

ART AND POLITICS IN THE WEIMAR PERIOD

**The New Sobriety,
1917-1933**

JOHN WILLETT

With 212 illustrations



Pantheon Books, New York

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THE TURNING POINT

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1921-3

The crucial period 1921-3: international relations and development of the media; Lenin and the New Economic Policy; Stresemann and German stabilization; Soviet Constructivism and its spread to Germany; the transformation of the Weimar Bauhaus; developments in German Communist art; emergence of Verism or the new naturalism; new voices in the German and Russian theatres; the first elements of functional architecture; the last fiascos of Paris Dada. The old avant-garde -isms abandoned in favour of objectivity, utilitarianism and economy.

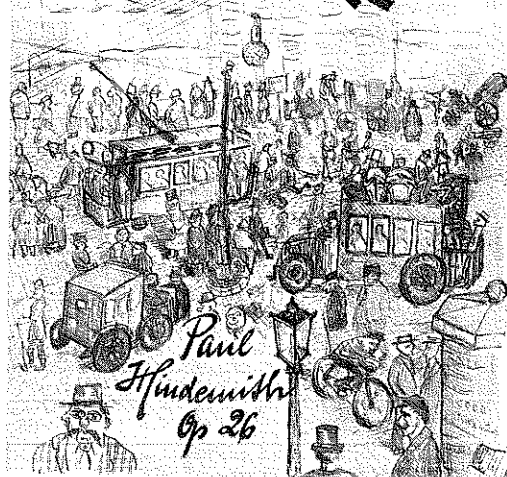
Politics, radio, cinema

The major political changes in Russia, Italy and Germany. International realignments and freeing of physical movement. Establishment of broadcasting services, new developments in sound recording and the cinema. Landmarks in the arts around 1922.

The recall to order was now to be heard with a vengeance on an altogether different plane. Between the spring of 1921 and the middle of 1924 there was throughout Europe an attempt in various ways to overcome the disorders, tensions and unresolved anomalies of the previous years. Thus in Russia the

1922

SUITE FÜR
KLAVIER



A crucial year as seen and heard by a key figure. Hindemith's own drawing for his jazzy 1922 piano suite.

New Economic Policy, or NEP as it came to be called, introduced a measure of private trading and profit-conscious public accounting as a means of getting the economy re-established after the end of the Civil War. In Italy the new nationalist, demagogic Fascist movement under Mussolini marched on Rome, took over the government and began a campaign of violence against the Left, whose strikes and political indiscipline were hampering economic recovery. In Germany a final revolutionary attempt by the Communists and a first futile putsch by the new Fascist-type National Socialist Party coincided with the stabilization of the headlong currency inflation by Gustav Stresemann. In all these countries there was a major change, one way or another, of political and economic policy which caused repercussions right through the system, affecting not only the administration of the arts but also the fortunes of publishers, galleries and other cultural middlemen, the interests and ideals of countless individual artists and indirectly the whole climate of the time. On top of this came a general reordering of international relations after the war years: first the Rapallo agreement between Germany and the USSR, then in 1924 the recognition of the latter by Britain and France, finally the Locarno Treaties which marked the normalization of these countries' relations with Stresemann's Germany. Though Italy was a sadly prophetic exception the arts now became much less inhibited by nationalistic hang-ups. Suddenly a great deal of physical movement seemed to take place.

It is as though, in any field involving elaborate preparatory work, it must have taken the same interval of four or five years for the immediate postwar upheavals to lead to fresh conclusions. For, coinciding in time with the politico-economic 'rappel à l'ordre', there were many other new developments affecting the social and technical framework of the arts. Radio, for instance, which had hitherto been treated as a communications medium, whether as part of the postal services or as an instrument of war, now turned into the public broadcasting service for which a far-sighted minority had been pressing: first in the United States, where commercial stations began springing up towards the end of 1921, then in England with 2LO and the establishment of the BBC under Reith in 1922, followed by Germany in October 1923. Linked with this, and equally important where music was concerned, was the improvement in gramophone reproduction: electrical recording began in the early 1920s, and the results were on the market by 1925; the first two-sided (non-electrical) records appeared in 1923. As for the cinema, while Lenin in Moscow was concerning himself with its future in the context of his new policy and the Germans were at last permitted to import the Chaplin shorts, the first truly modern films were beginning to appear: Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (documentary), Abel Gance's *La Roue* (involving Cendrars, Léger and Honegger) and Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (his first independent venture).

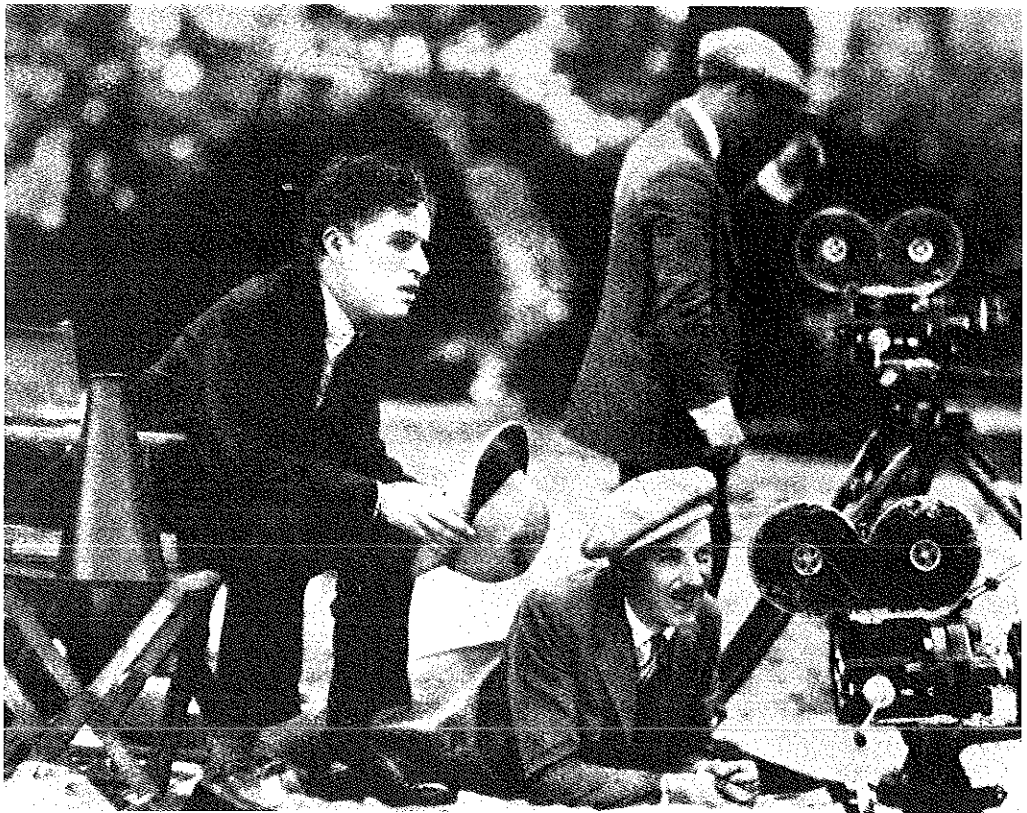
Nor can it have been entirely a coincidence that a number of crucial masterpieces in the other arts were completed just at this time, works which had certainly germinated over a number of years: Joyce's *Ulysses*, Kafka's *The Castle*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Valéry's *Le Cimetière marin*, Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, Hašek's *Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*, Svevo's *The Confessions of Zeno*, Berg's *Wozzeck*. Similar landmarks were Schönberg's *Serenade* op. 24, which inaugurated the dodecaphonic technique, and Picasso's *The Three Musicians* which marked the end of his Cubist period. None of these new classics can be seen as a product of the turning point that took place around 1922-3; far rather they served as signposts and additional factors making for change. More than at any moment since 1910 the arts now seemed to be in the balance, ready to move in a number of ways according to the factors which impinged on them most strongly. Right along the line, from great institutions like the Bauhaus down to the single individual, they were never the same again.

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The burgeoning media. Above: Lauritz Melchior, the Wagnerian tenor, broadcasting from Chelmsford. Below: Chaplin in 1922 directing *A Woman of Paris*, which he did not himself act in



The NEP, International Workers' Aid Rapallo

Impact of Lenin's New Economic Policy on the arts; birth of the Soviet cinema. Russian famine and the establishment of Muenzenberg's International Workers' Aid. Secret agreements and creation of a special relationship between Russia and Germany.

One effect of NEP in the USSR was vastly to reduce the state expenditure on the arts. Printed matter and theatre tickets could no longer be given away free, independent publishing businesses once more sprang up – 300 in Moscow and Petrograd by May 1922, it is said – while a number of theatres had their subsidies withdrawn. So too for a time did the State Publishing House (Gosizdat) together with the film and photographic section of Lunacharsky's Commissariat. In January 1922 the Proletkult likewise lost its subsidy, after which it was forced to abandon its central Moscow theatre to a private entrepreneur. In the course of that year one theatre in three went bankrupt. The 'academic' theatres, including the Bolshoi and the Moscow Art Theatre, remained subsidized; however, in September 1921 Meyerhold was made to close his RSFSR Theatre no. 1 on the grounds of extravagance. When he reopened in the old Sohn Theatre the following year it was with a collective of his students from a new teaching workshop, who seemingly could balance the books only by doing most of the backstage jobs themselves.

In the visual arts the effect of the cuts in patronage was if anything worse, for as Lunacharsky said:

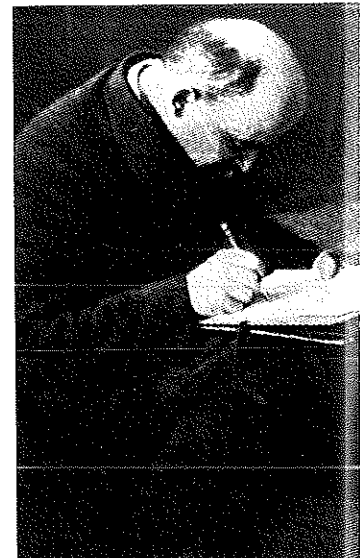
Who has the money to buy art? Almost nobody but the speculator. That means that so-called free art will go into dependence on the speculator. He is a neo-bourgeois, tasteless, and thirsting to enjoy himself on his newly-won wealth.

It was at this point, when the Constructivists were abandoning the easel picture altogether, that the naturalist painters once again surfaced, with Isaac Brodsky as their most capable representative, to form the AKhRR, or Association of Russian Revolutionary Artists, dedicated to the portrayal of Soviet personalities and themes. Similarly in literature some attempt was made to bring back pre-Revolutionary writers, though the only substantial figure to return from exile appears to have been Alexei Tolstoy.

But if this made for something of a new conservatism Lenin's concern with building a film industry emphatically did not. There were two issues

here, the need to re-equip the film and photographic section (which by mid-1921 had a mere 5000 metres of negative film left) and the problem of what to show in the reviving free-enterprise cinemas all over the country. Lenin's view, expressed in a set of directives of January 1922 and elaborated in a talk with Lunacharsky, was that within certain (censorable) limits it did not much matter what the feature films were like so long as enough good propagandist documentaries and newsreels were shown. Accordingly that year, while the NEP cinemas of Moscow showed imported works like *Daughter of Tarzan* and *A Night of Horror in the Menagerie*, Dziga-Vertov's first *Kino-Pravda* magazine films started to appear. With them the documentary movement was born.

In 1922 for the first time no mention was made of the world revolution in the Moscow May Day slogans, but this does not mean that party leaders' hopes of a communist revolution in Germany had yet been laid aside. 'Unless all tokens deceive', said Zinovieff at the Fourth Comintern Congress at the end of the year, 'the path of the proletarian revolution leads from Russia through Germany.' However, while still doing their best to further this cause, the Russians were busy developing their links with Germany in quite other ways, with almost immediate implications for the exchange of ideas in the arts. Thus, to start with, the disastrous harvest of 1921 and the ensuing famine in the Volga basin forced Russia



Animator of the documentary. Lenin composing a speech to the Third Comintern Congress, filmed by Dziga-Vertov in 1921

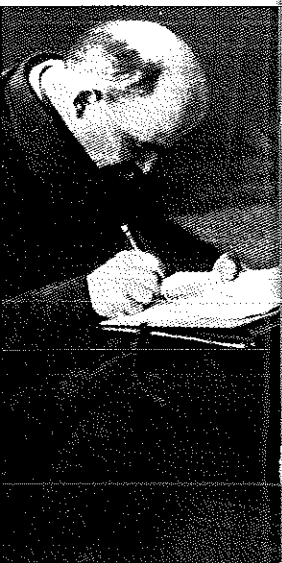
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to accept an unforeseen degree of foreign help via the Red Cross and the American Relief Administration. To offset this politically Lenin called in Willi Muenzenberg, recently appointed head of the Communist Youth International, whom he commissioned to found a new organization of International Workers' Aid. Sponsored by a committee that included Einstein, Bernard Shaw, Alfons Paquet and George Grosz, the IAH (to give it its German abbreviation) set up its headquarters in Berlin and reported not to the KPD but direct to the Comintern, which had also established a Western Secretariat there. Piscator became secretary of its *Künstlerhilfe* or appeal to artists with the painter Otto Nagel as his aide; in January 1922 and again two years later a number of the Bauhaus painters contributed works to their sales. Jung too, escaping to Russia after the 'March Action', was made Moscow representative and launched a quite unrealistic plan for developing agriculture in the Urals with IAH and other resources. Since propaganda was a fundamental part of the organization's job other artists and writers, such as Käthe Kollwitz and the worker-poet Max Barthel, were immediately drawn in, thereby laying the basis of Muenzenberg's new Soviet-German communications empire, which was to continue growing long after the IAH's original task was finished.

On the heels of the IAH came a plan to form an

international committee of intellectuals interested in strengthening relations with the new Russia. During 1922 this took Grosz and the Danish novelist Martin Andersen-Nexö (under haphazard arrangements) to Moscow, where they joined a mixed delegation led by Holitscher which helped pave the way for the foundation of the Society of Friends of the New Russia in Berlin the following June; for Grosz, who met not only Lenin, Radek and Lunacharsky but also Tatlin it seems on more than one ground to have been a somewhat disillusioning experience. Meanwhile at the official governmental level (which was becoming almost schizophrenically detached from that of the Comintern) the Russians at Rapallo had established diplomatic and economic relations with the country against which they bore no grudges and entertained no reparations claims, and which like themselves had suffered from the policies of the English and French. This outwardly natural conjunction had in some measure been prepared by Radek's interviews, when in gaol, with Walter Rathenau, now the German foreign minister, and his partner at the electrical firm AEG, Felix Deutsch. Under the respectable (if to the Entente powers not wholly palatable) surface of this important agreement a much more surprising deal was worked out with the German General Staff - this time with Radek playing a leading part - by which the war factories and military training establishments forbidden to the



The Comintern's man on Germany. The polyglot Karl Radek in the 1920s

Germans under the peace treaties would be jointly set up on Soviet soil for the benefit of the armed forces of both countries.

Altogether then the years 1921-2 saw the creation of no less than five new sets of ties between Germany and Russia, even aside from that existing through the Comintern and the KPD. Given the generally increased willingness in the NEP context to let Russian citizens travel abroad this made almost overnight for more traffic between Moscow and Berlin, and not just because of the diplomatic recognition (which France and England by contrast had failed to grant) but also because enough revolutionary fellow-feeling still prevailed for those citizens not to be all that uneasy about leaving Communist territory. It was what we in our country call a special relationship (as we gaze wistfully across the Atlantic), and it remained one long after the Russians had acknowledged the German revolution to be a dead duck.

German stabilization

Ruhr occupation and the 1923 German economic crisis. Failure of planned Communist risings in Thuringia and Hamburg, also of Hitler's Munich 'beer-cellar putsch'. Currency stabilization by Stresemann backed by American capital; consequent ending of the boom in Expressionist art, theatre etc.

Trusting in their own ability to guide it – and much underestimating the power of the Reichswehr and the ruthlessness of the German Right – the Russian leaders in 1923 saw a revolutionary situation developing and actually set a date for the German revolution, to take place symbolically just six years after their own. Rathenau had been murdered by anti-semitic nationalists on Midsummer Day 1922, and a wave of pro-Republican feeling resulted; the same year the Malik-Verlag published a devastating book by E. J. Gumbel, a statistician friend of Tucholsky's, whose bald summary of *Vier Jahre politischer Mord*, four years of political killings, showed irrefutably how, from the Spartacist rising on, the irregular forces had been given free rein by the courts while left-wingers like Toller and Hölz had been swingingly punished. In this new climate, where it looked as if the days of the Freikorps might at last be numbered, the occupation of the Ruhr by the French (for non-payment of reparations) drew the whole country together in a remarkable if also ruinous passive resistance. Though the KPD's policy towards its

fellow-parties was at first far from clear – the USPD meanwhile having split and its membership divided between the KPD and the SPD – the Ruhr conflict led Radek to proclaim a new policy of 'national Bolshevism'. This was intended to attract rank and file German nationalists to communism.

By now the slide of the German Mark had begun, carrying it from a rate of 10,000 Marks to the dollar at the start of the occupation to 25,000 in April, 1923, 110,000 in June, 4.6 million in August, and so on down. That month a general strike threw out the government, and although another took its place, led by the conservative Stresemann and with SPD participation, a special meeting of the Soviet Politburo accepted Trotsky's view that revolution was on its way. Advised by Radek on the spot and by the Soviet military experts who had been setting up paramilitary units called 'Red hundreds' since the beginning of the year, the Communists under Heinrich Brandler were supposed to enter the Saxon and Thuringian provincial governments and launch the revolution from there; risings throughout Germany would follow.

In the event, however, Brandler's appeal for a general strike fell flat even among the Communist rank and file; after five years of disillusionment their fighting spirit had gone. The whole operation was called off apart from the Hamburg rising under Ernst Thälmann, which was embarked on because of a misunderstanding and suppressed after two days, among those gaoled being a twenty-two-year-old worker called Willi Bredel. And perhaps coincidentally, certainly ironically, the coup which did take place almost exactly on the prescribed date was that led by Hitler and Ludendorff in Munich, the Nazi 'beer-cellar putsch', which was just as efficiently put down.

So Stresemann began his domination of German politics over the next six years with severe blows to the extremists of both Right and Left. With great courage he called off the passive resistance in the Ruhr, then stabilized the currency: a policy which worked, thanks partly to a change of government in France the following spring but above all to the so-called Dawes Plan for an international loan by which a stable German economy would be enabled to pay adequate reparations and at the same time made attractive to foreign (i.e. mainly American) investment. What this meant in terms of a changed internal climate will be seen in due course. Among its practical results was the deposition of the Thuringian

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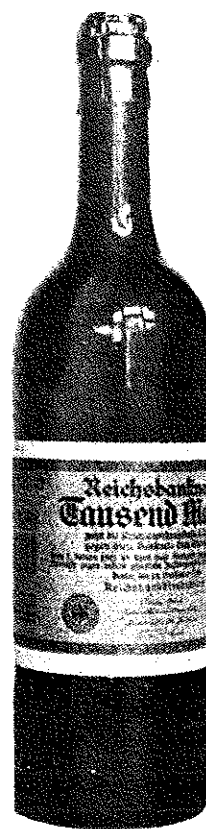
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Impact of the Ruhr Occupation. A vast crowd protests in Berlin, June 1923, beneath the Victory Column of 1870-71.

Leader of one of that year's failed coups: Herr Adolf Hitler, as he first appeared in the *Illustrated London News*



The inflation of 1923. A wine bottle and its 1000-Mark label



provincial coalition on which the existence of the Bauhaus depended – Gropius's own flat had been searched in November by the army – while the effects of the currency crisis on the whole apparatus of the arts were not unlike those of NEP in Russia.

This applied particularly to the theatres, for whom 1923 was a disastrous year, forcing a widespread reorganization. In Berlin Piscator's second venture, the would-be popular Central-Theater, collapsed in the spring, as did the Grosses Schauspielhaus; that autumn a new Intendant, Fritz Holl, took over at the stagnating Volksbühne. In the provinces, where the bulk of the local theatres had remained in private hands after 1918, a wave of failures now forced municipal authorities to step in and take them over. Thus whereas in 1914 only sixteen out of 120 so-called Stadttheater, or city theatres, had been municipally owned, by the late 1930s there were hardly any that were not. With this process, which largely completed the transfer to public ownership that had started with the state theatres after the revolution, went something that, for Berlin at least was even more significant: a reorganization of many theatres' repertoires, resulting in a search for new directors and a different sort of play.

At the same time the market for Expressionist graphics, which had boomed during the whole postwar inflation, as industrialists and business men tried to find solid investments for their profits, suddenly petered out; new, more internationally minded dealers like Alfred Flechtheim came to prominence, while publishers almost overnight turned away from Expressionist works and began looking in new directions. This applied not only to the question of illustrations but also to imaginative writing, which likewise suffered something of a slump as the fashion for the 'Sachbuch', or factual book, began. The firm of Rowohlt, for instance, who in 1920-21 had published two of the chief Expressionist anthologies, now scored a great success with the popular historical works of Emil Ludwig and the memoirs of the opera singer Leo Slezak, and in 1923 embarked on a big Balzac edition. Kurt Wolff, hitherto the leading Expressionist publisher, lost one of his main authors, Franz Werfel, who found inflation Marks of little use to him in Vienna; feeling generally disillusioned with modern German writing, Wolff launched a major edition of Zola.

The Malik-Verlag cut itself loose from Dada, publishing its last works by Jung in 1923 and going over instead to the novels of the great foreign

Socialists, first Upton Sinclair then Gorki; it also inaugurated the long series of photomontaged book jackets for which Heartfield became famous. Finally, with book prices after the stabilization proving quite out of the ordinary wage earner's reach, two unique book clubs were set up in 1924. These were the 'Bücherkreis' inspired by the main educational committee of the SPD and the Büchergilde Gutenberg which was founded by the German printers' union. Both combined a high typographical standard with a broadly Socialist commitment, and once again took many of their novels from abroad. Indeed the Büchergilde's first publication was a book by Mark Twain.

Russians in Berlin, *Veshch*

Predominance of the Productivist wing in Soviet Constructivism, and emigration of many revolutionary artists. The Soviet Art Exhibition of 1922 in Berlin; arrival of Lissitzky and others. The magazine *Veshch* (or 'Object').

The new close relations between Germany and Russia began coming into effect just as Soviet Constructivism was splitting into two branches. With Kandinsky no longer taking part, the theoretical argument within Inkhuk continued intensively throughout the second half of 1921, till by November that body could agree that since 'the last picture has been painted' it was the duty of its members to go over to what Brik termed 'productivism', in other words utilitarian graphics and industrial design. So Rodchenko, Tatlin, Popova, Stepanova and their followers from now on abandoned 'art' for textiles, furniture, clothing, stage design, photography and photomontage of various kinds, along with typography and film tinting, and applied the skills evolved in their 'laboratory' work to such new objects and materials. Similarly the theorists Arvatov and Kushner took their anti-psychological, behaviourist view of art into the Proletkult, which became much more modernist as its old members left.

However, those Russians who carried the constructivist message to Germany (and thence to the rest of the world) had left before or because of this development, or had simply not followed it. Thus Kandinsky decided to accept an invitation to teach at the Bauhaus, and left for Berlin as soon as Radek allowed him to. Pevsner and Gabo, who had opposed the new direction, similarly went to Berlin when they

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found that the former's Vkhutemas studio had been closed. Ilya Ehrenburg, a not entirely convinced supporter of Constructivism, had already been allowed to go that spring to write a novel in Paris, taking along his painter wife Kozintseva who had been studying at the Vkhutemas and a stack of copies of *Unovis*, *Iskusstvo Komuny* and other now slightly outdated publications. Thrown out by the French authorities, they too arrived in Berlin at the end of the year, to meet up with Lissitzky, who had been sent to help mount the first big exhibition of modern Soviet art under the auspices of Lunacharsky's Commissariat and the IAH. Later Shterenberg and Altman also came in connection with this show, while Chagall used his involvement in it as a pretext to leave the country for good.

In the course of 1922 a number of other Russians arrived: Bely, Yesenin, Marina Tsvetaeva, Shklovsky, likewise the young Russian-born American Louis Lozowick who studied at Berlin university. In the autumn came Mayakovsky and the Briks, who had been seeing a Riga publisher with whom they hoped to produce a Futurist art journal. Many émigrés of course were already there, including the Nabokovs, the monarchist poet Khodasievitch, the sculptor Archipenko and Lili Brik's sister Elsa who had left Russia during the allied Intervention with a Paris gentleman rider called André Triolet; back from the United States, Prokofieff too settled in Bavaria for eighteen months; while Alexander Dovzhenko left his job in the Russian consulate in Berlin to study painting with Erich Heckel. Mayakovsky's plan for a journal fell through, to materialize instead in the form of *LEF*, a substantial review of the arts which Gosizdat in Moscow began publishing the following spring. All the same various Russian publishers were active in Berlin, notably Helikon, which now published Ehrenburg's comic novel *Julio Jurenito* and Tsvetaeva's *Razluka*, and the Skythen-Verlag which published partly in German with the deliberate aim of linking the two cultures.

It was with Skythen that Ehrenburg and Lissitzky now planned a journal called *Veshch* ('Object') aimed, so its first issue said in April 1922

1. To acquaint creative workers in Russia with the latest Western art.
2. To inform Western Europe about Russian art and literature.

Veshch would stand, said Lissitzky, for 'constructive art, whose task is not to decorate our life but to



1922: when the Russian avant-garde descended on Berlin. *Above*, photograph of Mayakovsky by Alexander Rodchenko. *Below*, cover of *Veshch*. *Gegenstand. Objekt*, a trilingual magazine edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and El Lissitzky from Berlin that year. Under the heading 'Art and Socialness' is a tribute to Malevitch and the ideas of *L'Esprit Nouveau*.



organize it', and among its contributors were Yessenin, Hausmann, Mayakovsky (translated into French by Tsvetaeva), Fernand Divoire, Louis Delluc and the architect Ludwig Hilberseimer. Under (1) it recommended such writers as Aragon, Cendrars and Proust, the Purist painters and the review *L'Esprit Nouveau* (which it called 'best in Europe'); under (2) Prokofieff's Third Piano Concerto and the Berlin-published writings of the Serapion Brothers, i.e. the Petrograd group of novelists which included Pilnyak and Zamyatin. The cover of the May issue, the last to appear, shows that while the title and layout were Constructivist the allegiance expressed was rather to a mixture of Malevitch and *L'Esprit Nouveau*; 'Technical object - = Economy - Suprematist Object' being the slogan linking a railway snowplough to a Malevitch circle and square.

Berlin Constructivism

Moholy-Nagy and the first works of German-Hungarian Constructivism under Lissitzky's influence.

Even before the big Russian exhibition the impact of Constructivism had been felt by a number of German-based artists, and by none more powerfully or more fruitfully than László Moholy-Nagy. Then painting, it seems, partly in a Dadaist, partly in a geometrical-abstract vein, he must have met Lissitzky early in 1922; thus Mrs Lissitzky recalls seeing him, Hausmann, Hannah Höch, and the young motor mechanic Werner Graeff together with Hans Richter who since leaving Zurich had been working on scrolls and animated film projects with Viking Eggeling. These, along with Schwitters from Hannover, formed the nucleus of German Constructivism, and to Moholy the Russian example was a revelation: 'This is our century', he wrote in *Ma* that May:

technology, machine, Socialism . . . Constructivism is pure substance. It is not confined to picture-frame and pedestal. It expands into industry and architecture, into objects and relationships. Constructivism is the socialism of vision.

Of his fellow-Hungarians in exile Alfréd Kemény, a close friend with whom he wrote a kinetic sculpture manifesto that year based on that of Pevsner and Gabo, had just come back from Russia after lecturing Inkhuk on modern German art; he must therefore have been aware of the productivist trend. The sculptor László Péri in Berlin was another convert,

while Kassák in Vienna joined Moholy to compile a 'Book of New Artists' (*Uj művészek könyve*) whose illustrations juxtaposed works of art ranging from Klee to Constructivism with industrial buildings and machines in a manner not unlike Le Corbusier's. Yet another Berlin artist of similar convictions was the Pole Henryk Berlewi, who had met Lissitzky on his way through Warsaw and now developed a Moholy-like form of geometrical painting which he called 'mecano-fakturen'.

Moholy himself at this point began making photograms and his characteristically linear, geometrical photomontages; he also produced some paintings on metal by the deliberately impersonal means of ordering them from a sign factory using coordinates, a colour chart and squared paper. In the same spirit he wrote (or got his wife to write, since his German was not very good), an article for the July *De Stijl* under the title 'Production-Reproduction', which proposed using the new reproductive techniques directly as artistic media: e.g. cutting one's own grooves directly in a master recording disc. Film also came under this heading, and here he thought the greatest progress to date had been made by Eggeling and Richter.

International Constructivism

Van Doesburg's Weimar period. The Düsseldorf and Weimar artists' conferences as creating a form of 'Constructivist international' on the eve of the Soviet exhibition. Alliances of Lissitzky, Van Doesburg and Schwitters; differences from Soviet Constructivism.

From the middle of 1921 Van Doesburg had been living in Weimar, trying to counteract what he considered Johannes Itten's unduly cranky influence at the Bauhaus; and as a result *De Stijl* now somewhat detached itself from the Dutch movement and became a more international journal. Van Doesburg himself was never on the Bauhaus staff, but among the pupils whom he collected for a *De Stijl* course on that school's doorstep were Peter Röhl and Werner Graeff. In October he published a manifesto by Moholy, Puni, Hausmann and Arp whose 'Appeal for an Elementary Art' already prefigured some Constructivist ideas, as indeed had some of the earlier Dada notions. Then at the end of May he, Graeff, Richter, Arp, Hausmann, Schwitters, Berlewi and the architect Cornelis van Eesteren, together with Lissitzky, all met at a vast International Congress of

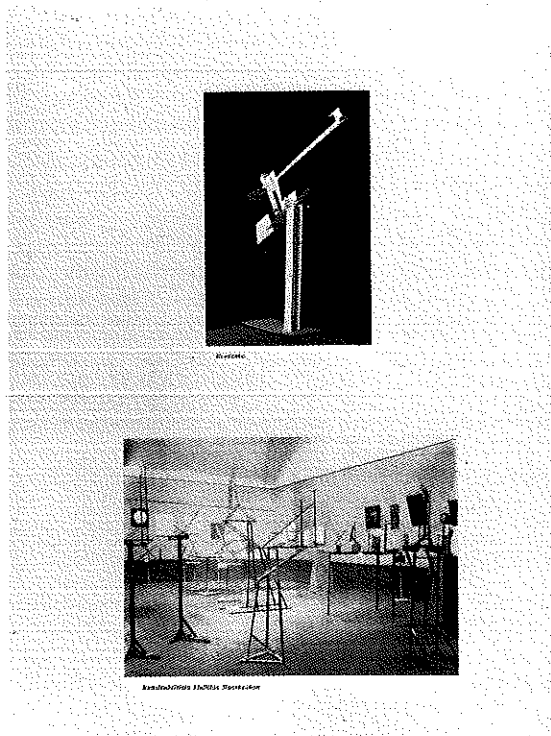
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The spread of Constructivism. Another opening from the *Book of New Artists*, 1922, in which work by Rodchenko and his school, *left*, faces an early Moholy-Nagy, probably painted in Berlin

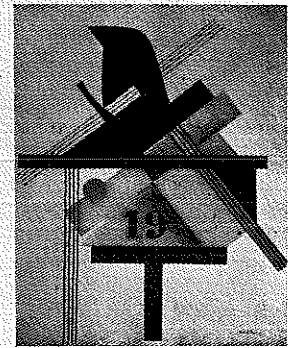
Progressive Artists which the Novembergruppe and allied societies had called at Düsseldorf.

Like much else to do with the Novembergruppe, this was evidently a somewhat boring affair – Hausmann indeed walked out – devoted to exhibitions, rates of payment, the art market and the like; Graeff's youthful comment being that the members seemed to be neither international, progressive nor artists. Lissitzky on behalf of *Veshch* made a statement against the concept of art as a priesthood and the use of its works for decorative purposes. Richter spoke for 'groups of constructive artists from Switzerland, Scandinavia, Rumania and Germany', i.e. Baumann, Eggeling, Jancu and himself, and also joined with Van Doesburg and Lissitzky to sign a statement on behalf of 'the international fraction of Constructivists' which was subsequently published in *De Stijl*. This defined art as 'an implement of the universal working process' and the progressive artist

as one who denies and opposes the dominant place of subjectivity in art, founding his works not on any basis of poetic arbitrariness but on the principle of new creation, using systematic organization of means to achieve universally intelligible expression.

However, the 'international fraction' was as yet a notional scheme, and in July an appeal came from the *Ma* group, signed by Kassák, Moholy, Sándor Barta, the critic Ernst Kállai and others, suggesting that *Veshch*, *Ma* and *De Stijl*, being evidently kindred spirits, should form a committee to set up an 'international organization of creative persons of revolutionary outlook'. Arp was just then holidaying in the Tyrol with the Ernsts, the American Matthew Josephson (for whose magazine *Broom* Lissitzky had designed a cover), the Eluards and Tzara from Paris; and that September he brought Tzara to its meeting.

This was held in Weimar in a spirit, possibly, of somewhat more levity than that at Düsseldorf (one





Constructivists at the Düsseldorf Congress of Progressive Artists, 1922, showing, *from the left*, Graeff, Hausmann, Van Doesburg, Burchartz standing, also Lissitzky in a check cap. The opposite sign is for an exhibition of Municipal Cleansing.

incidental aim no doubt being to shake up the Bauhaus), and its alignments seem to have been: Zurich Dada - Tzara and the Arps; Berlin Dada - Mehring; *Vesbch* - Lissitzky; *Ma* - Moholy-Nagy and Kemény; *De Stijl* - the Van Doesburgs and van Eesteren; Hanover - Schwitters and Max Burchartz; plus Graeff and Richter and some of Van Doesburg's students. A 'constructivist international' was in effect set up, with a provisional committee based on Berlin and consisting of Van Doesburg, Lissitzky, the Belgian Karel Maes, Richter and Burchartz; though how far this ever functioned is not clear. The Russian exhibition in Berlin followed in October; it was held at the Van Diemen Gallery on Unter den Linden, not far from the Soviet Embassy, and represented every trend of the new Russian art from the prewar 'Jack of Diamonds' group via Kandinsky and Malevitch to Constructivism; there were also individual exhibitions of Kandinsky, Alexandra Exter and Kozintseva at the *Sturm* and other galleries during the course of 1922.

Schwitters, who saw the show at Lissitzky's invitation, appears from his catalogue notes to have been particularly taken with the work of Altman,



The Dada-Constructivist meeting at Weimar, autumn 1922. *Front, left to right*: Graeff (with stick), Nelly and Theo Van Doesburg, Tzara (gloved and monocled), Sophie and Hans Arp. *At the back*: Lissitzky (check cap), the Moholy-Nagys and Kemény (smiling)

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Gabo, Malevitch, Rodchenko and the 'Obmokhu' sculptor Medunetzky. And from now on there is a strong Constructivist flavour to all Schwitters's designs, including the *Merz* magazine which he launched in January 1923. It was also Schwitters who brought Lissitzky and his work to Hanover, where the Russian fell in love with Sophie Küppers of the Kestner-Gesellschaft, found private and industrial patrons and established his German base, thereafter collapsing with tuberculosis so that he had to be sent to Switzerland at the end of 1923.

Yet the Dada spirit was not all that dead, and when Schwitters and Van Doesburg organized their manifestations – first in German provincial cities after the Weimar meeting, then in Holland where Tzara joined them and Lissitzky came with the Russian Exhibition – they used the old Dada ingredients: phonetic poems, insults to the audience, Mrs Van Doesburg at the piano, and the rest. 'While the French were occupying the Ruhr with guns and tanks', Schwitters wrote in *Merz 1* (subtitled 'Holland Dada'), 'we were occupying the Dutch art world with Dada.' As *Merz* came in effect to take over from Van Doesburg's Dada magazine *Mécano* there was a new fusion of the visual austerities of Lissitzky, Arp and the Dutch with an inspiredly Dadaist sense of fun. *De Stijl* in this context was becoming less a movement, more a channel of communication for the other main currents of the time.

Ehrenburg left Berlin for Prague and Moscow late in 1923, having completed a number of books including *The Love of Jeanne Ney* ('my sentimental novel', he termed it), *Trust D.E.* and the stories in *Thirteen Pipes*. He also wrote some acute reports on life in Germany: 'I had spent two years in Berlin', say his memoirs,

with the constant feeling of a gathering storm, and suddenly I realized that the wind had died down. To tell the truth I was dismayed . . .

Not only would there be no revolution, it appeared, but the émigré publishers were by now bankrupt and the Russian colony largely dispersed. Some returned to their own country (Mayakovsky for one arriving home loaded with Western art publications); others moved on to Paris.

Back in Russia Alexei Gan, who had made himself the first theoretician of Constructivism with a manifesto datelined 'Moscow-Tver 1922-23', now added a postscript to differentiate Soviet Constructivism from the views not only of *L'Esprit*

1

K. Schwitters:
Merzzeichnung

Zeitschriften gibt es genug. Aber bislang hat sich keine ausschließlich für die

MERZIDEE

eingesetzt. Um einem dringenden Bedürfnis abzuhelfen, habe ich mich deshalb entschlossen, die ZEITSCHRIFT

MERZ

herauszugeben, die viermal im Jahre erscheinen soll. Manuskripte und Klischees, die vom Geiste der

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getragen sind, bitte an meine Adresse. Ich übernehme für nichts Garantie. Bestellungen und Abonnements bitte an meine Adresse, Text nach Bedarf in allen Weltspachen.

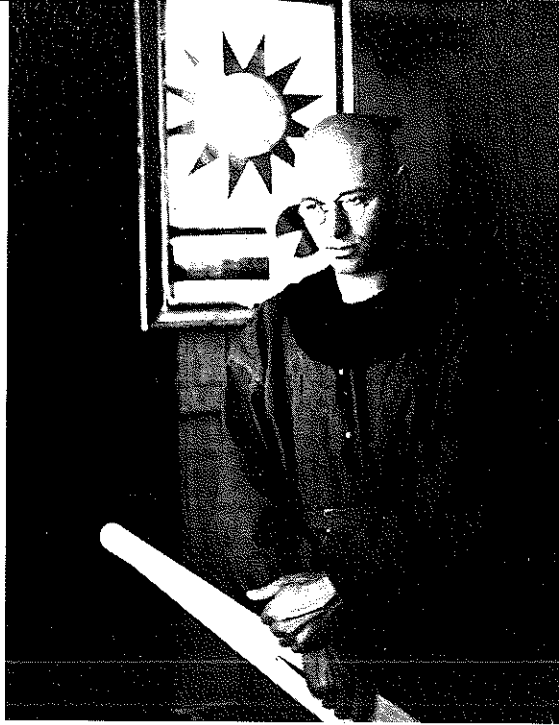
MERZ 1 widme ich dem

DADAISMUS IN HOLLAND.

Opening page of the first issue of Schwitters's *Merz*, January 1923, devoted to 'Holland Dada'

Nouveau and *De Stijl* (which he had evidently followed) but also of Ehrenburg and Lissitzky. While he saw a common postwar tendency at work in Europe, he objected to its identification with such figures as Léger, Chaplin, Meyerhold and the music hall artists, accusing critics outside Russia of 'not knowing how to detach themselves from Art' and therefore 'fraternizing' with it instead: 'a policy of conciliation, the endemic malady of the West'. A rival manifesto published by *Merz* and *De Stijl* was called 'Against Committed Art' or 'Prolet-art Manifesto', and directed apparently against Moholy-Nagy. Signed by Van Doesburg, Arp, Tzara, Schwitters and his Hanover friend Christof Spengemann, and dated 'The Hague, 6.3.23', it argued that art, Constructivist or not, had no class basis whatever:

The art we want is neither proletarian nor bourgeois, since the forces developed by it are strong enough to



'Art and Technology—a new unity', 1923. The Bauhaus before and after Gropius's change of policy. (1) The head of the Basic Course. Above: Johannes Itten, who left in Spring 1927. Below: his successor László Moholy-Nagy.



influence the whole of culture and not to be influenced by social conditions.

[. . .]

Thanks to their conservative liking for old, outmoded forms of expression and their incomprehensible aversion to modern art [the proletarians] are preserving just what their programme demands they should combat, i.e. bourgeois culture. . . communism is just as bourgeois an affair as is majority socialism, in other words capitalism in a new guise.

That June yet another Constructivist magazine, *G* (the 'G' standing for 'Gestaltung' or 'formation', what *De Stijl* had meant by 'beelding'), was launched in Berlin by Richter with Lissitzky's support and a number of new collaborators including Graeff, Hilberseimer, the Austrian stage designer Friedrich Kiesler and Mies van der Rohe. The bias of this was more towards film (Richter) and architecture (Mies and Hilberseimer), and although modern architecture in Germany was still almost entirely confined to paper projects Mies's down-to-earth attitude gave the paper a functional emphasis which, while still politically neutral, ran against the theorizing of *De Stijl* with its penchant for non-utilitarian art.

Between these divergent Constructivist streams there were the independents like Willi Baumeister in Stuttgart, then painting abstract-geometrically, while Moholy-Nagy too continued working outside the German groups.

The Bauhaus at Weimar

The Bauhaus's abandonment of utopian Expressionism and pseudo-religions; arrival of Moholy-Nagy and the policy of 'Art and Technology—A New Unity'. Closure of the school on politico-economic grounds by the new Thuringian provincial government.

The Bauhaus was meanwhile undergoing a double transformation. In 1921 the school was still a mixture of Expressionism and Arts-and-Crafts, its architectural style being set by the Cubist-romantic Sommerfeld House which Gropius and his partner Adolf Meyer built in Berlin, while its members from the top down were susceptible to pseudo-oriental cults and wandering prophets like the ex-champagne salesman and self-proclaimed superman Louis Haeusser who lectured there that year. Plievier, who came to the Weimar youth hostel a few months later as a preaching Tolstoyan, recalls several such peripatetic 'Inflation Saints', as he termed them: Leonhardt Stark (a hippy figure depicted in Hans Wingler's big

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Bauhaus book), Christ II, Zarathustra, Genghis Khan and other fringe mystics of the time. The unworldly credulousness then prevailing, like the vegetarian diet imposed on the school's kitchens, was traceable above all to the influence of Itten, and it seems to have been with this in mind that Gropius's partner Adolf Meyer, though not himself involved in the running of the school, helped Van Doesburg to establish his unofficial course.

Oskar Schlemmer, who had taken over the wall-painting workshop at the end of 1920 and was himself strongly influenced by Carrà, is a good barometer for the ensuing change in Gropius's own attitude. After feeling initially that the Bauhaus was 'a beautiful façade' with no real results to show, Schlemmer came by the end of 1921 to regard Itten and Gropius as opposite poles:

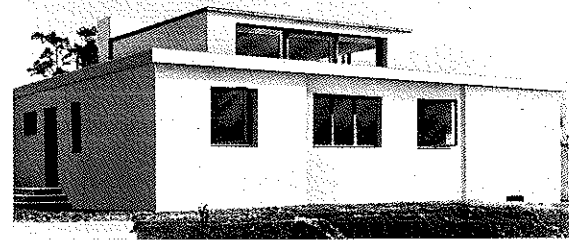
On the one hand, the influence of oriental culture, the cult of India, also a return to nature in the *Wandervogel* [or youth-hostelling] movement and others like it; also communes, vegetarianism, Tolstoyism, reaction against the war; and on the other hand, the American spirit [*Amerikanismus*], progress, the marvels of technology and invention, the urban environment.

Another six months, and the diet was back to normal; Itten had agreed to leave, and Schlemmer could sum up: 'Retreat from Utopia. . . In lieu of cathedrals the machine for living in. In short, retreat from mediaevalism'. To a great extent this must have been due to the influence of Van Doesburg (along with the writings of Le Corbusier), but Gropius thought the former too opinionated to put in Itten's place; and after the Dada-Constructivist meeting he seems to have stopped giving his course and played no more part at the school. The balance of the teaching altered further with Kandinsky's arrival to take over wall-painting in the middle of the year; this allowed Itten's functions in the sculpture and woodworking departments to be assumed by Schlemmer, and by the end of 1922 Gropius had decided to get rid of Itten altogether and bring in Moholy-Nagy instead. The crucial changeover took place in the spring of 1923, Moholy then taking charge of the Basic Course and the metal workshops, and thereby becoming the almost exact opposite number to Rodchenko at the Vkhutemas. Schreyer too left at this time, his theatre workshop being put under Schlemmer, who made it one of the most vital parts of the school.

Gropius's political position was now one of avoiding any kind of embroilment with the parties,



(2) Two houses. *Above*: house by Gropius and Adolf Meyer for the Berlin builder Adolf Sommerfeld, 1921. *Below*: exhibition house of 1923 by Adolf Meyer and Georg Mücke



whether Left or Right. This he felt to be the best way of safeguarding the school's existence against the kind of reactionary attacks to which it had been subjected, even though they had largely subsided since the election of a new Thuringian Landtag in the autumn of 1921. For about two and a half years thereafter the province had a Socialist government backed by the Communists; the Education Minister was a former Independent Socialist called Max Greil, while the school's syndic (or administrator) Alfred Lange was likewise a member of the SPD. On May Day, 1922, Gropius's monument to the dead workers was officially unveiled. All the same the new government was anxious for the Bauhaus to justify itself in the public eye, and began pressing it to hold an open show, not least in view of the complaints of such international journals as *De Stijl* and *L'Esprit Nouveau* who found it too decorative and individualistic. The result was the Bauhaus Exhibition of August and September 1923, which almost exactly coincided with the climax of the inflation. Here

Gropius announced the school's change of line under the slogan 'Art and Technology - a New Unity', and from now on he seriously concerned himself with trying to market its products.

Herbert Bayer was commissioned to design one- and two-million Mark banknotes for the state; under Moholy's direction the first Bauhaus Books appeared. The typography became functional or Constructivist; an experimental house (by the painter Georg Muche) was built with an austere rectangular appearance and a flat roof; Marcel Breuer, still a student, designed some *De Stijl*-like chairs; Schlemmer and his class painted murals in the school buildings. In the exhibition itself, which flowed over into the Provincial Museum, there was a show of advanced architectural designs including Mies van der Rohe's project for a glass skyscraper thirty storeys high, while a 'Bauhaus Week' of entertainments featured Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* with its globular doll-like costumes and Kurt Schmidt's *Mechanical Cabaret* to a score by Stuckenschmidt as well as more orthodox modern works. All this had an effect far beyond the immediate public relations objective. For even though traditional crafts like weaving and pottery continued to play a major part in the school's work such things as Joost Schmidt's typography and the metal workshops' first electric lamps only date from now.

Though the change of direction was permanent, the improvement in the school's fortunes was short-lived. After the decision of the KPD to enter the Thuringian government in October 1923 and the failure of the rising which was supposed to follow, the army moved in, the government fell and the provincial assembly was dissolved. Not only was Gropius's flat searched by the troops but he even had to apologize to General von Seeckt for complaining. The ensuing elections returned a predictably right-wing assembly dominated by a so-called law-and-order alliance of the nationalist and liberal parties whose election manifesto had singled out the Bauhaus as a threat to the middle class. Try as he might to remain 'unpolitical' there was not much that Gropius could do. Backed now not merely by a group of eminent German 'Friends of the Bauhaus' but also by the different Constructivist groupings and *L'Esprit Nouveau*, he could only fight a rearguard action. In September the new government gave the whole staff notice; in December the budget was cut to an unworkable level; by April 1925 the school must close down or move.

Grosz and political art

Evolution of the Malik-Verlag group. George Grosz's abandonment of Constructivism in favour of political cartooning on the one hand and a gallery contract on the other. Development of Schlichter, Heartfield and others into committed Communist artists.

Further to the Left were those who were neither surprised by the final failure of the revolution nor quite so innocently outraged at the results. As long ago as September 1919 Johannes R. Becher had dismissed the German revolutionary proletariat as interested only in material things, arguing according to Kessler that 'a communist revolution in Germany would only be feasible once links were established with Russia, using Russian leaders and Russian Red Guards'. A period of unpolitical writing ensued, during which (so Becher later said) he could easily have moved to the Right like Gottfried Benn; police records show that despite his KPD membership he paid no political dues between 1921 and 1923. Then came what he called the 'caesura' in his work, when he joined a party cell in Berlin, to emerge with the book *Vorwärts, du Rote Front!* in 1924 as a still windily rhetorical but now wholly committed communist writer:

All you artists who during the four war years
fought with such courage, endurance and
integrity against the madness of war,
you revolutionary singers when November began,
where are you now?

Grosz, to whom this kind of hectoring Whitmanese was quite alien, was extremely productive in 1922-3, publishing such albums as *Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse* (The Face of the Ruling Class, which Lenin liked), *Abrechnung folgt!* and *Ecce Homo*, and illustrating no less than twenty-one books including the masterly version of *Tartarin de Tarascon* designed by Heartfield. The Malik-Verlag survived the currency reform by turning itself into a limited company with capital from the Argentine grain exporter Felix J. Weil, a patron of Grosz's who also founded the Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung in 1923; Herzfelde moved the firm into West End premises with a special gallery for Grosz's work, to become a major publisher of Russian and other left-wing fiction. Once again he and Grosz were prosecuted, this time for the alleged obscenity of *Ecce Homo*; though defended by the deposed KPD leader

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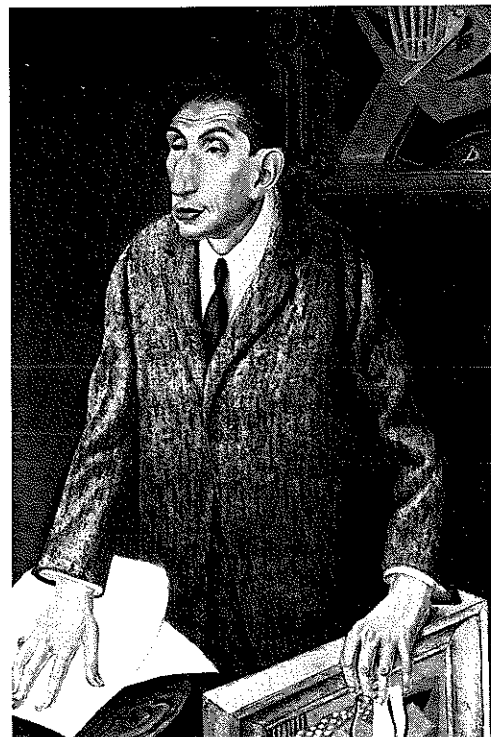
Paul Levi and supported by distinguished witnesses from the art establishment they were fined 6000 (new) Marks.

By then however Grosz too had undergone a radical change. How far the disillusionment of his Russian trip contributed to this, how far his new domesticity, how far sheer over-commitment is difficult to say; but during 1923 he accepted a contract from the smartest of Berlin dealers, Alfred Flechtheim, who gave him a show that year including sixteen of the large watercolours which he was now beginning to paint. The next spring he made his first postwar trip to Paris, where he met such newcomers as Pascin (returned from America), Masereel (from Geneva) and Tucholsky (just moved from Berlin). Masereel's dealer Joseph Billiet introduced Grosz's work there in the autumn, and for a while one part of him seemed to be on the fringes of the Ecole de Paris. From then on his big watercolours came to relate as much to 'Society' as to society, and the line in his drawings visibly softens up.

At the same time the other half of Grosz appeared to be going further to the Left. In mid-1921 the Novembergruppe had allowed the Prussian Ministry of Culture to ban paintings by Dix and Schlichter from the big exhibition in the Lehrter Bahnhof, and an 'opposition' thereafter split away, including also Grosz, Hausmann, Hannah Höch and Schlichter's Karlsruhe contemporary Georg Scholz, to announce its 'solidarity with the proletariat'. 'The aim', said their statement in Herzfelde's *Der Gegner*,

must be to abolish the trade in aesthetic formulas either by means of a new objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) born of a revulsion against bourgeois society and its methods of exploitation, or else by conducting preparatory experiments in non-objective optics which likewise reject the aesthetics and society in question with the aim of discarding individuality in favour of a new human type.

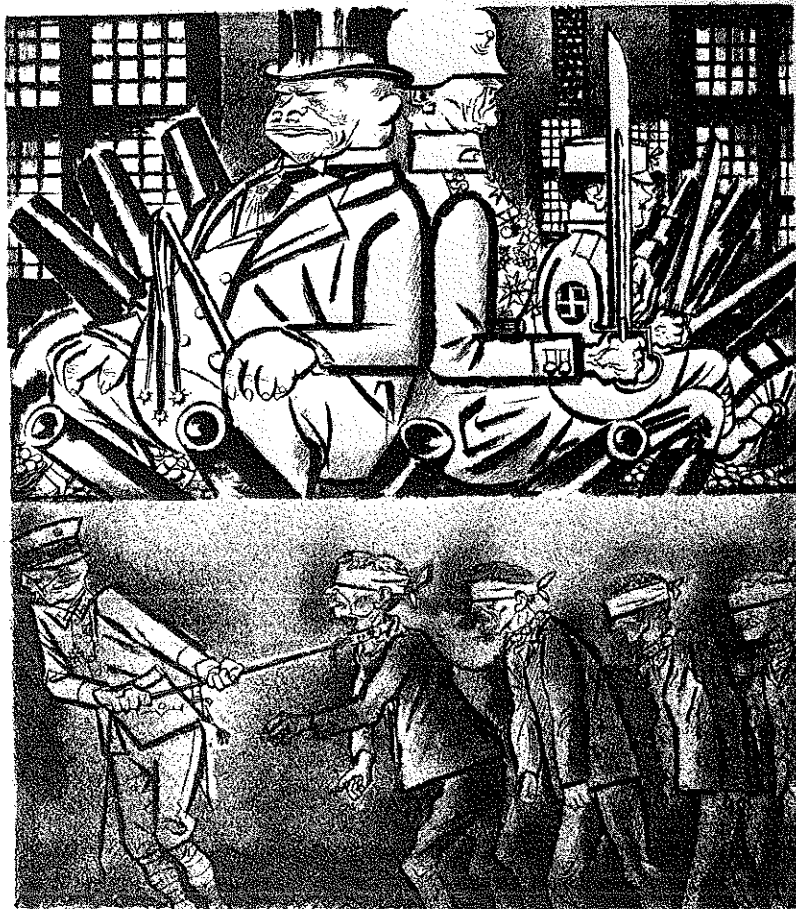
For Grosz this almost Constructivist position did not last long; for his last mechanical-constructive collages appeared in the album *Mit Pinsel und Schere* (With Scissors and Brush) in 1922, and he is a notable absentee from all the Constructivist debates in that year; nor did he care for the non-objective works in the Russian exhibition. He had already nailed his flag to the mast with his statements that 'art today is an utterly secondary affair', that the artist should get out and help the workers so as to become himself 'a clear, healthy worker in a collectivist society', and above all that (in contradistinction to Leonhard Frank's



Grosz for the well-to-do. His new dealer Alfred Flechtheim, portrayed by Otto Dix in 1926. Now in the West Berlin National Gallery

famous wartime book *Der Mensch ist gut*) 'der Mensch ist nicht gut – sondern ein Vieh!': Man isn't good, but disgusting. Mayakovsky evidently met Grosz in Berlin through the Malik-Verlag, and took three books of his drawings back to Russia, publishing some of them in *LEF*; while Grosz also identified himself with the appeals of the IAH and did some drawings for it. A little later he embarked on political cartooning, lithographing with a brush and spray technique rather than the old venomously exact pen, for a new KPD satirical journal called *Der Knüppel* (The Truncheon, a descriptive title) which appeared under Heartfield's editorship in 1923.

Schlichter, a much underrated draughtsman, joined him in this work, as did Hans Bellmer, a Dresden artist then following in Otto Dix's footsteps, and Grosz's own brother-in-law Otto Schmalhausen. Thereafter a new 'Red Group' of KPD artists was formed in June 1924, with Heartfield and Schlichter as its secretaries and Grosz in the chair. Among its members were Dix, Otto Nagel and the Dresdener Otto Griebel, yet another former Dadaist.



zur Schlachtbank

Zeichnung von George Grosz

Grosz for the proletariat. A page from Heartfield's magazine *Der Knüppel* ii/4, 25 July 1924

A new naturalism

Conscious emergence of a 'new naturalism' or Verism in the painting of Dix and Beckmann. Contacts of the new Munich realists with Italian groups, including the Fascist-favoured Novecento.

When Lissitzky and Arp compiled their book on the -isms during the former's Swiss convalescence, they chose to describe 'Verism' by a definition borrowed from Grosz:

The Verist holds a mirror to his contemporaries' ugly snouts. I drew and painted from a spirit of contradiction, and tried by means of my works to convince the world that it is hideous, sick and dishonest.

In 1922 the Berlin art magazine *Das Kunstblatt* had detected 'a new naturalism' arising from the ashes of Expressionism; in 1923 G. F. Hartlaub, director of the municipal gallery at Mannheim, began soliciting works for an exhibition that would display a clear-cut attitude to what he termed 'a positively tangible reality'. He cast his net wide, writing among others to Lissitzky, who however refused to show in anything but a Russian exhibition, as well as to Grosz, Dix, Schlichter, Max Beckmann and Georg Scholz. Dix by then had gone through a more or less 'proletarian'

period (embracing his first portrait of his parents) before being taken up by the Düsseldorf dealer Johanna Ey; moving to that city he had gone over to the themes by which he is best known: portraits with a technical-professional setting, paintings of social (largely night-) life like a cruder version of Grosz's drawings, and war paintings and etchings that are either horrifyingly expressive or creepily surreal. Beckmann too in Frankfurt was going his own patient, isolated way.

At the same time Hartlaub turned to the two artists who in 1922 were most under Italian influence: the Munich painter Carlo Mense, contributor of an Expressionist Madonna to Herzfelde's *Neue Jugend*, who that year showed under *Valori Plastici's* auspices in Milan, and the former *Freie Strasse* collaborator Georg Schrimpf, who was also in Italy and in touch with Carrà. Though on the surface this kind of painting had nothing to do with the newly established Fascism (hitherto much more logically identified with Marinetti's brand of combative bombast), the Novecento Group which developed from it in 1922, with tame neo-classicists like Funi and Casorati supported by the critic Margherita Sarfatti, was to enjoy Mussolini's personal approval and become the cradle of official Fascist art.

End of theatrical Expressionism

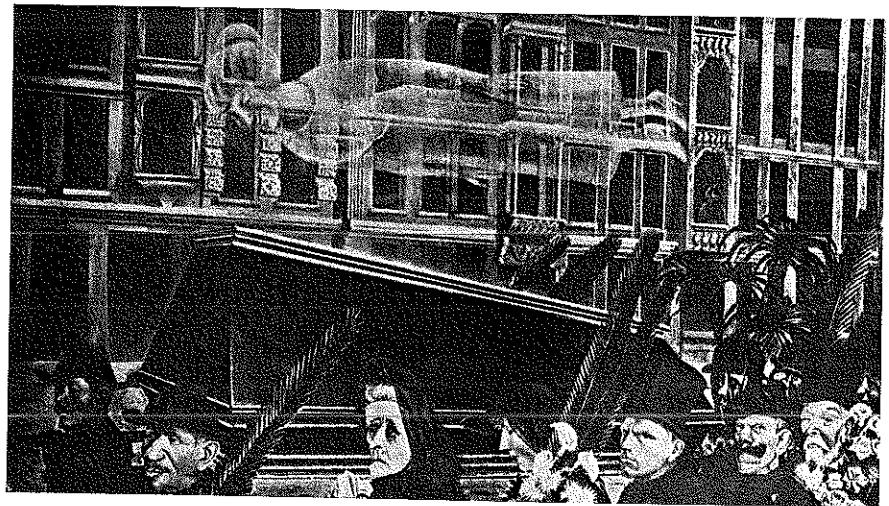
Abandonment of Expressionism on the German stage: Brecht, Pirandello, changes in Kaiser and Barlach. Piscator enters the Berlin Volksbühne. Meyerhold in Russia: theatrical Constructivism and 'biomechanics'; his recruitment of Eisenstein and Tretyakoff, leading to *Engineer Glumov's Diary* and *Gasmasks*, two signposts for the cinema.

Both in Germany and in Russia the theatre too reacted – dramatically is perhaps the word – to the same assorted stimuli. Though Expressionism still had a good grip on the German stage as late as 1922 (for the more complex a medium is, the longer it takes to absorb new movements), Brecht's first staged play *Drums in the Night* was instantly seen by the more far-sighted as significant both for its novel language and for its comparative realism. With this (so his next two plays showed) went a much more restrained form of staging and a new, low-toned, down-to-earth décor; and in the box-office crisis of 1923 a whole group of the young Munich innovators – Brecht the writer, Erich Engel the director and Caspar Neher the designer – was invited by Reinhardt to Berlin. So for that matter was the Rhinelander Carl Zuckmayer, whose writing at this point was still somewhat Expressionistic and confused. Iwan Goll too, who in Paris had written four outstanding short German absurdist 'superdramas' in the Apollinaire tradition – *Die Chaplinade*, *Die Unsterblichen*, *Der Ungestorbene* and *Methusalem, der ewige Bürger*, saw three of these published by Kiepenheuer, while in 1922 the last-named was due to be staged in Königsberg with

costumes by Grosz, though for some reason this plan fell through.

The real turning point here was Georg Kaiser's 'people's play' or 'Volksstück 1923' *Nebeneinander*, which had its Berlin premiere on 3 November 1923, two weeks before the currency stabilization. Kaiser had previously been thought of as an Expressionist, but in this key work his curt, comic dialogue served a lighthearted story of the Berlin inflation, centring round the tragic figure of an idealistic pawnbroker. It too was among the few plays designed by Grosz, and it introduced another new director, Berthold Viertel, then briefly running his own company 'Die Truppe'. 'Georg Kaiser', said the review in the *Weltbühne*, 'has left the cloud that used to surround him, and landed with both feet on the earth.'

The same year Barlach's plays found their first effective director, with Jürgen Fehling's production of *Der arme Vetter*, another work that is a far too subtle mixture of comic and tragic to seem at all like an Expressionist play. Then in 1924 Reinhardt himself came back from Vienna to stage a succession of brilliant non-Expressionist productions, including Shaw's *St Joan* and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*; William Dieterle directed the Goll *Methusalem* (but without Grosz's designs); while Brecht's Munich production of *Edward II* introduced a fresh way of looking at the classics. That spring Piscator established himself at the Volksbühne with his politically committed, documentary production of Paquet's 'epic' play *Fabnen*, which no other director had been prepared to tackle. And finally on



The Verist Dix. *Death and Resurrection*, a painting of 1922 reproduced in *L'Esprit Nouveau* no. 20 and subsequently lost from view

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field's magazine *Der*
del ii/4, 25 July 1924

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Though Piscator always denied any Russian influence in his formative period Ehrenburg claims to recall Mayakovsky in Berlin talking to him about Meyerhold's theatre. The Soviet company which was actually seen in Berlin (and in Paris) during 1923 was however Alexander Tairoff's much less radical Kamerny Theatre – his book too was published in Germany that year with a cover by Lissitzky – nor did its programme include *The Man who was Thursday*, with its influential Constructivist setting by Vesnin, which was staged in Moscow only that December. What Meyerhold was doing at this time was attempting to assimilate the language of productivist Constructivism into the theatre. Possibly it was the pressures of NEP which gave him good economic reasons for leaving the back wall of his stage exposed, using objects (Veshch, Gegenstand) rather than a full-scale set, and giving his actors dungarees to wear instead of costumes. But visually the result still seems breath-taking: Popova's wooden structure for the Belgian writer Crommelynck's rustic-sexual farce *The Magnificent Cuckold*, with its rotating mill machinery; Stepanova's scattered bits of apparatus for Sukhovo-Kobylin's nineteenth-century satire *Tarelkin's Death*; then in 1923 Popova's last major job (aged only 35, she died in May 1924) *The Earth in Turmoil*, an adaptation of the verse play *La Nuit* by the French pacifist-Communist Marcel Martinet, this time with real utilitarian objects on a bare stage, and realistic costumes.

To go with his now almost functional approach Meyerhold had devised for his students a technique of acting which he termed 'bio-mechanical'. Practically speaking it seems to have involved a large admixture of gymnastics and circus-like acrobatics, and to have been particularly successful in grotesque and slapstick contexts. Theoretically it was related to the experiments in what we should now call ergonomics being conducted in the bio-mechanical laboratory of Gastev's Institute for the Scientific Organization of Work and the Mechanization of Man. Gastev was the former Proletkult poet who also launched a campaign against time-wasting; he wrote his instructions to workers in telegraphic style and has been credited (if that is the word) with inspiring the characteristic Soviet abbreviations, of which Inkhuk for Institute of Artistic Culture and Mezhrabpom for International Workers' Aid are among those relevant to this book.

Just around this time Meyerhold recruited two new collaborators. First Eisenstein, who had been working with the Proletkult Theatre, joined him in 1922 as a designer (for an unrealized production of Shaw's *Heartbreak House*) and worked as his assistant on the production of *Tarelkin's Death*. Then during the same year the slightly older Tretiakoff arrived in Moscow from the Far East, where he had been deputy Minister of Education in the Far Eastern Republic and managed the state publishing house. After helping to write Meyerhold a revue which was not publicly performed, he went on to adapt the translation of the Martinet play, cutting it (he said) by 35 per cent, removing rhetoric and over-elaborate psychology, substituting real speech-rhythms for those of the verse and creating a 'speech-montage' in which the important sentences were stressed so as to make 'poster phrases'. After its production both Tretiakoff and Eisenstein moved over to the Proletkult's First Workers' Theatre (which was actually the ballroom of a private house), taking with them the actor Grigori Alexandrov with whom Eisenstein had been developing a still more radical theory of acrobatic acting.

Already before leaving Meyerhold these three had started planning a centenary production of Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man*, which Tretiakoff's 'free text composition' now updated so as to make the central figure Glumov (played by Alexandrov) into a Paris émigré who returns to Russia to take advantage of NEP. Using a minimal set, Eisenstein staged this in March 1923 in slapstick circus style, with acrobatics, a tightrope act over the audience's heads, female impersonations and musical parodies, finishing up with a 120-metre film, *Engineer Glumov's Diary*, which Eisenstein made in one day with Alexandrov and his fellow-actor Maxim Straukh. The show opened with Tretiakoff explaining the story – necessary, said one critic, since 'the play is structured without a basic plot and complications – along the straight line of the slow unfolding of the path of events' – and closed with Eisenstein's appearance on the screen, bowing to the audience's applause.

A second collaboration followed the same autumn, when Tretiakoff wrote another piece called *Listen Moscow*, which Eisenstein again staged: an 'agit-guignol', this time celebrating the expected success of the German October risings, and timed with inappropriate optimism to be performed on 7 November, actually two days after Hitler's 'beer-cellar

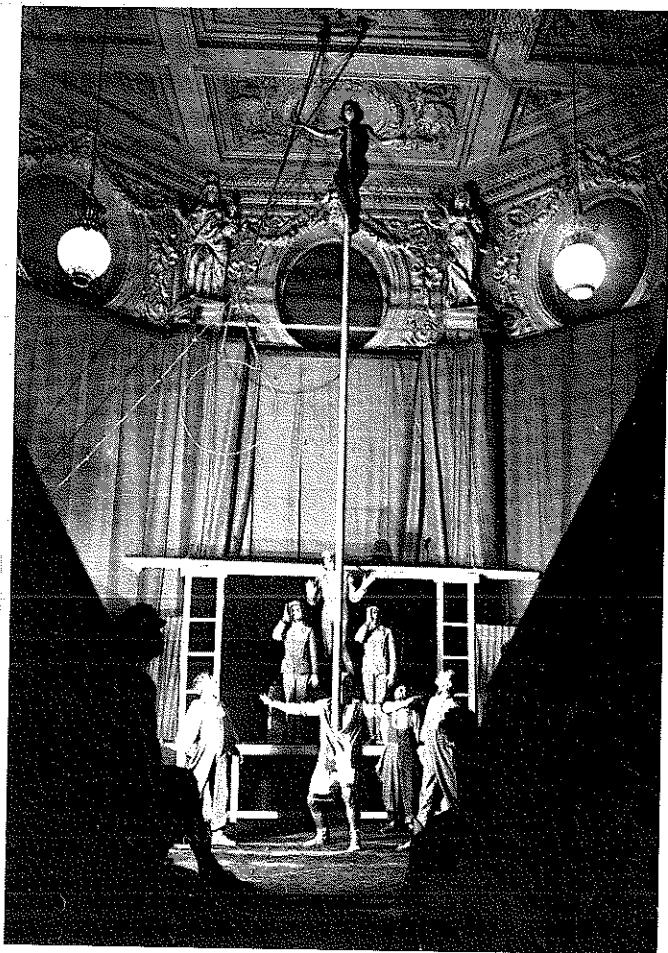
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Right: End of the German Expressionist theatre. Georg Kaiser's *Nebeneinander* staged in Berlin by Berthold Viertel, 1923, with sets and costumes by Grosz. Below: Meyerhold and the Constructivist 'object'. *Tarelkin's Death*, designed by Rodchenko's wife Stepanova in 1922





Eisenstein and the 'montage of attractions'. His acrobatic production of Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man* as adapted by Tretiakoff at the Proletkult First Workers' Theatre in 1923

The 25-year-old director with a poster advertising the play as 'Eisenstein's montage of attractions: staging, script [direction . . .], costumes, props'. In some Soviet reproductions of this photo Tretiakoff's name as adaptor has been blotted out.



putsch'. Finally at the end of February 1924 the Proletkult put on *Gasmasks*, a further short agitational 'melodrama' based by Tretiakoff on a newspaper report and staged by Eisenstein inside a Moscow gasworks. The grandeur of this real-life setting, for Eisenstein, so contrasted with the unrealities of the play that, in his famous phrase, 'the cart fell to pieces and the driver dropped into the cinema'. As for the playwright, he dropped into a chair of Russian at Peking University, where he remained for the next two years.

La Création du monde, Hindemith, mechanical instruments

Music and the smaller festivals. Spreading influence of Schönberg (especially *Pierrot lunaire*) and Stravinsky (*L'Histoire du soldat*). Milhaud and the impact of jazz; Antheil and machinery. Questions of scale: Hindemith's 'chamber music', Stravinsky's alienation from Diaghileff. The appeal of mechanical instruments.

At the same time there was a considerable shift of balance in the musical world, thanks largely to the new international traffic. As yet this did not greatly affect Russia, where no interesting composers had emerged and such experimenting as there was took place more on the social-industrial plane: for instance, the creation of the Persymfans conductorless orchestra which gave its first concert in February 1922, and the organization of a factory-siren concert at Baku that autumn. Moreover Stravinsky's works since *Petrouchka* were curiously shunned in his own country, though the absent Prokofieff was better appreciated, Mayakovsky for one admiring his works. But certainly Germany and Austria at this point became a lot more important on the musical scene.

In part this was due to the new institution of avant-garde festivals: both those of the International Society for Contemporary Music, which was founded in 1922 as an offshoot of Max Reinhardt's revived Salzburg Festival, and the Donaueschingen chamber music festivals which began under the patronage of Prince Fuerstemberg the previous year. These latter introduced the work of such young composers as Ernst Křenek, then a student under Schreker in Berlin, and Paul Hindemith, the viola player of the Amar Quartet from Frankfurt, where Hermann Scherchen was now conducting and organizing the museum concerts. The work of the Vienna school too

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now began to circulate, for in the summer of 1922 Poulenc and Milhaud came to see Schönberg together with the singer Marya Freund, played him a four-handed arrangement of *Le Boeuf sur le toit* and discussed *Pierrot lunaire*, which had recently had four performances in Vienna and which they now tried out in both French and German; to his brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky, who meanwhile was setting up a Prague branch of the Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen, Schönberg wrote afterwards that Milhaud, like him or not, was by no means 'insignificant' (as Zemlinsky must have suggested) but highly talented and 'the most significant representative of the school now prevalent in all the Latin countries, polytonality'.

Outside Vienna Schönberg's current pre-occupations were as yet barely known but the prewar *Pierrot lunaire* now began a triumphal progress, being performed not only in Prague but also under Scherchen at Winterthur in Switzerland, again at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik in October, and then in December under Milhaud at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. *L'Histoire du soldat*, its (almost literally) opposite number, written on a similar scale, had its first German performance under Scherchen in Frankfurt in June 1923, followed by one at the Bauhaus Week, which also included first performances of works by Busoni, Hindemith and Kronek; Stravinsky himself came to this, and thereafter was increasingly often in Germany. Just before, Kandinsky had written to Schönberg to ask if he would come as director of the Musikhochschule in Weimar and help widen the Bauhaus's range. However, Schönberg had heard from Mrs Mahler that two of the others there (the names have been charitably expunged in Erwin Stein's edition of his letters) were anti-semites. And from his anger it appears that Kandinsky must have excused them, blaming the Jews for Communism and citing the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

In Paris the organizer of the remarkable series of concerts in which *Pierrot lunaire* was included, along with Stravinsky's recent works, Alois Hába's quarter-tone music and Billy Arnold's band, was Marya Freund's son Jean Wiener, a composer who played the piano in the Rue Duphot nightclub patronized by Cocteau and his friends and christened by them *Le Boeuf sur le toit* after Milhaud's piece. Wiener (whose name means 'Viennese') himself wrote sophisticated jazz (for example *Toccata Dance* and *Sonatine syncopée*), but he was a good enough



Revolutionary music in Baku, 1922. Conducting a concert of factory hooters in the open air

pianist to play Schönberg and Stravinsky in the concerts and had been a fellow-student of Milhaud's at the Conservatoire. Milhaud for his part seems to have got to know a more authentic kind of jazz during his visit to the United States earlier in 1922; for he came back having heard not only Paul Whiteman but also an evidently more interesting band at the Hotel Brunswick in Washington, and above all the New Orleans jazz currently being played in the Capitol on Lenox Avenue in Harlem. With him he brought negro jazz recordings under the Black Swan label and jazz tutors from The Winn School of Popular Music.

Having been commissioned to collaborate with Cendrars and Léger on a work for the Swedish Ballet, he at once contacted both men and, he says, 'remained more closely in touch with my collaborators than for any other of my works'. Cendrars at this point had just compiled his *Anthologie nègre*; Léger, who had designed *Skating-Rink* to Honegger's music for the company's previous season, shared the common Cubist interest in negro art; Milhaud wanted to use the jazz style and the scale of orchestra heard in Harlem. The result was *La Création du monde*, which had its premiere in October 1923, one of the best and

least superficial of the 'serious' adaptations of the jazz idiom, despite its somewhat artificial remoteness from the contemporary urban context where that idiom was properly at home. Sharing the bill with it was a ballet by Cole Porter called *Within the Quota* – about a Swedish immigrant trying to enter the United States – whose story and almost pop-art setting were by the expatriate American artist-cum-socialite Gerald Murphy, follower of Léger and friend of Porter and Scott Fitzgerald.

Immediately before, a piano recital was given by the young Polish-American George Antheil, who had come to Europe in the wake of a girl and now played his own *Airplane Sonata*, *Mechanisms* and other works in front of Léger's set. He told his friends that he was writing a *Ballet mécanique* for which he wanted a 'motion-picture accompaniment': an idea that Léger was soon after to take up. Satie, who was also there, added that he too was going to write a mechanical ballet – to be called *Relâche*. As for Antheil's 'Musico-mechanico Manifesto', which was published in *De Stijl*, its subject was not so much machine noises as the future replacement of the orchestra by 'vast music machines in every city' whose outpourings would 'open a new dimension in man', create new psychic rhythms and make the people vibrate: an all too prophetic view.

Jazz was likewise being used at this time by Hindemith. He had heard a certain Sam Wooding in 1921 (presumably in Germany) who had come, in Heinrich Strobel's words, as 'a revelation'; Hindemith accordingly included jazz movements – foxtrot, shimmy and the like – in his *Kammermusik* op. 24 no. 1 and the 1922 suite for solo piano. Among the various young central European composers heard at Donaueschingen, who tended to operate within the same economical 'Kammermusik' framework and reflect similar neo-classical and polyphonic influences, Hindemith stood out for his extreme fluency and instrumental skill. What is more, he was a comedian, which perhaps made him even more exceptional. In *L'Esprit Nouveau* Adolf Weissmann, the *Berliner Tageblatt* critic, presented him to French readers as an unsentimental sceptic, while Stravinsky welcomed him as representing 'a principle of health and luminosity among so much darkness'. For Stravinsky had become largely preoccupied with analogous questions of scale and economy of means, which took him in a different direction from the Diaghileff ballet, though for a time he still worked with it on its classical revivals.

Thus when Diaghileff mounted *Renard* and the equally small-scale chamber opera *Mavra* at the Paris Opéra in June 1922, the former with a marvellously simple yet evocative setting by Larionov, they were lost in the vast house with its audience of wealthy balletomanes. The *Wind Symphony* for a dozen players was likewise misplaced in the framework of a Koussevitzky concert; in fact both it and *Mavra* satisfied their composer only when performed in Jean Wiener's series. And similarly with *Les Noces*, which Stravinsky, after scoring two scenes for a combination of mechanical piano, mechanical organ and two cimbaloms, orchestrated in 1923 for four pianos and percussion: for he wanted it to be a 'divertissement' like *L'Histoire du soldat*, with the musicians visible on the stage, rather than a quasi-anthropological examination of marriage customs (executed, as it turned out, in somewhat bio-mechanical style). Diaghileff, so Stravinsky was to recall later, 'could never stomach' *L'Histoire du soldat*, and from this point the two men drifted apart. Not that Stravinsky's experiments at a less grand level were altogether successful, for when he orchestrated some of his pieces for a Paris music hall sketch in 1921 the band's sloppy treatment of his work, degenerating as the show progressed, convinced him that such establishments were not to be trusted. But he did become seriously interested in mechanical music, and the firm of Pleyel now gave him a studio in which to work on pianola-roll recordings for their Pleyela mechanical piano. Indeed the second Wiener concert in the winter of 1922 was devoted to Stravinsky's own pianola version of *Le Sacre du printemps*.

Architectural beginnings

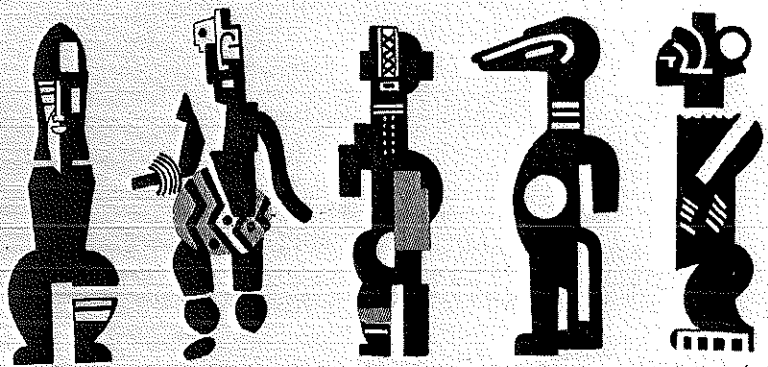
New ideas in German architecture and planning; their first realization at Celle. Taut at Magdeburg. Le Corbusier's La Roche house in Paris.

In architecture the economic problem remained dominant, and although there were some major new commercial buildings, like Erich Mendelsohn's stores and offices in Germany, it was only in Holland that they reflected the post-Expressionist developments. Perhaps the most important single event in this field was the introduction by the Socialist municipality in Vienna of its *Wohnbausteuer* or housing tax, which allowed a large-scale rehousing programme to be started in September 1923. Le Corbusier's scheme for a 'Contemporary City' of

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PERSONNAGES

par Fernand LÉGER

Jazz double bill at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées by de Maré's Swedish Ballet, 25 October 1923. Left: Léger's figures for *La Création du monde*, Milhaud's negro ballet on a Cendrars libretto. Below: Set by Gerald Murphy, Léger's American pupil, for Cole Porter's *Within the Quota*, a 'ballet-sketch' about the US immigration laws





Mechanical music. The Pleyela player-piano as taken up by Stravinsky and featured in *L'Esprit Nouveau* no.22

three million inhabitants, shown at the 1922 Salon d'Automne, remained a project only, with its tower blocks, urban motorways and generous open spaces, as did the architectural exhibit mounted by Van Doesburg and van Eesteren at L'Effort Moderne the following year. This was in effect the swansong of *De Stijl* as a movement, though the magazine itself struggled on.

In Magdeburg in northern Germany the utopian theorist Bruno Taut, one of the founders of the Berlin Arbeitsrat, became chief architect to the Socialist municipality in 1921. He was only able to build one important building, an exhibition-cum-market hall, and the rest of his work remained on paper. Helped by a group of left-wing artists, however, he launched a scheme for introducing colour in the streets, painting façades, kiosks and trams with gaudy abstract designs and encouraging the populace to do the same in residential districts. The reception was mixed, Ehrenburg for one reporting with a shudder that 'we have become too sober' for that kind of visual affront. Certainly the effect seems to have been to sober Taut himself up, for he resigned in 1923 and wrote *Die neue Wohnung*, a sensible, instructive book on home planning and furniture which sees any real improvement in taste as being bound up with the liberation of women. There was also another city architect who had visited Magdeburg and that year embarked on a more effective programme of rehousing: Otto Haesler at Celle near Hanover. His

'Italienischer Garten' estate was the first of its kind in Germany; and other schemes by him followed.

In Russia there was just a handful of modern constructions in the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition the same year, notably Konstantin Melnikov's Mahorka tobacco pavilion. In Paris Le Corbusier had no following in his profession and no hope of any official jobs, but in 1922 he went into partnership with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret to build his first two postwar houses: one for Ozenfant in 1923, then the double house for his own brother Albert and the Swiss banker Raoul La Roche which was completed in 1924. This was virtually an embodiment of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, since not only was Albert Jeanneret that magazine's main music critic and La Roche one of its backers, but the heart of their house was a gallery for the paintings which La Roche had bought. These came mostly from the Purist exhibitions and, on Ozenfant's and Le Corbusier's advice, from the sales of Kahnweiler's confiscated Cubist paintings (under the heading 'Vente des Biens Allemands') in the second half of 1921.

End of Paris Dada

Accusations of chauvinism cause collapse of André Breton's Congrès de Paris; decline of Dada. Its final fling with *Relâche*, another signpost for the cinema.

It is symptomatic, perhaps, that in the year when the first international congresses and festivals of the modern movement were being held in the German-speaking countries the plan to mount one in Paris should have failed. For although that city could absorb almost anything and anyone on its own terms the ineffectiveness of the political Left, combined with the dependence of the arts on the patronage of a still largely aristocratic Parisian élite, imposed a certain parochialism which was to become increasingly cramping. The plan in question was for an 'international congress to determine directions and defend the modern spirit', and it was launched by Breton at the beginning of 1922 with the support of Auric, Delaunay and Léger, Ozenfant, Paulhan and Roger Vitrac, they being leading representatives respectively of 'Les Six', the former Cubists, *L'Esprit Nouveau* and *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. This was a powerful front, even if it self-evidently contained no foreigners.

However, some of Breton's Dada friends saw so ambitious an undertaking as inconsistent with the

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spirit of their movement, and Tzara for one decided to take no part. At that Breton and all his fellow-organizers except Paulhan issued a press statement warning the world against 'the actions of a character known to be promoter of a so-called movement originating in Zurich'. Among those outraged by such apparent xenophobia were Satie, Eluard and Ribemont-Dessaignes, who joined Tzara in summoning a meeting at which over forty signatories, including Brancusi and many other foreign-born artists or writers, protested at the phrase 'originating in Zurich' and formally withdrew their confidence from the congress. Paulhan thereupon said that the NRF could no longer be involved, and in April Ozenfant had to tell Breton that the plan was off.

Dada at this stage was dormant; *Littérature* was losing subscribers; Breton had become interested in table-turning and other spiritualist occupations. It was just the opposite of what was happening at the Bauhaus. 'Let it not be said', wrote Breton that September, while Tzara was away among the Constructivists at Weimar, 'that Dadaism served any end but to maintain us in that state of perfect availability in which we are and from which we shall now move lucidly away to that which is beckoning us.' If this new vocation meant that the movement was virtually over it was not to fall apart bloodlessly. On 6 July 1923 a Russian émigré manifestation organized by Zdanievitch was billed to include not merely an assortment of avant-garde items such as short films by Richter, Man Ray and the American Charles Sheeler, all to a piano accompaniment by Antheil, but also some poems by Cocteau and Tzara's short play *Le Coeur à gaz*. This was violently and by all accounts unprovokedly broken up by Breton and his friends (Eluard having meanwhile changed allegiance); the police were called in; Tzara sued for damages, and Dada was visibly at an end.

All the same its spirit had one last posthumous fling at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, when in 1924 Picabia, despite the modishly decorative trend in his painting at this time helped to turn Satie's ballet *Relâche* into the major French Dadaist work. This was partly due to the absence in Brazil of Cendrars, who had sketched out the first scenario and called it merely *Après-dîner*. Picabia took the project over under the new mystifying title – which means 'No performance tonight' and looked good on the posters and press advertisements – devised a unique setting of lamps and reflectors to dim or brighten in accordance with the music, and wrote a short interlude film in which

he got Satie, Duchamp and Man Ray to act with the Swedish Ballet's principal dancer Jean Borlin. The film was made in three weeks that June by a young writer whom Hébertot had recruited as a film critic for his magazine *Le Théâtre* at the end of 1922. It was called *Entr'acte* and its maker was René Chomette, otherwise known as René Clair.

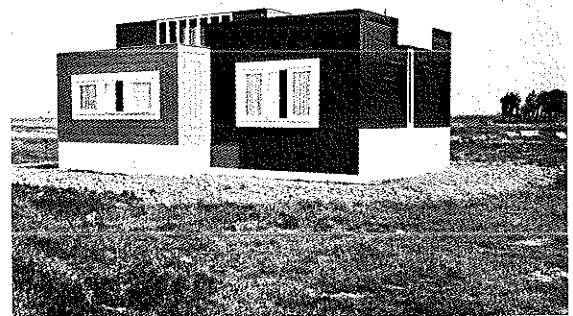
1921–3: Summary

The turning point summarized: ending of the pre-1918 -isms; assimilation of Purism and Constructivism in a wider, nameless trend; the pressure of technical changes. Stagnation of the Comintern's World Revolution. Creation of a calmer, more open and tolerant German climate from 1924, temporarily free from nationalistic excesses.

All this adds up to a complex and far-reaching transformation, which affected many other people and fields; one has only to think of any artist – Picasso, Chirico, Kirchner, Masereel – and compare his work before 1921 and after 1923 to see what a universal change there was at this point. Universal, but far from uniform, for there were back-peddling influences at work as well as processes of simplification, cross-fertilization and extension, so that it is not easy to make sensible generalizations about it and all we can do is to sum up its most obvious features.

These years, to begin with, saw the effective end of the main avant-garde movements which started before 1918: Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and Dada. The Metaphysical period in Italy ended; Purism ran its term; *De Stijl* shot its bolt; Russian Constructivism revised and reduced itself, leaving

De Stijl in architecture. Construction office by Oud, Rotterdam 1922–3, painted in red, yellow and blue. Photo from *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne* no. 4, 1924



one half of the movement to continue elsewhere. What emerged was a still nameless double trend, one part Abstract-Constructivist, the other concerned with 'real' down-to-earth things, both of them marked by those main movements through which the artists had passed. Classicism, simplicity, impersonality: such undramatic ideals were in the air, together with a much deflated but still persistent concern with social change. At the Bauhaus, utopianism and mysticism were to a great extent discarded and the way cleared for a closer engagement with technological society, to be pursued in a more favourable setting after the school's expulsion from

Last echo of Paris Dada, swansong of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Jean Borlin and Edith von Bonsdorff in the *Satie-Picabia Relâche*, December 1924



Weimar. Elsewhere too the technical pressures were felt, sometimes pushing the creative artist towards soberer, more practical, and utilitarian solutions, sometimes bringing him new instruments with which to experiment, continually giving him fresh standards by which to judge his own work.

Lenin died in January 1924 after having been largely incapacitated for more than a year; in May the Soviet economist Eugen Varga (yet another member of the Hungarian diaspora of 1919) told the Russians in a pamphlet that the acute social crisis of capitalism was by and large overcome. So the communist revolution in the West was temporarily stagnant, though as yet there was no new policy of Russian self-sufficiency and the exchanges between that country and the outside world could continue to be as free as they had become in 1922. The new phenomenon of fascism as a form of nationalist, populist oligarchy had been seen to be internationally important, even though the murder of Matteotti and the final establishment of the Italian dictatorship still had to take place. The relationship between it and the similar German movements had been grasped; indeed in 1923 the KPD had symptomatically organized an 'anti-Fascist week'. However, in the relatively stable situation that now developed in Germany the latent strength of such extreme nationalist feelings was difficult to appreciate, particularly for foreign observers; there too internationalism seemed on the face of it to have prevailed.

For the new German cultural developments had now begun moving into the centre of a whole international movement which would leave France somewhat to one side, particularly where architecture and design were concerned. German society might be highly industrialized like its Western neighbours, but it had a special tradition of cultural decentralization and of strong public patronage with a Socialist slant, and the fact that it was in a sense a new society, with everything to rebuild after a disastrous war, made it more accessible than others to the new ideas from both East and West. Given a clear run, even for as little as five years, it could fuse and digest these into a coherent culture. Until another equally drastic moment of change came along, the old violent nationalist sentiments could be safely pushed underground, with nothing but the occasional small flare-up to keep the more enlightened alert.