# Berlin: A City Drawn
# From the Linear Network to the Contour

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In the middle of bustling Berlin in 1928, as Europe's new city of bright lights saw itself reflected in the glitz and glamor of movies, revues and exotic fashions, Bertolt Brecht presented himself at George Grosz' studio. Elias Canetti, who was also present, recalls: "He came with all the signs of respect, slightly bent; he was bearing a present for Grosz, a pencil, a completely ordinary pencil, which he placed on the drawing table emphatically and significantly. Grosz accepted this modest homage and transformed it into something greater. He said, 'This pencil was just what I needed. I can use it.' "[1] Brecht's "restrained and economical" gesture, all the more "impressive"[2] for that, had something of the force of Grosz' own laconic language of signs and acknowledged the power of his political caricatures. At the end of the year Grosz would be charged with blasphemy in a third trial, over the drawing *Christ in a Gas-Mask*. He had already presented Canetti with the portfolio *Ecce Homo*, for which he had been tried in 1924 on a charge of "undermining public morality."

During the twenties, drawing as a means of expressing critical opinions about society and the age grew out of artists' exploration, especially since the early years of the century, of their power of linear expression. In drawings, artists used various methods and techniques to work through the overwhelming experiences triggered by the city and the war, so that the processes of perception and reflection are revealed most clearly in this medium. In drawings, one can reconstruct experiential stages ranging from empathy and shock before and during the war to detached, socially critical awareness in the twenties. Over this period, the line evolved from a structural element and formal embodiment of such abstract subjects as speed, destruction, energy, and various psychological states, toward its use as a defining contour to precisely detail concrete facts and "tangible" reality which had urban man, his physiognomy and body, at its center.

The resulting polarity of drawn representation, which Franz Roh's book *Nachexpressionismus* (Leipzig, 1925) described as expressionist "ecstasy" versus "post-expressionist disillusionment," with their correspondingly different modes of linear depiction, will be shown in the following discussion to be a relationship of mutually dependent and pervasive tensions.

### The straight line as skeleton of the urban organism

In his "Introduction to Painting Big Cities" (1914), Ludwig Meidner, who significantly influenced Beckmann and Grosz and played an important part in the development of a realist aesthetic, called for the straight line as the only adequate stylistic means of depicting metropolitan life. In doing so, he gave a formal impetus for recasting urban modes of seeing. The abstractness of the straight line demanded the selection and analysis of the kind of view that could come about only in the city. The Futurists had already made a substantial contribution to this concept of the line as an autonomous, articulating, structural element of pictorial composition.

The straight line broke through Art Nouveau's ornamental linear flourish and rid itself of that harmonizing elegance, a fact which became significant not least for the realistic clarity of the line's statement, its energetic expression, and especially for its incisiveness in caricature.

The abstract line took into account the sober modern industrialization and rationalization which had been going on behind the historicizing splendor of Wilhelmine Berlin's pompous *Gründerzeit* facades. Thus, impressionist tonal values would no longer determine how the city was depicted. No more was Berlin a landscape where one could breathe as if beneath an open sky; it was not characterized by natural light and *sfumato* but rather by linearity, as influenced above all by the urban experience of time. An irreversible linear chronology, not nature's cyclical clock, controlled the city. Time, now something congealed and fixed, piled up as dates and hours of departure and arrival which segmented the urban dweller's life into little units of time.

Artists reflected this experience of time in the short, fragmented lines of their big-city pictures. The continuous experience of time and space fell victim to the

linearity through which the city accumulated, ordered and counted its overabundance of time, then subjected it to simultaneity: "A street…is a bombardment of whizzing rows of windows, of screeching lights between vehicles of all kinds and a thousand jumping spheres, scraps of human beings, advertising signs, and shapeless colors. […] Are not our big-city landscapes all battlefields filled with mathematical shapes? What triangles, quadrilaterals, polygons, and circles rush out at us in the streets. Straight lines rush past us at all sides…."[3] The abbreviated, concentrated network of lines, with its short, interrupted marks, teeth, and edges, reflected the fragmentation, dissociation, and discontinuity of this experience of time with staccato-like drawing.

Just as time pervaded the city like a functional scaffold, lines became the skeleton of the urban body. The tempo of the city diminished the quality of time just as it rendered the experience of space abstract. Urban space was constricted. Space was compressed to the point of claustrophobic narrowness, especially in Beckmann's drawings and etchings. Look, for example, at the lithograph *The Street* from the portfolio *Hell* (1919).[4] Furthermore, Beckmann's decisive, powerful lines also expressed the postwar sense of suffocation in an inextricable law of fate. They positioned man amid the confining urban surroundings, as if he were imprisoned.

Beckmann appeared to be influenced by Kirchner's expressionist line and contour, which derived from the angularity of the woodcut line. According to Kirchner, these "lines of power," pulsating with urban energy, were supposed to give expression in urban drawings to "the feeling that pervades a city," through a "purely linear network with almost schematic figures."[5]

Compared with Kirchner's almost archaic-looking lines, Meidner's drawings of prewar Berlin were characterized by excited, nervous strokes. "A straight line is not cold and static! You need only draw it with real feeling and observe closely its course. It can be first thin and then thicker and filled with a gentle, nervous quivering."[6] The agitation of the line exposed not just the urban experience, but also the city dweller's powerlessness in the face of dissociation. This is why Meidner's city scenes resonate with an apocalyptic-visionary tone, heightened with signs of the end of the world (such as Halley's Comet, which appeared over Germany in 1910 and had long been considered a bad omen).

In Meidner's work, the oneness of the urban organism was blown apart, fragmented, torn open — if it did not



Fig. 1 Ludwig Meidner
*Street,* 1913
*Strasse*
Tusche heightened with white
56 x 46 cm
Marvin and Janet Fishman Collection

disintegrate into individual stretches of street. The city was usually shown from a high viewpoint, drawn with a geometric network of splintered, hatched pen strokes going in all directions, giving the impression of a world and cosmos in the throes of ruin, but a ruin which would also precede a vital renewal (fig. 1).

Dix tried to use heavy, broad, explosive ink brushstrokes softly shaded with tonal nuances of black chalk in *The Horror of the City* (1918, fig. 2) to show war as an all-embracing detonation which turned city, nature, and cosmos into a black realm of shadows. In Grosz' pen-and-ink drawing *Pandaemonium* (1915–1916, fig. 3), total destruction is visited on the human masses, which, with World War I, had come to be seen for the first time as a motive force in German history. An apocalyptic psychosis, hysteria on a national scale, and a wild frenzy of fear and aggression sparked, then inflamed each other. The mass is shown as an aimless, destructive, chaotic creature of primal instinct, in which drives long suppressed by civilization are unleashed. This is why Grosz, Dix, Schlichter, and Hubbuch so intrinsically associated sex murders with the mass murder of the war.

Fig. 2 Otto Dix
*The Horror of the City,* 1918
*Das Grausen der Stadt*
Black chalk and tusche
39.8 x 39.3 cm
Private Collection

Grosz exposed the primal-catastrophic aspect of the mass spectacle of war in an impenetrable chaos of lines which bound and entwined the schematic forms of men. The metropolis was not a place where the aggressions released by war could be controlled. On the contrary, it was only here that the trauma of the battlefield erupted in panic-ridden massacres.

## Dada's perception of contemporary media

In Grosz' and Heartfield's *Life and Living in Universal City at Five Past Noon* (ca. 1920, fig. 4), the dense network of lines becomes concrete through a staccato montage of advertising, film, and magazine images.[7] The ''roaring'' quotations of the montage replace the panicked mass scream of *Pandaemonium* and become the masses' mouthpiece. The ''actual'' finds its way into the picture. After the war, the phantasmagoria of the advertising and film industries, especially the American ones, gripped the metropolis. Typified city dwellers, as characterized by Grosz' pen, stand out from the chaos of lines in the middle of the montage like dregs amid the whirl of the city. While the montage releases the din of the material world, the drawing mutely consolidates the apocalyptic panic, hardness, and indifference of city dwellers' physiognomies; there is also fear in their distorted faces. Sherlock Holmes



Fig. 3  George Grosz
*Pandaemonium,* 1915–1916
Pen and ink
47 x 30.5 cm
Private Collection

mixes among these types, that clue-seeking detective with whom Grosz identified, having a stake in the business of the city but successfully avoiding participation.

The tension between montage and drawing makes it clear how the montage formally threatens to devour the drawing. The latter's subjective expressiveness is outdone by the richness of media and optical stimuli. Drawing is no longer given the chance to evoke the emotions concentrated in the center of vibrating lines. This contrast between drawing and montage illustrates Hugo Ball's insight into ''mass culture'':

> And when a further destructive, threatening element—the mass culture of the modern big city—joined the despairing search for new order for a shattered world, individual life died, melody died. A single impression meant nothing any more. Interwined thoughts and observations crowded in on the brain, a symphony of emotions. Machines arose and took
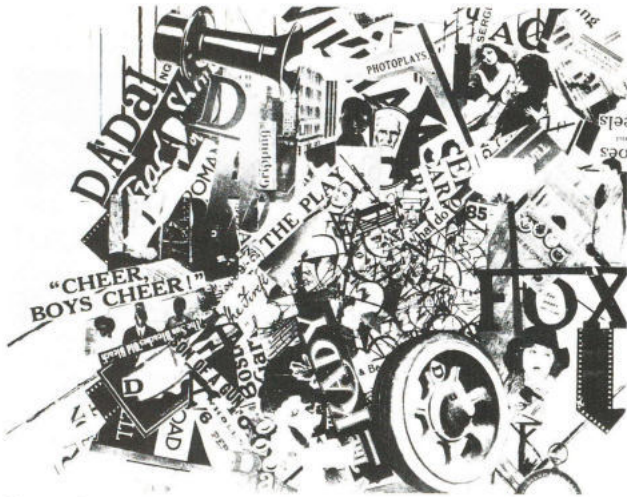
Fig. 4  George Grosz and John Heartfield
*Life and Living in Universal City at Five Past Twelve,*
  ca. 1920
*Leben und Treiben in Universal City um 12 Uhr 5 Mittags*
Pen, ink and collage
Dimensions and location unknown

the place of individuals, complexes and beings of a superhuman terror, greater than the individual. Fear became a creature with a million heads…new battles, ascents and declines, new celebrations, heavens and hells. A world of abstract demons engulfed individual opinion…destroyed the "I" and flung oceans of collapsed emotions against each other…The tenderest vibrations and unheard-of mass monsters appeared on the horizon, mixed, intersected, and permeated each other.[8]

While in the center of the collage, this threat of being identical with nothing and therefore becoming autistic became acute, a more distanced point of view was expressed by the montaged area, in which the little word "Dada" floats. Dada was atomized in the same way as advertising and film publicity, and "moved in the world,"[9] freeing itself from the torment of seeking the stability of an identity.

The Dadaist assumed the urban armor of ironic indifference, and glossed over his fear of the dominance of objects. Reality, perceived as meaningless chaos and a cultural field of rubble, became freely available. Awareness of time was dissolved into an eternal present. The Dadaist examined everything and drew back from nothing. His search for reality, which, according to Hugo Ball, had the single purpose of "capturing and fettering time" through simultaneity[10] — perhaps in a kind of "self deception" — anticipated the halting and

rigidifying of time.[11] Dada was "at once buffoonery and requiem."[12]

It is evident, furthermore, how the Berlin Dadaists' skeptical questioning of the sense and efficacy of traditional artistic techniques arose from the tension between these two media. Here the Dadaist spirits parted company. For the montage artist John Heartfield, the pencil proved all his life to be "too slow a tool. The lies spread by the bourgeois press could overtake it."[13] Wieland Herzfelde emphasized the time-related nature of Berlin Dada as early as 1920, in the catalog of the First International Dada Fair. The "fountainhead of its [Dada's] production" was, he said, to be the illustrated newspapers and press editorials. This demand became an artistic maxim for Hannah Höch in the twenties, and Raoul Hausmann turned to photography at this time. But the pencil and pen remained the essential media for Grosz, Schlichter, Dix, and Scholz, who had been just as much a part of Berlin Dada. The reproductions of their drawings and graphics in portfolios and periodicals, among others the *Knüppel* and *AIZ,* were aimed at a wide public.

In 1917 Grosz and Heartfield extended their exploration of the topicality and effectiveness of media to film. Grosz, for example, intended to combine his drawings with the new medium, proposing that the UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft) release a monthly animated film as a mock chronicle of the world. Caricatures were to be edited into a "war movie" which Grosz and Heartfield planned in 1917, adding to its expressionist-cosmic tone the grotesque-comic style which was then appearing in America with such great success. However, an animated film of Grosz' drawings actually appeared only in 1928, occasioned by Piscator's performance of *Schweijk* on the Nollendorf stage. Grosz prepared some 300 drawings for this, from which he selected 17 for publication in the *Background* portfolio.[14] Sheets 5 and 8 (fig. 5), in particular, clearly show various phases which take cinematic movement into account. Grosz also drew backdrops "on an enormous drawing board" for other Piscator productions. "I used it", Grosz wrote in 1928 in the *Blätter zur Piscator-Bühne,* "to accompany the stage action with large hieroglyphs. It is a fact that Erwin [Piscator] has created a large arena for new drawing, a veritable circus-ring for draughtsmanship. […] As in film, the line should be clear, simple and not too thin (because of dissolves), and furthermore should be hard, as in the drawings and woodcuts of Gothic blockbooks and the lapidary stone incisions on the Pyramids…"

Grosz' use of line and stroke was marked by the hectic pace of urban perception, leading Hannah Höch to

Fig. 5 George Grosz
'Patriotic Instruction' (for the Background portfolio), 1928
'Ein bisschen gut zureden' (zur Hintergrund Mappe)
Brush and ink over charcoal
47.3 x 65.4 cm
Estate of George Grosz, Princeton, N.J.

remark that she had never seen an artist draw as fast as George Grosz. Even during his student years, Grosz practiced quick drawing with five-minute figure studies. A 1924 film called Creative Hands [Schaffende Hände] by Hans Cürlis deals with Grosz' drawing. Grosz never gave up drawing during the Dada period, always using montage elements in contrast with drawn ones, or drawn ones to contradict one another: an impersonally drawn line versus one drawn with emotion or used in a caricaturizing form. In Grosz' portfolio With Brush and Scissors (1920), one can follow his progress from work to work, as he slowly suppressed all traces of the "actual," the citations in montage as well as the emotional or caricatural line, in favor of the impersonal rational depiction which alone showed an engineer's aesthetic. This portfolio was his attempt to reach a new definition of the artist's standpoint, approximating the engineer's non-aesthetic one. Ultimately, this was the viewpoint which Meidner had tried to express as early as 1913/14, referring to artists as the "contemporaries of engineers."[15] Beyond the "straight line," pittura metafisica gave artists further aesthetic means for expressing these positions radically and consistently in their art.

### Sachlichkeit—an apotropaic attitude?

With the pencil drawing Wild West Scene (cat. no. 94, ill. p.132), among others, Rudolf Schlichter also reacted to the challenge of urban media and the Americanization of culture. The romanticizing archaicism of this drawing's subject stands in some contrast to the city's modernity, but continues to refer to it. "What are the dangers of the jungle and prairie, compared with the shocks and everyday conflicts of our civilization?" wrote Baudelaire, one of the first modernist urban Apaches. "Whether man snares his victim on the boulevard or spears it in obscure forests, does he not remain the eternal human, i.e., the most perfect beast of prey?"[16] For artists who aspired to a realistic point of view, the metropolis was an asphalt jungle of crudeness, hardness, depravity — a forest of opinions, media and competition, where they had to assert themselves in combat.

The metropolis, moreover, like the Wild West, was an adventurous contrast to these artists' youthful provincialism. The city was more primal and violent than provincial nature, which was characterized in their minds by philistinism and narrow-mindedness. The metropolis and the Wild West, American jazz imports, the gold rush, American westerns, Karl May novels and pulp-fiction books—all of this had fused since the time of their youth into a popular myth of an urban contrast to provincial order, morality tricked out with a bit of Christianity, and the Western value system. The modern urban Apache escaped state control; the labyrinth of houses, passages, cellars, and backyards was his

jungle. He slashed his way through the thicket relying on instinct, ego, and independence.

Amidst the pulp-fiction of the urban jungle, Schlichter, Grosz and Dix pursued the traces of the "externalized dream of the suppressed creature who longs for a great life,"[17] which lived on in the myth of the Far West. For as Ernst Bloch put it, "the twists and turns of pulp-fiction are not subject to the contemplative muse, but incorporate wishes and fantasies of fulfillment; and they do not offer the glamor of this fantasy only for diversion or intoxication, but also for *provocation* and *revolt*,"[18] for the overthrow of all the powers that suppress and repress life.

The fight shown in the drawing *Wild West Scene* reflects Schlichter's vitalistic, Dionysian idea of life: "There was no putting oneself above it, one could only throw oneself into the terrible round of desire and lack of desire, sympathy and cruelty, retching disgust and burning sensuality in the gruesome game of destruction and conception."[19] The America myth activated vital explosiveness, spontaneity and aggression against the sublimating constraints of Western culture. "The whole store of classical education that I had acquired sank without a trace next to this newly emerging world of the 'Great Snake in the wigwam of warlike Mohigans.' Only Wagner and a few French survived this deluge; indeed, Wagner's world merged with the poetry of America's virgin forests into a strange myth of a legendary adventure."[20]

The drawing gives the impression of a compilation of different scenes from a western film, intentionally preserving a juvenile, impulsive air in its method of presentation. Since his youth Schlichter had done sketches of film sequences in darkened movie theaters, reusing them for adventure stories which he invented himself. He preserved these sketches on rolls of paper ten to fifteen meters long, or transformed them into adventure stories in his school notebooks.

The vital challenge of these westerns had its effect on Schlichter's politicization, and Dix's and Grosz' too. In Berlin, Schlichter put the aggressive pugnacity he had learned from pulp-fiction in the service of his socially critical efforts and class warfare goals, with "every last ounce of utmost devotion."[21] He transformed Berlin into his own western pulp-fiction battlefield, where he would turn his "dream of Last Judgement for the evil and glory for the good"[22] into reality. With this vehemence, he opposed the *Novembergruppe*[23] as strongly as he then committed himself after 1924 to his role as recording secretary of the *Rote Gruppe*.[24] But in the end the

intellectualizing which political activity demanded remained alien to Schlichter. In retrospect it appeared to him to be a "hard crust of Marxist dogmas," an "artificial wall of intellectualistic constructions."[24] In this political phase, the intellectualization of artistic work found expression in the distanced, naturalistic depictions of people from the lower social classes. Schlichter's subjects during his political phase were mainly portraits (cf., for example, cat. nos. 103 and 106, ill. pp. 140-141) These dispensed with the apocalyptic urban exterior, containing their own volumes and setting their own spatial scales, usually isolated in the picture.

The contours which the people were given also marked, by analogy, the process of outlining and demarcating an artistic position, characterised by concentrated attention to nearby persons and objects. It meant separating and detaching oneself from cosmic or archaicizing longings for intoxication, from all-encompassing visions of apocalyptic destruction and vital eruptions. This delineation also offered relief, since it never came up against the undefined 'contour-less' ambivalence of Dadaistic relativism. Thus the decisiveness with which its contours were drawn could also be understood as a demarcation from the Dadaist strategy that called everything into question. Yet it was Berlin Dada which gave artists the crucial impetus to use their own political-artistic profile as a way of countering the Weimar Republic's neurotic urge to define itself. This was reflected in the clarity of their drawings. After the war had destroyed the individual's self-image and left a vacuum, only a sober process of inventory could discover the remnants of self-esteem surviving in the proletarian environment or at the edge of society and then all but glorify the strength of those remnants.

The *Wild West Scene's* outwardly directed aggression and pugnacity, exploding out of the picture in all directions, now imploded in a concentrated look at the contemporaries for whose sake the revolution was to be continued, in spite of all defeats. In contrast to the ecstatic air of the Wild West scene, this imploded observation was characterized by an intensive clarity and sharpness of bodies and physiognomies.

Hubbuch's graphite drawings, his principal medium, will serve to demonstrate how wildness and sobriety, involvement and rejection, could overlap in the perception of the city. In those wide-open, frightened eyes shadowed by deep rings lay both a wildness and a fear which wanted to banish the objects of terror, to which he felt vulnerable in the chaos of the city (cat. no. 59, ill. p. 146). At the same time he assumed the level-headed attitude of a hunter moving through the hunt-

Fig. 6  Karl Hubbuch
*The Madman's Delirium,* ca. 1922
*Im Rausch des Irrens*
Lithograph
45.3 x 61.2 cm

ing grounds of an eccentric urban hell, lying in wait at the scenes of madness, desire, and crime. The pencil shaded this hell, giving it the blackness and plasticity of night, but simultaneously the sober sharpness of clear insights which can occur suddenly after intoxicated nights—hence the drastic contrasts of light and dark tones in the drawings (fig. 6). In its demands on the faculty of abstraction, the city's objectivity itself led to an unrestrained sensual gluttony as a complement of this rationalistic endeavor, with the eccentric "experiencing" having priority over content of the experience. This urban unleashing of the senses tore Hubbuch into disillusionment to the point of excess and instability.

In *Berlin and Departure* (1922, fig. 7), we see the artist making his hectic departure from the provinces. Looking around with a gaze of fearful anticipation, he dismisses the familiar objects of everyday surroundings, the props of social stability such as bread, laundry, tiled stove, cuckoo clock, a crate of drawings. The journey's uncertainty is condensed into the melancholy of arrival. Sitting to the side, he observes catastrophies, profiteers, suicides, prostitutes, and the mass of humanity with melancholy brooding. In the city — different from *gemütlich,* provincial, cuckoo-clock time — Chronos, disguised as a variety act, flogs his horses, while the patron who makes this trip possible is shown directly over the seated figure of the artist. The money in the

Fig. 7  Karl Hubbuch
*Berlin and Departure,* 1922
*Berlin und Abreise*
Graphite
33.5 x 26 cm
Location unknown



Fig. 8  Karl Hubbuch
*On the Corner of Leipziger and Friedrichstrasse,* 1922
*Ecke Leipziger und Friedrichstrasse*
Graphite
29.5 x 23.5 cm
Location unknown

patron's hand is a reminder of profit's impersonal reign as the law of the city desubstantiating its life. The train in the center of the picture corresponds to Chronos and the dome of the Hallesches Ufer train station. The train carries "empty, homogenous time" (Walter Benjamin) into every last corner of the city. The melancholy spectator can recognize all the hectic activity as stagnant

time, and he protests through boredom and idleness against Chronos' power and against time's bondage to profit, utility, and linear progress. "With wrinkled brow, this city pulls its cart round an eternal circle — *sit venia verbo* — and never notices that it is pulling in a circle without budging,"[26] Tucholsky remarked.

Hubbuch showed in his drawing *On the Corner of Leipziger and Friedrichstrasse* (1922, fig. 8), done as a study for a series of etchings, how the subway was devouring and injuring the body of the city. The excavated, uprooted earth, rammed through with supports and scaffolds, gapes like a dark, criminal trap, threatening the pedestrian on the sidewalk. The board fence offers little protection. "The city is moving in every di-

mension," wrote Alfons Goldschmidt, a contemporary of Hubbuch, "crawling on all fours, walking, driving, flying and digging itself in, the most diligently industrious city on earth. With all this antlike activity, it is making itself more sterile every day."[27]

The objectivity with which the city is observed and its dangers tracked becomes an apotropaism. Sober observation girds itself against fears, phobias, emotions. This becomes clear in Beckmann's reaction too: "I do not cry tears…I think only of the object. A leg, an arm, breaking through the surface with that wonderful feeling of foreshortening, of dividing space, of combining the straight line in relation to the curved…."[28] The process of drawing itself is presented as an act of defense: looking at the details protects one from looking at the chaotic whole.

Georg Simmel, sociologist and student of the urban physiognomy, had emphasized as early as 1903 the importance of the urban intellectuality with which the city dweller had to protect himself against uprooting

and try to counter congestion and closeness, city life's destablizing effect.[29] For he felt that the romantic "I" stood little chance of survival, exhausting itself amidst the urban chaos in ever more exalted attempts at self assertion until it became blasé. Simmel contrasted this endangered "I" with the myth of the city's "functional body," which would "reconcile the contradiction between individual people and their environment, which had now become abstract."[30] But even this myth was colored by what it opposed. As Gert Mattenklott has observed, it was "also a mystification, … a hypernaturalism whose objectivity....remained thoroughly related to post-romantic currents. It appears in the pairing of [Stefan] George and Simmel, just as two decades later in the constellation of surrealism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*."[31]

The attempt to represent urban chaos objectively thus immediately includes meeting its challenge and mastering the fears and traumas arising from the war's upheaval. Beckmann's angular, decisive strokes—his "crystal clear lines and surfaces"[32] — record his struggle and strain to "grasp the gruesome, twitching monster of vitality." The need to overcome the destructive dynamic of what had occurred ("once again stability, reconstruction, functionality…"[33]) lies also in Grosz' emphasis on achieving "control of line and form."

The artists had in common their desire to meet the challenge of reality and their realism, understood first of all as an attitude — even if from different points of view: for Beckmann, as love of one's fellow man, for Dix, as an affirmation of human expressions, for Grosz, as a cynical statement of man's immutable ugliness.

In contrast to Dada's individual-anarchistic understanding of the present, their understanding of time was transformed into an historical category. Time left its traces. The burden of memory, the apocalypse of war, weighed heavily. They wanted to show injury — for Beckmann as passion, for Dix as perplexity, for Grosz as cynical defense. At a time when the city unconsciously taught oblivion both in a sober lifestyle and a thirst for pleasure, drawing recorded in all clarity these modes of suppression, and saw itself also as persistent evidence of the way in which this society was trying to erase its own memory, the processes of mortality, and death, rationalizing itself in a permanent, objective way, and marginalizing those who appeared as witnesses: the artists. In their drawings, the artists — especially Dix — succeeded above all in showing the marks of time on bodies and physiognomies, and establishing a contrast between the private, transient nature of the body and its objective social depiction.
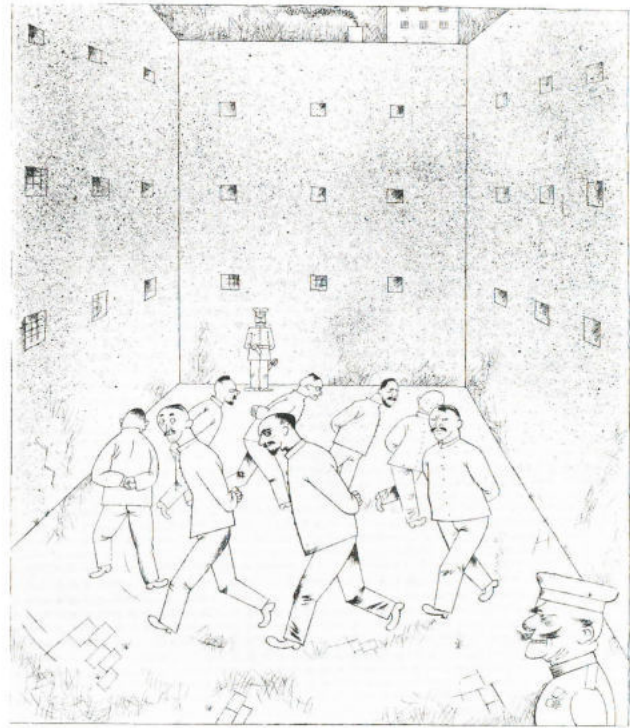


Fig. 9  George Grosz
*The Workman's Holiday* (from the *'God With Us'* portfolio), 1920
*Licht und Luft dem Proletariat* (aus der Mappe *'Gott Mit Uns'*)
Photolithograph
48 x 38.7 cm
Harvard University Art Museums (Fogg Art Museum), Purchase - George R. Nutter Fund

## Passersby — a "cinema of odious types"

The city in Grosz' caricatures and urban scenes condenses into an upside-down world which has lost its salvation, where violence determines the urban physiognomy. After the failure of the revolution in 1919, the sea of houses became an exitless prison. The feeling of inevitability was shown with the sparest lines in the drawing *Workman's Holiday* (fig. 9). Grosz' choice of motif was inspired by Doré's prison view *Newgate Exercise Yard:* (fig. 10) but he 'rationalized' the scene until only precise contours remained. This scene of the supervised walk round the prison courtyard once again became timely in 1933. Oskar Nerlinger, watching with the objective eye of Argus from a watchtower, drew children as a teacher drilled them around a schoolyard (fig. 11). The watchful overhead vantage-point, to be understood as both overview and supervision, characterizes the violence which followed from that sober period. Grosz, Hubbuch, Schlichter — and in a sense Gustav Wunderwald and Grossberg too — tried to reveal in
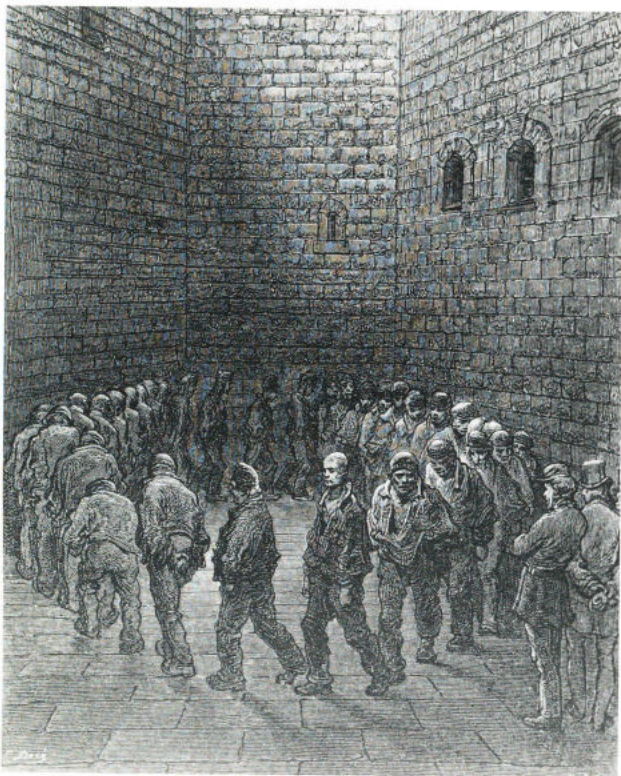
Fig. 10 Pisan after Gustave Doré
*Newgate-Exercise Yard* (from *London, A Pilgimage by Gustave Dore and Blanchard Jerrold*, London, 1872)
*Hofgang im Zuchthaus Newgate*
Woodengraving



Fig. 11 Oskar Nerlinger
*The Schoolyard*, 1933
*Der Schulhof*
Spatter paint, tempera and graphite
72 x 50 cm
Academy of Arts, Berlin (East)

"objective," neutral views of Berlin not only political violence, but also the violence which grew out of a bureaucratized and thoroughly rationalized entangling of capital, economics, and politics (cf. cat. nos. 40 and 96, ill. pp 209 and 134). Their urban landscapes petrified to the extent that the underlying constants of functioning society became apparent after the chaos of war, a society with an economy based on "permanent facts and laws."[34] Berlin's up-to-dateness was not a sign of impulsive liveliness. On the contrary, the Berliner, with all the hectic nervosity unique to the city, was shown (to paraphrase Bloch) as a "Caput mortuum, namely as product of his reification."[34]

Yet Grosz, in his caricatures, humanized the anonymous force of rationalization, relating it to man's conscience and behavior. Even if an intellectual process of abstraction, of categorizing people according to class and economic worth — here exploiters, there exploited — preceded his caricatures of the various types of city dweller, Grosz still managed to portray these types as alive. He chose the street as a challenging common ground for the differing types. Here

they ran into each other as pedestrians: poor and rich, cripple and prostitute, philistines and German nationalists, proletarians, match vendors, militarists, not to forget the clergy — all met here in an instantaneous encyclopedia of Grosz' view of society, a "cinema of odious types" (Carl Einstein) (cat. no. 44, ill. p. 109). Yet these caricatures should be seen as an attempt at ordering, intended to give relief and reduce the chaotic, primal masses of *Pandaemonium* to a busy metropolitan crowd.

Grosz' process of drawing consisted of projecting an individual face into a class-specific type; the drawing *Friedrich Ebert* (1923, cat. no. 46, ill. p. 111) is an exemplary display of how Grosz laid bare the *Kleinbürger* in Ebert's physiognomy and posture. His intention of being as clear as possible led him to reach back to simple picture-language and the style of children's drawings. Grosz wrote of his caricatures in 1924:

In order to achieve a style which would thus reproduce the drastic, unadorned hardness and unsentimentality of my subjects, I studied the immediate manifestations of the art instinct: I copied folkloric drawings in toilet stalls, which seemed to me the most immediate expression and direct translation of strong feelings. Children's drawings also inspired me to this knife-sharp style of drawing, which I required to transmit my observations, dictated at that time by absolute misanthropy.[36]

Hate became the active impetus for observation and caricature, with Grosz reverting in part to a language of types which even Bruegel had used as a critical method of showing social abuses: for example, the fat capitalist is a descendant of the fleshy glutton done in by his own greed and avarice, whose obesity laid him open to ridicule—narrow forehead, pinched mouth, bull's neck, and dull, small eyes characterized this type. Caricatures of the fat clergyman not only exposed the contempt and disregard for the church's highest law, moderation. In the context of Prussian 'moral militarism,' they also struck at conformity with the war-mongering government of Wilhelm II, who tried to justify his power politics in World War I as worldly executor of the divine Last Judgement, under the slogan "God With Us." Grosz contrasted this fleshiness with the poverty of the proletariat, using the traditional antithetical pairing of thick and thin to show class differences. Grosz used deformities and ugliness to lay bare German philistinism. Ugliness had been associated with sins and lies since the Middle Ages, interpreted as God's judgement on the heathen world of the devil, disbelief, and depravity; Grosz seized on the "moralizing" of the aesthetic which this implied, though without sharing the Christian world-view. He made himself both plaintiff and judge along Marxist-socialist lines.

Grosz also reinstituted the symbolism of death and hell, which he connected with the growing power of the military. In addition to recalling the lethal violence of war, death symbolism in the city was also used in those places, where the phantasmagoria of city life was revealed as empty, vain and futile. The metaphor of death was especially linked to the appearance of prostitutes. In self-portraits of both Dix and Grosz from the early twenties, woman, death, and the city permeate the scenes (cf. fig. 12).[37] In many of the socially critical artists' works, the metropolis was presented as a prostituted body which had traded itself to the market for financial gain, offered its flesh and spirit to the business of culture and advertising, and sold its language as a "whore of the press" (W. Mehring). The demonic,



Fig. 12 Otto Dix
*Self-Portrait with Death*, 1921
*Selbstbildnis mit Tod*
Graphite
43.5 x 35 cm
Courtesy Serge Sabarsky Gallery

seductive effect of the whore of Babylon played a role in these pictures.[38]

The process of caricature involved not only exaggeration and overstatement, but also an oversimplifying reduction. Linear signs were employed which seethe with harsh aggressivity, often looking like sketchy, hateful notes, not lacking in impulsiveness. But for all that, it seems to have been an impotent hatred which inspired these drawings in Grosz. The bloody suppression of the 1919 revolution weighed heavily on the metropolis, so that in some images (cf. fig. 13), static horizontals, not dynamic diagonals, were used to depict class conflicts, which were apparently seen as something fixed. Furthermore, poor and rich were shown equally as Saturn's children. The proletariat was denied sensory pleasures for financial reasons, while the rich, who could afford them, were not cultivated enough to appreciate them. The hatefulness with which Grosz laid bare this gluttonous crudity of the senses was itself the constant evidence that everyone was deprived of sensual pleasure. To Grosz the aesthete,

Fig. 13 George Grosz
*Five in the Morning* (from the portfolio *In the Shadow*),
   1921
*Früh um Fünf Uhr* (aus der Mappe *Im Schatten*)
Photolithograph
48.9 x 35 cm
Harvard University Art Museums (Fogg Art Museum),
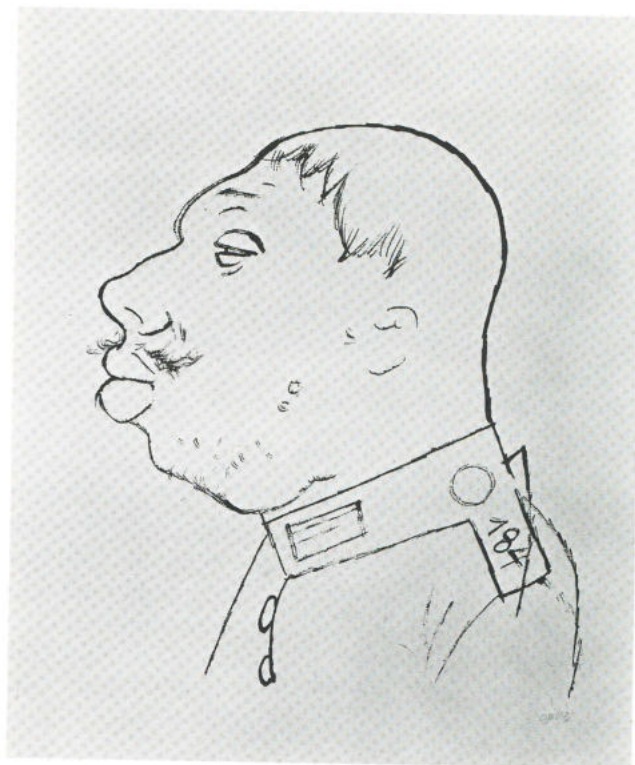Purchase - Friends of the Fogg



Fig. 14 George Grosz
*Made in Germany* (from the portfolio *God With Us*), 1920
*Den macht uns keiner nach* (aus der Mappe *Gott Mit Uns*)
Photolithograph
28.4 x 24.7 cm
Estate of George Grosz, Princeton, N.J.

## Dance fever and the vamp in Berlin

For Dix, too, a representation of the metropolis in the twenties, one which would take account of traditional pictorial language, color and form, meant more than simply finding a fixed point of reference in the past. In 1927 Dix defined the "new", in contrast to the twenties' cult of isms, as "extending the subject matter of the old masters, heightening the form of expression whose nucleus already exists in the old masters."[42]

Dix considered drawing to be the "most authentic, original expression of artistic personality."[43] This view will be illustrated by the following discussion of the female dancer in the foreground of the *Metropolis* triptych's center panel. Although the drawing for the *Metropolis* triptych (cat. no. 34, ill. p. 102) was conceived as a preliminary study, it acquired a meaning independent of the oil painting, which was subjected to greater stylization through the brushwork (fig. 16). The woman is taking part in a dance accompanied by a jazz band to the left of the picture, whose center is occupied by a couple happily dancing the Charleston, watched on the right by a thickset, seated couple.

the city "in which Circe turned men into pigs,"[39] the brutality and bestiality of the amusement halls and the pigheaded gluttons meant the death of Eros. He watched that death through the melancholy eyes of a "lovesick one," as one of his self-portraits of 1915 was titled.

Grosz created a prototypical example of gross stupor and bestiality in a caricature called *'Made in Germany'* (1920, fig. 14).[40] The figure shows pronounced signs of degeneration: short receding forehead, bulging lips, and dead eyes. However, Grosz had not found him in the jungle of the cities; his features recall the fifteenth-century court jester of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, whom Grosz probably discovered in a painting in the palace at Versailles (fig. 15).[41] This makes it clear that Grosz' caricatures, however contemporary they may be, also benefit from references to the tradition of socially critical art.

Fig. 15 *Court Jester of Philip the Good*
*Hofnarr des Herzog Philip des Guten*
Drawing from the Arras Codex (from Post, *Jagdbild*, p. 131)



Fig. 16 Otto Dix
Center panel from the *Metropolis* Triptych, 1927–1928
Mittelteil des *Grossstadt*-Triptychons
Oil on wood
181 x 201 cm
Galerie der Stadt Suttgart

This scene is a synthesis of the leisure time of the twenties. "With shouts of rapture, people plunged in, letting go at any price. This crazy dance fever, with its recklessly exaggerated orgies of contorted limbs, became the rage everywhere."[44] While Dix translated the eccentricity of the dance into movement, Beckmann captured the "dance fever" in the "decisive zig-zag" of his lines (cf. cat. no. 1, ill. p. 76). In Carl Einstein's words: Beckmann "makes strong use of the rushing diagonal, a dance cafe rushes forward into the tip of a dissected triangle, while shoved-together columns poke into it; the division is by section, yet each compositional impulse has to be dramatically motivated and the drama put back into form. One is attempting something demoniacal and complex…"[45] Dancing, the great pastime of Berlin in the twenties, was the essence of the greatest pleasure that could be squeezed from the inflationary money: "Why save—for tomorrow? Who knows what the dollar exchange rate will be tomorrow?"[46]

Pleasure was subjected to the sober gaze of the artist, who saw in the stimulation a repeated attempt to

drown out the emptiness of time, the "dead, unbearable present" (Hugo Ball), with the phantasmagoria of the lust for pleasure. "This is no drunkenness, no wildness, no compulsion to break chains, but putrefaction on the phosphorescent framework of society. I am well aware that all cities fester this way, but few are as crude, insolent, and exposed as Berlin. These half-humans are dancing on abject misery, clucking and cooing past begging stumps, and living out their sham pleasures on credit."[47]

Dix uses the Charleston and jazz rhythm to illustrate the efforts of the time to find diversion. If, in Expressionism, the soul may be said to have taken on form in the dance — "to be ever dance, desire, flame and yearning"[48] — then it was here celebrating its going-out-of-business sale.

The dancer in the foreground occupies a special position within the *Metropolis* triptych. It is striking that exactly this figure undergoes a large change between the drawing and the oil painting. In the drawing, her body is visible through the loosely flowing garment. The fabric reveals as it conceals and thus allows the contours and shadows to appear with all the more impact. In the painting, on the other hand, she is clothed in a heavier fabric. Her pleated veil flows in great sharp folds behind her, while with her right hand she triumphantly swings her ostrich-feather

fan above her head. The painting is wholly oriented towards the colored surface effect of the material, playing up the external, 'official' aspect of an appearance. The drawing concentrates on body language, and shows the female body prostituting itself. The face in the oil painting has frozen into a mask, while the drawn face assumes a more demonic effect, reminiscent of the profile and demonically made-up eyes of the dancer Anita Berber (fig. 17). This female type, familiar from Art Nouveau, where she appeared with long, flowing hair, is lent an androgynous air by the fashionably short hair.

Only in the drawing does the sensuality of the tall, slender, graceful body become apparent. More physically than in the painting, the dancer here embodies the vamp who blazes through this scene of bourgeois amusement like an "unholy meteor." In the painting she has to be characterized by attributes — jewelry, the butterfly which symbolizes the momentary pursuit of pleasure. In the drawing, she awakens sensuous desire, yet looks more refined than her surroundings, especially the dancing couple. She refers back to prewar "body-dance-art."

Observing the dance scene, Otto Flake, who described prewar Berlin as an "international metropolis…in the throes of dance fever", was especially impressed by the "young girls" clothed in "flowing Iphigenialike gowns the color of pale ivory, as befitted the performance of heathen religious rites."[49] These "tall, slim girls" danced "what was no longer a gliding step…but rather a display of their bodies, and at the same time a renaissance of the erotic."[50] They were "dancers who had begun to form their own caste, just as in ancient Athens and Alexandria."[51] They looked "like Iphegenias using all the tricks of artifice, full of the religiosity of the grand gesture."[52] Furthermore, the gesture of the dancer in the triptych transmits something of Anita Berber's ecstatic appearance, next to which the Charleston looks pale and mechanical, and the crude postures of the heavyset bourgeois customers stand in sharp contrast. "At a time when women were still fat, and hid their excess fat cleverly and coyly under their veils of cloth, [Anita Berber] sprang into the footlights, stark naked and thin as a twig…."[53] She embodied the excesses of the twenties, which also made her, the archetypical vamp, look dangerous: men who saw in her a maneating, destructive female projected their fantasies onto her. She was also the object of voracious sensationalism for having exploded bourgeois morality. Postwar eroticism, cocaine, Salome, the ultimate in perversity: such terms conveyed the brilliance of her glory. Her solitary appearance in the drawing also con-



Fig. 17  *The Dancer Anita Berber*
*Die Tänzerin Anita Berber*
Photograph

veys her "heroic" solitude: "She stood surrounded by her legend, amidst a terrible solitude. The air around her was icy cold."[54]

In the oil painting she does not look so isolated. Here she is integrated into the phantasmagoria of the scene, especially coloristically. If we view her with the seven deadly sins in mind (which Dix, after all, also treated (cf. cat. no. 35, ill. p. 106)), her appearance in the painting is much more reminiscent of vainglory, *superbia,*

decked out in the fetishes of gold, expensive clothing and exquisite jewelery, while in the drawing she acquires the meaning of sensual pleasure, *luxuria*.

Around the turn of the century, Aby Warburg considered this body language in a cultural-historical light, with the intention of establishing a connection between it and traditional forms of pathos. He discovered this type, which he called "Nympha," in Ghirlandaio's fresco *Nativity of St. John*. The following quotation shows how his cultural-historical analysis was colored by subjective, contemporary ideas which make him spiritually akin to Dix:

> This lively, light-footed and rapid gait, this irresistible energy, this striding step, which contrasts with the aloof distance of all the other figures, what is the meaning of it all? ... My condition varied between a bad dream and a fairy-tale...Sometimes she was Salome dancing with her death dealing charm in front of the licentious tetrarch; sometimes she was Judith carrying proudly and triumphantly with a gay step the head of the murdered commander; then again she appeared to hide in the boy-like grace of little Tobias ... Sometimes I saw her in a seraph flying towards God in adoration and then again in a Gabriel announcing the good tidings. I saw her as a bridesmaid expressing innocent joy at the *Sposalizio* and again as a fleeing mother, the terror of death in her face, at the Massacre of the Innocents...I lost my reason. It was always she who brought life and movement into an otherwise calm scene. Indeed, she appeared to be the embodiment of movement ... but it is very unpleasant to be her lover ... (Nov. 23, 1900)."[55]

In the end, Warburg classified her among the Maenads, pointing out the ancient Dionysian element in her, which stands in contrast to the otherwise static figures of all Renaissance art. For Warburg, her liveliness and sensuality became a sign of the Quattrocento's conflict between magic and rationality.[56] Now Dix sifted the magic-Dionysian historical dimension of this lively female image into the contemporary appearance of his dancer in the drawing. She may not be the only one in motion, but her movement deviates from the Charleston's mechanical step. The dancer's body language has, however, rigidified into a pose which sells itself sensationally. Nevertheless, the vamp's appearance was linked to chaos and disorder, sensuality and the destruction of patriarchal "peace and quiet."

While the vamp may have embodied the manic side of the *sachlich* era, the cripples in the triptych brought out its melancholy aspect. A tension arose between these two emotional poles, whose complementariness set up the cultural conflict of the twenties, and subversively undermined the "objectivity" of this world. A year after the triptych was completed, Aby Warburg also recognized this polarity as the Janus-head aspect of Western culture: "Sometimes it looks to me as if, in my role as a psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization from its images in an autobiographical reflex. The ecstatic 'Nympha' (manic) on the one side and the mourning rivergod (depressive) on the other..."[57]

Notes

[1]Elias Canetti, *The Torch in My Ear,* trans., Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1982), p.282.

[2]*ibid.*

[3]Ludwig Meidner, "An Introduction to Painting Big Cities," trans. by Victor Miesel, in *Ludwig Meidner: An Expressionist Master* (Ann Arbor, 1978), pp. 30, 31.

[4]cf. Alexander Dückers, *Max Beckmann: Die Hölle 1919* (Berlin, 1983).

[5]E.L. Kirchner, quoted in *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1880–1938* (Berlin 1980), p. 196.

[6]Meidner, "Introduction," p.31.

[7]On this lost collage/montage, see Hanne Bergius, "Zur Wahrnehmung und Wahrnehmungskritik im Berliner Dadaismus" in Eckhard Siepmann, ed., *Montage: John Heartfield* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 43–47.

[8]Hugo Ball, "Kandinsky" [lecture given in the Galerie Dada, Zurich, April 7, 1917], in Hugo Ball, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit* (Frankfurt a.M., 1984), p. 42f.

[9]Raoul Hausmann, "Dada ist mehr als Dada" in Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada* (Giessen, 1973), p. 86.

[10]Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (Lucerne, 1946), p. 158.

[11]On this, cf. Hanne Bergius, *Dada Berlin 1917–1922, Chaos und Monotonie als komplementäre Erscheinungsformen der Moderne* (dissertation, Dortmund, 1980), and Hanne Bergius, "Dada als Buffonade und Totenmesse" in Stefanie Poley, ed., *Unter der Maske des Narren* (Stuttgart, 1981).

[12]Ball, *Flucht*, p. 78.

[13]Quoted in Siepmann, *Heartfield*, p. 7.

[14]cf. Alexander Dückers, *George Grosz: Das Druckgraphische Werk* (Berlin, 1979), p. 201f. (M VI)

[15]Meidner, "Introduction," p.111.

[16]Charles Baudelaire, "Journaux Intimes, Fusées XXI," quoted in Werner Hofmann, Georg Syamken, Martin Warnke, *Die Menschenrechte des Auges: über Aby Warburg* (Frankfurt a.M., 1980) pp. 90, 91.

[17]Ernst Bloch, "Die Silberbüchse Winnetous" in Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935), p. 114. Cf. Hanne Bergius, "'Lederstrumpf' zwischen Provinz und Metropole," in *Rudolf Schlichter, 1890–1955* (Berlin, 1984) pp. 33a–46a.

[18]Ernst Bloch, "Traumschein, Jahrmarkt und Kolportage," in Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p. 120.

[19]Rudolf Schlichter, *Tönerne Füsse* (Berlin, 1933), p. 52.

[20]Schlichter, *Füsse*, p. 253.

[21]Rudolf Schlichter, *Zwischenwelt. Ein Intermezzo* (Berlin, n.d.), p.22.

[22]Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p. 120.

[23]On the 1920–21 opposition to the *Novembergruppe* as being purely an exhibiting society, see Helga Kliemann, *Die Novembergruppe* (Berlin, 1969). Dix, Grosz, Höch, Scholz and a number of others joined Schlichter in this protest.

[24]The *Rote Gruppe* existed from 1924–1927, and included

Davringhausen, Dix, Felixmüller, Griebel, Grosz, Heartfield, H. Nagel, Schlichter and Lachnit. Most worked for the satirical workers' paper *Der Knüppel* (Berlin 1923–1927).

[25]Schlichter, *Zwischenwelt*, p. 25.

[26]Kurt Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, p. 449.

[27]Alfons Goldschmidt, "Sinfonie der Grossstadt," in Ruth Greuner, ed., *Berlin, 99 Autoren, Stimmen einer Stadt, 100 Jahre an der Spree* (Berlin, 1971), p. 232f.

[28]Max Beckmann, "Bekenntnis," in Uwe M. Schneede, ed., *Die Zwanziger Jahre* (Cologne, 1979), p. 112.

[29]Cf. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life [1903]," in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms. Selected Writings* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 324ff.

[30]Gert Mattenklott, *Das übersinnliche Leib: Beiträge zur Metaphysik des Körpers* (Hamburg, 1982), p. 36f.

[31]Mattenklott, *Leib*, p.38.

[32]Beckmann, "Bekenntnis," p. 112

[33]George Grosz, "Zu meinen neuen Bildern," *Das Kunstblatt* 5 (January 1921): 11.

[34]Ernst Bloch, 'Funktionen im Hohlraum', in Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p. 154.

[35]*ibid.*

[36]George Grosz, "Abwicklung," *Das Kunstblatt* 7 (February, 1924): 34.

[37]For Grosz, see his *Self-Portrait for Charlie Chaplin* (1919), illustrated in Dückers, *Grosz*, p. 149. (E 53)

[38]Cf. Hanne Bergius, "Berlin als Hure Babylon," in T. Fechter, F. Boberg, and E. Gillen, eds., *Berlin - Metropole der Gleichzeitigkeit* (forthcoming).

[39]George Grosz, Letter to Otto Schmalhausen (June 30, 1917), in George Grosz, *Briefe 1913–1959*, ed. Herbert Knust (Hamburg, 1979), p. 53f.

[40]Cf. Bergius, "Buffonade," p. 208.

[41]This was kindly pointed out by Ina Schwebes. The Versailles painting is a 16th-century copy of a lost early 15th century Netherlandish original. Cf. P. Post, "Ein verschollenes Jagdbild Jan van Eycks," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 52 (1931): 120ff.

[42]Otto Dix, "Das Objekt ist das Primäre," in Schneede, *Zwanziger Jahre* p. 138.

[43]Quoted from *Otto Dix: Zeichnungen, Pastelle, Aquarelle, Kartons und Druckgraphik der Jahre 1912–1969 aus der Stiftung Walter Groz in der Städtischen Galerie Albstadt* (Salzburg, 1984), p. 14.

[44]Helmut Günther and Helmut Schäfer, *Von Schamanentanz zur Rumba* (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 205, quoted by Sarah O'Brien-Twohig "Beckmann and the City," in *Max Beckmann - Retrospective* (Saint Louis, 1984) p. 106.

[45]Carl Einstein, "Max Beckmann" in Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1928), p. 168.

[46]Hans Fallada, quoted in Greuner, *Berlin*, p. 165.

[47]Goldschmidt, "Sinfonie", p. 229.

[48]Curt Corrinth, *Trieb* (Munich, 1919), p. 102.

[49]Otto Flake, *Das Logbuch* (Berlin, 1917), p. 103

[50]*ibid.*

[51]Flake, *Logbuch*, p. 122.

[52]*ibid.*

[53]Grete Müller, quoted in Lothar Fischer, *Anita Berber: Tanz zwischen Rausch und Tod, 1918–1928 in Berlin* (Berlin, 1984), p. 28.

[54]Fischer, *Berber*, p. 84.

[55]E.H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography* (London, 1970), p. 107f.

[56]Cf. Werner Hofmann, "Die Menschenrechte des Auges," in Hofmann, et al., *Menschenrechte*, p. 89.

[57]Journal entry, April 3, 1929, quoted in Gombrich, *Warburg*, p. 303. The author of the present essay is preparing a full length study of the Dix *Metropolis* triptych.