective. “High culture,” which he identifies with humanism and the “liberal arts,” has created an expansive and comprehensive totality that would create the conditions for the inclusion of proletarian imagery, but only as the (by definition, subversive) potential of its content was summarily reoriented to the world-view of the bourgeoisie. There were, therefore, both practical and ideological imperatives.

In creating his photomontages, Heartfield’s relationship to the traditions of painting and to the craft of photography was complex. Perhaps moving from a position of respect for the specific vantage point of the worker photographer, Heartfield drew exclusively on the extensive archive of imagery he had collected, and on pictures he discovered through research in news archives rather than producing photographs himself. He did not assume the position of the worker-photographer, but remained the “operative” figure whose practices he would have observed in Piscator. An exception is the second photomontage he produced for A-I-Z, published in 1930 and untitled but identifiable by its caption, which reads: “Forced supplier of human material [no punctuation] Take courage ! The state needs unemployed workers and soldiers !” (figure 38). Heartfield took this photograph himself, producing it in the studio for use in this photomontage.

161 Ed. Ribalta, ibid., 110.
The primary figure is a pregnant woman, clearly working poor, who sits with her hands folded in a docile posture before the camera’s eye. Her desperation is communicated through her expression, and by her disheveled clothing and unkempt hair. The woman sits against a carefully airbrushed background, a steep landscape that also holds the corpse of a young soldier lying on the grass with his gun dropped carelessly nearby. That the woman’s head intrudes on the youth’s body creates a direct relationship between the two figures, but the rather abrupt transition between head and body establishes a sense that the distance between them is figurative, rather than actual, and that the image is not the depiction of a particular circumstance but relative to all in a similar station of life. The photograph of the fallen soldier, appropriated from a news source, is here put in the service of a universalizing function in the procedures of photomontage: Every mother, every son, and every war.

Heartfield’s photomontage was produced for an issue that commemorated International Women’s Day, on March 8, 1930, and as an inclusion in this particular issue, his intervention may be understood as a commentary on the position of women under the oppression of class exploitation in daily life. Intending a critique that was not distant, Hannah Höch used Heartfield’s photograph to produce an entry in her series entitled The Ethnographic Museum, which included emblem-like presentations of appropriated photographs of contemporary women whose faces, clothing, and accessories are drawn from depictions of women, or their sculptural representations, originating in non-Western cultures (figure 39). In the series, Höch

used the photographs of contemporary women, some of whom have been identified, as grounds for layering the found photographic fragments, a procedure suggesting the equally layered procedure of (feminine) identity formation in modern life. Höch intends a critical stance on the "progressive" ideas of the "New Woman" and her place in industrialized society. Höch's "New Woman" and "the primitive," in the form of fragments of non-western cultural artifacts, collide uneasily in the images of the series, but the unease is critical rather than exploitative. Höch's appropriative gesture is parodic on another level as well, pointing to broader cultural movements that made frequent use of decontextualized and carefully re-organized non-Western objects, a conceptual fragmentation, and circulated them freely in popular publications. This process of objectification and recirculation is a broad interest of The Ethnographic Museum.

Höch's use of the appropriated photograph, also dating from 1930, differs fundamentally from Heartfield's in many significant ways. While her presentation is more complex than a simple retrieval of l'art pour l'art-informed criticism would allow, it is helpful for the purposes here to draw out those characteristics most at odds with Heartfield's own use of the photograph. Höch entitled her presentation simply Mütter, identifying the emblematic presentation as an incomplete and partial picture by appending the prefix Aus einem ethnographischen Museum, as was her practice in the series. In spite of this disclaimer, that the single image was merely part of a larger structure, the title situates the single presentation in a continuum that is simultaneously contemporary, historical, and universal: A transcendental feminine condition, which evokes a broader set of idealist conceptualizations, including "art." An artfully placed eye, clearly that
of a modern, sophisticated, perhaps bourgeois, woman, peers knowingly at
the viewer from behind her (appropriated) mask. The expression of the woman
is radically reoriented by the addition of the eye. In Heartfield’s
presentation, the blank desperation of a working-class woman is
communicated on her face, and with the addition of the body of the soldier
lying above, the viewer interprets this expression in the context of the
senseless suffering and unspeakable sacrifices that the young man’s body
emblematises just above. In Heartfield’s photomontage, cause quite
directly, and quite immediately, leads to effect. Conversely, the mouth of
Höch’s woman, although unchanged from Heartfield’s photograph, loses
anguish to move into near boredom, if perhaps the particular ennui that
derives from lack of fulfillment and unsatisfying social realities.

Höch’s presentation draws on the painterly and the handcrafted in its
construction, with the appropriated mask moving her figure into the realm
of aesthetic autonomy to which Heartfield was fundamentally opposed. At the
same time, Heartfield was not opposed to traditional “painterly effects.”
In his enthusiastic essay on Heartfield entitled “Revolutionary Beauty,”
Louis Aragon would draw attention to the compositional harmonies Heartfield
achieved.164 In this photomontage, whose caption identifies the figure only
as “Forced supplier of human material,” Heartfield presents the subject in
traditional portrait format, and in a unified space. While the steep
perspective does work against this unification, it does so subtly,
asserting itself to opportune a moment of reflectiveness on the part of the
viewer regarding the relationship between the main subject, the mother, the
dead soldier above, and the powerful emblem of the collusion between big

industry and war - the gun. Heartfield preferred reproduction with copperplate photogravure, as did many of the "pictorialist" photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, for example, Stieglitz in his early career, Clarence White, and Edward Steichen. Photogravure mitigates the effect of high-contrast in reproduction, allowing a subtle "studio" sense and constructed-ness perhaps more related to painting than to the photographic, to inform the composition.

In Mütter, Höch appropriated photographic fragments that were then mobilized symbolically in the world of her picture in the expression of an enduring and universal truth. This is the case even if one would conjecture that she drew on universal truths to point to their continued authority over the contemporary world, as was likely the case. Conversely, Heartfield’s photomontage practice has been understood as a specifically allegorical practice, at odds with the logic and operation of the symbolic in the register of representation. In the opening passages of his essay entitled “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” Benjamin Buchloh theorizes allegory through the later writings of Benjamin, who “developed a theory of allegory and montage based on the structure of the commodity fetish as Marx described it.”165 Buchloh writes:

The allegorical mind sides with the object and protests against it devaluation to the status of a commodity by devaluing it a second time in allegorical practice. In the splintering of signifier and signified, the allegorist subjects the sign to the same division of functions that the object has undergone in its transformation into a commodity … The procedure of montage is one in which all allegorical principles are executed: appropriation and depletion of meaning, fragmentation and dialectical juxtaposition of fragments, and separation of signifier and signified.166

This practice would seem especially relevant to Heartfield, whose claim (with Grosz) to have invented photomontage opens Buchloh’s essay: “From the very moment of its inception, it seems that the inventors of the strategy of montage were aware of its inherently allegorical nature, ‘to speak publicly with hidden meaning,’ in response to the prohibition of public speech.”

In developing his model, Buchloh draws on the Dadaist photomontages of Grosz and Heartfield, however, and Heartfield’s photomontages for A-I-Z, which are characterized by a reintroduction and sophisticated use of narrative realism, posit a different set of critical and interpretive problems. In what follows, taking the set of critical questions and trajectories that Buchloh’s essay originates, I will discuss Heartfield’s photomontages in the kind of non-dichotomous field that his position in the realm of photographic practice, in the registers of representation, and in his chosen forms of cultural distribution suggest.

Against the fact of contemporary social relations, the National Socialist Party, even before their election, posited the authority of an archaic and pre-logical world that remained untainted by and impervious to the contradictions of lived experience. Consider: “For the very reason that National Socialism is an elementary movement, it cannot be gotten at with ‘arguments.’ Arguments would be effective only if the movement had gained its power by argumentation.” Heartfield often grounded his photographic fragments on motifs traditional in German culture, as was the case, for example, with the photomontage that bears the caption, “Hurra ! Hurra !

166Buchloh, ibid., 44.
167Buchloh, ibid., 43.
Here’s the Brühning Father Christmas!” (figure 40). Here, Heartfield evokes a holiday tradition whose unifying social and cultural import pre-dated National Socialist rhetoric and he demonstrates, through the addition of appropriated contemporary text, slogans, and imagery, the actual devastating impact that the appropriative National Socialist counter-mythologies had. Heartfield’s use of German social and cultural traditions to ground contemporary interests was simultaneously critical, resistive, and potentially constructive. In his photomontage entitled “A new year!” (figure 41), Heartfield juxtaposes the image of a blacksmith, cropped to emphasize the ancient origins and nobility of this trade, to the handwritten last verses of the Communist anthem, the “Internationale.”

Heartfield navigated a body of photographic imagery and textual sources that he shared with the Social Democrats and National Socialists in contemporary Berlin, and that was coded, therefore, by convention established by frequent circulation rather than on reliance on a fixed set of cultural values. Heartfield preferred to appropriate imagery that had been previously circulated and that retained, therefore, the greatest measure of connotative possibility. The imagery of "The Meaning of the Hitler Salute," one of Heartfield’s best known and much-analyzed works, (figures 42-44), is exemplary in this sense. Published in 1932, less than a year before Heartfield would be chased from his home in Berlin and forced to flee to Prague as a result, the photomontage reflects clarity of vision that was dictated by necessity as final elections loomed. A large figure, identified as an industrialist by his suit and as a wealthy and successful industrialist by the ring on his finger, stands behind a much smaller figure that is obviously Adolph Hitler. Text assumes a kind of “legend”

status as it hovers in the coloristically and iconographically neutral but narratively charged space that also holds the figures. The action of the scenes coheres around the center, where gesture — the industrialist hands Hitler a stack of currency — and text are in dialogue.

In a fundamental sense, the Hitler figure derived significance by virtue of its origin in the stock archive of a news agency. A flag ceremony had provided the occasion for the original photograph of Adolph Hitler that is included in the photomontage (figure 45). As was well known, the donations of financiers and industrialists just after the November 1932 elections provided the specific occasion for this image. Eckhard Siepmann quotes Manfred Clemenz: “... after ... ‘the coming together of the Hitler and Papin wings of German industry the most pressing financial problems were solved for the moment: a syndicate of industrialists paid part of the debts resulting from the election and made ... one million Reichsmark available for financing the SS.’” Here, the journalistic fragment is released from its specific temporal context, and it functions at one remove in the more abstract world of types. The Reichstag “election” Clemenz mentions, the National Socialist wins in the elections of July 31, 1932, were understood as the actual content of the narrative presentation. At the same time, the content of the presentation resided outside the work. Revealing the greater logic inherent to a moment in contemporary history and politics, the image warns the viewer and reader of the possibility of things to come.170

A competence within contemporary media culture was also needed to relate the image and the text, which reads: “The meaning of the Hitler

169Evens, ibid., 64
170The original photomontage for this image is one of very few that has survived. Heartfield had shows in Moscow and New York and images that had not yet been returned survived destruction by the National Socialists. Eckhard Siepmann, “Die Millionen-Montage: Versuch einer Strukturanalyse,” in Montage: John Heartfield. Vom Club Dada zur Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung (Berlin [West]): Elefanten Press Galerie, 1977):243.
salute. Little man asks for big gifts. Motto: Millions stand behind me.”

Broadly speaking, the image functioned to contradict National Socialist claims to support a great and unified community of the mobilized “millions.” Exemplary of this ambition to complete a union of formerly hostile classes was the Nuremberg rally, which was held in the Zeppelin fields in 1936 and occupied a prominent place in contemporary consciousness. But the National Socialist myth of a consensual community was based on a fatal contradiction. It promised the coming of a classless society, that is to say, a “folk” community that would resolve the conflicting interests of competing social classes, but it contended the ability to accomplish this without eliminating that social institution that was the basis for the division of society into classes -- the private ownership of the means of production. In “The Meaning of the Hitler Salute,” Heartfield re-situates the claims of the National Socialists, using the evidential fragments that were circulated in their own illustrated weekly, in specific commitments and interests by revealing that the collusion between big business and National Socialism was already embedded in the very images themselves.

Heartfield’s use of a specific formal template (unified pictorial space, documentary details, strategic type-face) to organize disparate reportage fragments would appear to succeed in its attempt to establish and deliver a narrative structure. Heartfield constructs a space-time narrative, which he reconstitutes by recourse to photomontage, but he does not mobilize the photographic fragments in order to represent a space-time matching that, mimetically speaking, of an “outside.” Once Heartfield had erased from the surface of the image the physical traces of montage technique, which he accomplished by airbrushing the edges of the
phographic fragments, for instance, or by forcing the fragments together
beneath the enlarger prior to the printing process, it would seem that a
kind of perfect mimesis had accomplished true realism in the form of a
seamless melding of image and life. But in the virtual space of the
photomontage, the process of reading initiates a play of paradoxes rather
than the unfolding of a story that the operation of mimesis works to
commence. In the narrative structure, closure is denied as the expectations
of the narrative process are not quite met. In the process of
signification, a disruption of semantic continuity is first accomplished by
the juxtaposition of non-continuous fragments and then emphasized in the
literal, spatial contiguity of the fragments within the re-visioned and
performative world of the picture.

Given the narrativity of the presentations, the photographic
fragments, markers of actual contemporary life, should function as mimetic
launchers, but to circulate the signs as naturalized signifiers - a
founding interest of mimesis - would curtail the performativity of
Heartfield’s resistive pictorial language. In other words, such a move
would impose a fatal limit on the dialogic process itself. The photographic
fragments are instead assigned the functional status of emblems and
mobilized by the diegesis instead. By definition, mimesis re-creates
reality by following the rules of established forms and genres, and
Heartfield’s ironic use of the conventions of painting, of “high art,”
suggests a site of resistance in this register as well. As is the case in
Heartfield’s body of photomontages for A-I-Z, these conventions are evoked
but they do not function to create closure. Mimesis, therefore, endeavors but fails. A founding paradox results.171

At this point, it is helpful to consider the specific functionalities and interests of diegesis and mimesis as well as the implications that each entails. Narrativity has received extensive theorization, perhaps most notably by Gérard Genette. Genette describes diégèse as "a term that sends us back to the Platonic universe of the modes of representation, where it is contrasted with mimésis. Diégèse is pure narrative ...." He offers these definitions in a critical explanation of his own position given debates that have formed around this terminology. Genette draws a distinction between the Platonic understandings of mimesis and diegesis, which Anglo-Saxon authors include in translations of the term, thereby re-defining it as simple "diegesis" rather than the more nuanced diégèse that Genette prefers. Setting aside Genette’s objections for a moment, I will suggest that consideration of the origins of the terminology is useful here, for reasons that will be apparent.172

The first distinction between mimesis and diegesis was made in the Republic, where Plato identified them as two distinct ways of presenting a story. Mimesis is associated with neutralized depiction, self-evident display, and a kind of manifestation rather than tendentious positing, that naturalize a given presentation by erasing the traces of its own operations. At a fundamental level, mimesis involves a maximum of informative detail, a gradual accumulation of “reality effects,” and a

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minimum presence of the informer, who would compromise the mimetic process by inserting a subjective rather than objective perspective as regards story telling. Mimesis enacts a story and presents it to the viewer, and it is objective in the sense that no narrative voice is apparently present. Truths and morals are self-evident, mere effects of the actions of the characters, which are themselves merely objects driven by the mimetic function within the pictorial space. By extension, the naturalization process of mimesis permits little awareness of the circumstance of cultural production, distribution, or broader social context. Plato is more favorably inclined to the mimetic, which strives for a closer distance to its “model” than is the case with diegesis.

Mimesis and diegesis are not oppositive terms or situated in a dialectical relationship, but two modes or tendencies that predominate (or do not) within a given design in textual or visual representation. That said, diegesis functions at the level of conceptual story telling, on the plane of content, and it is best understood comparatively in relationship to mimesis. Mimesis entails a presentation that confronts rather than critically incorporates or engages the viewer; by implication, a subject/object separation. Moreover, given that artist and narrator are not necessarily identical in the constructed space of an image, one might consider here the very different relationships between internal narrator and external creator that mimesis and diegesis, respectively, imply. Mimesis as the dominant form of presentation requires that the presence of an image’s creator is disguised or ignored in order that inter-pictorial narration dominate. Diegesis, however, is reliant on the fact that the creator addresses the viewer directly, and that a deliberately indirect presentation of information, a secondhand statement of fact, is actively
received. Heartfield rejects (in print and by implication) the designation “artist,” but he inserts himself into his images in a way that suggests the productivity of this distinction in creating a perspective on his specific practice of narrative realism.

In his “Exposition of the Problem of Reported Speech,” V. N. Volosinov implies that the artist/“operative” artist distinction may be particularly useful in the realm of imagery, where the presentation of signs and their association with an author or producer requires theorization, especially as regards the possibility of an “operative” artist, what Volosinov terms “a reporter,” and the understanding of properly “productive” art. In a fundamental sense, indirect discourse, the tool of Volosinov’s “reporter” and of Benjamin’s “operative” author, may best be understood by the following statements: “He said that...”; “I saw that...”. In every language, indirect discourse is marked by specific tenses and governed by particular syntactical laws. As regards Heartfield’s presence in a given image, see, for example, his re-worked von Stuck, which bears an inscription testifying that Heartfield has re-conceived the painting (figure 46; compare figure 47). Except as object of criticism, an author/artist is not present because that aesthetic discourse is absent. Yet, the insertion Heartfield makes of his own identity as speaker and initiator is central to reading the image.173

Volosinov is critical of structural linguistics as a theorization of meaning production, and he provides the best model for reading the inter-pictorial function of signs in Heartfield’s photomontages. About Saussure’s distinction between langue and parole, he states: “Saussure’s contention is that language as a system of normatively identical forms must be taken as the point of departure and that all manifestations of speech must be illuminated from the angle of these stable and autonomous forms.” Volosinov would assert the primacy of “parole” over Saussure’s privileging of “langue,” establishing the ground for what would become understandings of linguistic “events.” See V.N. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1929), trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1986):60. David Lodge brings Volosinov to bear on received understandings of the mimesis-diegesis problematic in a literary context. See After Bakhtin (London: Routledge, 1987). Regarding the inter-pictorial operation of signs in Heartfield’s A-I-Z photomontages, the theories of V.N. Volosinov, set forth in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, may be most useful.
There are two possible sources for Heartfield's involvement in a diegetic mode. The first is the theater. Drawing an important distinction between mimesis and the function of documentary in Brecht's theater, David Bordwell states: "... it is possible to see Brecht's 'literalization' of the theater - the use of episodic structure, voice-over commentary, and inserted captions - as a tactic for bringing out the diegetic aspect which Aristotelean conceptions of theater had effaced."\textsuperscript{174} Brecht inserts the documentary into his theatrical productions but it does not function mimetically to create illusionistic or "convincing" scenes. Instead, the documentary fragments remain in the service of Brecht's story while never denying the terms of their manufacture, the process of their insertion, or their origination in the world outside the presentation.

Film production provides a second context that may have lent Heartfield this perspective, perhaps something that existed for him as a set of formal possibilities that might be matched with necessary content when the occasion arose. Heartfield produced "trick" films and animations (which are not extant), at one point working for Universum Film AG (UFA) until he was dismissed for organizing workers into a strike after the murders of Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht. In this context, it is tempting to consider the observation of Christian Metz, who described a filmic process whereby mimesis folds into the diegetic. Metz's often-quoted, rather matter-of-fact definition of the presence of diegesis in film is interesting in this context: "'[Diegesis] designates the film's represented instance ... that is to say, the sum of the film's denotation; the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the
landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect."  

Returning to Genette’s theorizations of narrativity, I suggest that releasing his interesting and productive analyses from the imperatives of structuralist criticism might allow the mobilization of his critical model with the reading of the narrator/reporter that was present in Plato’s dialogue, and that also functions quite productively for a reading of Heartfield’s photomontages for A-I-Z. Genette’s *diégèse* originated in the critical formulations of Étienne Souriau, which formed around the question of narration and narrativity in film. In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette states:

> My use of the word *diégèse* [diegesis]; partly proposed as an equivalent for *histoire* [story] was not exempt from a misunderstanding that I have since tried to correct. Souriau proposed the term *diégèse* in 1948, contrasting the diegetic (*diégétique*) universe (the place of the signified) with the screen-universe (the place of the film signifier). Used in that sense, *diégèse* is indeed a universe rather than a train of events (a story); the *diégèse* is therefore not the story but the universe in which the story takes place – universe in the somewhat limited (and wholly relative) sense in which we say that Stendahl is not in the same universe as Fabrice.  

Genette’s *diégèse* is most productive in thinking about the “universe” that Heartfield’s photomontages launch, but in combination with the Platonic origin, which allows consider of narrator and representation.

As functionality and as a practice, mimesis operates given the existence of a “model,” a perfected form of unified totality and conceptual

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coherence. While the mimesis-diegesis alternatives have been re-thought, re-theorized, and re-cast for centuries in the interests of theater, film, and literary criticism, it is important to note that in its originating articulation, in Plato, mimesis was used to describe a distancing between "art" and "truth," a fictional casting that insistently argued its authority to produce a lie. Heartfield abandoned the dichotomous realm inhabited by the mimetic function, by the logic of "model" and "copy," to redefine realism as that which may be circulated, and that which may perform, in the social realm.

When Heartfield returned to East Germany, after the end of World War II, he was criticized as a "modernist, a "formalist," and an "avant-gardist," and in his own defense, he stated: "I am a communist, and as such, I am a social realist." In Heartfield’s Berlin of the early 1930s, social realism exceeded the structurings of mimesis to cohere into diegetic truth.
Conclusion

The Present: Subject, Object, Performative

The concept of the public sphere is originally one of the revolutionary rallying cries of the bourgeoisie. It comes as a surprise when Kant ascribes to the public sphere the status of a transcendental principle, indeed that of the mediation between politics and ethics.

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, 1973

In a recent installation titled *Work as Action*, Dia: Beacon presented Franz Erhard Walther’s *Handlungsstücke* (*Action Pieces*), dating from the 1960s, along with a complete presentation of the 1. *Werksatz* (*First Work Set*). Walther’s 1. *Werksatz* had first been presented at the Museum of Modern Art over a four-month period during 1969–1970 in the context of the exhibition *Spaces*, and just after the Dia: Beacon presentation, the museum included Walther’s 1. *Werksatz* in an installation aptly entitled *Eyes Closed / Eyes Open: Recent Acquisitions in Drawings*. The subtitle oriented the viewer of the exhibition to the centrality of the theoretical basis of the installation in the history of the museum and drew attention to the challenges posed by the three artists included, Franz Erhard Walther, Martha Rosler, and Willem de Kooning, to the traditional practice of drawing. Exhibited with Walther’s 1. *Werksatz* were the twenty-four drawings, *Untitled*, that Willem de Kooning produced with his eyes closed.

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and a selection from Martha Rosler’s two *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* series. Rosler draws attention to the involvement of mass-cultural media, here selected issues of *House Beautiful* on the one hand, and documentary images from news reports of the Vietnam war on the other, in providing those distinct sets of experiences that worked against the possibility of reading one through the other and seeing both as the products of the specific ideological landscape of the era: In Rosler’s project, material becomes idea, and morphs back into material in the form of lived experiences of the war - in rapid transformation.

De Kooning understands the collective eye as one very much involved in material: The realm of the body. Circumventing the ideal and rationalizing force of the eye, de Kooning works through his figures (they are both male and female, and include references to art historical discourse through the inclusion of crucifixions) with a specific intent: “I am the source of the rumors surrounding these drawings,” he would state, “and it is true that I made them with closed eyes. Also the pad I used was always held horizontally. The drawings often started by the feet ... but more often by the center of the body, in the middle of the page. There is nothing special about this ... I found that closing the eyes was very helpful ...” 178 De Kooning began the series around 1963, and a selection of the drawings was published in a 1967 volume that included de Kooning’s statements, which were far less explanatory than important in providing the set of coordinates that would stand him in relation to Jackson Pollock, for

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example, and which would, much later, contribute to the theoretical framework of this installation.

It is significant that Walther’s 1. Werksatz, his First Work Set, opens the exhibition, occupying the largest gallery and positing the set of problems that are also present in the projects of de Kooning and Rosler. Upon entrance to the gallery, the relationship between the “objects” of the installation, rolled up canvas bundles and the series of diagrammatic drawings that are situated above, is obscure. The canvas bundles are horizontally displayed and mute regarding functionality and essential formal presence. Their place in the hierarchy of the presentation is also uncertain, given their apparently parenthetical location along the sides of three walls. Moreover, remaining at first glance, the relationship between the canvas bundles and the diagrammatically cast drawings, seemingly meant to offer a set of guidelines for the engagement of the project given authority of placement, is unclear. Nor do titles, in the case of the canvas bundles, prove immediately revelatory. Written directly on the canvas material, the titles state, variously: Object for Collection (nine); Blind Object; Five; With Direction (six). Moving from authority of experience the viewer, accustomed to regarding framed presentations standing on a wall, searches first along a vertical axis for intention and meaning, moving finally to the canvas bundles standing horizontally below, and finally to a second predominant horizontal: The mat that commands the center of the installation.

With the “facilitators,” exhibition assistants who hover unobtrusively nearby, the mat initiates the operation of a crucial set of

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179 The MoMA installation included the “original” objects, in the form of what one might term bundled performative materials, along with a “working” set of identical materials. The audience used the latter.
frames for the presentation. This framing process is performative rather than definitive or didactic, however, and it is here that the most significant aspects of Walther’s project, and of the installation, lie. The “facilitators” do not provide explanation or pedagogy in relationship to the installation, but offer subtle guidance in choosing the proper canvas bundle that will activate, in the space created by the mat, the unfolding of Walther’s (aesthetic) event. The canvas bundles hold collaborative performance projects for one, two, three, four, or more participants, and these are only actualized given the simultaneously conceptual and literal addition of the body (or bodies) of the viewer or viewers within the mat-delineated locus in the museum’s space. Viewer(s) may select project(s) either given a careful reading of the titles supplied on the canvas bundles, by following the advice of the facilitators, or simply through the process of unpacking itself. The audience is not static or coherent, remaining only loosely circumscribed by the social and political boundaries of museum attendance, and within this body of possibility, the experience shifts to accommodate all. Lacking a third or fourth member, a group will expand when another viewer, moving from observer to performer, joins. The “framing” operation of the mat, located in the center of the installation, is not parenthetical to the presentation, as one might interpret the facilitators. The mat stands as a conceptual nexus of context, subjectivity, and aesthetic experience while also providing a provisional ground for sets of challenges to these: Subject becomes context, and all establish “aesthetic” event. The mat produces an object of social and cultural production even as it challenges the stability of their parameters from within.
The above discussion of Walther’s project intends to draw Heartfield into the world of more recent theorizations of aesthetic object and subjectivity, and therefore into more recent theorizations of the intersections of these in the public sphere, than has been the case. In many ways, the formal parameters of Heartfield’s critical interventions, first in Weimar culture and ultimately in the Fascist theater established with the assumption of power by National Socialism in 1933, are as resonant in our own time as they were perhaps too tragically decipherable, too simultaneously resistive and constructively productive, in their own context - the rise of Totalitarian culture. Otherwise stated, in concluding, I propose a move that will read history through positions originating in contemporary interests and theorizations, not in order to establish a greater objectivity, but to allow the dialogue between past and present that was suggested in the text of Dick Higgins and that might initiate the possibility of a different set of questions: A dialogue that includes the present in a reading of the past, and that draws on, rather than “writes out,” through a process of re-presentation, framing, and conscription, the engagement we have of the past itself. While Heartfield’s interventional project in the pages of the Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung might not quite stand within the “relational aesthetics” that comprise an interpretive framework for Walther’s 1. Werksatz, this work does initiate a resonant set of problems regarding subjectivity, object, and the formation of related and disjunctive public spheres in the context of event. By

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180 See Fascism and the Theater: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945, ed. Günter Berghaus (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Press, 1996); and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater for the Masses (Stanford: Stanford University Press). Berghaus draws out the performative aspects of fascist theater, relating these to the party gatherings and festivals from which they received an important impetus. Heartfield’s specific set of responses to established Fascist culture, the origins of which stand in his resistive practice of the decade prior, require, in my opinion, a somewhat different theoretical model – thus my reason for stopping at 1933.
definition, the inquiry that follows will launch more questions than it will pose solutions, but it will attempt to establish trajectories for further work.

In their 1972 text entitled *The Public Sphere and Experience*, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, writing from a perspective just moments past the student protests and political upheavals of the 1960s, revisit older questions forming around the specific involvement of a “public sphere” in functioning as a site for human interaction and experience. For Negt and Kluge, re-visitation and re-theorization are urgent ethical and political necessities. In their introduction, they state:

The loss of a public sphere within the various sectors of the left, together with the restricted access of workers in their existing organizations to channels of communication, soon led us to ask whether there can be any effective forms of a counterpublic sphere against the bourgeois public sphere. This is how we arrived at the concept of the proletarian public sphere, which embodies an experiential interest that is quite distinct. The dialectic of the bourgeois and proletarian sphere is the subject of our book.\(^{181}\)

Focused on “the transformation of the capitalist productive process and its impact on concrete human experience and psychic structure” [my emphasis], as Eberhard Knödler-Bunte aptly phrased it, Negt and Kluge intend a deliberation on the possibly of a proletarian public sphere, defined on its own terms, and the relationship of this formation to a pre-existing public sphere, the bourgeois public sphere, whose precise origins, configurations, and locus of actualization remain currently under

\(^{181}\)Negt and Kluge, ibid., xliii. On might ask here how this has changed, in the past decade, given the possibilities theoretically embodied in the internet. Regarding technology and media culture, which Negt and Kluge take as focus, the ethical implications of uneven access to these powerful tools among the general populations of second- and third-world countries, for example, or even in the less technologically advantaged populations of the first world, are in a very much needed process of discussion and theorization.
debate. At the same time, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes here, Negt and Kluge, writing in response to the theorizations of Jürgen Habermas, reject views that situate a proletarian public sphere in a merely responsive and therefore, reactionary formation defined by recourse to an already-formed, coherent, and grounded bourgeois public sphere: as Knödler-Bunte points out, the "'repressed variant of a plebian public sphere'," as Habermas had defined it in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

For Habermas, consensus is attained through rational debate within a pre-existent public sphere, a point of view to which Foucault, for example, stands in diametrical opposition. Habermas thereby initiates a re-positioning of the terms that re-establish the grounds of formation, in this case a bourgeois public sphere, that he would purport to historicize and potentially to critique. Habermas locates rationality in structures of linguistics, rather than positing a kind of teleological subject in the transcendental sense, and he presents a historicized rather than a abstracted world-view (indeed Habermas argues against this), but he retains something of the logic of this teleology in his very supposition of a subject linguistically-founded in a pre-existing bourgeois sphere, and the participation of this subject, even in the sense of radical opposition,

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182 See, for example, more recently, Mark Poster and Stanley Aronowitz, *The Information Subject*, which describes the problem both Baudrillard and Habermas encountered, the relationship between a more utopic realm - for Baudrillard, perhaps defined by a freedom of linguistic categories - and pre-existing, hegemonic one. See Mark poster, commentary by Stanley Aronowitz, *The Information Subject*, Critical Voices in Art, series ed. Saul Ostrow (G & B Arts International, 2001).


184 For an argument that does not take the differences between Foucault and Habermas as a point of departure, see Jessica Kulynych, "Performing Politics: Foucault, Habermas, and Postmodern Participation," *Polity*, volume 30, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 315-346. On page 318 she states, for example: "Theoretical focus on the distinctions between Habermas and Foucault has too often obscured important parallels between these two theorists. Specifically, the Habermas-Foucault debate has underemphasized the extent to which Habermas also describes a disciplinary society."
from within. As I will suggest below, Foucault understands a very different operation of linguistic categories and subject formation, and his analysis is more productive for thinking through aspects of Heartfield’s set of cultural interventions in 1930s Berlin.

Cast in Marxist terms, the public sphere theorized by Negt and Kluge would abandon the legitimizing function that a foundation from within a preexisting bourgeois public sphere would imply. It is significant that Negt and Kluge retain the Marxist insistence on dialectical relationships, a response to the vast proliferation of media culture, the all-encompassing nature of popular culture, and the crisis of theorizations of the left that were specific to their own time. Still, under suggestion in the introductory comments of Negt and Kluge is a change from the unitary synchronic orientation of the historian to include a rather more diachronic consideration, the incorporation of which permits an analysis of mutual productions of identities and cultural practices. Knödler-Bunte writes that the central category of Negt and Kluge’s work, the ‘public sphere,’ “organizes human experience, mediating between the changing forms of capitalist production on the one hand and the cultural organization of human experience on the other” [my emphasis]. Negt and Kluge, Knödler-Bunte points out, providing an important departure from the historical analyses of Habermas,

... emphasize that the public sphere can be understood as organizing human experience, and not merely as this or that historically institutionalized manifestation. They conceive of the public sphere as a historically developing form of mediation between the cultural organization of human qualities and sense on the one hand and developing capitalist production on the other.
In distinction from Habermas, who could not breach the limits of his own approach, the approach of Negt and Kluge

... serves to prevent a confusion between the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere - the basis for its historical claim to legitimacy - and the actual process by which the bourgeois public sphere became established as an instrument of class domination ... [Habermas fails to arrive at] ... a conceptual differentiation between the “ideal” and “real” history of the bourgeois public sphere. Nor is Habermas able to trace this distinction back to the structural weaknesses of the society.185

Understanding action as a series of linguistic events posited in a field of communicative action presupposes the existence of this field, and represents its logic. If they do not draw out the implications, Negt and Kluge suggest that identity formation and cultural production are sets of process: Mediative, organizational, and involving many aspects of human experience, which are in turn mediated and produced by a productive and potentially hybrid apparatus.

Negt and Kluge state the necessity for a conceptualization of the public sphere that takes account of an instrumentalizing public sphere of production that intends to complicate, if not at all to evade, oppositions between public and private, for example, and that can historicize and theorize both resistive and normative actions: “The traditional public sphere, whose characteristic weakness rests on the mechanism of exclusion between public and private spheres, is today overlaid by industrialized spheres of production, which tend to incorporate private realms, in particular the production process and the context of living.”186 Given the

185Eberhard Knödler-Bunte, ibid., 51.
186Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and
specific moment that Negt and Kluge describe, which stood at a distance from 1930s Berlin, it is important to consider the relevance of their far later model for Heartfield’s own engagement of the public sphere. From the Weimar period, the condition of industrialization and advancing technology described above was initiated in Germany forming, as Jeffrey Herf argues in *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in the Weimar and the Third Reich*, a central paradox in the context of National Socialism:

Rapidly modernizing industry and advancing technology in combination with regressive, anti-rational, and anti-Enlightenment values.\(^\text{187}\) If an impetus for the last in particular formed around responses, in both popular and official realms, to the recent legacy of the First World War, the assumption of power by National Socialism organized this under a mandated form of political collectivity: A public sphere. Negt and Kluge locate the origins of Habermas’ public sphere, constructed through the operation of rational discourse between participants, in Kant and Enlightenment thinking:

> The statement that “reason alone had authority,” and that this reason is the product of a collaborative, communicative, intellectual exertion on the part of those members of society who are qualified for this task has been a cardinal point of emancipatory bourgeois thought since Descartes. When I think, I ascribe my capacity for thought not to my isolated existence but to my connection with all others who think, with the community of rational individuals, such as mathematicians, astronomers, natural scientists, logicians. ‘I think, therefore I am’ could therefore also be formulated as: ‘I am, precisely because I am able to disregard the fact that I am an isolated individual.”\(^\text{188}\)


\(^{188}\) Negt and Kluge, ibid., 9.
In the place of the specific “new media” that are a focus for Negt and Kluge, we might understand the publishing projects of the Malik Verlag, Piscator’s *agit prop*-based conception of political theater, and Heartfield’s photomontages from the pages of *A-I Z*. The presence of capital in collusion with growing industry is present in many of Heartfield’s photomontages, most notably “The Hitler Salute” (Chapter 5, figures 7–9), which juxtaposes industrial interests to the development of political power, and situates both in a suspended (public) realm, a void left for the completion of the viewer, who would contribute various cultural, political, and ethical discourses, experiences, and involvements. Moreover, the operation of the worker-photographer in asserting a proletarian world-view through a literal circulation of the visual productions of its members may be understood as “expanding the concept ‘public sphere’ beyond the meaning ascribed to it by individual disciplines or by its bourgeois content.”

Negt and Kluge theorize, therefore, a “proletarian public sphere” that stands in opposition to the “bourgeois public sphere” and that is simultaneously, in an avoidance of the incorporative functions of the bourgeois public sphere, structurally an entirely different formation. In its resistive relationship to the bourgeois public sphere, however, it may define itself by recourse to the same logic. Their retention of dialectical logic does allow a move from Habermas’ pre-existent (bourgeois) public sphere, his arena of “rational discourse,” but in replicating the dialectical relationship, they risk failing to challenge the terms of Habermas’ model in a meaningful way. In a text entitled *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe suggest that this

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189Knödler-Bunte, ibid., 53.
compromise is inherent in Marxist theorizations of subjectivity and class identity:

Diverse subject positions are reduced to manifestations of a single position; the plurality of differences is reduced or rejected as contingent; the sense of the present is revealed through its location in an a priori succession of stages. It is precisely because the concrete is in this way reduced to the abstract, that history, society and social agents have, for orthodoxy, an essence which operates as their principle of unification. And as this essence is not immediately visible, it is necessary to distinguish between a surface or appearance of society and an underlying reality to which the ultimate sense of every concrete presence must necessarily be referred, whatever the level of complexity in the system of mediations.\(^{190}\)

Heartfield’s project was, given the imperatives of his historical situation, directed toward defining an alternative subjectivity, but this alternate subjectivity needed situation in an equally alternative, yet substantive and existent, “proletarian” collective sphere. This would seem to imply that theorizations of the public sphere that establish agency, for example, even if by recourse to an ontological imperative, would be most useful in reading Heartfield’s project. Lacalau and Mouffe’s critical commentary on the historical development of the left are interesting, however, in view of the outright rejection that Heartfield’s project received after his return to East Germany, a context of established “left” culture, after the war.\(^{191}\) Read with Negt and Kluge’s argument for the interaction between ostensibly “isolated individuals” and greater cultural, social, and political spheres, a challenge to “orthodox” left thinking emerges, and the preliminary indications of this challenge may have been


\(^{191}\)See my discussion above, page 8.
embodied in Heartfield’s project. Simply stated, mobilizing both deconstructive and constructive forces in his photomontage practice, Heartfield produced a set of responses that were powerful and effective and whose functionality would outlive their historical moment.

Debates forming around the constitution of gender occupy a critical space that might be helpful in thinking through subject formation in the realm of political resistance, and in considering the articulation of subjectivity that is counter to a greater hegemonic discourse, as was the case for Heartfield. Consider Foucault, writing in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> I shall abandon my attempt... to see a discourse as a phenomenon of expression – the verbal translation of a previously established synthesis; instead, I shall look for a field of regularity for various positions of subjectivity. Thus conceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject, and his discontinuity with himself may be determined.¹⁹²

Regarding the constitution of the subject in language, Foucault describes a “field of regularity,” rather than a pre-existent or stable field, and a field whose appearance is coincident with the appearance of a subject. That the operations of discourse produce “dispersion” and “discontinuity” rather than stability and (naturalized) manifestation has posited the problem of agency, and if this problem has been debated in the realm of feminist theory and criticism, its implications are interesting for considering the intersection of political action, agency, and political subjectivity in many discourses. Regarding linguistic categories and the generation of subjectivity, critical writing has increasingly turned to Foucault, and to

¹⁹²Quoted in *The information Subject*, ibid., 39.
Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s formulations of the generation and functioning of language as a dynamic and open field of possibilities instead of looking to the Saussurean models that adopt a quasi-scientific and fundamentally objectifying viewpoint. As Therese Grisham points out, according to the Saussurean method, a “linguist collects and interprets data, separating what is essential from what is accidental or extrinsic to language and determining the forces permanently and universally at work on language” [my emphasis].

Fundamentally, Foucault’s refusal to posit potential or pre-existent ontological unity generated hostility from feminist writing that asserted the necessity for anchoring a specifically resistive subject position, and, by extension, a point from which to launch meaningful political and social actions and interventions. One might ask, at this point, whether a similar set of imperatives were required for Heartfield’s proletarian subject. Returning to Heartfield in the context of agency, the photomontage practice he developed in publishing, in Berlin Dada, in his work in Piscator’s theater, and finally, in the context of A-I-Z, pressed against the boundaries of the dialectical model properly speaking: Thesis,

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193 Therese Grisham, “Linguistics as an Indiscipline: Deleuze and Guattari’s Pragmatics,” SubStance, volume 20, no. 3, issue 66: Special Issue: Deleuze and Guattari (1991): 36-54. This quote from page 37. Grisham points out the alternative views of Volosinov and Labov, stating on page 39, for example, that they “lead away from the established domain of linguistics, in part by systematizing it, and toward a much more radical connection of language to its political and social ‘outside’ …”

194 Jana Sawicki, for example, admits that Foucault's critical discussion of sexual preference embodies a powerful attempt to “stimulate … avenues of resistance,” concluding: “The fact that one cannot guarantee the outcome of such resistance is no argument against it. It is, instead, a reason to be attentive to the limits of one’s own discourses and practices.” Yet, she continues, adopting a rather Habermasian position: “In the absence of alternatives to present principles and values governing political struggle, we must continue to appeal to the standards of rationality and justice that are available to us within the specific contexts in which we find ourselves.” Sawicki fails to see that the grounds themselves are restrictive of resistance, and that these will neutralize and translate action, and ultimately identity, into terms that are acceptable and intelligible to itself – a paradox. Judith Butler adopts a very different position, maintaining that insistence on the ontological unity that might produce a categorical femininity merely works to reproduce and to maintain the oppressive distinctions. See Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body (New York and London: Routledge, 1991): 100; Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
antithesis, and a resolution in the form of final synthesis that writes out the contradictions, and the potential instability, of both. Moving dangerously close to the borders of these categorical designations, Heartfield’s “dialectical” object threatened not merely to expand, but to definitively breach their boundaries, exposing their contents to the destabilizing processes of “becoming,” “multiplicity,” and the Deleuzian “fold.” Deleuze and Guattari wrote:

There are no individual statements, only statement-producing machinic assemblies ... For the moment, we will note that assemblages have elements (or multiplicities) of several kinds: human, social, and technical machines, organized molar machines, molecular machines with their particles of becoming-inhuman ... We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, only of types of interpenetrating multiplicities that at any given moment form a single machinic assemblage ... Each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind, and we reproduce its statements when we think we are speaking in our own name; or rather we speak in our own name when we produce its statement.195

While this theorization of meaning production would seem to imply a subject that has little political or social mobility, consider John Rajchman, writing on the Deleuzian event:

... in what happens to us – and what has happened to us – there is always something “inattributable,” which nevertheless forms part of our “becomings.” That is what Deleuze calls an “event” – the sort of event supposed by the “sense” of his logic and the odd grammar of its ‘And.’ ‘In all my books I have sought the nature of the event,’ Deleuze declares; ‘it is a philosophical concept, the only one capable of destituting the verb to be and the attribute’ ... this logical destitution is then not an end in itself, but rather the consequence of another way of thinking about and connecting things – of another kind of logical construction with a different relation to ‘what there is.’ Deleuze calls his logic ‘constructivist’ not ‘deconstructionist.’ It is not so much about undoing identities as of putting differences together in open or complex wholes.196

195Deleuze and Guattari, ibid. 36.
In the body of his varied projects and significant interventions, Heartfield consistently sought the borders of social, cultural, and political existence in search of a kind of Deleuzian “And.” Perhaps ironically, it was the possibility of a subject “becoming” in a mutually “becoming” social and political field, the subversive potential of “multiplicity,” that opened Heartfield’s photomontages to criticism during the rise of Totalitarianism in Europe and the Soviet Union. Far less tragically, it was also his consistent self-positioning in the interstitial, as Dick Higgins recognized, that opened his body of work to subsequent appropriation and framing in an ever-expanding series of art historical and art-critical events.
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