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**“Systematic Work on the Ball”:
The New Constructor as Dada Apollo**

In the *Dada Roof Studio* (fig. 154) we perceive two different types of artist shown as mechanical figures. On the one hand there is the excluded academic painter of the old school, wearing a white smock and seated in front of an inverted easel; he marks a farewell to the traditional art of accomplished “master works.” On the other hand we have the metamechanical constructor who sits at the table, in front of his geometrical utensils, doing nothing.

The means and forms of representation of the “academic artist” seem to be used up, his messages no longer relevant, his visionary abilities extinguished. He has nothing to say: his easel is empty and turned away from him. His hands are not visible, only part of a wooden arm prosthesis. His old concept of the artwork is no longer of interest. He is a “leftover,” still reminiscent of periods of art to which access has now been lost. Not even the *Prussian Venus* can still inspire him.

The artist shocks by his anonymity. Was this actually a role behind which the anti-academic Dadaist could conceal himself, presenting anonymity and de-individualization not as a loss of personality but as an Apollinian camouflage? The gas mask of the artist heightens the impression of a personality that wants to make itself unapproachable, invulnerable to the traumatic experiences of the outside world. Whoever has faced terror, according to Nietzsche, will search for the mask of Apollinian art. The Apollinian appearance emphatically highlights paralysis and lack of emotion toward the exterior world, making of the artist an uncanny enigma, for the origin of his mask points to his knowledge of the horrors of World War I. The mask appears as a relic reflecting the past, allowing the conclusion that the artist is passive, in mute and melancholy revolt against a culture devoid of meaning. Through his paralysis, moreover, he liquidates his senses, which were directed toward conformity and habit and a convention-laden traditional notion of art. This attitude expresses Dada's tendency to depart from what Duchamp called “retina art,” a notion of art relying on mimetic representation. Therefore, the work on the easel has ultimately become unnecessary; what counts is solely to regain art as a new idea, a conception in keeping with the period.

And one more facet of Dada Berlin can be discerned in the artist's passivity. It is connected to his social position and his negative fixation

on the upper class as his customers. He seems to retreat from this "ruling class" by way of his lack of productivity; yet at the same time we realize his isolation from the "proletarian masses." Schlichter was working for a functional change in art and shared Grosz's opinion that only if art no longer "flows anemically through the lives of high society," only then will it become alive again and "communicate to all of working humanity as a full stream."⁶⁵

What then does this figure of the old artist and his attitude mean with regard to the Dionysian process of destruction in the montages? What was conceived in the Dionysian techniques of ecstasy now was consistently brought to an end, the disappearance of the traditional picture. Let us call to mind once more how in the procedure of montage a constant process of reflection on the medium of the picture, referring back to itself, was excessively stimulated by crosswise joining acts of destruction, aiming as much at the picture as a symbolic form as at the human body as the object of representation. Especially the deconstructing montages of the Dadaists' own and their friends' portraits showed paradoxically, ironically, grotesquely how much the body was equated metaphorically with the picture and its materiality. By continually dismantling themselves, they simultaneously performed the "execution" of the picture. The attack on the picture, however, does not mean the end of it. The Dionysian dissolution of the picture in actions simultaneously gives birth to the Apollinian metamechanical constructions. The universalist and ubiquitous signs of technology as an anaesthetical elementary language introduced a new vision into the void: to see art in the perspective of science and technology. The designs of abstract functional models, diagrams, and typecasts seem to keep open all forms of representation. They look as though all limitations of unchangeable shaping and stylization can be overcome, representing themselves, pure and free of ideology.

Thus, the other type of artist on the roof studio may embody the new Apollinian role of the Dadaist as constructor. In this role he seems to perceive the problem of rationalism without prejudice, matter-of-factly and in a playful experimental way. His instruments are the geometrical tools with which he competently plans a new rationalized world, creating a metamechanical culture that emerges out of the combination of art and technology, and including also the natural sciences (represented by the anatomical model).

Whereas De Chirico in the unfamiliar realm of civilization recalls the former mythic significance of art, and does so in a melancholy vein, the new Dadaist artist appears to be concerned with the persistence of art in the "gay" union with the rational ability of science, perhaps with a "further development of the artistic" in scientific man, as Nietzsche demanded it in the phase of *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878).⁶⁶ Grosz recognized a new artistic guideline in the "matter-of-factness and clarity of the engineer's drawing."⁶⁷ By responding to the mechanistic challenges,

the Dadaist wanted to give a new foundation to the problem of rationalism by means of art as metamechanical play. For this reason the engineer's drawing, the diagram, plan, and blueprint were often introduced into the constructions as a picture within the picture: in Grosz's *Der Diabolospieler* (The Diabolo Player, 1920; fig. 95) and *Der neue Mensch* (The New Man, 1920; fig. 94); also in Hausmann's *Kutschenbauch dichtet* (Kutschenbauch Composes Poetry, 1920; fig. 112). They testify to an artistic indifference beyond any traditional aesthetic pretensions, marking a closeness to Duchamp's anartistic, "dry" concept of art and to Picabia's mechanomorphous and machinoid sections: *Tamis du Vent* (ca. 1918; fig. 142; cat. no. 103), *Cannibalisme* (ca. 1918; cat. no. 48), *Oeil Rond*, *Buschmannzeichnung* (Round Eye, Bushman Drawing, 1919–20; cat. no. 47) were selected for the Dada-Fair. Furthermore we find, in *Kutschenbauch dichtet* (fig. 112) and in *Diabolospieler* (fig. 95), the metamechanical activity intensified to a hermetic systematization that, compared to the *Roof Studio* (fig. 154), has already achieved an absolute, equilibrated order. Mechanics has become a second, abstract, artistic nature — an automatism, the "Seelenautomobil" (soul automobile). Hausmann's *Kutschenbauch* (1920) represents an artificial figure taken from the ambiance of Baader's assemblage *Das große Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* (The Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama, 1920; fig. 47), and resurfacing in *Der Verfasser des Buches der "Vierzehn Briefe Christi" in seinem Heim* (The Author of the Book of "Christ's Fourteen Letters" in His Home, ca. 1920). Hausmann makes him churn the coffee grinder like a prayer wheel. With his big blue eyes he stares blankly out of the picture, his head slightly bowed. Grosz's *Diabolospieler* (1920; fig. 95) functions unconsciously from out of the interior of his mechanism, the little cogwheel directing the motion of his arms. The Diabolo game, which had spread to Germany in 1908, belonged to the American fashion in toys. In *Ein kleines Ja und ein großes Nein* (A Small Yes and a Big No), Grosz writes:

One day we were suddenly all playing Diabolo: with a string tied between two sticks held in our hands, we would throw an hour-glass-shaped top up into the air and catch it skillfully with the string when it came down. Doing this we would be humming the tune of the day: "Since my old man caught the latest craze of Di-Ei-E-Bi-Olo-."⁶⁸

Kutschenbauch with his coffee grinder and the Diabolo player are reduced to stereotypes by their jointed-doll movements. They escape human unreliability and subjectivity by their perfect metamechanical functioning. The Dionysian has been transposed into its Apollinian counterweight. The "inner necessity" of expressionist creation has been ironically replaced by the metamechanical automatism. The Diabolo player's feat, which lives off of the tension of his balancing act, becomes a uniform motion, back and forth, up and down, a perfect equilibration

in the context of Dadaist indifferenciation. Its hermetic functioning allows the child's Diabolo game to be seen as equivalent to the metamechanical plan in the picture. Both represent an independent, autonomous, self-generated system, a stringent formal reality with an interior consistency. This new model of metamechanical creation no longer needs to engage with the creativity of the psyche. Hausmann used the male tailor's dummy; Grosz used men that were stereometrically assembled from cylinders and balls. They are the new metamechanical production machines of art. Yet in contrast to industrial fabrications, they are devoid of function and use, independent and autonomous; as "transcendental-immanent *perpetuum mobiles*" (Hausmann), they apply a visionary mathematics, which makes art and science equally enigmatic.

What they state is so void and purposeless that they are at the same time an ending and a beginning, an ending because their automatism does not negate their origin in the mechanics of society. The Diabolo player still contains the prosthetic cripple, and Hausmann's *Kutschenbauch*, if we relate him to the satire written in 1920, is a product of German convention and education. Viewed in this light their mechanism would be an "unspiritual and unintellectual" one (Hausmann). But the Dadaists are able to reduce to absurdity their meaningless motion and ironically change it into an "anti-spiritual or anti-intellectual" nonsense.

In Grosz's *Der neue Mensch* (The New Man, 1920; fig. 94) the new artist's seclusion in the roof studio, the automaton-like equanimity of *Kutschenbauch*, and the Diabolo player are transformed into a more reality-related quality of metamechanical activity: "My works can be recognized as works of training, a systematic working at the ball."⁶⁹ We also meet these new types in Hausmann's watercolor *Ingenieure* (Engineers, 1920; fig. 110), intruding into the small town like "American exploiteure," surveyors of new plans, exorcising the old spirit. While the engineer in the foreground makes his measurements on a flat base, the other one, immediately behind him, seems to take on the function of a supervisor. The influence of Carrà's painting *Mother and Son* (1917; fig. 143) cannot be overlooked, not only in the arrangement of the frontal figures but also in a certain resemblance of the dress, as well as in the relations to base, measuring rod, and ball. The walking figure in front of the house wall in *Ingenieure* is a motif repeated frequently in spatial image montages to emphasize dimensions of depth. Grosz's *neue Mensch* (New Man, 1920) is also walking with resolute steps through a clear space toward an engineer's drawing showing a cross-section of a two-cylinder V-engine. He passes the geometrical utensils lying in the foreground and the punch ball hung up in the middle ground, his most important training device; he is an engineer and a boxer. *Ingenieure* and *Der neue Mensch* show a new understanding of rationalism. The figures appear to be living in an empty space free of contradiction, in a perfect

functional context, as opposed to the crushing apathy of the *Dachatelier* (fig. 154). The type of the artist as a boxer and an engineer is an embodiment of a new identity of art and technology, art and life. The metamechanical Dadaist became a boxer (steadfast and with quick reactions, always wary of a possible attack) and an engineer (coolly reasoning, calculating, up-to-date). In order to live modernity, one needed such a "heroic constitution" (Benjamin). Hausmann's engineers (fig. 110) were artists approaching a functioning world that demanded "stability, construction, expediency"⁷⁰ — conditions, which assumed the elimination of the artist's personal traits, of his emotions, and of any psychologizing interpretation. His acuteness of mind reduced art to a pure elementary simplicity, avoiding even in clear coloring any association of expressivity and "frenzy" (Hausmann). The new type of artist was further characterized by a calculating view of life, replacing traditional rootedness by a higher degree of mobility: not the cycle of nature, but the pace of the city; not the German small town, but America; not the individual, but the type; not the organism, but the apparatus. These were the new binary oppositions dominating the critique of culture and civilization, provoking in part and in part defensive. The new challenges of modern technology and the urban living space, as an attack on body and soul, conditioned the artist and his senses to a metamechanical, highly performative consciousness — planning, measuring, constructing the new Apollinian man.

This concept gave rise to Hausmann's *Mechanischer Kopf* (*Der Geist unserer Zeit*) (Mechanical Head [The Spirit of Our Age]; fig. 113). His thinking according to number and measurement announced a new creative combination of art and technology: a metamechanical transvaluation of aesthetics, viewing science in the perspective of art. Apparently the head was first exhibited in the *Große Berliner Kunstausstellung* in 1921 as part of the *November Group* and titled *Kopf in exzentrischer Bewegung* (Head in Eccentric Motion; no. 1086 of its catalog).⁷¹ Although Hausmann is inclined to an earlier dating of this item as well, favoring the year 1918 or 1919, it has not been found at the Dada-Fair or in the Berlin Dada publications. It only received the title *Geist unserer Zeit* in the course of Hausmann retrospectives since 1967. In *Mécano* (Blue, 1922)⁷² the Dadaist for the first time programmatically integrated his work into the anti-expressionist, anti-psychological, and anti-erotic concept of this journal that was edited by van Doesburg using his Dadaist pseudonym I. K. Bonset. The journal triggered a polemic of "mechanical" against "natural" man, above all in order to oppose esoteric notions of *Bauhaus* teacher Johannes Itten and the subjectively expressive, energetic pathos of the expressionists. The dedication below Hausmann's "*Plastique*" in *Mécano* needs to be understood in this context; it addressed all "*neo-classicistes et esthéticiens du compas et du nombre en France et en Italie*" (neo-classicists and aestheticians of compass and number in France and Italy), which probably meant Le

Corbusier, his *L'esprit nouveau* circle (October 1920–January 1925) and the artists of *pittura metafisica*. The instruments on the head point to a manner of living and of perception determined rationally and materially. In contrast to the Dionysian, emphatic eccentricity of the montages, the head inaugurates an Apollinian, concentrated perspective toward things. This perspective is made more precise — note the brass screws of the photographic plate camera — by photography as a covenant between the eye and the apparatus. The creation of the *Mechanical Head* is also, apart from its affinity to van Doesburg's concept, related to a new, scientifically motivated understanding of art. This was represented at the meeting of *Union fortschrittlicher internationaler Künstler* (May 29–31, 1922) in Dusseldorf by the constructivists El Lissitzky, Hans Richter, Werner Graeff, László Moholy-Nagy, Cornelius van Eesteren, and Max Burchartz together with Hausmann, and it further asserted itself in the concepts of the constructivist group in Berlin and in the *Bauhaus* in Weimar.

Hausmann's thoroughly Dada-Apollinian creation of the Head was preceded by drawings: one of them represents the portrait of Conrad Felixmüller (1920; fig. 111). His three-quarter profile is schematized; his physiognomy typified as that of the intellectual. His head is placed in an empty room on a flat base, comparable to those *manichini* by De Chirico that invite contemplation. The painter Felixmüller also strove for a change of function in the combination of art and industry, art and revolution. In his manifesto *PRÉsentismus*, published in number nine of *De Stijl* in 1921, Hausmann declared: "The beauty of our daily lives is determined by the models, the hairdressers' art of wig-making, the exactness of a technical construction. We are striving again for a conformity with the mechanical work process: we shall have to get used to the idea of seeing art produced in the factory!"

This metamechanical decision supported "the will to style" Hausmann called for, in October 1921 together with Hans Arp, Iwan Puni and László Moholy-Nagy, in their "*Aufruf zur elementaren Kunst*" (Call for Elementary Art) in the next edition of *De Stijl* (no. 10): "Turn away from styles. We demand stylelessness in order to achieve STYLE!" Van Doesburg explicitly saw this will to style in the union of art and technology⁷³ by setting determinacy against indeterminacy, simplicity against complexity, synthesis against analysis, logical construction against lyrical constellation, mechanism against handicraft, collectivism against individualism.

Grosz related the metamechanical transvaluation of art in a utopian perspective to a new communist social order, connecting it to his notion of Tatlinism, the synthesis of revolutionary and technical art. For Grosz, the new man was "a bright healthy worker in the collectivist community."⁷⁴ The clarity of technical reason seemed identical with the idea of a transparent social order as described by Lenin: "After the fall of the capitalists, after the destruction of the modern state's bureaucratic

machinery, we will have before us a mechanism freed of all parasites and of a high degree of technical perfection."⁷⁵

The new man as a collective prototype inspired Grosz to further mechano-constructions, abstract *Planrisse* (Construction; fig. 86.7). This new man appeared to reflect the Russian constructivist utopia of progress underlying the proletarian culture revolution, which systematically connected artistic and industrial production, intending to revolutionize art as part of the shaping of everyday life. At the center of this culture-revolutionary desire, the constructivist placed the work of the "Monteur," the "Constructor," and the "Engineer," who had to take into account the state of technology and production in building up a culture of the future. The contrast between aesthetic and material production was to be abolished. The real production of art took place in the factory and the laboratory. Influenced by these ideas, Grosz undertook his trip to Russia in 1922, only to return disillusioned. After that, the new collectivist type was no longer to appear in his works in this utopian conception.

Yet in contrast to the constructivists, Dada's new Apollinian "conventionality" of the artist, his type-castings, hermetism, and *Sachlichkeit* were to retain an unresolved remainder of Dionysian disquiet. As yet, the old roles of the artist, though dismissed and in anachronistic paralysis, could not be clearly distinguished from the new constructivist creations. The constructor on the *Roof Studio* (fig. 154) is passive and lethargic, as yet apparently unable to exhaust the possibilities of a "cultural will to style of the machine" (van Doesburg). The Dadaist employed also boredom and lack of productivity as a denial, in order to denounce the growing normativity "of our hollow, empty epoch."⁷⁶ He consciously made ironic the stagnation of the monotonous and paralyzed society allowing glimpses of the repressed horrors behind its surface. His ennui was meant to expose the loss of culture. The denial of subjective, work-oriented productivity was a Dandyist attitude common to Dada.⁷⁷ With regard to French Dadaism, Jacques Vaché wrote: "The man of humors should not be creative,"⁷⁸ the Geneva Dadaist Walter Serner said: "The best book: the one left unwritten,"⁷⁹ and co-founder of Dada Zurich and Paris, Tristan Tzara, claimed: "I would have become an adventurer of great style and fine gesture if only I had the psychic and physical power to complete this one task, not to get bored."⁸⁰ Salomo Friedlaender used the argument of "creative indifference," and Carl Einstein had his protagonist Bebuquin ask: "Indifference, of what stuff are you created? Was excessive sensibility your origin or the force that equals opulent nature?"⁸¹ Marcel Duchamp created silence and achieved a great influence among the avant-garde. Although the new metamechanical artist seemed already to master the new technical regularities, the themes would not adapt so easily and without contradiction. As yet, the stereometrically assembled New Man (fig. 94) remained in a fixed polarity to the war cripple patched up with prostheses. As yet, metamechanics could not conceal its fragmentary nature.

65. Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern," 14.
66. Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human), KSA 2, 186.
67. Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern," 14.
68. Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und ein grosses Nein. Sein Leben von ihm selbst erzählt* (1st, 1947; 2nd, 1955; Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1974), 220.
69. Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern," 14.
70. Ibid.
71. On the condition of the *Mechanical Head*, cf. correspondence of Hausmann to César Domela-Nieuwenhus, Jershöft, June 9, 1932, in Hausmann, *Scharfrichter*, 429f. Cf. Andreas Haus, "Der Geist unserer Zeit. Fragen an einen Holzkopf," in *Wir wünschen die Welt bewegt und beweglich. Raoul Hausmann Symposium der Berlinischen Galerie*, ed. Eva Züchner (Berlin 1994), 50ff.
72. See *Mécano Blue* (n. 51).
73. Theo van Doesburg, "Wille zum Stil" (The Will to Style), in *De Stijl. International maandblad voor nieuwe kunst, wetenschap en kultur*, ed. Theo van Doesburg, vol. 5 no. 3 (Weimar, Leiden, and Antwerp, March 1922), 34.
74. Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern," 14.
75. V. I. Lenin, "Staat und Revolution" ("State and Revolution"), in René Fülöp-Miller, *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschewismus* (Zurich, Leipzig, Vienna, 1926), 23.
76. Ball, *Flight*, 103.
77. See Bergius, "Der Da-Dandy — das Narrenspiel aus dem Nicht," in cat. "Tendenzen der zwanziger Jahre." Third part: *Dada in Europa. Werke und Dokumente* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer 1977), 3/12-3/29.
78. Jacques Vaché, Letter to André Breton, August 18, 1917, in *Kriegsbriefe* (1919; Hamburg: ed. Nautilus, 1979), 45. Cf. André Breton, *Anthologie des schwarzen Humors* (1940) (Munich: Rogner und Bernhard, 1972), 472.
79. Walter Serner, *Letzte Lockerung. Ein Handbrevier für Hochstapler und solche, die es werden wollen* (1927) (Berlin: Gerhard Verlag, 1964), 44.
80. Tzara, Letter to André Breton, September 21, 1919, in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Pauvert, 1965), 449.
81. Einstein, *Bebuquin oder die Dilettanten des Wunders* (1907) (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Verlag der Wochenschrift Die Aktion, 1st ed., 1912; 2nd ed., 1917), 81.

“Stagnant Death”: The Ominous Future

Schlichter appeared to be rather skeptical toward the alliance between art and technology. Art seemed not yet able to have a productive effect on technology and industry and to transvaluate it in the sense of a poetic and artistic experiment. By contrast, mechanics without its Dionysian counterpart generated deadly, paralyzing powers in the semblance of the Apollinian work. The dark figure in the foreground of the *Roof Studio* (fig. 154) — muffled and covered up in a buttoned leather coat with upturned collar and an aviator's mask — faces the beholder with a fixed stare through its glasses. It is close to the lower edge of the picture, visible only to the level of its chest, so that its presence can compellingly assert itself. Its mask hypertrophically enhances the impression created by that worn by the white figure of the old artist. The dark figure faces the viewer like a constant, immutable bulk of threatening paralysis. It is the negative, pessimistic correlative to the comparable figure in Grosz's *Automaton George* (fig. 86.3). Whereas this “bachelor machine” invoked the productive union of art and technology, the dark figure here embodies rational order as an already-produced presence of death in “life”: made of steel, uncompromising, a trauma of anonymity and incalculability, it appears as the warden of the roof studio's company. It seems to be the unfeeling servant of a thoroughly rationalized world, of an iron god of mass battles and mass destruction risen to power in the war. Its omnipresence of control over life gives rise to fears of torpor, paralysis, and interior and exterior immobility. To see mechanization as a life-denying phenomenon corresponded to a general insight of cultural pessimism, voiced for example by Walter Rathenau in 1922:

We must accept that as long as there is human life on earth there has never been a global mood that dominated such an immense circle of beings in this uniform fashion as does the mechanistic worldview. Its power seems inescapable, for it dominates the sources of production, the forces and goals of life; and this power is based on reason. But though mechanization has not reached its zenith by far . . . it is today carrying death in its heart.⁸²

The embodiment of rationality approaching the picture's edge and fixing the viewer with its gaze seems to have been inspired by Edvard Munch's *Red Virginia Creeper* (1898-1900; fig. 155) — not only the figure itself but also the spatial relations: the conception of perspective, the architectural view. Yet Munch painted in emotional fervor, giving his figure the expression of panic and horror — especially through the wide open eyes and the greenish color of the skin. Whereas fear of death here annexes the whole picture, Schlichter draws its threatening weight from the field of deadly reason. “O paralysis, stagnant death, fossilization and sleep, you set the limits of our lives,” Bebuquin said in his “*Rede*

vom Tod im Leben" (Speech of Death in Life) of 1912.⁸³ Death as the suddenly intervening power of horror, as the catastrophic ending — as Grosz still saw it in the apocalyptic vision of *Widmung an Oskar Panizza* (Dedication to Oskar Panizza) (1917–18; fig. 78) — was here replaced by the slow process of decay and gradual standstill — a constant menace of the people on the scene as well as of the viewers. This is an ending that does not close in from outside; this is an ending from inside through the steel rationality of mechanization.

Schlichter's multifaceted allegory of the arts in the *Roof Studio* lends probability to the hypothesis that this work was based on Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514). Dürer's "*Denkbild*" (image for contemplation, Schuster) at this time had a great influence on art, especially on *pittura metafisica*. It was for this reason also that De Chirico's *The Seer* (1914–15; fig. 146) was programmatically accepted for the *Dadaco* proofs (fig. 165.3). The highest goal of the humanists, the virtuous striving for knowledge, seemed to have turned fatal through the experiences of a self-destructing, completely rationalized society. The roof studio, like Dürer's engraving, creates a "*Denkraum*" (realm for contemplation, Warburg) of the polar qualities of melancholy: lethargy and creativity. The picture is in the grasp of melancholy's coldness and aridity. The black figure might appear as the *facies nigra* of melancholy. The great productive capability that is usually ascribed to black bile is here transformed into a passive apathy due to the overwhelming, chilling influence of the technologized rational world. Devoid of meaning, enthralled by an apparently limitless progress, *acedia*, the negative typhus of melancholy, triumphs as listlessness and passivity. The dominance of rationality reveals itself as disastrous for this society and its culture. Its mechano-cripples belong to the children of Saturn, the planet of misery, which indeed hovers above the metropolitan society in Schlichter's *Hausvogelplatz* of 1923 — the same year Panofsky and Saxl published their interpretation of Dürer's *Melencolia I*, which saw in it a "*Warnblatt*", an "image of warning," a reading of cultural pessimism, which itself probably also was a symptom of its time.⁸⁴

But, as we have seen, the old type of artist was still harboring other possibilities of interpretation also connected to the unique gifts of melancholy, which the Renaissance had rediscovered with reference to classical antiquity. In this paralyzed civilization marked by its decline, the artist remains, offering resistance in his passivity. His gas mask makes us realize that a different kind of art and culture is necessary after the horror of World War I. He survives because he reflects on art, on science, and on himself. The Dadaists themselves remained passive in dreary resignation, and yet they took an active stance of denial, exposing the world to its meaninglessness. Although they perceived modernity from the point of view of its potential ending, this happened with a kind of dandyist heroism, which did not itself succumb to the end but activated as a clean slate for a new creative challenge, both negative

and affirmative.

In the roof studio we see the new artist seated in front of his utensils, passive yet ready to take them up. What he lacks, however, is the pair of circular compasses of *Melencolia I*; it is no longer in his hand; the ingenious capability of a global master builder is denied him. His instrument seems mainly to be the triangle with which he can construct a new metamechanical beauty of the world, piece by piece, devoid of anthropocentric goals. As in Dürer's copperplate engraving the instruments of astronomy and geometry, the Saturnine arts of measurement as two of the seven liberal arts, challenge *Melencolia I*; likewise in the *Roof Studio* they provoke a rethinking of their use in the context of art and an interpretation of the "meta" of mechanics as an intensification of life, not as metaphysical incapability. Creativity itself is the foundation of the metaphysical dimensions of art. Schlichter himself, using geometry, developed a new kind of beauty that transcends lethargy; it is not gloomy but bright and clear. The scene's profound melancholy is captured by the "veil" of geometrical beauty, captured, not repressed: "If we could imagine dissonance become man — and what else is man? — this dissonance, to be able to live, would need a splendid illusion that would cover dissonance with a veil of beauty" (Nietzsche).⁸⁵

The finality, which is resolutely connected to the black figure, will not attain such a dominant effect if we rethink the appeal of the *Prussian Venus*. She appears on her pedestal, together with the child, showing its Dionysian origin as counterpart to the black figure. As yet she is capable, in union with the child, of relativizing the entry of death, even if the company seems to have become its prey. She attempts to balance the new demands of the time, rationality and discipline, with what remains of her Dionysian potential.

In metamechanics, the Apollinian enters a union with forces of melancholy ingenuity. The new aesthetics of discipline, coldness, simplicity, and regularity mark the constructor in Nietzsche's sense: "Logical and geometrical simplification is a consequence of increased power: conversely, the perception of such simplification will increase the feeling of power . . . The height of development: grand style."⁸⁶ The artist appeared on the scene as one who created his own laws for himself: the *New Man* (Grosz, fig. 94) controlled the new set of instruments in order to construct his own world. The utopian conditions of this new creative constructor were a non-alienated relationship between man and technology and a classless society demanding a new type of collective man, a "bright healthy worker" (Grosz). Rationality was thus no longer separated from life but served to enhance the will to life. But if these conditions were not fulfilled and mechanization was not controlled by an artistic creative mind — if it did not unite with art but sacrificed life to the intellect of industrialization — then mechanization would appear as a repressive force perpetuating the rules of bourgeois society. It would even be a deadly force because it paralyzed man by turning him into a

puppet, alienated from other people and the environment, without a space for agency.

Metamechanics uses the same set of instruments, matter-of-factness and precision to construct both a repressive, mechanized anthropology and a productive, serene one. The Apollinian dominance will only take full effect when it has completely "counterbalanced" the Dionysian forces — not having deadened them, but having maintained its rationality passionate, its emptiness alive, its tranquility vital, its precision activated, its indifference creative, and its silence audible. In this way metamechanics was not to form any unequivocal position but to remain tied to Dada's concept of polarities. Consequently Dada's metamechanics shows on the one hand liberating moments allowing a detachment from metaphysical residues, heading for a reorientation of culture in an artistic and poetic tension by integrating rational intellect as part of life; on the other hand, it presents the dangers of alienation by a life-denying rationality, a one-dimensional progress of civilization.

We could conclude with Nietzsche's sense that the metamechanics of Dada contributes to a liberation of rationality towards its own existence — in order to contribute to a transvaluation of values. "Whoever has to some extent achieved the freedom of reason cannot feel but that he is a wanderer on earth — even if he is not a traveler toward an ultimate goal: for this does not exist. And yet will he watch, and keep his eyes open for whatever actually happens in the world; this is why he must not attach his heart too tightly to every single thing; there must be something wandering inside him enjoying change and transitoriness."⁸⁷

Dada's metamechanics presupposes first of all a bright self-reflecting transparency of reason. Strength and strictness of the intellect are the enabling forces for "Lust der Erkenntnis" (joy of knowledge) and an "erfinderisches glückliches Ich" (inventive happy ego).⁸⁸ Dada then was working in a deconstructive way on the preconditions of a "great architecture of culture"⁸⁹; it tried to balance the contradictory, dissonant forces, scientific coldness and skepticism, with the Dionysian energetic and vital power of art and poetry. In this spirit Hausmann's *Mechanical Head* demanded a new conception of culture.

Notes

82. Walter Rathenau, *Zur Kritik der Zeit* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1922), 135.

83. Einstein, *Bebuquin* (n. 70), 81.

84. Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürers Melencolia I. Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Stud. d. Bibliothek Warburg, II) (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner Verlag 1923). See Peter-Klaus Schuster, *Melencolia I. Dürers Denkbild* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1991), 2 Vols.

85. Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* (The Birth of Tragedy), 1, 155.

86. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1887–1889* (Unpublished Fragments), 13, 294.

87. Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (Human, All Too Human), 2, 362f.

88. *Ibid.*, 417f.

89. *Ibid.* 228f.