METROPOLITAN THEATRICS:
PERFORMING THE MODERN IN WEIMAR BERLIN, 1919-1933

by

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Abstract

"Metropolitan Theatrics" charts the unsettling and reshaping of everyday life in Weimar Berlin between 1919 and 1933. It does so, by convening a conversation between the multidisciplinary insights of performance studies and recent geographical approaches to the study of the modern city. Berlin's restless relationship with the 'modern' offers, it is argued, an ideal historical milieu in which to test performance theory while at the same time question some of its presentist assumptions. Drawing on a variety of historical sources, the study focuses on the role of performance – not only theatrical representation, but also the popular press, novels, the visual and performing arts, modern dance, scientific experiments, and everyday practices - in order to demonstrate the specific conjunction of visuality and embodiment that allied 'Berlin' with 'modernity.'

The thesis is divided into two main parts. Part One is a close reading of texts and images and how they have come to figure Weimar Berlin as an imagined environment. In this respect, recent scholarship in the humanities has been caught on the horns of a theoretical dilemma, namely how to accommodate the seemingly undocumentable event of performance. Different responses to this dilemma are discussed. In particular, it is argued that in seeking to go beyond representation to embodied experience, a sense of the cultural presence of the former in the latter merits greater critical attention. Part Two continues the thesis's discussion of performance's unorthodox archives by drawing attention to a repertoire of aesthetic and scientific practices which were developed to sense and adapt to the traumatic shock of metropolitan modernity. Ultimately, this thesis provides an historically specific account of aspects of Weimar modernity and thus means to contribute not only to an historical geography of Berlin, but also to the forging of methodologies that
serve to widen the cross-disciplinary study of modern culture and modernity. Given the importance of the Weimar era to our understanding of the nature of European modernity, the development of a geography of performance makes a strong case for re-examining the ways in which the relationship between 'modernity' and the 'city' is usually formulated.
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Introduction

Spectral Spaces and Urban Performances

It is not at all easy, the viewing as well as the living in a city that is constantly moving, always in the process of changing, never resting in its past.

-Franz Hessel

To exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right...to a hospitable memory...out of a concern for justice.

-Jacques Derrida

Writing in 1921, the author Heinrich Mann described the city of Berlin as the place where “Germany’s future was already being covertly acted out [Die Zukunft wird heute andeutungsweise vorausgelebt von Berlin].” Mann was visiting the city for the first time in three years and he was surprised to find that despite the trauma of military defeat and political and economic instability, the agitations of the immediate post-war years were no longer, at least for Mann, the city’s most notable characteristic. Indeed, Mann singled out Berlin as a place that didn’t “have time to whine and oppose the new facts.” “Whoever wishes to seize hope,” he added, “must only look to Berlin.” That Mann’s comments were not published in the *Vossische Zeitung* until 1929 was not without a certain degree of irony

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especially given to what extent Mann’s commentary replayed what had already become the classic definition of a city condemned, as the art critic Karl Scheffler would have it “to always become and never be.”4 Various described as a “Kolonialstadt” and “Parvenu Polis,” Weimar Berlin differed from London, Paris, or even Vienna not so much by virtue of its modernity, but rather as a result of the city’s almost exclusive identification with the pace of modernization.5

It is, therefore, not surprising that the city became a key topos in ongoing debates within Weimar Germany about modernity and modernization, polarized, as they were, into culturally conservative jeremiads on the one hand and euphoric hymns to technological progress on the other.6 Among the former, one would have to include an understanding of the “transcendental homelessness” and “radical uprootedness” that philosophers like Georg Lukács and Martin Heidegger increasingly saw as the fundamental predicament of metropolitan modernity. As their contemporary Walter Benjamin made clear, what may plausibly described as the “radical plight of dwelling” testified to the decay of genuine historical experience [Erfahrung] that had seemingly atrophied with the rise of modernity only to be “supplanted by a mere lived-throughness [Erlebnis].”7 The decline of experience was for Benjamin inseparable from the liquidation of any intrinsic connection to memory, memory as the faculty that was supposed to “connect sense perceptions of the present with

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those of the past and thus enable us to remember both past sufferings and forgotten futures." Of course, for a city that seemed to throw itself wholeheartedly into the relentless rhythm of modern life, "it became difficult," as the poet Heinrich Heine famously noted, "to see any ghosts."

The intrusion, however, of a forgotten past capable of disrupting a certain model of history, one bound inexorably to the progress of modernity and the lockstep march of its teleology, appears frequently in the work of Benjamin, himself one of Weimar Berlin's more important residents and interlocutors. As he writes in his *Berlin Chronicle*, "noisy, matter-of-fact Berlin, the city of work and the metropolis of business, nevertheless has more, rather than less, than some others, of those places and moments when it bears witness to the dead." Indeed, the kind of memory-work staged by Benjamin in his autobiographical writings has itself become something of a commonplace in more recent descriptions of Berlin, a city seemingly haunted by a desire to overcome the phantoms of its violent past. As Andreas Huyssen has recently pointed out, "there is perhaps no other major Western city that bears the marks of twentieth-century history as intensely and self-consciously as Berlin." For Huyssen among others, history has become so brutally imprinted on the physical presence of the contemporary city that it is an underlying stratum of ghostly yet palpable absences that continues to hold the city's deepest meaning and fascination.

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If much of Berlin at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains a patchwork of terrains vagues (fig. A.1-A.3) - empty spaces, forgotten buildings, and neglected sites - there are, I would suspect, ample reasons to wonder what it would mean to rewrite our...
representations of the city as modes of bereavement; to investigate, in other words, why that which would appear absent remains indeed a seething presence. After all, how do we come to terms with what modernity has rendered ghostly? How do we develop a critical language adequate to the study of such hauntings? What does it mean to associate a sense of the ghostly with particular political effects? To ask these questions is not, of course, to suggest that Berlin’s urban territory is somehow a symptom of transhistorical laws of haunting, but rather to try to do justice to an irregular historical city freighted with the phantoms of modernity’s violence and wounds.

It is with these preliminary characterizations in mind, that I propose to trace, in the following pages, the affective modalities by which we can come to accommodate the spectral revisitings of Berlin’s past. I do so not to subject the dense materiality of alternative urban imaginaries the further indignity of becoming the objects of Theory or even for that matter History or Geography. My main impulses are, if anything, as much political as they are historiographic, especially given recent planning attempts to normalise Berlin’s built environment and provide the city with a single strong identity. Whether these attempts to polish up and eviscerate historical differences in Berlin’s cityscape have been successful is open to debate. What is however certain, I would argue, is the extent to which the ongoing construction of a new identity for Berlin was always tantamount to a desire to redefine its past.

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13 It is in a similar spirit that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno appended a two-page note to *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, entitled “On the Theory of Ghosts.” Written under the sign of radical extirpation, they advocated for a kind of theory of ghosts as a way of both mourning modernity’s “wound in civilization” and eliminating the destructive forces that open it up over and over again. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1987), p. 216.

It would therefore seem that while Heinrich Mann and many of his Weimar contemporaries were haunted by the contingency of modernity, their faces largely pressed up against the window of the future, more recent attempts to come to terms with the city’s multiple pasts have much more in common, I would argue, with Benjamin’s much overworked but still irresistible image of the angel of history:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceived a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.\(^{15}\)

Benjamin’s materialist historiography differs, however, in key respects from more recent appeals to a therapeutic past. As Andreas Huyssen has, I think rightly pointed out, the millennial turn toward memory in the West has been largely brought about a desire “to anchor ourselves in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space.” These were certainly conditions to which Benjamin was himself familiar, writing under the advancing shadow of a “feral fascism.”\(^{16}\) But unlike the nostalgic desires of late-modern memory-work, Benjamin was singularly interested in a concept of history that would dispense with the sequential procession of past, present, and future in favour of a mode of thinking capable of accommodating the irruptive reappearance of the past in the present. “This is why,” he writes, “memory must not proceed by way of narrative, much less by way of reports, but must, rather, assay its spade, epically and rhapsodically in

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the most rigorous sense, in ever new places, and in the old ones, to delve into ever deeper layers.”

Taking Benjamin's lead, the following pages seek to retrace the movement of his mnemonic spade as it churned up the various fragments of Berlin's excavated past. Of course, to say, as Benjamin does, that the rewriting of memory is to proceed “rhapsodically,” is to also reject any pretension to linearity and closure. In the words of Gerhard Richter, “to think and write rhapsodically means, among other things, to operate in a disconnected style, to valorise the torn fragments of consciousness and narration without obliterating broad historical trajectories.” For Benjamin, this kind of methodological treatment was crucial to the status that he accords to the role of “constellation” and “montage” and was, as such, to find its most ambitious form in the massive collection of notes assembled in his unfinished cultural history of 19th century Paris, the Passagenwerk (Arcades Project).

If Benjamin's mode of historical writing stresses a need to accommodate the uncanny presence of the past in the present, it does largely along the lines of what he famously refers to as the “dialectical image.” “It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past,” Benjamin tells us in the Passagenwerk, “rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation like a flash of lightning. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation

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18 Gerhard Richter is right to suggest that the archaeological procedures developed by Benjamin in his Berlin Chronicle also served as an allegory of the process of writing. As he points out, an archaeologist's Scharren, or digging, is in German etymologically related to the practice of "scratching and engraving, to writing itself." See Gerhard Richter, Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), p. 47.
19 Richter, Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography, p. 47.
of the Then to the Now is dialectical – not development but image leaping forth.” It would not be difficult to see in these words one of Metropolitan Theatrics principle purposes, namely to replace the traditional narrative of Berlin’s past with a more critical and less self-assured “history of the present.”

As I hope will become clear in what follows, the ghostly presence of Weimar Berlin represents an ideal point of purchase on the predicament of the contemporary city. This hasn’t, however, always been seen to be the case. Traditional narratives of modern Germany history have typically described the Weimar Republic as the troubled interlude between two eras of greater historical significance: the Wilhelmine Kaiserreich which created a unified nation and the Third Reich which destroyed it. According to these accounts, ‘Weimar’ is frequently caricatured as a desperate and irredeemably compromised experiment in democracy whose failings would end up having profound consequences not only for Germany but the world. More often than not, such accounts also contributed to an understanding of a German exceptionalism – the Sonderweg thesis - which stressed the various ways in which Germany allegedly failed to live up to Anglo-American patterns of modernity. As a result, explaining the failure of the Weimar Republic depended largely on a retrospective teleology which inevitably read the spectre of National Socialism back into the nineteenth century.

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The long backward shadow cast by the Third Reich have tended, however, to obscure the historical record's nuances and complexities and in recent years, many historians have begun to question the master narratives that have relegated the Weimar Republic to a particular place within the trajectory of Germany's "special path" to modernity. Not only have a number of historians challenged the whole notion of a German Sonderweg, but recent historical work on the Weimar Republic has also suggested that the fourteen-year period cannot be easily committed to the arc of a single integrated narrative. As David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley have famously argued in The Peculiarities of German History, a study of the Kaiserreich period must turn its attention away from the so-called "Defizit an Bürgerlichkeit" to a thick description of the specifically German forms of "bourgeois society" and "modernity." For Blackbourn and Eley, the "peculiarities of German history" to the extent that they exist are to be found in the "contradictions of the distinctively 'bourgeois' and 'modern' features of twentieth-century German society rather than in the persistence of preindustrial remnants." In a similar vein, the historian Detlev Peukert has compellingly made the case that the rise of National Socialism represented an extreme and pathological outcome of a wider "crisis of classical modernity." In Peukert's view, the Kaiserreich, far from being a preindustrial leftover, inaugurated a period of modernity that experienced its most attenuated crisis during the years of the Weimar Republic. Drawing on

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the work of Max Weber and Michel Foucault, Peukert described how the development of a “classical modernity” combined capitalist forms of production with the broader process of social rationalization [Sozialdisziplinierung], a process in which the “life of individuals and of society as a whole was increasingly penetrated, shaped, and directed by laws, administrative agencies, social sciences, and the mechanisms and institutions of public economic, political, and cultural life.”

Like Blackbourn and Eley, Peukert promoted a normalization of German historiography refuting depictions of National Socialism as the culmination of Germany’s “historical aberrations from modernity.” As he once wrote, “positing the relative normality of German society as it modernized should trivialize neither National Socialism nor its prehistory. Rather it stands as a warning against the fallacious notion that the normality of industrial society is harmless.” And yet, Peukert goes on to also argue that while Weimar shared the contradictions of modernity with other modernising nations, these crises still anticipated the excesses of fascism:

Each individual symptom of the crisis in Germany can also be found in other modern industrial countries. To that extent the German crisis is paradigmatic. However, in Germany the modernization process prevailed during the 1920s in a more brutal and direct manner than in other countries...What was “special” in Germany between 1919 and 1932 was the abrupt and unadorned breakthrough of modernization on the one hand and the conjuncture of all to many crisis factors on the other. This special situation, however, points precisely to the vulnerability to crisis of those modernization processes which we are accustomed to regard as normal.

In the end, although Peukert’s groundbreaking work on the development of welfare policy has already achieved the status of a minor classic, his conclusions remain problematic in several respects. As a number of recent scholars have pointed out, Peukert effectively

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reduces the complexities of the Weimar welfare state to what he sees as its intrinsically
negative consequences. Indeed, for Peukert, the social discipline paradigm of welfare policy
was always in potentia fascist, bearing “unmistakable similarities to the bleak vision of
Weber’s ‘iron cage’ and Horkheimer and Adorno’s ‘dialectic of the enlightenment.’” At the
same time, Peukert’s attention to what he calls the “pathological side-effects” of “progress”
and “modernization” have also been singled out for their inability to attend to the
experimental conflict-ridden history of Weimar modernity. As the editors of the Weimar
Republic Sourcebook have argued, “the historian must recognize the variety of different
stories that can be wrested from the debris of Weimar.” A plenary understanding of the
period’s modernity only loses sight, I would argue, of the different local histories and
geographies which taken together lay claim in various ways to the “modern.” As a
consequence, diagnoses of the “Weimar symptom,” to borrow Peter Sloterdijk’s phrasing,
have often traded on a remarkably coherent landscape which has tended to flatten and fix the
period’s cultural life outside its local and proximate conditions of production.

It is, therefore, with a renewed commitment to a “sense of place,” that I set out in the
following chapters to track a rather different and adjacent set of historical geographies. In
part, this is to argue for an engagement with the sort of “place-specific experiences of
modernity” that also advance a relational understanding of modernity’s geographies,
geographies that are constantly being made and remade and that are not sutured to the
specificities of place. “These differentiated geographies,” as Miles Ogborn has recently

Press, 1998), p. 4; Similar arguments can be found in David Crew, *Germans on Welfare: From Weimar to
30 Peter Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of
31 See Keith Basso and Steven Feld, eds. *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996).
argued, “are made in the relationships between places and across spaces.” “The modern world,” he continues, “is a hybrid and cosmopolitan one forged from a multiplicity of flows and networks of people, material objects, and ideas.” To be sure, these prescriptions have themselves been traditionally tethered to the marionette movements of a monolithic modernity. More recent scholarship, however, has shifted attention away from these models focusing instead on what I would describe as the heterogeneous engineering of the modern and the multiplicity of space-times generated in the process.32

My own aim in this dissertation is to elaborate these stances not in the abstract but by working them through a case study of Weimar Berlin, the metropolis which was in many respects the crucible of Peukert’s classical German modernity. Let me state my case and lay out my cards in advance: I wish to argue that to detail Berlin’s complex, heterogeneous, and hybrid modernity is to revisit and revise the ways in which we routinely think and write about the ‘modern city.’ Bluntly stated, the majority of work on the relationship between the city and the modern has been dominated and even monopolized by discussions of nineteenth and early-twentieth century Paris and London.33 But this can I think be pressed still further. Beyond a plea for revaluation, my main objective is to show that a close, critical reading of

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the cultural practices through which a composite ‘Berlin’ was constructed opens up a series of important questions about how we come to understand the “tensions and irregularities that create modernity’s conditions of existence.” How, for example, should we read the modern city in order to make sense of its extraordinary variety and complexity? How do we accommodate the experience of modernity when it is by its very definition “always on the point of vanishing into the future?” What theoretical technologies are the most suitable to the task of writing historical geographies of modernity?34

In order to begin to answer these questions, it is my intention to build on a recent interdisciplinary body of theory which attempts to “reimagine the urban.” As Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift have argued, there is a growing momentum to understand the complexity of cities as spatial formations. In an important conspectus, they outline the key features of this new work. In the first instance, they stress an understanding of cities as “spatially open and cross-cut by many different kinds of mobilities, form flows of people to commodities and information.” These “hybrid geographies,” according to Amin and Thrift necessitate an appreciation of the urban as the product of myriad socio-material imbroglios and the systematising networks that they convene. With this mind, they also describe cities as “virtualities.” In their own words, “we understand the trajectory of cities not as being instantiated through replications of the present, but as a set of potentials….Each urban moment can spark performative improvisations which are unforeseen and unforeseeable.”35

This is not, as they suggest tantamount to a naïve vitalism but rather a commitment to the city as an arena for all manner of political possibilities and strange mappings.

34 Nead, Victorian Babylon, p. 6.
One of the crucial outcomes of this new work is to redescribe the city from its “recurrent phenomenological patterns” and to emphasize its vitality through an intimation of these very practices. This is admittedly a seductive and powerful view though one I believe still has many shortcomings. Many writers on cities outside the West complain, for example, about the restricted purchase of these urban theories obviating, as they have, the rather different experience of those places. To the extent that urban studies still needs to ‘decolonise’ its imagination of the city, I would add that it also needs to pay much more attention to a historical archive which has largely been reduced to an eviscerated caricature. I am not suggesting in any simple sense that the new urbanism isn’t really new, but rather that it would, in the spirit of a history of the present, benefit from a sustained engagement with the host of practices and performances that have already carved out much of its theoretical mandate. In the end, *Metropolitan Theatries* should be not only seen as making a contribution toward this kind of urbanism, but also as a kind of staging post for an alternative approach to the ways in which we have to come to understand the spaces of modernity.

It is for these reasons that, in my dissertation, I examine the transformation and reshaping of lives, practices, and places in Berlin between 1919 and 1933. Recent studies of Berlin have already begun to explore the city as a pre-eminent site of German modernism. Peter Fritzsche, for example, has analysed the word city choreographed by Berlin’s numerous newspapers and magazines in the first decades of the twentieth century. Michael Bienert, in a similar vein, has traced the various ways in which the city became a key topos for the feuilleton literature of the Weimar era and the city also appears fleetingly in Janet

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Ward’s recent exploration of urban visual culture in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{37} If this work has focused on different \textit{representations} of the city’s modernity, my own inquiry builds on and complicates these earlier studies by bringing Weimar Berlin into the multifaceted arena of performance studies. Indeed, the city’s restless relationship with the ‘modern’ offers, in my view, an ideal historical milieu in which to test recent performance theory while at the same time question some of its presentist assumptions. Performance, in other words, provides a critical paradigm to understand the intimate mediation of visuality, embodiment, and material culture that allied “Berlin” with “modernity.”

In turning to the performative, I am drawing on recent work within the humanities for which questions of performance and practice have assumed a certain centrality. While much of this work pays close attention to the range of embodied performances that activate, shape, and sustain everyday lives, the motivations behind this shift of focus are many.\textsuperscript{38} They range from an increased awareness of the “fleshy realities” of the human body to diverse effort to accommodate the non-human within the fabric of social life.\textsuperscript{39} Ultimately, these imperatives have largely been driven by an interest in what Peggy Phelan has described as the “immaterial allure of performance.”\textsuperscript{40} For Phelan, the undocumentable and ‘unmarked’ event of performance depends primarily on an ethos that apprehends the world less as a

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series of punctiform sites from which to extract representational meaning and instead as an ephemeral field of processes and practices, latent with political possibilities.\textsuperscript{41}

The ambitions of performance theorists to \textit{enliven} and reanimate cultural enquiry certainly holds some considerable appeal. Already practiced in the coordination of words, gestures, images, and spaces, the performing artist, as Shannon Jackson has recently pointed out,

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  is particularly well-positioned to speculate on the interdisciplinary event of culture. Combining such proprioceptive intelligences in the day-to-day decisions of rehearsal, performance knowledge further requires attention to the operationality of culture, moving between acts of abstract speculation and the urgent and stubborn pragmatics of getting the production `on its feet.'\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

But a focus on getting the production `on its feet’ has also meant that the question of \textit{liveness} itself has assumed a privileged role within performance studies. “Performance’s only life is the present,” writes Phelan, it only “becomes itself through disappearance.” According to such a view, performances are by definition transient, they are immediate yet “quickly become historical.”\textsuperscript{43} While I do not intend to dispute the notion that performances are in a constant state of appearing and vanishing, I do not think it is enough to simply accept the inherent difficulties in “tracing ways of moving, feeling, or performing in the past.”\textsuperscript{44} After all, “the pastness of performance” has recently come to figure prominently within some of the most important contributions to performance studies. From this vantage point, the very fact that performance “goes away” has been seen as “its greatest

\textsuperscript{42} Shannon Jackson, \textit{Lines of Activity}, p. v.
As Rebecca Schneider has speculated, "in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore, other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains different – appears but appears differently." To think of performance as evanescent and driven by an ontology of disappearance, is, for Schneider to see it in overwhelmingly negative terms. In contrast, Schneider wonders what it might mean to actually write histories of performance and "weave shrouds of words for bodies long gone." Is it, in other words, possible to do justice to the 'mortality' inherent in performance?

As Hayden Lorimer has suggested, much is contingent on the availability of 'archival sources' which capture or at least approximate the spectral presence of performance. The key requirement is a creative reengagement with conventional (and unconventional) 'representational' sources, rather than a strict reliance on the identification of a previously ignored corpus of embodied practices. In this way, the following chapters of this dissertation should be understood as working as much to produce an archive as to analyse one. Two main lines of inquiry animate my work here. First, I want to ask to what extent a performance history of Weimar Berlin resides ostensibly within its representations, in their texture, syntax, artistic codes, and vocabulary? Secondly, and in contrast to many studies of the modern city, I want to link up a discussion of urban representation to the whole range of performances developed to accommodate the shock of urban industrial modernity. In practical terms, this has meant that I have divided my dissertation into two main sections.

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which take up these concerns respectively. In doing so, I’ve adapted Richard Schechner’s concentric model of performance in which he distinguishes between “drama,” “script,” “theatre,” and “performance” (fig. A.4). For Schechner, “drama” is the domain most closely aligned with the representational. It is the domain of the written text, score, scenario, or plan. “Performance,” on the other end of the scale, is the broadest ill-defined domain that corresponds to the whole constellation of events and encounters that characterise the habitus of everyday life.48 I have slightly altered and simplified Schechner’s model in order to provide a guide to the dissertation’s main structure (fig. A.5). If the general movement of my argument is from the innermost circle (marked ‘representation’) to the largest (marked ‘performance’), Part One is largely tasked with marking out of the terrain of the former while Part Two concentrates on the latter.

Before I set off with this rough diagram as my guide, I do need to place some limits around it. First, I do not mean to suggest that there is any simple progression as we move from the inner circle to the outer. Secondly, I would also insist that the boundary between the two discs was always porous and my intention was never to suggest that the representational be seen as a subset of the performative only that we need to begin to understand representations as themselves performative. Ultimately, the chapters of this dissertation are organized thematically as a set of paired essays which, taken together, make a case for what can been “performed with performance’s remainders.” While they may be read as interventions that elaborate the theoretical currents set in motion in this introduction, they also serve as individual thematic essays that each address the performance of modernity from a particular angle. For this reason, I felt that it was also necessary to augment and

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revisit the introductory orientations of this chapter by prefacing each subsequent chapter of the dissertation with the appropriate commentary.

The first part is very much a close reading of texts and images and how they have come to figure Weimar Berlin as an “imagined environment.” The first chapter, “Writing the Asphalt Jungle,” describes the extent to which the real space of the city extended into and was in part performed and produced through the changing shape of its written form. Particular emphasis is placed here on the different textual forms through which a
modernizing Berlin was materialized. These themes are carried into the next chapter “Dynamik der Großstadt,” which shifts attention to the visual register and explores the ways in which Berlin solicited different ‘spaces of visibility.’ Indeed, the principal aim of this chapter is to argue that a critical interrogation of paintings, photographs, and other relevant sources demonstrates the theatricality coursing through the various locations of Weimar visual culture. My readings of select texts and images build on what is usually understood as the modernist critique of referentiality. According to this view, modern works of art and literature attempt to displace the nineteenth-century naturalistic emphasis on external reality by problematising the relation between a representation and the thing represented. If there is much to recommend this view, I would also insist that representations of Weimar Berlin need to be apprehended for their performativity. For many of the examples that I explore in the pages of my dissertation, the primary interest is not referentiality per se but rather to redirect attention towards the material composition and conduct of representations. In other words, the concern here is less one of faithfully representing Berlin and more one of performing modernity’s contradictions, i.e. of staging the anxieties and aspirations, fears and fetishisms that characterized the traumatic years of the Weimar Republic. To consider the aesthetics of urban modernism in this light is to also interrogate our understanding of the poetics of the avant-garde project that had been at the very heart of early modernism. While my doing so might easily be taken as yet another attempt to recuperate modernism’s frequently discredited politics, it does seem to me that in this context, a cautious reappraisal of one of modernism’s defining milieus – Weimar Berlin - could enrich our sense of its variegated historical geographies.

If Part One stages one strain of Berlin’s performance genealogies, Part Two explores a broader repertoire of practices which contributed to what Peter Sloterdijk once referred to as
the “theatricality” of Weimar cultural life. Chapter Three, “Traumatic Territories,” examines the traumatic re-enactments of Weimar Berlin’s post-war ‘inheritance’ in the broader context of the period’s economic instability, burgeoning status insecurity, and parliamentary crisis. It argues that the unfolding of trauma found a high degree of concentration and imaginative expansion within the performance styles of Epic Theatre, Dadaism, Kabarett, and early cinema. To expand on this perspective, I examine in Chapter Four, “Governing Performances,” a series of experimental embodiments fashioned to dissimulate the impact of the modern urban experience. While the earlier discussion of avant-garde cultural production had been confined to a limited cultural space, a more guarded fascination with bodily comportment is the subject of this chapter in which I trace the regime of everyday conduct that was itself crafted and tested in the day-to-day routines of the psychiatric sciences. In the end, these four chapters do not espouse or trade in a pro-forma reading of a particular philosophy, although their investments certainly position them philosophically. If they could, taken together, disclose something of the unsettling that accompanies Benjamin’s “dialectical image” then I would indeed be happy. At least this way we could begin to glimpse the ghostly human geographies that continue to permeate the city of Berlin and trouble its pretensions to an unfettered future. After all, as Benjamin has so often reminded us, the task of the historian is to “grasp the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.”

PART ONE:
IMAGINED ENVIRONMENTS
Chapter 1

Writing the Asphalt Jungle: Berlin and the Performance of Classical Modernity

One can approach a city by writing, once one had decoded its alphabet. Berlin’s alphabet has gaps. So the only admissible stories here are written with gaps. The fragment, this modern form of narrative, finds fertile soil in this city. The rounded-out stories with well constructed beginnings and endings and calculated climaxes take place elsewhere. But here the fractures in biographies, the memories buried under rubble, the leaves hanging loose from characters’ family trees are all visible. One goes out to collect them, always with a sense of incompleteness. One thinks one has found and one loses in the same moment.

- Zafer Senocak

1 A much abbreviated version of this chapter was published in Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 21 (2003), pp. 169-184.
Re-Writing the City

There is no city in the world so restless as Berlin. Everything moves.
- Harold Nicolson

It is difficult to describe Berlin. Berlin does not allow herself to be captured.
- V. Shklovsky

This chapter marks the point where the representational and the performative meet. Here, versions of a written Berlin hinge on their almost obsequious appeal to archiving a persistently eventful city. Here, one confronts the performance of a city in which the key terms and practices of its operation are never fully secure, a performance that "anxiously crosses various stories, theories, [images], texts, intertexts, and spheres of practice, unable to settle into a clear, linear course, neither willing nor able to stop moving, restless and transitive, traversing spatial and temporal borders" And it is here, among the stacks of photocopies which marked my archival presence, that I had unwittingly tracked the remains of an alternative historical geography lodged within the 'textual lineaments' of modernity's material culture. Doing so, has meant not only an engagement with the possibilities of re-locating performance in the archival repository, it has also been about a resistance to what Scott Spector calls "territorial ideology," a conceptual system which underlabours to read and write the city as an abstracted knowable space.

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4 Viktor Shklovsky, Zoo oder Briefe nicht über die Liebe (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1965), p. 71; originally published in Russian in 1923.
city,” as Henri Lefebvre reminds us, “is not to know the city and the urban.”

For Lefebvre (among others), the imaginative geographies of the modern city cannot be reduced to one structural model or order which [re]arranges the city ipso facto into a single ‘territory’, a space of recognizable indices and icons.

These characterizations should not be taken to suggest that the modern city is completely unyielding to forms of representation. To argue that the texture of metropolitan experience lies somehow outside representation and that the “vicissitudes of the urban sensorium” are incommensurate with forms of representation is to miss the fact that they are already a part of the world of representation. Indeed, the following chapter builds on recent work within the field of study usually referred to as ‘writing the city.’ This multidisciplinary field explores the performative relationship between cities and the texts which enact them and does not depend or inadvertently reinscribe the predictable and now notorious separation between text and city, nor the invariant one-to-one correspondence between representation and reality. On the contrary, the process of writing the city remains irrefutably bound up with unstable spaces which disclose, broadly speaking, the dense materiality of the city. To write, following Maurice Blanchot, is the same thing as to form and indeed these ‘metrotexts,’ “all carry within themselves their own formative geographies: they are events

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that enact, that gather into themselves, the compound spatialities of experience, encounter, and representation."¹¹

In order to elaborate a more detailed and nuanced account of these claims, I want to read them against what is often troped as the modernist critique of referentiality and its singular preoccupation with charting an all-too-familiar "poetics of indeterminacy."¹² While I want to retain something of these ambitions, my concern in what follows is to draw attention to the essential materiality of the modernist text.¹³ A focus on the messy event of language should not, in this way, be seen as another imperialism of écriture, a reproach often levelled against certain versions of literary criticism. "The materiality of the text," as Michael Davidson has rightly pointed out, "exists in relationship to institutions for which materiality is important, for which objects remain discrete markers of cultural development and progress."¹⁴ In this respect, my focus on Weimar Berlin is hardly coincidental. It was, after all, in the 1920s that the meaning of materiality emerged as the object of a profound and often anxious engagement that we find in the work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Georg Lukács, and Martin Heidegger, and in the reclamatory activities of the Bauhaus, Dadaism, and the Neue Sachlichkeit.¹⁵ Admittedly, such an interest in material culture raises many questions, not least about how we come to write historical

¹⁴ Davidson, Ghostlier Demarcations, p. 33.
geographies of Weimar Berlin even if (and perhaps because) this comes to problematise what we mean by "Weimar," "Modernity," and the "City." My own purpose in posing them is to confront the means of material production out of which new forms of urban understanding emerged. To 're[write]' Berlin is to thus proceed in a pars pro toto fashion tracing how a range of writers came to be "irritated" by a particularly overdetermined urban presence – early twentieth century Berlin.\(^{16}\) For many of these writers, the textual production and performance of a modern Berlin heralded the capacity of the urban text to imaginatively re-map the condition of the city onto the text itself – hence the fashioning of textual presences as surrogate city spaces. But, more than anything else, 'writing the asphalt jungle,' transposed the vivid presence of a rapidly changing metropolis into a series of reiterated tropes, points of view, figures of speech, and repeated syntactical structures, all of which staged the impossibility of being able to describe Berlin with any sense of completeness or closure.\(^ {17}\)

If the cultural history of the city that I have in mind here, resides ostensibly within its representations, in their texture, syntax, artistic codes, and vocabulary, I want to pay particular attention to the local elements that 'compose' Berlin's belated modernity and highlight what Lynda Nead has recently referred to as "the tensions and irregularities that create modernity's conditions of existence."\(^ {18}\) In order to do so, I want to suggest that the performance to which writing Berlin attests depends on the deployment of 'Berlin' as a

\(^{17}\) Numerous contemporary German references to the literature of the period (especially the Weimar Republic) described what they called "asphalt" literature. "Asphalt" adumbrated a whole citationary structure synonymous with the textual performance of urban modernism. This was related, moreover, to a much wider discourse on the nature of the relationship between the modern metropolis and modern capitalism explored by a diverse group of commentators including Max Weber, Werner Sombart, Georg Simmel, and even Friedrich Ratzel. See David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Werner Sombart, "Der Begriff der Stadt und das Wesen der Städtebildung," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 25 (1907), pp. 1-9.  
‘travelling’ sign and as a series of ‘moving’ images. A close reading of what are primarily literary texts will concentrate on how the multiple spaces of German Modernism were formed around a citationary structure in which successive writers invoked ‘Berlin’ as a privileged site co-articulated with competing or alternative versions of modernity. Whether one chooses to emphasize the feuilletonistic images of Walter Benjamin, Franz Hessel, and Siegfried Kracauer and their contemporaries or the ambulatory qualities of the ‘big-city’ novels of Alfred Döblin and Paul Gurk, common to all of these representations of the city is the key role of Berlin in the struggle over the meaning of modernity as a mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomenon of the urban environment.  

Setting aside traditional claims for the autonomous status of literary modernism, the following pages are less concerned with charting the internal divergences of modernism than with the development of an argument which focuses on how the poetics of writing Berlin overlap with a more expansive history and economy of sensory perception. This will be plotted in two interrelated ways. First, in the proliferation of textual strategies which approximate the montage effect of a rapidly modernizing metropolis. Second, in the writerly anticipation of cinematic innovations as a scripting of modernity’s ‘moving’ urban culture. Taken together, these writings inhabit travelling geographies which encompass, if nothing else, an immediate tactile encounter with the materiality of the modern city. Indeed, it is one of the central points of this chapter to claim that there is something doggedly persistent about the ways in which a modernizing Berlin was made tangible through its textual archive. This is registered in the autobiographical corpus staged by Benjamin in his Berlin writings, in the critical hermeneutics of Kracauer’s reportage, or even in the impressionistic contours of

Hessel's retrospective flânerie. Beyond the procession of canonical figures, I want to sketch in, where appropriate, the work of Bertolt Brecht, Erich Kästner, Irmgard Keun, Walter Mehring and Walter Serner not to mention supporting contexts from a vernacular modernism squarely located in a popular print culture. It has, however, been necessary to limit and rule out many unjustly underrated texts as well as many popular ones. The point it seems to me is not to try to exhaust an archive, a Sisyphean task at any rate, but rather to elaborate on some of the terms through which a ‘word city’ was constructed, consolidated, and contested.

As is also this case, this is an undertaking closely attuned to the tacit performativity of urban spectatorship and the changing relations between spatial perception and bodily motion which underwrite the city of ‘asphalt culture.’ These performances, where travel and text constantly fold into each other, constitute “mobilized territories,” or “mappings of practiced places.” For Giuliana Bruno, they disclose spatial practices “through which the dynamics of space, movement, and narrative impose themselves on the body.” Ultimately, for the writers here considered, ‘Berlin’ demonstrates the extent to which the changing space of the city extends into and is in part produced through the shape of its written form. In works ranging from journalistic reportage to novels, Berlin-as-text thus offers us no mastering form or code despite efforts to control and manage its ‘geographical’ condition. What I hope to show instead are the ways in which the act of writing Berlin directs the spectral nature of its performance against formal representation and structure. The fact that such a performance exceeds and recedes from the strictures of conventional historiography need not be seen as a

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methodological conundrum. Rather, I believe, following the performance theorist Peggy Phelan, that something substantial can in fact be made from the outline of a city’s past left long after it has disappeared. Paraphrasing Phelan, my hunch is that the “affective outline” of what seems lost might in fact bring us closer to the Berlin we still want (and need) to understand and make sensible, a pressing predicament given the extent to which the newly reconstructed Berlin is singularly treated as a place to locate dramatic and sweeping narratives of urban transformation. “Writing the asphalt jungle” dramatizes the pull, in other words, of another modus operandi, one which is less about the loss of the past than marking the resilience of its performance in text.  

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Performing the Word City

The excitement of the streets, the stores, the vehicles is the energy that I must accommodate in my writing. This is the petrol that fuels my engine.

-Alfred Döblin

Oh Berlin, how far you are from being a true capital. You have become a capital overnight through political fortuitousness, not through your own devices.

-Theodor Fontane

Unlike Paris or London, Berlin has historically been troped as a unique symbol of presentness, contemporaneity, or simultaneity, and it was rapid urbanization in the years after the founding of the German Reich in 1871 that inaugurated the first Gründerzeit as the major period of socio-spatial transformation in which Berlin was re-imagined as the new imperial capital and a major industrial metropolis. Berlin’s wholesale transformation into a modern metropolis was all the more remarkable for a community that had remained a peripheral Prussian town well into the 19th century. While the city’s status as the administrative capital of Prussia had spawned a neo-classical architectural renaissance in the early years of the 19th century, it was the abrogation of economic tariffs and the expansion of the German customs union in the 1830s which opened the city up to new economic markets and incipient industrialization. As the textile, machine, and metalworking industries gained prominence, the city grew rapidly doubling in population between 1849 and 1871. Even so, it was ultimately the proclamation of a unified German State in 1871 which was the catalyst.

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25 Gründerzeit refers to the foundational period in German history after the unification of the country in 1870. It is often used to index a particular building style and the building boom which Berlin witnessed after unification. For a comprehensive account of Berlin’s history see Wolfgang Ribbe, ed. Geschichte Berlins, 2. Vol. (Berlin: Berlin Wiss.-Verlag, 2002); an entirely conventional account can also be found in Alexandra Ritchie, Faust’s Metropolis: A History of Berlin (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). For a different perspective see Werner Süß and Ralf Rytlewski, Berlin: Die Hauptstadt (Berlin: Nicolai, 1999); Hansen, “America, Paris, the Alps,” p. 385. The most notable contribution to the geography of Berlin remains Friedrich Leyden, Groß-Berlin: Geographie der Weltstadt (Berlin: Gebr.-Mann Verlag, 1933).
Fig. 1.1 Population graphs for Berlin and outlying suburbs, 1700-1930.
Fig. 1.2 Map of Groß-Berlin after incorporation in 1920.
for a new and accelerated phase of urban expansion transforming the provincial capital into a true *Weltstadt*, an industrial and commercial centre of global significance. As migrants arrived in large numbers from the provinces of Silesia, East Prussia, and Brandenburg, the population of Berlin exploded from around 825,000 in 1871 to over two million by the turn of the century (fig. 1.1). In 1920, the surrounding cities were finally incorporated to create Groß-Berlin, an agglomeration of over four million inhabitants.

Of course, Berlin’s status as *Großstadt* was never simply a matter of having attained a particular level of population as some contemporary commentators suggested. Much of the change was socio-geographic especially given the manner in which new flows of capital had been unleashed to the task of restructuring the built environment. Entirely new zones, grafted at sharp angles onto the old Prussian centre testified to the city’s rapid growth and its status as the *Fabrikstadt* [Factory City] *par excellence*. New factories spread west down the Spree River and ultimately in other directions as well. Round them clustered the largely proletarian precincts of Wedding in the north, Neukölln in the south, and a wide crescent of neighbourhoods extending north and east from Alexanderplatz. Industrial wealth also helped create the middle-class suburbs to the west and southwest (Charlottenburg, Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg) (fig. 1.2). While Haussmannization in Second Empire Paris could lay claim to having achieved the imbrication of governmental rationalities and modern infrastructural systems, similar attempts in Berlin were peculiarly fractured and uneven. Efforts to control unfettered urban development through the implementation of a *Generalbebauungsplan* [General Building Plan] in 1863 proved wholly inadequate and only exacerbated overcrowding and speculation. Subsequent attempts to accommodate the excesses of industrial modernity were partially achieved under the auspices of Martin Wagner in his capacity as *Oberbaurat* for city planning in Berlin from 1925-1933. While the rise of Berlin
as an industrial city heralded the penetration of capital circulation into new spaces of industrial production, the construction of multiple and often intersecting human geographies of consumption only reinforced the city’s identification as a metaphor and model for a runaway modernity. Berlin contained, as it were, its own version of disorder in which “the fugitive appearances, unexpected encounters, and rapid fluctuations of the city challenged nineteenth-century certainties again and again.”

By the onset of the 1920s, a historian of the city could plausibly claim that Berlin was a place “everywhere lacking in characteristic and valuable records of its history.” Successive phases of creative destruction led contemporaries to condemn an urban environment that provided few orientation points for its citizens. Instead, it had become a popular cliché to describe the city as a Kolonialstadt, a frontier settlement that conferred on the city its reputation for provisionality and instability. For these critics of the “parvenu polis,” Berlin could not and would not lend itself to traditional aesthetic certainties according to which architectural artefacts, cityscapes, and intelligible texts would be made to perform as a formal guide linking places and names while designating a secure relationship between seeing and knowing. Karl Scheffler noted as much in 1910 when he wrote that:

Berlin is not elegance and taste set into the landscape, but separated from it as something alien. This effect is reinforced by the unsuitability of the terrain on which Berlin is built. The ground is flat, it lacks the hills and hollows which make a city landscape attractive, create viewpoints, architectural unity, and picturesque streets.

For Scheffler, editor of the leading art journal Kunst und Künstler, the city represented the “capital of all modern ugliness.” A few years earlier, the politician Walter Rathenau

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described Berlin as an “ugly bastard among cities,” a locus of architectural tastelessness and inconsistency. “A city does not necessarily need beautiful buildings,” he writes,

but when it must also do without scenic beauty, without a liberating view of the sea, without broad, flowing rivers, without even the picturesque charm of sky and atmosphere, then it has the duty to create a significant and well-planned arrangement of its streets... I prefer to say 'streetscape' or cityscape, as that which is of utmost importance is the actual scenic view in general; this is created through the organizing and arranging of masses in the same manner as a natural landscape proceeds out of the grouping of masses of mountains and vegetation. Whoever has once set foot on Trafalgar Square or the Place de la Concorde, Piccadilly or the Piazza della Signoria can appreciate what a stirring impression urban scenery - purely as a general picture, not as an effect of single works - is called upon to make.  

What Rathenau defined as the “overall image” [Gesamtbild] of a metropolis was intended as a formulation of something Berlin lacked and it pointed to an understanding of the city’s modernity which dissolved the possibilities of a centred and composed picture.

Representing Berlin was indeed haunted by a crisis of perception which coincided with the [historical] moment at which it was “no longer possible to hold a certain position.” The local essayist Arthur Eloesser, who penned numerous sketches of city life, noted in 1912 that “Berlin used to have a physiognomy when it still was poor, when it consisted of philistines, officers, civil servants, and academics.” But now, “everything is provisional, and whoever was born in Berlin finds himself less at home there than a newly arrived inhabitant, who does not have to cast off any inhibiting memories or troublesome sentiments in order to jump into the flowing present and swim toward a shoreless future.” “It is as if Berlin were built on nothing,” added Wilhelm Hausenstein, “[one] feels no ground, and precisely this is the location of the city.”

For those who therefore experienced the restless geographies of German industrial expansion, Berlin became the arena of frantic circulation synonymous with the growth of urban traffic, the distribution of mass-produced goods, and the consolidation of new technologies of transportation and communication (fig. 1.3). Writing in 1929, Paul Westheim described the city as a chaotic scene striated by the constant movement of machines and human bodies: “how the traffic rushes in from all sides, streetcars, automobiles, people hurrying blindly towards their destinations, how it entangles and disentangles itself, swells and ebbs away, surges, pushes, flows without ever exhausting itself.” Indeed, Wilhelm Hausenstein spoke for many when he concluded that “Berlin has
drawn up a simple equation, life equals traffic. In Berlin the act of moving, gliding, circulating is made out to be the essence of existence.”

If speed and circulation were key elements within the developing lexicon of Weimar modernity, they were also implicated in modes of representation committed to the immediacy of metropolitan experience. For Walter Benjamin, these agitations found a sanctioning framework amidst the idiosyncrasies and textures of the local dialect. As he proclaimed in a children’s radio broadcast from 1929: “Berlinisch has its origin in the working-class. It’s not found in writers and academics, but in locker rooms and at card tables, on buses and in pawnshops, in sport arenas and factories. Berlinisch is the language of people who are always in a hurry and often have to communicate with a mere hint, a glance, half a word [Das Berlinische ist eine Sprache von Leuten, die keine Zeit haben, die sich oft mit einer ganz kurzen Andeutung, einem Blick, einem halben Wort verständigen müssen].” Benjamin was hardly alone in acknowledging the actuality of what came to be called Berliner Schnautze. An abiding interest in popular speech styles was a point seized on by many local writers including the city’s cabaretic artists whose chansons increasingly dropped the traditional couplet form in favour of an idiom more appropriate to the rhythms of a modernizing metropolis.

The songs of Walter Mehring, in particular, were singled out by critics impressed with their ability to capture the performance of metropolitan modernity. “[Mehring] has a new

35 Alan Lareau, The Wild Stage: Literary Cabarets of the Weimar Republic (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995). An interest in Berlinisch can be traced back to the early 19th century and included writers as diverse as Adolf Glassbrenner, Theodor Fontane, and Heinrich Zille.
36 Walter Mehring (1896-1981) was a member of the Dada Movement in Berlin between 1918-1920 before turning his full attention to the postwar cabaret scene, especially the more political version practiced in clubs like Schall und Rauch (Sound and Smoke) and Die Wilde Bühne (The Wild Stage). Walter Mehring, Chronik der Lustbarkeiten: Die Gedichte, Lieder und Chansons, 1918-1933 (Berlin: Claassen Verlag, 1981); also see
sensibility, a new rhythm, a new technique," noted Kurt Tucholsky, editor of Die Weltbühne, in a review of his collection Das politische Cabaret. As a bricolage of jazz rhythms, advertisements, newspaper headlines, political slogans, and scraps of local dialect, songs by Mehring like “Berlin Simultan,” “Gleisdreieck,” “Heimat Berlin” generated, in Tucholsky’s words, “an effect similar to driving past a wall of posters.” Mehring’s montage poetry owes much, in this respect, to the language games of his Berlin Dada counterparts, especially in their insistence on recasting more traditional ways of describing the discords and dissonances of the city. The song “Gleisdreieck,” for example, refers to a train station in Berlin where several different underground lines crossed. Mehring textualises this image adopting a form of lyrical parataxis in which an abrupt series of verbal outbursts are organised into two parallel columns:

| Kutschke und | Untergrund |
| Droschke und | Kuunterbund |
| Mund an Mund | Kurve! und |
| Los-töff – töff! | Republik |
| Pierot | General |
| Pierett’ | Und sozial |
| Numéro | Allemal |
| Soixant’neuf | mit Mus-sik! |
| Seidne, be | Rasen |
| Scheidene, | Phrasen und |
| Alles im | Faseln im |
| Kater | Fieber. |
| Lebemann | Rassen und |
| Ehemann | Klassen das |
| Achherrjeh! | Gleiche Ka- |
| Vater | liber |

Jeder in
Anderer
Richtung und


38 That Gleisdreieck became something of a textual cipher or material proxy for the vicissitudes of industrial modernity is a point taken up by Michael Bienert, Das eingebildete Metropole.
Achtung! Das
Gleis-drei-eck

[Taxi and carriage and mouth-to-mouth, let’s go, beep-beep! Pierrot, Pierrett, numero soixant-neuf! Silky ones, modest ones, everyone’s hung over! Dandy, husband, ohmygood, Father! Underground, allaround, curve! And Re-pu-blic! General, social, everything with music! Raging, clichés, fevering babbling! Races, classes, all the same thing! Everybody going in different directions – and Beware! The Tracks are crossing!]39

This is a text not only preoccupied with recording the breathless pace of the modern city, but also itself remarkably fast-moving. Lexically and syntactically, it recalls the typographical experiments of Dada collage, a succession of fragments which, in their very juxtaposition, thematise the kind of experience for which the eponymous Gleisdreieck station had become a privileged theatre (fig. 1.4). In this case, however, the genre of ekphrasis is also extended to its breaking point, to the point where the visual organisation of the chanson-poem has itself become a verbal artefact rendering iconic the visual form that it supposedly addresses.40

Fig. 1.4
Gleisdreieck in construction, 1912. •

39 Walter Mehring, Das Ketzerbrevier: Ein Kabarettprogramm (München: Wolff, 1921), p. 19-20. For the sake of doing justice to the visual and metrical organization of Mehring’s chanson, I’ve reproduced the German text in full with the English translation below. In the actual performance of the song, the singer skipped from one side of the lyrics to the other and back.
While the overt experimentalism of Mehring’s liveliest numbers may often focused on the spatial organization of the printed page, his work also traded heavily in the political possibilities that inhered within the metrical patterns of everyday speech. Unlike later trends in Weimar verse which stressed a utilitarian approach to the reportage of modern urban life, Mehring’s chansons often reassembled the fragments of received street wisdom into a succession of sardonic reflections on the “urban life-cycle:”

Schliesslich land’t man treu und wacker
Ausjebaggert
Uff’m Acker,
Sacht nicht: meff
Leichenschauhaus zahlt die Rente
Und verwendt dir
Zu Zemente,
Altes Reff!
Nächtes Jahr deckt’s Jross-Stadtpflaster
Deine Laster!
Denn wo Gottes Mühlen mahlen,
Wächtst keen Jras Mehr!

In the end, you loyal trooper,
your land clapped out in the cemetary
you’ve breathed your last!
It’s the mortuary’ll pay your pension,
and use you for cement,
you old soak!
Next year the city streets will cover your vices!
For where the mills of God grind,
The grass never grows!\(^{41}\)

In the end, the example of Mehring’s chansons helps us to see to what extent the vagaries of metropolitan modernity promoted a system of representation that would best reflect a city described by Ernst Bloch as “extraordinarily contemporaneous, a constantly new city, built hollow, on which not even the lime becomes or is really set.”\(^{42}\) While it would be easy here to suggest that Bloch was restating one of the powerful myths that has come to sustain our understanding of Weimar Berlin as a city of fragmentation and flux, this is not the same as saying that the city lacks “order.” Instead, it may well be – and this was certainly Bloch’s view – that it was the forces of uncertainty themselves which provided an alibi for


the economic mechanisms that rendered palpable the dense materiality of the *Großstadt*.

Ultimately, these preoccupations highlighted the problem of constructing a privileged *point of view* around which to hold and frame the city as a legible space. Berlin had, so it seemed, turned the mobile, anonymous public experience of the city – inhabiting and navigating space – into a visual flux, a shifting perceptual arena in which the city, as Alfred Döblin once noted, "is for the most part indiscernible [*unsichtbar*].”43 Problems of urban understanding were an unavoidable issue here, especially given the realist conceit that the modern city was ultimately knowable, that it could be faithfully described and mimetically represented without drawing attention to its own conventionality.44

For many contemporary commentators, a sustained engagement with the *modernity* of Berlin depended on the unique vision provided by the classic flâneur. While one may wish, on historical grounds to confine the flâneur to his original parameters, Paris in the 1830s and 1840s, there is ample evidence to suggest that this figure was alive and well on the streets of the German capital in the 1920s. Indeed, it was the congruence between the flâneur’s manner of seeing and the collective state of the times that, for Walter Benjamin, accounts for the "return of the flâneur" in Weimar Berlin.45 As an active theme in representing the city, the category of flânerie was not without its shortcomings and over the course of this chapter various incarnations of flânerie on the streets of Berlin will be considered. For the moment, however, let us remind ourselves of the definition supplied by Franz Hessel: “strolling [*flanieren*],” Franz Hessel explained, “is a way of reading the street [*eine Art Lektüre der Strasse*] whereby faces, displays, show windows, café terraces, cars, tram tracks, and trees

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all turn into an entire series of equivalent letters, which together form words, sentences and pages of an always-changing book.”

“Heaps of words and piles of goods did in fact circulate in the metropolis and could be idly browsed,” but Fritzsche asks, “could they be read and interpreted as fragments of a coherent [narrative]?” Hessel understood their meanings as fleeting and contingent. “Other Berliners,” Fritzsche notes, “…found the words in the street “jumbled and the sentences and pages they composed unintelligible.” Texts were, after all, active on these streets, re-inscribing the heteroglossia of print culture within a popular geography of billboards, placards, and neon signs which covered the facades of city buildings. As a local newspaper proclaimed, “Berlin ist allerlei” (Berlin is everywhere) a continuous web of textualisations that grew thicker with each succeeding year.47 The result, in the words of Walter Benjamin, was a new cityscape where “locust swarms of print” repeatedly bombarded metropolitan readers:

Script...is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos...If centuries ago it began gradually to lie down, passing from the upright inscription to the manuscript resting on sloping desks before finally taking itself to bed in the printed page, it now begins just as slowly to rise again from the ground. The newspaper is read more in the vertical than in the horizontal plane, while film and advertisement force the printed word entirely into the dictatorial perpendicular.

If Benjamin’s characterisations highlight the degree to which the means of mass representation had come to govern the symbolic economy of the city, the sheer surfeit of texts seemingly presented Berlin to its subjects as a dilemma of reading and recognition, a book that simply refused a close reading.

47 Fritzsche, Reading Berlin 1900, p. 170, p. 129.
That Berlin figured as an avatar of unreadibility is a seductive view easily supported by the various bits and pieces of newspapers, schedules, advertisements, handbills, and posters that littered the streets of the city (fig. 1.5). In this regard, however, we should perhaps avoid what has become something of a routine occasion within modernism – the notion that the modern city “lies beyond intelligibility.” Rather, I would draw attention to the ways in which a “word city” actively produced what we tend to call the metropolitan everyday.  

Newspapers, serial novels, advertisements all, in their own way, presumed the extent to which the material landscape of the city had re-aligned the relationships of its subjects to the momentary culture of modernity, and where textual cartography had itself become a form of

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embodied choreography. The consequence was a shift from static representation to a *kinaesthetic imaginary* where space and movement converged. For many Berliners, the city unfolded in the creative act of becoming, providing a kinetic seeing body ample opportunity to experience uncertain social and durational trajectories. The “creation and apprehension of movement” thus took on a pivotal role in approximating the irreproducible presence of modern Berlin. The local 1913 guidebook *Berlin für Kenner*, for one, recommended that “connoisseurs” hazard a trip on the Omnibus in the early evening to experience the striking contrasts and colours of a city in transition: “The incredible image of the movement of people, lights, and vehicles which now meets the eye,” the guide writes, “that is Berlin. The highlight is where the bus turns from Leipziger Strasse into Friedrichstrasse and the flood of neon signs, lamps, and banners all the way to the Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse comes alive with the heaving crowd of people.” Fleeting impressions and momentary encounters characterized the shifting texture of a city, a tableau vivant which precipitated a juxtaposition — even a montage — of disparate images. Berlin as “movement-image,” was never “constantly present, never constant as a stable entity or identity,” and it was the act of writing (about) Berlin which served to produce a layer of mediation capable of choreographing the eventfulness of the city.

My main point here is to begin to work towards one version of what Michael Davidson has recently described as modern writing’s “material character.” For Davidson, a materialist

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54 Wolfreys, *Writing London*, p. 130.
reading of the city-in-text “suggests the need for a historicist perspective in which textual layers refer not only to previous texts but to the discursive frame of the present in which they are seen.” Hence, the “textual condition” explored in this chapter, one which underscores both the materiality of the modernist city and the important sense in which writing organizes in advance the scripting of urban space. I have chosen here to speak of “scripting” because it emphasizes the production (and consumption) of spaces that reach beyond the narrowly textual, and also because it foregrounds the performative and so brings into view discursive framings that were themselves bodily framings, namely the postures and performances, alignments and dispositions of a seeing body. From this view, the performance of writing with which I am concerned actualises or, as it were, innervates the political and aesthetic implications immanent to reconstituting Berlin in textual form. Writing Berlin recovers and reactives the unseen, the distracted, the familiar and habitual as a means of adapting the physis to the alienating sensibilities of twentieth-century urbanism. In this respect, I wish to shift attention back to the question of modernity in its profane actuality not only in terms of the impact of industrial-capitalist technology, commodity production, and the emergence of mass society, but also in terms of “new modes of organizing vision and sensory perception, a new relationship with ‘things’, different forms of mimetic experience and expression, of

57 I am drawing here on Miriam Hansen’s excellent discussion of Benjamin’s use of the term innervation. As Hansen points out, Benjamin “understood innervation as a two-way process, that is, not only a conversion of mental, affective energy into somatic, motoric form, but also the possibility of reconverting, and recovering, split-off psychic energy through motoric stimulation...This possibility would make the protective shield against stimuli, the precarious boundary or rind of the bodily ego, a bit less of a carapace or armor and a bit more of a matrix or medium - a porous interface between the organism and the world that would allow for a greater mobility and circulation of psychic energies.” In this way, innervation is recast as an antidote – or counterconcept - to technologically multiplied shock and its anaesthetizing economy. Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” Critical Inquiry 25 (1999), pp. 306-343, p. 317.
affectivity, temporality, and reflexivity, and a changing fabric of everyday life, sociability, and leisure." The premise of writing the city, of writing about the modern city, depended, in other words, upon an enabling reception and adaptation to the destabilizing nature of what one was quite literally caught up in describing.

In the remainder of this section then, I focus on scriptings that incorporated textual practices – reading and writing – as central moments in the production and reproduction of Berlin as a visual enigma: an opaque surface whose cultural inscriptions dispel the possibility of mimetic or realistic interpretation. Knowledge of the city could only be provisional and tentative. It follows that if Berlin preserved its mysteries, it also profited from their spatialising. As Curt Moreck noted in his well-known underground guide to Berlin nightlife, *Fuhrer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin*,

> Every city has an official and an unofficial side, and it goes without saying that the latter is the more interesting one and more revealing for the understanding of an urban entity. Everything that lies so exposed in the light of the street lamps shows a face that resembles more a mask than the features of a human being. It shows a smile that is merely an appeal to the pocketbook...One who searches for experiences, who demands adventures, who hopes for sensations – someone like this will have to walk in the shadows.

For Moreck, the city never became, as de Certeau puts it, *“un espace propre,”* a space through which a particular constellation of power-knowledge has mastered and transformed the growing complexities of urban reality into easily readable spaces. Alternatively, Moreck’s Berlin trades, albeit cautiously, on *“les espaces autres,”* the other spaces (heterotopias) of modern Berlin which constantly threatened to disrupt its closures and

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certainties, a kind of "accursed share left over by the [calculations] of social rationality."\(^{62}\) Moreck's general fascination with seedy cafés, clubs, dance-halls, and the underworld textualises what Roach has in another context called "vortices of behaviour;"

improvisational sites which militate against reducing Berlin to the number and sum of its textual traces, marks, and signs.\(^{63}\)

Such a formulation, however, does not quite get the measure of anxiety and instability which characterized the Berlin of classical modernity, a period that "rehearsed the contradictions of modernization in belated and accelerated form."\(^{64}\) Not only was the physical fabric of the city widely identified as an instrument of systematized alienation, "metropolis" or "Großstadt" had, by the First World War, already become a word that implied both a physical site and a pathological state.\(^{65}\) Urban space, according to these various views, was a major source of fear and anxiety not to mention their psychological counterparts, anxiety neuroses and phobias. In this sense, Berlin's situated modernism was specifically linked to the disquieting slippage between a place where men (the gender ascription is significant) expected to feel at home and the sense that that place is a definitive manifestation of the unheimlich, the uncanny.\(^{66}\) The 'modern uncanny,' re-imagined as the illegible city of mystery, inevitably returned to haunt the latent positivity of the city as a stable, fixed representational form. After all, "fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions;"


\(^{63}\) Roach, Cities of the Dead, p. 28; Wolfeys, Writing London, p. 45.

\(^{64}\) Hansen, "America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity," p. 366.


\(^{66}\) Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny, p. x.
Walter Benjamin once remarked, “which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it.”\(^{67}\) That the shock of the ‘modern’ fostered, as a consequence, a new level of adaptability among city-dwellers to the seemingly fortuitous conditions of the city is by now a commonplace observation.\(^{68}\) What is more important for our purposes is the extent to which the ‘unsettledness’ of Berlin could never offer a comprehensive arrangement of the city in text. Berlin may be plausibly understood therefore as a spatial or geographical correlate to the “transcendental homelessness” that Georg Lukács saw in the 1920s as the predicament of modernity.\(^{69}\) Plausible only, as a function of competing narratives which were themselves an accumulation of diverse formations of class, race, gender, and sexuality.\(^{70}\) Yet here much caution is necessary. For by the mid-1920s, a recognition of cultural difference was already competing with a revivified realism which anxiously tried to recuperate a de-authenticated world and the conditions of its representability. Much of this, to be sure, fell under the banner of the \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} movement with its emphasis on urban reportage and matter-of-fact observation. At the same time, countless popular treatises offered tools to sharpen perception and a growing interest among city-dwellers for numerous volumes on physiognomy, characterology, and even graphology certainly highlighted an

intensifying crisis in representing the space of modern Berlin in an unproblematic or static way.  

While the imaginative geographies of a modern Berlin signalled in some important measure the exhaustion of ‘representation,’ as it was conventionally understood, they also dramatised the dissolution of established identities and conventions as in the case of the protagonist in Viktor Shklovsky’s 1923 epistolary novel, *Zoo oder Briefe nicht über die Liebe*. “I am now confused,” he writes, “because this asphalt, polished smooth by the rows of automobiles, these neon signs, these elegantly dressed women, all this confuses me. Here I am not the one I used to be, here, it seems, I am out of sorts.” Better known as a leading proponent of Russian formalism, it would be tempting to align Shklovsky’s famous formalist doctrine of “making it strange” or “defamiliarization,” [*ostranie*] to his experiences as a member of the Russian émigré community that found a home in Berlin during the 1920s and included among its ranks, writers as diverse as Shklovsky, Andrei Bély, Vladimir Nabokov, and Boris Pasternak.

If such a view undoubtedly risks prioritising biography at the expense of literary criticism, the decentring and dispersal of the subject was, nevertheless a *characteristica formalis* of writing Berlin. As Alfred Döblin noted in one of his many essays on literary form and technique, “I am not me, rather I am the streets, the lights, this and that event, nothing else” [*Ich bin nicht ich, sondern die Strasse, die Laternen, dies und dies Ereignis, weiter nichts*]. What lay behind Döblin’s preoccupation with the crisis of subjectivity was not an interest in providing simple psychological explanations for his characters’

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motivations. Döblin, himself a practicing psychiatrist, excoriated the psychological novel of the 19th century with its singular emphasis on the consistency of character and the narrator’s ability to sustain a coherent account of his or her characters’ psychological make-up.\(^75\) In contrast, Döblin advocated a form of empiricist psychology restricting himself to the strict scientific observation of what he described as “events and movements” \(\text{[Abläufe und Bewegungen]}\).\(^76\) The montage form that Döblin develops to great effect in \textit{Berlin Alexanderplatz} was, in this way, a consequence of his attempt to refine the presentation of urban phenomena in strict accordance with the scientific demands of psychological description.\(^77\) Observed phenomena are thus present in \textit{Berlin Alexanderplatz} not simply to create an ekphrastic collage of metropolitan life but because they are constitutive parts of an observational field increasingly hostile to the independence and coherence of the modern subject. We see this immediately in Franz Biberkopf’s initial movement into the space of the narrative in Alfred Döblin’s \textit{Berlin Alexanderplatz}:

He shook himself, gulped. He stepped on his own foot. Then he made a run and was sitting in the streetcar. In the midst of people. Start. At first it was as if one was at the dentist, who has grabbed a root with forceps and pulled, the pain grows, one’s head wants to burst. He turned his head back toward the red wall, but the streetcar raced on with him along the tracks, only his head still faced the prison. The streetcar made a turn, trees, houses intervened. Busy streets sprang up, Seestrasse, people got on and off. Something inside him screamed with terror: Look out, look out, it’s starting now.\(^78\)

Biberkopf’s terror at being plunged back into the city precipitates a “radical disturbance in his perceptual field.”\(^79\) The teeming crowds surrounding him suddenly appear lifeless, like

\(^{74}\) Alfred Döblin, \textit{Aufsätze zur Literatur}, p. 16.
the mannequins he notices in a store window. For a fleeting moment, the city as an abstract ordered structure comes into focus:

Wax figures stood in the show-windows, in suits, overcoats, with skirts, with shoes and stockings. Outside everything was moving, but - back of it - there was nothing! It did not - live! It had happy faces, it laughed, waited in twos and threes on the traffic islands opposite Aschinger's, smoked cigarettes, turned the pages of newspapers. Thus it stood there like the street-lamps - and - became more and more rigid. They belonged with the houses, everything white, everything wooden.80

And yet, inanimate objects spring threateningly to life denying perceptual mastery of the scene: “The cars roared and jangled on, house fronts were rolling along one after the other without stopping. And there were roofs on the houses, they soared atop the houses, his eyes wandered straight upward: if only the roofs don’t slide off, but the houses stood upright.”81

The distorted perspective of a convict recently released from Tegel Prison, Biberkopf’s entry into Berlin dramatizes the “disturbance of vision” which, according, to Andreas Huyssen, is emblematic of literary modernism in general and Berlin Alexanderplatz in particular. For Huyssen, this disturbance of vision arises primarily from a changing habitus that was originally the domain of the classic (read male) flâneur.82 To describe Biberkopf as a flâneur would, however, miss the point. Biberkopf lacks the characteristic detachment and self awareness that keeps the flâneur in possession of himself.83 As a privileged observer, the flâneur asserted both independence from and insight into the successive urban scenes which unfolded before his eyes. “The flâneur goes botanising on the asphalt,” writes Walter Benjamin, classifying the sights before him into more or less stable categories.84 In contrast,

80 Alfred Döblin, Berlin Alexanderplatz, p. 5-6.
81 Alfred Döblin, Berlin Alexanderplatz, p. 7.
Biberkopf’s paranoid engagement with the city denies him the perspective of mastery to which the discourse of flânerie traditionally aimed. This is perhaps not surprising. After all, the accelerated modernity of Weimar Berlin was hardly sympathetic to the “key-identifying marks of the classic flâneur” and the legible city-text upon which the practice of flânerie ultimately depended. For one thing, the Alexanderplatz (fig. 1.6) through which the performance of Döblin’s narrative was organised was a place in which

The most violent transformations [gewaltsamsten Veränderungen] have been taking place, where excavators and jackhammers have been continuously at work, where the ground trembles under the impact of their blows and under the columns of omnibuses and subway trains; where the innards of the metropolis and the backyards around Georgenkirchplatz have been laid bare to a greater depth than anywhere else.

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the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Keith Tester, ed. The Flaneur (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

85 Gunning, “From the Kaleidoscope to the X-ray,” p. 28.
Throughout Weimar Berlin, spatial transformations coincided with the push for rapid and unfettered urban development. The inadequate Hobrecht plan of 1863 had only provided the most pernicious conditions for what David Harvey has more recently described as the urbanization of capital.\(^{87}\) The plan divided undeveloped land in Berlin and the surrounding area into 400 square metre blocks that were separated by a grid of wide streets. Hobrecht had assumed that these streets would be added as the land was developed, but property speculation drove up land prices as developers capitalized on every inch of their property.\(^{88}\) By the Weimar era, the result was the creation of the *Mietskasernenstadt* – row upon row of identical apartment buildings – which covered the full depth of the lots and quickly became the dominant disorientating feature of the city’s new residential districts (fig. 1.7). As the feuilletonist Joseph Roth remarked in a review of Werner Hegemann’s political history of these tenements *Das Steinerne Berlin*, “The city has so many different and rapidly changing physiognomies [Diese Stadt hat so viele und so schnell wechselnde Physiognomien], that one cannot speak of just one image but rather a conglomerate of squares, streets, tenant housing, quadrants, churches, and palaces. An orderly disorder, a planned arbitrariness, a seemingly useful vision without aim [Eine ordentliche Verworrenheit; eine planmäßig exakte Willkür, eine Ziellosigkeit von zweckhaft scheinendem Aspekt].”\(^{89}\) For Roth and his contemporaries, the modern city was perceived as an ongoing process rather than a place and without major “architectonic punctuation,”

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\(^{89}\) Joseph Roth, “Das steinerne Berlin,” *Das Tagebuch* 5.7.1930, p. 228 ff.
without pauses and breaks, the metropolis was nothing more than a "heap of buildings," a "gigantic improvised structure," a "stony labyrinth" – an endless iteration of dark streets and grey buildings that was disorientating and unmappable.⁹⁰

Growing anxiety in the face of an uncertain metropolitan landscape was not limited, however, to the paranoid projections of Döblin or the anxious reportage of Roth. A preoccupation with expressions of urban paranoia found striking realization in Paul Gurk’s phobic city-text *Berlin*. Gurk’s novel recounts the last year in the life of the itinerant bookseller Eckenpenn who commits suicide at the end of the novel when he is evicted from his room for failing to pay his rent. As a street figure and patron of the city’s underworld, it is through the eyes of Eckenpenn that the outward manifestations of the modern city are composed. For Eckenpenn, the street which had once stood for order had “exploded” into a place of irritation and annoyance poisoned by gases and emissions, without the colour of air wrapped in discolorations of yellow, grey, light brown, and pale violet.

⁹⁰Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, p. 199.
The streets began to wander. The monster traffic devoured the walls, his servants were coercion and force, expropriation and action, pickaxe and compressed air hammer. It seemed as if the gas trench warfare of the war had become the normal behaviour of peaceful citizens. Thus the face of the big city was changed. What had been felt because life had kept it together had withdrawn to make room for things to be... 

Because Berlin lacked, in Gurk’s view, a generalizable physiognomy, the representation of an increasingly violent and illegible city replaced a traditional naturalist understanding of place with the compositional confusion of expressionism. Berlin, according to Gurk and other commentators, compulsively staged the traumatic reappearance and repetition of the First World War within an existing discourse of urban fear and danger. Berlin was re-imagined as a battlefield, a city in a state of total mobilization. Gurk’s view was further echoed by the conservative mandarin Ernst Jünger who noted in 1926 that “the Great War is itself a good example of the way in which the essence of the city has begun to take possession of the whole range of modern life. The generation of the trenches went forth expecting a joyous war in the old style... But just as the landscape of this battlefield proved to be no natural landscape but a technological landscape, so was the spirit that animated it, an urban spirit.” And yet, for both Gurk and Jünger, the city of ‘classical German modernity’ also remained, a focal point of disorganization, of anonymity and contingency.

“Not even for a blink of the eye,” wrote Gurk, “does [the street] hurl at us the same

91 Paul Gurk, Berlin [1934] (Berlin: Agora Verlag, 1980), p. 250. While a contemporary of Döblin’s, Gurk (1880-1953) was unable to make a living as a writer in Berlin. Upon his death in 1953, hundreds of watercolours were discovered in his Wedding home, mostly depictions of the Brandenburg countryside that had been rapidly taken over by the expansion of Berlin. Archival materials (mainly short poems) can now be found in the Archiv - Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Literatur Abteilung.


94 Helmut Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 40.
picture. If nothing else, at least one thing became certain with the dissolution of meaningful sightfulness: new modes of visual apprehension and [performative] writing were needed to compensate for the ever-changing nexus of relations between *sehen* [to see] and *erkennen* [to know].

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Recuperating Flânerie in Modern Berlin

Is it not truly extraordinary to realise that ever since men have walked, no-one has ever asked why they walk, how they walk, whether they walk, whether they might walk better, what they achieve by walking, whether they might not have the means to regulate, change or analyse their walk: questions that bear on all the systems of philosophy, psychology and politics with which the world is preoccupied?

-Honoré de Balzac

City ‘views’ redirected the writing of the city to the performance knowledges surrounding photographic images. “Photography,” notes Benjamin, “reveals in this material the physiognomic aspects of visual worlds which dwell in the smallest things, meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable.” If this is accepted, then it is perhaps scarcely surprising that the writerly devices invoked to capture the ever-changing kaleidoscope of Berlin’s modernism were scripted ‘snapshots,’ inaugural visions which attempted to hold and frame the city’s fragmentary signs as a legible space. These moments, like single photographic images, constituted the fragments of evidence which adjudicated the epistemological problem of a city in motion. This kind of modernist writing was neither predominantly “impressionist” nor “expressive” but in some new way performed what Garrett Stewart referred to as “a prosthesis of observation in the mode of inscription.” To this end, writing “[advanced] ever more deeply into the graphic regions of its new “eccentric figurativeness” becoming, in Walter Benjamin’s figuration, a Wandelschrift. According to Benjamin, Wandelschrift

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dramatised two complementary senses in which writing had become at once “more moving” and “more mobile:”

A new mutability and plasticity of script (Wandel in the sense of change), which heralds a resurgence of writing’s imagistic, sensuous, mimetic qualities; and the connotation of the verb wandeln (to walk, amble, wander), which suggests writing’s migration into three-dimensional, public space and which makes reading a more tactile, distracted experience.100

For Benjamin the materiality of writing was incumbent upon its kinship with forms of mass-mediated consumerism, especially the haptic qualities induced by new forms of advertising:

Today, the most real, mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement. It tears down the stage upon which contemplation moved, and all but hits us between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions, careens at us out of a film screen. And just as the film does not present furniture and façades in completed forms for critical inspection, their insistent, jerky nearness alone being sensational, the genuine advertisement hurls things at us with the tempo of a good film.101

If Benjamin’s comments describe writing in its increasing intertextual mass-reproduced form, it was the early twentieth century and the 1920s in particular which marked the discursive proliferation of what Eckhardt Köhn refers to as the kleine Form, the “prompt” textual form through which a phenomenology of mass-mediated modernity was itself projected and reproduced. The kleine Form, as the privileged figure of a fragmented urban text, eschewed the conventional narrative structures already in place while helping to construct a surface treatment of Berlin which approximated the speed and contingency of metropolitan life.102 In this way, feuilletons, vignettes, and other sketches educated readers during the period of ‘classical modernity’ on the provisional nature of Berlin while tracing

the “furtive assemblages of the bricoleur.” The writer Alfred Polgar captures this penchant for brevity rather well when he writes that:

If I had the necessary pathos, I would speak for this small form with big words, because I believe that it is in accordance with the pressures and needs of the time, in any case more so, as a flat analogy might indicate, than a tower of words. I find episodal briefness entirely befitting today’s role of a writer. Life is too short for long-winded writing, too fleeting for lingering descriptions and observations, too psychopathic for psychology, too quickly subject to decay and decomposition, as that one could preserve it by enlarging on it in large books. A great quake is going to topple what is standing, swallow the safely established, break open new ground: how presumptuous to erect large and massive buildings. Eternity proves to be temporary, the most reliable gods were idols, all anchors are weighed, no one knows where the journey is taking us but that it has begun we can tell by the dizziness we feel: who then wants to be burdened down by unnecessary baggage?...The shortest line between two points is what fits in with the needs of the fleeting moment.

If “episodal briefness” dictated the performance of Berlin as it did for writers like Polgar, Walter Kiaulehn, Viktor Auburtin, and Joseph Roth, it was Franz Hessel who, more than anyone else, charted the evolution of the peripatetic act into other modes of urban representation. Through his connections as editor of Rowohlt, a publishing house central to the literary coteries of Weimar Berlin, Hessel was to become a close friend and collaborator of Walter Benjamin, and his city-texts like Benjamin’s map a recuperated form of flânerie whose performativity finds quite literally a new footing within a city of modern mobility and transit. Hessel’s reappraisal of obsolete modes of walking partakes of elements of both the classic flâneur and his naïve counterpart, the mere gaper (badaud). Indeed the traditions of the flâneur and the badaud “establish a practical sense for the [walking] body, not only a sense of what the body is, but how it can or cannot negotiate

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106 Hessel is known as a friend of Henri-Pierre Roché, a writer who became an intimate rival for the affections of his wife, Helen Grund. The triangle inspired Roché’s novel *Jules et Jim* which was later adapted to the screen by François Truffaut.
space, its ‘location’ in terms of prevailing cultural coordinates.” But this can be pressed still further to suggest how the travelling body came to disorient and exceed those prescribed norms in the moment of their performance. “For Hessel,” writes Anke Gleber, “the anachronistic aspects of flânerie are what render it a form of resistance.” In this sense, the street motion of urban strolling works in opposition to prevailing city ‘codes’ conventionally understood as a set of prescribed steps and signals which regulate the order of things. The collection of essays comprising Ein Flaneur in Berlin describe, therefore, a “retrospective poetics” that aims to inhabit and textualise every facet of modern Berlin, tracing the “difficult art of taking a walk” in such chapters as “Der Verdächtige” (The Suspect), “Ich Lerne” (I am Learning), “Rundfahrt” (Sightseeing Trip), and “Berlins Boulevard” (Berlin’s Boulevard). “To walk slowly down lively streets,” writes Hessel, “is a special pleasure. To be left behind by the rush of the others - this is a bath in the surf.” Hessel, in this context, wishes to capture, even photograph, a “measure of slowness” at the margins of a mobile swirling landscape dominated by discontinuity, instability, and transience. “I would like to linger with the first glance [Ersten Blick],” he continues, “I would like to gain or rediscove

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108 Anke Gleber, The Art of Taking A Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 65, p. 69. Hessel’s flâneuristic texts of the 1920s draw attention, moreover to the persistent problem with Michel de Certeau’s hypostatisation of “walkers” in the Practice of Everyday Life, namely de Certeau’s refusal to historicize “walking.” Instead, “walking” appears as a transhistorical practice not as a situated practice with a sedimented history of performance. In short, a historical geography of flânerie did not reproduce a meta-geometry which was assimilable to different places at different times. As such, the production of its imaginative registers and the translation of its practices were freighted by the asymmetries of a differential geography. Suffice to say that flânerie is best understood within a set of spaces “fashioned, shaped and invested by social activities during a finite historical period.” Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), p. 73. See Rebecca Solnit, Wanderlust: A History of Walking (New York: Viking, 2000).
my first glance at the city in which I live.”\textsuperscript{111} This “first glance,” as Anke Gleber notes, “names a fictitious instance of perception - entirely open to impressions, uncompromised by prejudicial judgments, and free of routines and conventions. It looks upon the exterior world with the curiosity and fascination of a child but also with the historical awareness and experience of the modern city dweller.”\textsuperscript{112} Put differently, the “first glance” dramatizes what Ernst Bloch has elsewhere referred to as the condition of non-contemporaneity [\textit{Ungleichzeitigkeit}] to account for the temporal slippage between the spatial forms of urban modernism and the imaginative geographies of a flâneur fixated on the “declining remnants” of an “unrefurbished past.”\textsuperscript{113}

It thus follows that Hessel’s “first glance” shifts beyond obvious touristic sights in favour of non-contemporaneous circumstances and forms of consumption hovering on the edge of a more general city-text. In the chapter “\textit{Rundfahrt}” (Sightseeing Trip), Hessel re-writes the time-space itinerary of a bus tour as the counter-narrative of a “flâneuristic” text. In short, the official event is read against the grain of the city’s pre-defined guide to its textual reproduction. Any effort by the tour guide to organise the field of perception into a space of constructed visibility was highly suspect. “Sight seeing. What a forcible pleonasm,” he decries. The “bus travels too quickly,” he continues, “we must put it off until a journey through the streets on foot.” In the end, the desire to stabilize the management of Berlin’s signification only defers the free space and time for Hessel’s streetwalker to pursue another set of texts. “The real city stroller,” he adds, “is like a reader who reads a book simply to

\textsuperscript{111} Hessel, \textit{Ein Flaneur in Berlin}, p. 7.  
\textsuperscript{112} Gleber, \textit{The Art of Taking a Walk}, p. 69.  
\textsuperscript{113} Bloch, \textit{Heritage of our Times}, p. 108.
pass the time and for pleasure.” In order to “really” stroll, “one should not have anything too specific on one’s mind.”

If Hessel’s “flâneur” experiences city streets as a text, then he “finds the material for his readings on the surfaces of a city whose inflationary increase of marginalia forms a vast ‘wasteland’ of textual fragments, a “crowd of temporary structures, of demolition scaffoldings, construction fencings, board partitions, which become glowing spots of colour in the service of advertising, voices of the city.” Benjamin describes Ein Flaneur in Berlin as “an echo of the stories the city has told him ever since he was a child - an epic book through and through, a process of memorialising while strolling around, a book for which memory has acted not as the source but as the muse.” Hessel’s textualisations of the past and present of Berlin thematises the relationship of city and walker in terms appropriate to the enplotment of memory. Written as snapshots in prose, the book memorialises the meaning of being at home [Heimat] in a changing city. Hessel calls this project “Heimatkunde treiben” [to study one’s hometown] and it enacts a discontinuous mode of

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115 It is important to define the flâneur as a gendered subject, i.e. as a male for whom the streets were unrestricted public spaces that posed no physical danger. This is not to discount the proposition that the ambulatory masculine figure of the flâneur encounters an even more ambiguous counterpart in the public spaces of modern cities - the flâneuse. And yet, a female flâneur or flâneuse was not possible until women could wander the city and create multivalent symbolic positions in their own right and for their own purposes. From this view, the era of classical German modernity offered women significant public opportunities for mobility and participation in a heterogeneous social sphere. The literature on this topic regarding both Germany and elsewhere is extensive. See Katharina von Ankum, ed. Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Giuliana Bruno, Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film (London: Verso, 2002); Anne Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk; Marsha Meskimmon, We Weren’t Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Deborah Parsons, Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Erika Rappaport, Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Gleber’s examination of the phenomenon of female flânerie within the urban texts of Weimar women is particularly suggestive.
116 Hessel quoted in Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk, p. 67.
public perception that superimposes various locales in order to re-construct "a bygone city amidst the present one." What is 'unknown,' secret, about this Berlin," adds Benjamin in a review of Hessel’s novel Heimliches Berlin, "is no windy whispering, no tiresome flirting, but simply this strict classical image-being of a city, a street, a house, even a room that, as a cella, holds within itself the yardstick for the events in this book, just as it does for the figures in a dance." Hessel’s Berlin is indeed a kaleidoscope of attractions and impressions choreographing, the relation between language and photography. Like the camera that seeks to fix a moment of history, Hessel’s version of flânerie focuses on the illuminating “flashes” of the city-text, or “words of light” to borrow Eduardo Cadava’s phrase. Most of all, the native walker is free to read the “secret” [heimliches] signals of collective history and memory which re-compose the cityscape as a text:

Wandering around is not enough. I must study the local history and geography, concern myself with the past and the future of this city, this city which is always on the move, always about to become something else. This is why it is so difficult to discover her, particularly for someone who is at home here.

Hessel’s “pedestrian speech acts” are by implication situated at the interface of various modes of urban spectatorship. On the one hand, Hessel’s texts testify to the flâneuristic traditions that he revisited. On the other hand, as Tom Gunning has noted in a related context, the “transformations in milieu which have defamiliarized the metropolis seem to resolve the urban spectator into two figures often opposed in their relation to viewing and knowledge: the badaud (the gaper) and the detective.” Anke Gleber puts this rather well when she writes that this “flâneur’s walks through the city are characterized by an effort to

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119 Hessel, Ein Flaneur in Berlin, p. 96.
122 Hessel, Ein Flaneur in Berlin, p. 12.
join a kind of naive viewing pleasure with the critical scrutiny of his society.” Hessel’s sensitivity to local history signals, it would seem, a discourse of nostalgia predicated on re-ordering the signifiers of his Berlin along the lines of a “bourgeois” sense of Bildung. “Visit your own city,” he suggests at one point, “stroll in your quarter, promenade in the stony garden...Experience in passing the curious history of a couple dozen streets.” In many ways, Hessel’s version of Berlin comprises a shallow performance of the city’s surface emphasizing the visual focus of the sensation-seeker at the expense of a more critical and embodied engagement with a city that frequently served as an agent of production and power. As Hessel points out: “It is not necessary to understand everything, one only needs to look at it with one’s eyes.” Alternatively, the task is to perceive the image of exterior reality as an aesthetic imprimatur. “Let’s not go into the serious areas,” Hessel tells us, “where politics, trade, and local affairs are carried out. We belong below this straight line and in the entertainment section.” In so doing, Hessel’s abstinence from what Thomas Lindenberger has elsewhere referred to as Strassenpolitik re-aligns his definition of flânerie with a blind naivety whose sole recommendation is that “we should simply take a walk.” This is, of course, the view of a comfortable man of means and leisure, a view that was increasingly at odds with the violence and political class struggle that gripped city streets. It is also a position that largely ignored the presence of women in the streets of Berlin and the active flâneuse that can be found in the novels of Irmgard Keun and Vicki Baum among others. Ultimately, one might say that Hessel’s unitary images of an urban-aesthetic and

124 Gunning, “From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray,” p. 28; Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk, p. 78.
126 Hessel, Ein Flaneur in Berlin, p. 257.
127 Thomas Lindenberger, Straßenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914 (Bonn: Dietz, 1995); Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk, p. 80.
128 Irmgard Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen (München: List Verlag, 2000). For a contemporary guidebook directed specifically at the activities of women in the metropolis, see Eliza Ischehausser, Was die Frau von
his professed enjoyment of metropolitan impressions distances his experience of the city from the traumatic intoxication and tactile, visceral appeal that characterized the attempts by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer to resolve the enigmatic presence of Berlin as potent textual fragments. For Esther Leslie, this “city genre was not a harmonious part of Weimar, but hacked out of it. For it was clear to those who tramped the streets, who had an eye to how life was changing, or not changing but rolling backwards, that ‘Weimar’ was dead before the 1920s were out.”¹²⁹


Getting Hold of Berlin: Towards an Urban Reflexivity

Those who love a city in its profoundest sense, become the shame of that city, the détraqués, the paupers.

-Djuna Barnes\textsuperscript{130}

In the preceding sections I have attempted to show that a significant characteristic of writing modern Berlin is the permanent tension between presence and process which takes place as a mark of the urban text. Writing the city could not, in other words, proffer the obligatory points of stable reference for a city which lacked symbolic points of orientation. Rather, it disclosed a multiplicity of events, unexpected encounters, and deceptive appearances. In placing emphasis on writing Berlin, I have also suggested that the city isn’t reducible to a kind of vulgar textualism where its facticity becomes the objective correlative to its written form. Alternatively, the iconic aspect of modern Berlin is indeed paradoxical. On the one hand, it signposts a spectacular moment in the historical geography of urban modernity, symptomatic of the at times giddy, at times nervous surface culture which both Peter Fritzsche and Janet Ward have recently charted. On the other hand, the same surface remains a shield, a superstructural envelope which conceals a deeper and more sinister system of rationalization and reification. To take up David Frisby’s formulation, the fortuitousness of Berlin’s modernity belies its calculability.\textsuperscript{131}

Put this way, we are forced to accept that if an increasingly complex and intractable presence was to be mastered and made sensible, a specific alignment of seeing and knowing was needed.\textsuperscript{132} Following Walter Benjamin it was with the appearance of the detective as a successor to the flâneur that the epistemological challenge of the modernist city was taken

\textsuperscript{132} Christopher Prendergast, \textit{Paris and the Nineteenth Century}, p. 2.
The transformation of the flâneur into a detective depended not only on the detached mastery of variegated city scenes but also on the penetration of deceptive surface effects to re-discover meaning hidden in a city always on the move. In other words, the detective travelled through a city in which the relation between signifier and signified remained elusive, waiting to be uncovered and separated from misleading appearances and vertiginous traces. “The labyrinth of the city translated through signs,” writes Wolfreys, “transforms cartography into cryptography.” More than anything else, the Berlin of classical modernity was where the knowable and mappable was constantly displaced, that is where ‘différence’ took place.

If writing Berlin was predicated on capturing the city in a tightly woven textual net, then the process of detection neither arrived at the “active creation of order” nor the “mastering of the urban environment.” Traditional crime fiction depended, of course, on the narrative’s ability to “distinguish between types, reach judgements, and explain causes.” The crisis of referentiality that was a central characteristic of modernist literature challenged, however, this belief in narrative coherence, a point widely recognized by contemporary observers in Germany. Take for example, the short-lived series, Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart, which brought together writers as different as Alfred Döblin, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Iwan Goll in order to explore the breakdown of the case narrative which they attempted to do through a “combination of reportage, fictional techniques and

133 As Benjamin once noted, “preformed in the figure of the flâneur, is that of the detective. The flâneur required a social legitimation of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence presented as plausible front, behind which, in reality hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight.” Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project, p. 442; Konvolute M13a,2.
scientific analysis.” At the same time, writers like Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer often assumed a detective persona in their city-texts, though theirs was a selective performance organized around the “minute decoding of the surface phenomena of modernity as complex historical ciphers.” Here, detection transformed the urban setting into a hieroglyph, a rebus, to be deciphered. Reading the surface of the metropolis solicited the discovery of its hidden inscriptions and traces. For Benjamin and Kracauer, the transformation of Berlin into a locus of signs did not presume the privilege of logos in achieving a totalised understanding of the city, but rather the deployment of philosophical micrologies (Denkbilder, to use Benjamin’s term) to illuminate, however fleeting, the process of mystification which underwrites the characteristic features of modern social and economic structures.

“No face is surrealistic in the same degree as the true face of the city,” notes Benjamin. The spectacle arranged to dazzle the urban spectator, the aura of distraction [Zerstreuung] to which Kracauer often referred, was partly designed to cloak the core of commodity culture. For many, tracing the operations of the capitalist system amounted to a kind of detection driven as it is by a “narrative and rhetoric of exposure” with its secret

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138 Herzog, “Crime Stories,” p. 36. The series ran from 1924 to the following year in which it was cancelled due to financial problems encountered by the publisher, the Verlag Die Schiemde. Volumes included the following (in order of publication): Alfred Döblin, Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord; Egon Erwin Kisch, Der Fall des Generalstabschefs Redl; Iwan Goll, Germaine Berton: Die rote Jungfrau. Advertised volumes by Max Brod, Thomas Mann, and Joseph Roth were never published.


centre and single meaning.\textsuperscript{142} And yet, Benjamin's concern with the depiction of the modern city is interwoven with a "conscious refusal of or resistance to the presentation of an overarching, integrated, coherent view of the city as a whole."\textsuperscript{143} In Benjamin's own words, "we have to rethink our conceptions of literary forms or genres, in view of the technical factors affecting our present situation if we are to identify the forms of expression that channel the literary energies of the present."\textsuperscript{144} While Benjamin's writings certainly lack unanimity in addressing what has described as the "labour of the writer in modernity," an imagistic, thetic approach was often invoked to highlight the momentary character of modern metropolitan experiences.\textsuperscript{145} To this end, the scripting of urban space demanded a discontinuous yet\textit{activist} literary form and style, most unambiguously developed by Benjamin in his montage-like walk through the modern city in \textit{One-Way Street} (fig. 1.8).

"Significant literary work," writes Benjamin in the opening section, can only come into being in a strict alteration between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious universal gesture of the book - in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself equal to the moment.\textsuperscript{146}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{Denning} Denning quoted in Howell, "Crime and the City Solution," p. 363.
\bibitem{Benjamin} Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," \textit{SW} 2, pp. 768-782, p. 771. This is not to suggest that Benjamin was not equally interested in the development of a theory of \textit{reading} that was equal to the challenges posed by modernity. See Alexander Honold, \textit{Der Leser Walter Benjamin} (Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk, 2000).
\bibitem{Schwartz} Frederic J. Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde," \textit{Art History} 24 (2001), pp. 401-444, p. 402; original emphasis. In a Benjaminian sense, "history-telling" discloses a writing that "tends towards action - a type of praxis, a grasping, a \textit{Begreifen}, which produces the history it reports, by theorizing, not narrating, and so making history, not writing it." See Leslie, \textit{Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism} (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 214. Such an approach suggests a thetic mode of thinking history that can neither be understood in terms of a linear, temporal sequence nor understood strictly within the confines of a philosophical concept. Instead, the thesis, like the gaze of a camera, momentarily fixes history in an image, "condensing a network of relations into a frame whose borders remain permeable." Eduardo Cadava, \textit{Words of Light}, p. xx. Benjamin's thetic mode of presentation is most apparent perhaps in \textit{One-Way Street, the Arcades Project, Berlin Childhood}, and the "Theses on the Concept of History."
\bibitem{Benjamin2} Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street," \textit{SW} 1, p. 445.
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Benjamin’s notion of a “prompt language” ultimately took the form of a series of observations, dream reports, and lists that were organised under the headings of the “quick, verbal jolts of urban commerce,” that is, the warnings, advertisements, labels, and street signs that increasingly dictated metropolitan life. As a result, a detective-like performance (if one could call it that) was incumbent upon the juxtaposition of heterogeneous, incongruous cityscapes, what Benjamin later referred to as a ‘dialectical image.’ “It is not that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past,” Benjamin tells us, “rather an image is that in which the Then and the Now come into a constellation

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147 Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” p. 409. Benjamin’s notion of a “prompt language” was admittedly a commonplace among the “typographical avant garde.” As Josef Albers, a student of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, remarked, “we must read fast, as we must speak sparely. Only the schools still forbid us to speak in incomplete sentences, and this is wrong...So we must distance ourselves from the book. Most printed matter no longer consists of books.” Albers quoted in Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” p. 408.
like a flash of lightning. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill." A sudden flash, a momentary illumination, the dialectical image operates something akin to a moving photograph capturing the city’s abstract, moving, and changing form. Once a frozen film frame, the motion of an urban scene was subject to the “detective’s gaze,” the “x-ray vision” which endeavoured to bring the secret text of the city to light even as it threatened to disappear from view. In this way, the collection of sketches and aphorisms that made up One-Way Street clearly sought to take into account “modern conditions of visuality” though it is really Benjamin’s own recollections of childhood in Berlin Chronicle that foregrounded the shifting presence of Berlin as a unique constellation of “flashlike moments” and “dialectical images.”

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography. And these quite certainly do not, even for the Berlin years that I am exclusively concerned with here. For autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities. For even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have at the moment of recollection. This strange form - it may be called fleeting or eternal - is in neither case the stuff that life is made of. And this is shown not so much by the role that my own life plays here, as by that of the people closest to me in Berlin - whoever and whenever they may have been. The atmosphere of the city that is here evoked allots them only a brief, shadowy existence. They steal along its walls like beggars, appear wraithlike at windows, to vanish again, sniff at thresholds like a genius loci, and even if they fill whole quarters with their names, it is as a dead man’s fills his gravestone. Noisy, matter-of-fact Berlin, the city of work and the metropolis of business, nevertheless has more, rather than less, than some others, of those places and moments when it bears witness to the dead, shows itself full of dead; and the obscure awareness of these moments, these places, perhaps more than anything else, confers on childhood memories a quality that makes them at once evanescent and as alluringly tormenting as half-forgotten dreams.

148 Quoted in Gilloch, Myth and Metropolis, p. 113.
Berlin Chronicle, as Esther Leslie has noted, “is a multi-layered transcript, with convolutions of place and moment, and a mélange of memory, fantasy, fiction, document, and authorial self-reflexivity.” Written in close temporal and theoretical conjunction with the critical and philosophical questions that preoccupied Benjamin throughout the 1930s including memory and reproduction, politics and language, film and photography, the structure of Benjamin’s chronicling dramatises a particular tactical engagement with the experience of urban technological modernity. For Benjamin, writing the city depends, on a theatre of memory which inhabits its tacit performativity: “Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre [Schauplatz]. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie interred.” In other words, the experience of the city-text is organized around the constant negotiation with the ghosts and residues of previous experience, and Berlin is above all a “City of ghosts.” Here it is the detective-flâneur who remembers in the face of a rapidly changing city, and folds this memory into the experience of the present. This changes the experience of the city itself re-marking the lived moment as a “citable experience.” The paratactic performance of select sites (Tiergarten, Kaiser Friedrich School, Pfaueninsel, Steglitzer Strasse) is, therefore, bound up with a concern to memorialise the historical geography of a city that is [un]consciously constructed around the voids and haunts of forgotten people and places. It is not a case, as Avery Gordon reminds us, of “dead or missing persons sui generis, but of the ghost as a social figure.” It is a case,” she adds, “of inarticulate experiences, of symptoms and screen memories, of spiralling affects, of more

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151 Esther Leslie, Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism, p. 69.
152 Gerhard Richter, Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography, p. 200. In this regard, I would dispute Richter’s contention that the problem of Benjamin’s autobiographical subject is, in any simple way, cast in terms of the ear in Berlin Chronicle and a gazing eye in Berlin Childhood. Richter is correct, however, to point out Benjamin’s general preoccupation with the subject’s body within his autobiographical texts.
than one story at a time, of the traffic in domains of experience that are anything but transparent and referential." It is, moreover, a case of writing ghost stories, stories haunted by the "foreclosed potential of different dwellings," stories that repair representational mistakes and transform exclusions and invisibilities into "a whole dialectics of seeing replete with an optical unconscious." The notion of an optical unconscious is Benjamin's and refers primarily to "the ability of the apparatus and particular photographic techniques to register aspects of material reality that are invisible to the unarmed human eye – the microtexture of plants, the way people walk." For Benjamin, the mimetic capacity of photographic inscription "translates into an affinity with the unseen, the overly familiar, the repressed – with anything that eludes, conscious, intentional perception." More generally, the optical unconscious suggests an antidote to the pervasive unawareness in the workings of normal vision which has involved – at the very least – the elision of those tiny multi-sensory impressions that conjure up the multiplicity of urban space. In the end, Benjamin's Berlin reaches toward a particular performative disposition best described by Michael Taussig as "sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic 'knowledge' that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational...a knowledge that lies as much in the objects and spaces of observation as in the body and mind of the observer." Put somewhat differently, it is through this embodied and incarnate sensibility that *Berlin Chronicle* and its heavily revised successor, *Berlin

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158 Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, pp. 111-115.
Childhood around 1900, conspire to yield the “complex topography” of an autobiographical corpus inhabiting the various quarters of a modern metropolis.\textsuperscript{160}

The written trace of the city, where walking and writing constantly fold into each other, reappears in Siegfried Kracauer’s articles and reviews of the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{161} As review editor of the Frankfurter Zeitung and its Berlin bureau editor from 1930 to 1933, Kracauer’s Berlin underwrites the experience of the city-text as a labyrinth of fragmentary signs, a network of performative traces, marks, and citations. Indeed, urban performativity – the seriality of capitalist modernization – lies on the surface, a superficial constellation that is exposed to reveal a hidden structure:

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch’s judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. Conversely, knowledge of this state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally.\textsuperscript{162}

Kracauer’s starting point, the “landscape of raw Berlin,” suggests a critical phenomenological intention, a detection – often metaphorical – “that wrenches the object from its everyday self-evidentness, that explodes our conventional experience of it and that,

\textsuperscript{160}Gerhard Richter, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography*, p. 166-167. Benjamin penned the first version of *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* between 1932-1934. *Berliner Kindheit* evolved out of the earlier *Berliner Chronik* which was written in the first half of 1932 in fulfilment of a contract with the *Literarische Welt* that Benjamin had signed in October 1931. Despite their overlap, the two texts are quite distinct. There are, moreover, 5 main versions of *Berliner Kindheit*, the latest dating to 1938, having been found in 1981 by Benjamin’s Italian editor, Giorgio Agamben in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. For further details, see the annotations by Benjamin’s German editors in the *Gesammelte Schriften.*

\textsuperscript{161}Kracauer produced hundreds of articles in his capacity as editor including numerous important film reviews. For further discussion of Kracauer’s activities at the Frankfurter Zeitung, see Andreas Volk, “Siegfried Kracauer in der ‘Frankfurter Zeitung’: Ein Forschungsbericht,” *Soziographie* 4 (1991), pp. 43-69.

in the process of unmasking its reified nature, reveals its historical nature.”

“Just as the detective reveals the secret buried between people,” writes Kracauer, “the detective novel discloses, in the aesthetic medium, the secret of an unreal society and its substanceless marionettes.” In a similar fashion, the ephemeral, often forgotten, and culturally marginalized phenomena of the metropolis are translated into configurations of writing, which are then read as symptomatic signs of metropolitan modernity linked to the unfolding of a “progressively instrumentalized ratio” Kracauer’s commitment to the “afterlife of things” was recognized and appreciated by Benjamin who described him as a “ragpicker” [Lumpensammler] sifting through the discarded residues of modernity for fragments that might tell of “the small catastrophes that make up everyday life.” Indeed, unlike many of his Marxist counterparts, Kracauer rejected the abstractions of transcendentalist philosophy or the faddish reportage of the Neue Sachlichkeit for a form of critique appropriate to the quotidian realities of the modern city. As Benjamin, perhaps Kracauer’s most astute interlocutor, again noted in a review of Kracauer’s study of Berlin white-collar workers, Die Angestellten:


167 Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) was a term first coined in 1923 by Gustav Hartlaub, director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, to coincide with an exhibition of post-Expressionist German Art. More than a slogan and cipher for German Art in the 1920s, Neue Sachlichkeit became a byword for the surface culture of Weimar Germany’s relative boom phase between 1924-1929. For a discussion of its literary manifestations, see Sabine Becker, Neue Sachlichkeit Band I: Die Ästhetik der Neusachlichen Literatur, 1920-1933 (Köln: Böhlaus Verlag, 2000); Helmut Lethen, Neue Sachlichkeit, 1924-1932: Studien zur Literatur den "Weissen Sozialismus" (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970).
The author has...descended into the advertising sections of white-collar newspapers in order to discover those true subjects that appear embedded like puzzles in the phantasmagoria of radiance and youth, education and personality. That is today, encyclopaedias, beds, crepe soles, pens that prevent writer's cramp, good-quality pianos, rejuvenation potions, and white teeth. But the higher reality does not rest content with a fantasy existence, and so makes its presence felt in everyday life in puzzle-picture form [vexierhaft], just as poverty does in the bright lights of distraction.168

The visual metaphor is indeed apt as Kracauer's city-texts often concern sites that are also sights: cinemas, hotel lobbies, department stores, train stations, subways, amusement parks, variety shows, arcades, and neon lighting. For Miriam Hansen, "visuality itself becomes a cipher" that directs and adjusts Kracauer's [textual] management of modernist Berlin. What are at stake above all are the consequences of a capitalist grounding of modernization invested, as it was, in the permanent eradication and reinvention of the urban environment epitomized in Kracauer's eyes by the Kurfürstendamm, then of one of Berlin's premier commercial thoroughfares:

If some street blocks seem to be created for eternity then the present-day Kurfürstendamm is the embodiment of empty flowing time in which nothing is allowed to last. Elsewhere, what has passed remains fixed to the place that during its lifetime was its home; on the Kurfürstendamm it makes its exit without leaving behind any traces...the new enterprises are always absolutely new...What once existed is on its way to being never seen again, and what has just been claimed is confiscated one hundred percent by today. A frenzy predominates as it did in the colonies and gold rush towns even though veins of gold had hardly been detected in these zones. Many buildings have been shorn of the ornaments that formed a bridge to yesterday.169

In this manner, 'Berlin' betrays a "spectral dissonance" punctuated by the increasingly strident realities of a modern metropolis that is reformed and reaffirmed with each encounter.170 Like Wolfreys' London, Berlin becomes a "city of the event, a city-as-event, a city-always on the way to becoming, but never coming to a standstill." This continuous

170 Frisby, "Deciphering the Hieroglyphics of Weimar Berlin," p. 156.
constitution of the “absolutely new, unhistorical actuality of Berlin” is highlighted by Kracauer in “Repetition”:

It appears as if this city has control of the magical means of eradicating all memories. It is present-day and, moreover, it makes it a point of honour of being absolutely present-day. Whoever stays for any length of time in Berlin hardly knows in the end where he actually came from. His existence is not like a line but a series of points; it is new every day like the newspapers that are thrown away when they have become old. I know of no other city that is capable of so promptly shaking off what has just occurred. In other places, too, images of squares, company names and enterprises unquestionably transform themselves, but only in Berlin are the transformations of the past so radically stripped from memory.171

Be that as it may, the open visible surface of the city, its permanent association with absolute presentness and evanescence, also points to a more general crisis of cognition and experience. In “Screams on the Street,” Kracauer identifies a “panic horror” in the “friendly and clean” streets of Western Berlin. “[Streets] lose themselves in infinity,” he writes, “buses roar through them, whose occupants during the journey to their distant destinations look down so indifferently upon the landscape of pavements, shop windows and balconies...a countless human crowd moves in them, constantly new people with unknown aims that intersect like the linear maze of a pattern sheet.”172 As in the abstracted world of the detective, disturbed visions hint at larger urban pathologies which arise “from the total and absolute rationalization of the existential community.”173 In other words, the very processes associated with the logics of modernity – mechanization, standardization, reification – transformed Kracauer’s Berlin into an anonymous metropolis, a realm that reaffirms what Henri Lefebvre has, in another context, called “abstract space.”174 Thus Berlin was being produced as a space of capital accumulation – a space of calculation and circulation, of distraction and exploitation – in which an identity was forged between the

172 Kracauer, Strassen in Berlin, p. 27-29.
173 Siegfried Kracauer, Der Detektiv-Roman, p. 30.
174 See Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
abstractions of space and the operations of technological rationality, an identity made visible through successive landscapes of production and consumption. We encounter the destructive properties behind the production of abstract space, its domination by technological transformations, commodification, and visual stimuli, in Paul Gurk's frantic view of Berlin as a gigantic construction site:

The entrails of gaslines and sewage pipes were exposed between the dug up piles of sand and stone, supported by wooden poles, ran the digestive tracts of the big city, playgrounds for boisterous youngsters. Canals, with a residue of old beauty still showing, were filled up. The excavators were busy at work. Frantic electric rock drillers broke up the pavement. Diverted buslines disturbed the peace of the last quiet streets which hitherto lovingly encircled the waters. The crushing, pounding of the monster, swaying on its four axles shook the ground like the thundering gallop of a buffalo herd. When there was a halt, its engine shook with impatience and screamed: time devours space, time devours space.175

If this passage exposes the horror underwriting the ongoing reduction of the city to an abstract ordered space, it also anticipates the move towards an increasingly arbitrary relation between sensations and referents. To this end, one might conclude that Benjamin's concept of “shock” and Kracauer's “cult of distraction” owe much to an urban consciousness infected by the mobility of the city-text. Abstraction, it would seem, precipitated not only a crisis in writing the modernist Berlin, but in turn marked “the erasure of identity or loss of control over identity which is the cost of imagining the [modernist] city.”176 “The individuals of the big city streets,” writes Kracauer,

have no sense of transcendence, they are only outer appearance, like the street itself, on which so much is going on without anything really happening. The swirl of the characters resembles the whirl of atoms: they do not meet, but rather bump up against each other, they drift apart without separating. Instead of living connected with things, they sink down to inanimate objects: to the level of automobiles, walls, neon lights, irrespective of time flashing on and off. Instead of filling space, they follow their own path in the wasteland. Instead of communicating through language, they leave unsaid what might bring them together or pull them apart. Love is copulation,

175 Gurk, Berlin, p. 250-1.
176 Wolfreys, Writing London, p. 100.
murder is accident, and tragedy never occurs. A wordless and soulless coexistence of directed automobiles and undirected desires.\textsuperscript{177}

Seen this way, space is an active operator, only destructive and deadening. In essence, we are left with a lifeless version of the asphalt jungle spinning in its own textuality, staging the loss of reference as a loss of bearings, or as a function of the “cold personae” documented in Helmut Lethen’s recent study of interwar culture.\textsuperscript{178} Here, Lethen explores the widespread fascination during the Weimar Republic with what he refers to as “codes of conduct.” While I will assess Lethen’s claims in greater detail in Chapter 4, it is precisely this injunction to behave in certain ways that Lethen argues was taken up by the literature of the interwar period whose insistent performativity traded in a set of gestures functioning to preserve and shore up – “stiffen” – a subjectivity that was at risk of dissolution. Lethen’s account draws on an extensive corpus of literary texts though the prevarications of Walter Serner’s \textit{Handbrevier für Hochstapler} and Bertolt Brecht \textit{Lesebuch für Städtebewohner} are especially noteworthy. Serner’s parodic Dada handbook comprised 591 rules, divided into thirteen separate chapters. Each maxim is delivered deadpan:

\begin{quote}
It is better to speak conventionally, rather than in principle, if you want to gain time, and better in a chatty, rather than informational, manner, if you want to gain power (Rule no. 338).

From time to time, excesses are necessary. After two months of uninterrupted regularity, the body is sick of it (Rule no. 320).

Regard every ear within earshot as an enemy ear (Rule no. 444)\textsuperscript{179}
\end{quote}

For Serner, the city appears in an orientating function, a specific terrain of behaviour where the point of one’s ‘training’ is to leave behind in others’ eyes an impression of


authenticity. The suggested persona of Brecht’s Lesebuch is similarly “cool,” “defensive,” and “distancing:”

Part from your friends at the station
Enter the city in the morning with your coat buttoned up
Look for a room, and when your friend knocks:
Do not, oh do not, open the door
But
Cover your tracks!

If you meet your parents in Hamburg or elsewhere
Pass them like strangers, turn the corner, don’t recognize them
Pull the hat they gave you over your face, and
Do not, oh do not, show your face
But
Cover your tracks.

Eat the meat that’s there. Don’t stint yourself.
Go into any house when it rains and sit on any chair that’s in it
But don’t sit long. And don’t forget your hat.
I tell you:
Cover your tracks.

Whatever you say, don’t say it twice
If you find your ideas in anyone else, disown them.
The man who hasn’t signed anything, who has left no picture
Who was not there, who said nothing:
How can they catch him?
Cover your tracks.

See when you come to think of dying
That no gravestone stands and betrays where you lie
With a clear inscription to denounce you
And the year of your death to give you away.
Once again:
Cover your tracks.
(That is what they taught me.)

Brecht’s imperative to “Cover your tracks! was not lost, it should be said, on Weimar
Berlin’s much-vaunted flâneuristic urbanism. Benjamin, in an unpublished essay,

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180 Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 121.
distinguished Brecht’s adoption of the lyrical poem from earlier forms of urban poetry like Baudelaire, Whitman, and Verhaeren. “Brecht,” writes Benjamin, “is probably the first major lyric poet to say anything meaningful about city people.” In the Lesebuch, according to Benjamin, “the city appears as a vast theatre – of the struggle for survival, and of the class struggle.”

For Benjamin as well as Kracauer, Berlin thus remained a disseminating scene of writing around which the traumatic effects of the modern city and the alienating realities of industrial capitalism were registered and rejected, transmuted and negotiated. In both cases, the re-signification of a mass-mediated urban nature with its “jungle streets, factory massifs, and labyrinths of roofs” was contingent upon a break with historically sedimented practices (read capitalism) in favour of a modernity capable of accommodating the tensions between an urban-industrial economy in permanent crisis and the everyday practices of a democratic society.” ‘Berlin’ could, in other words, “come to signify what it never [had] signified before and, moreover, come to embrace interests and subjects [which] have been excluded from its [textual] jurisdiction.”

Modernist concerns with evolving cultural phenomena thus operated not only at a narrative-cognitive level but, more importantly, provided models of identification for appropriating and embracing the complex materiality of the modern city. More generally, they introduced hitherto unperceived modes of sensory perception and experience, offering a range of performative possibilities for knowing and “getting hold of the urban.”

In this way, one might also read Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s ‘city writings’ of the 1920s and 1930s as, among other things, an effort to theorize “a new

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mode of [urban] reflexivity. It is, however, with the broader compass of these remarks in mind that I wish to offer a few concluding observations.

Conclusion

It is really not easy to write about Berlin. Many good people have sunk their teeth into it. Only in film might it be possible.

-Gabriele Tergit\textsuperscript{186}

Film is laying siege to Berlin

-Alfred Polgar\textsuperscript{187}

The reflexive dimension of Berlin's textual performance consisted precisely of the ways in which it sanctioned readers to confront the ambivalence of modernity in a time of transit and transition, motion and movement.\textsuperscript{188} A reconstituted city-text responded by making its subjects excited and nervous all over again, unsettling the narrative and descriptive codes by which they had come to manage their compartmentalized apprehensions of an impinging modern world. What I would like to tentatively call the 'reflex character' of writing Berlin represented in many ways an "urban symptomatology," a diagnostic of the unruly "signs" of classical German modernity.\textsuperscript{189} From this view, the writerly 'diagnosis' of Walter Benjamin, Alfred Döblin, Paul Gurk, Franz Hessel, Siegfried Kracauer and their contemporaries constituted a form of local knowledge, an accumulated intelligence in-action through which a better understanding of the meaning and fate of modernity as a mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomena was indeed prosecuted.\textsuperscript{190}

It should be clear that in placing texts by Benjamin, Kracauer, and Hessel prominently within this project is to by no means afford them any sort of ontological privilege. As much

\textsuperscript{188} Gleber, \textit{The Art of Taking a Walk}, p. 20; Stewart, \textit{Between Film and Screen}, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{189} Thrift, "Afterwords," p. 242.
could be made, for example, of the defensive mode of ‘behaviour’ for which the literature [and art] of the Neue Sachlichkeit provided a code of conduct and a cast of “cold personae.” The critical realism of writers like Hans Fallada and Rudolf Braune or the Gebrauchslyrik popularised by Kästner also come to mind in this respect. Ultimately, I would insist that all of these works are constitutive elements of the same field of events, that they are to quote Jonathan Crary, “original fashionings of related problems.” My overarching concept here is rather of an approach that combines the traditional study of texts with an understanding of their capacity to recover and reinvent the “travails of performance.” While Nigel Thrift has argued that much performance “cannot be written down. It is unwritable, unsayable, and unstable,” I would, in contrast, stress that the performances to which writing Berlin attests do not reside tout court in their prescribed moment of disappearance. This would grant performance an unavowed presentism and limit our understanding of “the movement between past acts, texts, and their present-day interpreters.” To state my case somewhat programmatically: I think that there is still much to be gained by geographers through what are ostensibly historical performance studies, studies which engage with the ‘pastness’ of performance.

One of the main purposes behind this chapter has therefore been to take up such a program and examine how a set of urban texts operated as a symptom for the nervous performativity which characterised Berlin during the period 1900-1933. While these comments are made with the historical and cultural geography of Berlin predominantly in mind, this does not mean that they trade in a blithe historicism. Rather, one of the crucial aims of this dissertation is to think critically about how to write a history of Weimar Berlin

191 See Helmut Lethen, Cool Conduct.
which at the same time sheds light on the city’s recent building boom. Since much of present-day Berlin is again a gigantic construction site, a spatial and indeed temporal void, there are ample reasons to argue that Berlin continues to represent a “site for contingencies” to borrow Ingeborg Bachmann’s felicitous expression.195 “There is perhaps no other major Western city,” writes Andreas Huyssen that bears the marks of twentieth-century history as intensely and self-consciously as Berlin. The city-text has been written, erased, and rewritten throughout this violent century.”196 While Huyssen is admittedly painting in broad brushstrokes, even a cursory glance at the textual performance of the city in the latter half of the 20th century would seem to back up his view. For example, the work of the Gruppe 47, the poetics of Drunbein and Kunert, the transnational voices of Oren and Senocak, and finally the new generation of writers like Vladimir Kaminer, Inka Parei and Jenny Erpenbeck are all equally involved in an ongoing process of writing and rewriting the city. In the words of Benjamin, Berlin was (and continues to be) “full of things calculated to stimulate a storyteller – things that were to be found lurking not only in its medieval corners, remote streets, and dreary houses, but also in its active citizens of all classes and districts.”197

Insofar as the material habitus of Berlin’s ‘asphalt culture’ was re-enacted in written form, groundbreaking studies by performance historians Shannon Jackson and Joseph Roach have also dramatized the possibilities in working with a rich cross-disciplinary archive of practices.198 Similar claims could and should of course be made with a

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198 Jackson, Lines of Activity; Roach, Cities of the Dead.
modernizing Berlin squarely in mind. Indeed, from Dadaist experimentation to proletarian theatre, cabaret to cinema there exists a sedimented history of “performance styles” through which the mutability and mobility of Berlin was registered and contested.\footnote{Rae Beth Gordon, “From Charcot to Charlot: Unconscious Imitation and Spectatorship in French Cabaret and Early Cinema,” \textit{Critical Inquiry} 97 (2001), pp. 515-549; Richard Bodek, \textit{Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitpop, Chorus, and Brecht} (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997); Peter Jelavich, \textit{Berlin Cabaret} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).} As I will argue in subsequent chapters, a performance paradigm unsettles any attempt to restore and reduce Berlin to a single representational model. And as I hinted earlier, it might in fact be that textual reinvention found a useful corollary in the filmic form. This is admittedly only one of many examples of what W.J.T Mitchell has described as the “imbrication of visual and verbal experience.” Nevertheless it is one in which film was to enter modernity “not just as a function of the destabilized and variously solicited gaze of bourgeois culture’s commodified distraction factory but as a correlate of literary modernism.”\footnote{W.J.T. Mitchell, \textit{Picture Theory}, p. 83; Garrett Stewart, “Cinécriture: Modernism’s Flicker Effect,” \textit{New Literary History} 29 (1998), pp. 727-768, p. 727.} Crucial, it would seem then, are the ways in which films of classical modernity like \textit{The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari} (1920), \textit{Berlin: Symphony of a City} (1927), \textit{Metropolis} (1926), and \textit{M} (1931) re-traced and re-fashioned representational strategies already in place to articulate and mediate the uncertain experiences of urban-industrial technology. Put somewhat differently, writing Berlin as a \textit{cinematic} city emerged out of an existing shifting perceptual condition which engaged the spatio-corporeal kinetics of the flâneur-turned-detective as an epistemology, a negotiation of “room for manoeuvre” between displacement and presence.\footnote{See Ross Chambers, \textit{Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional in Narrative} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).} As a camera, a kino-eye, the flâneur dramatized the world of quotidian objects as a form of perception-in-movement designed to approximate the shock of metropolitan modernity. In this way, it was a cinematographic Berlin which re-directed the condition of its textual productions and
projections as "a new graphicity that... not only hybridised pictorial and scriptural qualities but also [made] writing part of a new economy of things, a changed phenomenology of nearness and distance, a different kind of aesthetic experience." In the end, whether one focuses on the textual production of the modernist city or the cinema and its "nomadic way of seeing," the Berlin of a classical German modernity was most remarkable perhaps for its capacity to inhabit the unstable temporality of performance. Berlin, after all, was a place "destined to dissolve and to overcome every tradition...and daily prepared for any change," a place "always to become and never to be."

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Chapter 2

‘Dynamik der Großstadt:’
Visual Cultures in Interwar Germany

What is lost in the withering of semblance [Schein], or decay of the aura, in works of art is matched by a huge gain in room-for play. [Spiel-Raum]

-Walter Benjamin

There is a difference between sitting quietly in Switzerland and bedding down on a volcano, as we did in Berlin.

-Richard Huelsenbeck

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1 I am borrowing my title here from Lazlo Moholy-Nagy’s Weimar-era manifesto on modernist visuality, “Dynamik der Großstadt” which was originally published as a ‘film script’ in Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Malerei, Fotografie, Film (München: Langen Verlag, 1925).
3 Huelsenbeck quoted in Matthew Gale, Dada & Surrealism (London: Phaidon, 1997), p. 120.
Finding ‘Room-for-Play:’ Modernism in Weimar Berlin

This is a chapter about German visual culture and the modern city. It had its beginnings in a couple of observations by two British artists who briefly made Berlin their home during the Weimar era: Francis Bacon and Christopher Isherwood. Francis Bacon is, of course, best known for his violently affective paintings. As a young man he left Ireland travelling to Berlin where he spent three months in the winter of 1927-8. As he later recalled in an interview with the well-known art critic David Sylvester, “when I was 16 or 17, I went to Berlin, and of course I saw the Berlin of 1927 and 1928 where there was a wide open city, which was, in a way, very, very violent.” If Bacon detected in the city “an atmosphere of tension and unease,” Isherwood found Berlin to be particularly suited to the kind of realism famously described in the opening page of his Goodbye to Berlin: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.”

It is tempting to see in these comments, clues to the different methods that Bacon and Isherwood would respectively impart to the artworks for which they themselves were to become famous. My own intention, however, is to move away from a positivist reduction of art history to a strict alignment of biography and treatment, influence and method. Insofar as this chapter tries to mediate between the opposing views of Bacon and Isherwood, it does so by putting a stress on the ways in which these ‘views’ represent limit cases around which the relationship between the modern and the metropolitan was quite literally made visible in 1920s Germany. Here I want to consider Bacon and Isherwood’s comments in the context of

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5 Bacon quoted on http://www.francis-bacon.cx/biography/bio1.html
Walter Benjamin's frequently quoted essay on the "Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." More precisely, following Benjamin, I want to relocate important aspects of Weimar visual culture within a conceptual trajectory defined by a polarity between "semblance" [Schein] and "play" [Spiel].

In the Artwork Essay, Benjamin describes how both the mechanical reproducibility of traditional artworks and the constitutive role of reproduction in photography and film have collectively reformulated the historical status of art. For Benjamin, this is a crisis defined by what he describes as the withering of semblance [Schein] or the decay of "aura," that "unique modality of being that had accrued to the traditional work of art." In order to counter the structural decline of aura, Benjamin introduces the concept of Spiel, understood in its multiple German meanings as "play," "game," or "performance." Spiel provides Benjamin with a conceptual framework, that allows him to imagine an alternative mode of aesthetics uniquely equipped to accommodate the regime of perception advanced by the new media of technological reproduction. The term Spiel also provides the framing condition for the main of argument of this chapter, namely that the visual record can recruit performative energy even as it withholds the full presence and duration of performance. The point is ultimately this: that modernist experiments in visual representation during the Weimar era were committed less to the strictures of autonomous art, as indeed a belief that the modern was somehow performed through a whole host of visual forms, old and emergent. Indeed, the vexed problem of representing a modern city – Berlin – was a primary instance of this secret sharing between the visual and the performative. Here the question was not only one of

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8 The term Spiel appears in a variety of contexts in the work of Benjamin. For an excellent genealogy of the concept within the Benjaminian oeuvre, see Miriam Hansen, "Room-for-Play: Benjamin’s Gamble with Cinema," October 109 (2004), pp. 3-45, p. 4, p. 6.
bringing the city's changing spaces (often quite literally) into view, but also of capturing a *form* appropriate to its changing geographies.

In this way, the arguments put forth here are motivated by a desire to think modernism otherwise. The point seems to me a vital one and raises the possibility of an enlarged horizon of meaning which would in turn reappropriate and transform the practices, terms, and tropes that have invested modernism with meaning and authority.¹⁰ Reappropriations, in this case, illustrate the vulnerability of sullied terms to an unexpected innocence; such terms are not property; they assume a life and a purpose - often in and through places - for which they were never intended.¹¹ For Rosalind Krauss such reappropriations have "begun to fill in the space of an alternative history, one that had developed against the grain of modernist opticality, one that had risen on the very site of modernism only to defy its logic, to cross the wires of its various categories, to flout all its notions about essences and purifications, to refuse its concern with foundations."¹² If Krauss argues for a counter-history of modernism, I would want to add that we are also obliged to attend to its uneven and foliated geographies. After all, the cultural effusions of Berlin's avant-gardes were themselves complex maps of an ongoing process of incorporating and negotiating the radically new social and cultural terrain of the city.¹³

To confront visual modernity in all its materiality has already been captured with remarkable acuity by the art historian, T.J. Clark in his classic study of impressionist

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¹⁰ While these comments are directed at caricatured readings of a hegemonic modernism, I am not suggesting that we shouldn't be equally alert to the ways in which the advocacy of an 'alternative' modernism could (and in some quarters has) become an orthodoxy of its own.


painting and Paris.\(^\text{14}\) This was a Paris, as Clark claims, remade in the image of capital. “The city,” he writes, “was the sign of capital: it was there one saw the commodity take on flesh – take up and eviscerate the varieties of social practice, and give them back with ventriloquized precision.” What Clark understood as “spectacle” was, in this way, clearly indebted to the modernization of Second Empire Paris under the auspices of Baron Haussmann. “[Spectacle],” he adds, “points to the ways in which the city (and social life in general) was presented as a unity in the late nineteenth century, as a separate something made to be looked at – an image, a pantomime, a panorama.”\(^\text{15}\) The impressionists drew attention to the artifice of these presentations though Clark is right to insist that much of this “version of modernity” – with its preference for bourgeois forms of urban recreation served in fact a whole “social way of seeing, or rather a refusal to see significant forms of difference, division, and conflict.”\(^\text{16}\)

The famous impressionist ‘blur’ is admittedly not my focus though do I want to retain and build on Clark’s fixation with the relationship between formal procedure and social practice.\(^\text{17}\) There are, moreover, as Clark has recently reminded us, several episodes in a history of modernism and part of the purpose of this chapter is to describe one set of circumstances in which the “terms of modernism” – themselves constructs – were crystallized.\(^\text{18}\) In the case of Second Empire Paris, these circumstances only became so “by being given the forms called ‘spectacle.’” Whether or not we are willing to accept that Impressionism’s repertoire of subjects and devices were wholly complicit in this spectacle is

\(^\text{15}\) Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, p. 69, p. 63; original emphasis.
\(^\text{17}\) Like Clark, I will insist that this social dimension is something that interpretation reads out of how content is sedimented in the artwork as form (or at the very least in the tension between forms of content and forms of expression), not something to be retrospectively read into the artwork.
open to debate. In any event, the appeal of Weimar modernity solicited a rather different set of technical possibilities then the act of painting to which Impressionism appealed. But an important caveat also follows from this brief gloss. To suggest, as is often done, that the terms of modernism and the facts of Berlin life are somehow linked runs the risk of reaffirming a tautologous relationship between modernism and modernity. Capsule definitions notwithstanding, these are hardly hermetically sealed categories and, if anything, I want to retain the heterogeneous sense of the modern that was performed through a wide range of artistic outputs.

These arguments will reappear in various guises in the discussion that follows, though in working toward establishing the historical coordinates by which we might come to understand the specifically modern conditions of Weimar visuality, I would like to redirect our attention to the positions advanced by the Frankfurt School and its followers. In so doing, the work of Adorno, Benjamin and Kracauer will be singled out not the least for their well known relationship to the avant-garde in the visual arts. A detailed reappraisal of the aesthetic assumptions of Critical Theory – what Miriam Hansen has described as the other Frankfurt School – is not, however, in the cards as my motivations here are not so much recuperative as they are historical. After all, the varied contributions of Adorno, Benjamin,
and Kracauer were deeply indebted to the artistic practices of their contemporaries. From within this framework, terms, concepts, and practices familiarly applied to the artwork of the day - like ‘montage,’ ‘haptic,’ ‘aura,’ and ‘negative dialectics’ – will now have to be grasped with a new specificity. These are, most importantly, terms that Benjamin himself collectively deployed in his excursus on Spiel in the Artwork Essay and while they have in recent years been subject to increased scrutiny, their overall relationship to the formal character of Weimar visual culture remains inadequately developed.22

This chapter hopes to redress this omission by focusing on an array of practices which came to figure Weimar Berlin as an “imagined environment.”23 I am not talking here about a sundry collection of idiosyncratic visions but a related set of complex interventions into the widened range of visual experiences made possible by the modern metropolis. With this in mind, I have divided the chapter into three main sections each corresponding with a key paradigm around which a constellation of artistic activities were primarily associated. I begin with a discussion of the montage practices (‘Montage’) that achieved a high degree of formal proficiency in the 1920s. Dadaist photomontage with its characteristically heterogeneous juxtapositions of materials was of particular significance here, challenging not only traditional modes of perception but also heralding a more tactile form of visual appropriation. For Walter Benjamin, this jarring contrast not only simulated the perceptual effects of metropolitan induced shock but was also tantamount to a form of ‘haptic’ visuality. Eliciting sensations that exploited a viewer’s sense of touch was indeed a source of

23 James Donald, Imagining the Modern City (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 8.
considerable interest to the Weimar avant-garde and, in the second section of this chapter ('Haptics'), I explore the various practices that engaged with the problem of the visual and the phenomenal. The most relentless and effective of these visual forms were often impugned for their ability to dissolve the "auratic" quality of the traditional, autonomous artwork – the aura being that "aspect of perceived distance that separates the viewer from the work of art, a distance Benjamin described in terms of an ineffable sense of life or the feeling that the work was somehow engaged in returning the viewer's gaze." While the liquidation of aura was undoubtedly associated with a wide range of activities, there were also, I would argue, a series of aesthetic procedures predicated on reviving a peculiarly modern version of auratic experience. In the third section of this chapter ('Aura'), I chronicle not only aura's wilful destruction but also that body of metropolitan painting and photography in which 'aura' played a precarious yet indispensable part. To the extent that these practices increasingly depended on a spurious alignment of the aesthetic and the political, it is finally my intention to revisit the tainted – some would argue irredeemably compromised – modernist dream of an art that could counter the vicissitudes of modernity.

Theodor Adorno perhaps more than anyone else has reflected on the possibilities (and limitations) of such a perspective claiming "that perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light." The concluding section of this chapter ('Negative Dialectics') briefly explores Adorno's insistence on an art of defamiliarization and whether those energies of "consummate negativity," the displacing and estranging

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perspectives that he persistently lauded, actually served as an organizing principle for rethinking our understanding of Weimar visual culture.\textsuperscript{26}

Ultimately, my aims in this chapter do not involve rewriting the history of Weimar visual culture. Rather, they involve looking into some of the blind spots and overdetermined narratives of that historiography, suggesting some of the terms through which the relation between Weimar Berlin and the modern was made ‘visible.’ If it is my intention to commit to memory what Lazlo Moholy-Nagy described in 1925 as a “widened range of present and future visual experiences,” I also continue to wonder how history can be entirely faithful to the ephemeral performance of modernity.\textsuperscript{27} “Performance’s only life,” writes Peggy Phelan, “is the present.” For Phelan, the liveness of performance is ontologically distinct from the photographic and recording arts. But as she has more recently suggested, the ephemeral nature of performance is also absolutely fundamental to the facticity of history.\textsuperscript{28} Writing in response to Phelan’s claim, Rebecca Schneider has speculated that, “in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently – appears, but appears differently.”\textsuperscript{29} To answer this question is, in many respects, the primary task of this dissertation and if I have already worked through the textual forms in which performance ‘re-appears’, in what follows I will focus on what is performed with another of performance’s remainders, with its images, photographs, and films.

\textsuperscript{26} Adorno, \textit{Minima Moralia}, p. 247. The most extensive treatment of this ‘task’ can be found in Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).


Montage

Art and Society converge in substance.

- Theodor Adorno.³⁰

The principle of montage was conceived as an act against a surreptitiously achieved organic unity; it was meant to shock. Once this shock is neutralized, the assemblage once more becomes merely indifferent material; the technique no longer suffices to trigger communication between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic, and its interest dwindles to a cultural-historical curiosity.

- Theodor Adorno³¹

As Pamela Lee has recently reminded us, it is tempting to see the history of modern art as a “litany of places” recalling schools and styles, networks and institutions, histories long and complex.³² To trace the development of modernism would similarly yield a codified series of iconoclastic gestures, retrospectively secured through a host of founding myths from the readymade to the grid, drip paintings to minimal sculpture, site specificity to performance art. The development of montage as a modernist medium is no different in this respect with its numerous talismanic representatives: Picasso and Braque’s cubist collages, Hains and Villeglé’s décollaged posters, Rauschenberg’s combine paintings, Höch and Heartfield’s photomontages. While questions regarding the precise moment of montage’s ‘invention’ – and ‘reinvention’ for that matter – do not merit much scrutiny unto themselves, I am interested in the important place that photomontage, and above all Berlin Dada montage, has occupied in the history of modernism.³³ As with so many other of modernism’s

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³³ The word ‘montage’ itself is most likely French in origin. It already appeared in Diderot and D’Alembert’s 18th century Encyclopédie as an “opération par laquelle on assemble les pièces d’un mécanisme, d’un dispositif, d’un objet plus ou moins complexe pour le mettre en état de servir, de fonctionner” [An operation through which the parts of a complex machine, system, or object are assembled in order to facilitate its proper
origin myths, the development of the photomontage was hardly unambiguous as later disputes among figures like George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Raoul Haussmann about who ‘invented’ photomontage abundantly shows. With these disputes in mind, I want to dwell on Brigid Doherty’s assertion that “Berlin Dada engaged very specifically with important aspects of German modernity.” For Doherty, montage represented a visual form predominantly conceived to engage with the embodiment of modernity in subjects transformed by industrialized war, rationalized work, and metropolitan life. I wish, however, to push this argument even further and explore to what extent montage, as an organizing structure and formal principle, was able to accommodate the theatricality of Weimar urbanism.

To invoke the theatrical character of Dada montage may raise the ire of some readers. ‘Theatre,’ after all, has remained a dirty word in the art historical literature, a term of opprobrium that dates back at the very least to Michael Fried’s infamous critique of minimalist sculpture in the 1960s where, in an almost desperate attempt to shore up the territory of modernism at the moment of its definitive disappearance, Fried singles out ‘theatricality’ as the prime enemy to the doxa of modernist visuality:

Theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture) but with art as such...The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre. Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre. Theatre is the common denominator that binds a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities to one

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another, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts...

The concepts of quality and value – and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre.  

For Fried, the most ingratiating and commonplace work of the 1960s (read minimalism) sought to establish a theatrical relation to the beholder, “whereas the very best work – the paintings of Louis, Noland, Olitski, and Stella and the sculptures of Smith and Caro – were in essence anti-theatrical, which is to say that they treated the beholder as if he were not there.” By now the argument is familiar with its emphasis on “perceptual empiricism, self-reflexivity, and medium-specificity and its prescription of an essential and exclusive visuality as the sole legitimate modus of the experience of high art objects.” Such a highly phobic prohibition against theatricality has created, however, an aporia in our understanding of the historical avant-garde. In other words, while Fried’s argument may have spawned over three decades of heated discussion about the merits of minimalism, there has been a “resounding art historical silence” with regard to the performance practices that were an important dimension of visual modernism from the 1920s and 30s to the 1950s and 60s. The argument that follows probes one area of this blind spot, the exchange between the visual and the performative that was tantamount to the photomontage techniques used by the

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Berlin Dadaists. In this context, montage represented much more than an innovative technique developed and refined by a small group of artists working in Berlin during the 1920s.\textsuperscript{41} It also served as a "kind of symbolic form, providing a shared visual idiom" that more than any other expressed the tumultuous arrival of a fully urbanized, industrialized culture.\textsuperscript{42}

The Berlin Dadaists were well aware of montage's indebtedness to the materiality of a rapidly industrializing society. Operating in what were clearly uncertain circumstances, they embraced the wrappings and promotional materials of everyday life ransacking trashy mass materials for their own visual practices.\textsuperscript{43} In using photographs, scissors, and glue rather than brushes and paint, the Dadaists were also able to distance themselves from the traditional practices of art-making. In the words of one recent critic, "their self-concept was that of a technician less personally engaged in the creative process than those artists for whom the unique, individual gesture was paramount." "We regarded ourselves as engineers," noted Hannah Höch in retrospect, "we maintained that we were building things, we said we put our works together like fitters."\textsuperscript{44}

In their self-professed capacity as 'monteurs,' 'industrial machinists,' and 'technical experts,' the Berlin Dadaists like many of their counterparts in the Weimar avant-garde elevated the notion of \textit{expertise} in an effort to attend to the labour of the 'artist' in

\textsuperscript{41} As Dickerman has rightly pointed out, discussions of Dadaism have suffered considerably from an emphasis on biography and anecdotal evidence. See "Dada Gambits."
\textsuperscript{42} Phillips, "Introduction," p. 22.
modernity.\textsuperscript{45} The Dadaists were, admittedly, hyperbolic in their “anti-art” diatribes though these are better read as a critique of the technical procedures of modernism rather than their rejection \textit{tout court}. As Leah Dickerman has suggested, “Dadaism is about making, about producing art in changed historical circumstances.”\textsuperscript{46} The accent on ‘making’ is reflected in the materiality of the techniques around which Dada as a movement developed: photomontages, sculptural assemblages, puppets, and typographic experiments. But more importantly, this was also an engagement with the materiality of those ‘changed historical circumstances’ to which the Dadaists directed their negative energies. This is not to unproblematically equate ‘materiality’ with the ‘real’ but rather to think through the ‘matter’ of Dada montage as a kind of \textit{materialization} through which the regulatory norms of modernity were brought into sharp relief.\textsuperscript{47} Judith Butler describes materialization as a process that “stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.”\textsuperscript{48} Butler is primarily concerned with investigating the various ways in which the performative can serve as a framework for understanding subject formation and creative expression. But what if the dynamics of performativity that she has mind were themselves literalised in the actual material form of Dada montage? What if the \textit{techne} of Dada montage – its processual nature – was deliberately mimetic? To answer these questions, I propose a connection between two concepts of materialization: materialization as a formal component in Dada montage and materialization as the accumulated series of performances through


\textsuperscript{46} Dickerman, “Dada Gambits,” p. 8.

\textsuperscript{47} I am adjusting a phrasing of Judith Butler. See Butler, \textit{Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”} (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 16.

\textsuperscript{48} Butler, \textit{Bodies that Matter}, p. 9.
which a culture sustains belief in the reality of a given social field.\(^{49}\) From this view, the montage materializations of Berlin Dada demand to be understood alongside the bodily materializations that anxiously worked to uphold the tacit performativity of a metropolitan world where "theatricality appeared to be the common denominator of all manifestations of life."\(^{50}\)

This is a provocative view, though I am supported in this regard by Theodor Adorno for whom modern art amounted to a critique of "the semblance of subjectivity."\(^{51}\) According to Adorno, "artworks bear expression not where they communicate the subject, but rather where they reverberate with the protohistory of subjectivity."\(^{52}\) The full ramifications of this passage cannot admittedly be unpacked all at once. Suffice to say, that, for Adorno, the arts, are a "repository of the elements of particular, sensuous, embodied experience that were found idle once the abstract sign – first the Platonic universal, later the mathematical sign – became legislative for empirical knowledge and practical reasoning." In this way, Adorno understood artworks not as unique particulars in themselves but as images or semblances of particulars having evolved under the weight of a "rationality" that sought to dispose of what was inherently sensuous and embodied.\(^{53}\) This is not, I concede, an obvious way to consider modern art and Adorno's critique has, unfortunately, relatively little substantive to say about


\(^{50}\) I am modifying, in this respect, the conclusions that Doherty reaches. See also Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 387. As Brigid Doherty has pointed, the Dadaists themselves often deliberately employed the language of materialization. In 1922, for example, George Grosz published a portfolio of lithographs called *With Paintbrush and Scissors: Seven Materializations*. Doherty, "The Trauma of Dada Montage," p. 84-5.


\(^{52}\) Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 112.

Dadaism; his avatars, after all, where Kafka, Beckett, and Schoenberg.\(^5^4\) And yet, despite his advocacy of autonomous art, Adorno’s articulation of the many deflations and projections of subjectivity voiced in modern art still resonates with the stated aims of the Dada movement.

This is best seen in the context of the First International Dada Fair (Dada-Messe), a mixed-media exhibition of roughly two hundred objects that was held in 1920 at a Berlin-Kreuzberg gallery owned by Otto Burchard, an expert and collector of Chinese ceramics. Recent discussions of the exhibition has largely focused on the “meaningfulness and vitality of trauma as a category of historical and interpretive interest in Berlin Dada.”\(^5^5\) But even more striking are the ways in which the montage principles to which the exhibition primarily adhered were bound up in an appreciation of modernity and its problematics. As Hanne Bergius has shown, the exhibition itself was organized to mimetically reproduce the montage logic that inhered in the individual works that cluttered the walls of the gallery.\(^5^6\) The disorientating surfeit of works on display was made to recall the bombardment of moving images and texts – the posters, electric advertisements, filmic images - that had already transformed the public spaces of Weimar Berlin while competing for the attention of the city dweller. The use of the word “fair” \([\text{Messe}]\) was also deliberately parodic mocking the very consumer culture that had sanctioned the dealing in works of modern art in the first place.

Consider, for example, the cover page to the printed catalogue of the Dada Fair (fig. 2.1) which not only advertised the sale of ‘Dada objects and products’ but also insisted that it

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\(^{5^4}\) Adorno was, however, deeply critical of the surrealist movement, especially its tendency in his view to absorb and sublimate the fragments of everyday life without any sort of critical reflection on the societal system that had promoted the same sort of reification. See his 1956 essay “Looking Back on Surrealism,” in *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), pp. 220-224.

\(^{5^5}\) Doherty, “The Trauma of Dada Montage,” p. 88.

was only through the Dada movement that "the sublation [Aufhebung] of the art trade" was at all possible. In the end, there is little to suggest that any of the objects on sale during the exhibition were in fact purchased. To the extent that the Berlin Dadaists may have been unsuccessful in recouping their investments in the exhibition, their efforts to generate publicity did succeed in reaching a wide audience. As the 12 publicity photos to the exhibition abundantly testify, the concerns of the Berlin Dadaists were firmly rooted in questions regarding the possibilities of public expression, especially as they became related to the contradictions of a mass-mediated modernity.

While Berlin Dada’s engagement with the public sphere was defining, its strategies hardly amounted to a coherent politics. Rather they are perhaps, best understood at a

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structural level as “disordering interventions into governing systems.” To underscore this point, I want to briefly focus on individual works that I consider in esse representative of Dada montage in its most powerful forms: Hannah Höch’s *Cut with a Kitchen Knife: Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*; Raoul Hausmann’s *Tatlin at Home*, George Grosz and John Heartfield’s *The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild*. Various other works could claim attention here as well, though my choices were made, not to submit individual objects to a hierarchy of judgment and taste, but to consider, as directly as possible, the relationship between Dada’s tactics and the metropolitan context out of which they emerged.

Take, for example, Höch’s photomontage *Cut with a Kitchen Knife* which was prominently displayed alongside some of her other contributions to the Dada-Messe (fig. 2.2). Until recently, Höch was a largely forgotten figure within the Berlin Dada movement having only become acquainted to its activities through her relationship to Raoul Hausmann. Originally trained at the Kunstgewerbeschule Charlottenburg (Applied Art School of Charlottenburg) and the Unterrichtsanstalt des königlichen Kunstgewerbemuseums (School of the Royal Museum of the Applied Arts), Höch’s wide-ranging expertise in design landed her a job in the handicrafts department of the Ullstein Verlag, Germany’s foremost publisher of illustrated magazines and newspapers. A strong background in the applied arts also meant that Höch was unusually well-positioned to take advantage of the medium of montage which she first encountered while vacationing with Hausmann on a small island in the Ostsee. As she later recounted:

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Fig. 2.2 Höch, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife: Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-20, collage.
[The] systematically arranged working with photographic material began with our seeing an amusing oleograph on the wall of our guest room in a fisherman's house on the Baltic Sea. It depicted...five standing soldiers in five different uniforms – yet photographed only once – upon whom the head of the fisherman's son had five times been glued. This naively kitschy oleograph hung in many German rooms as a memento of the son's service as a soldier. It provided the occasion for Hausmann to expand upon the idea of working with photographs. Immediately after our return we began to do pictorial photomontage.60

By clipping out photographs from newspapers and magazines and recombining them in often unsettling ways, Höch and Hausmann were hoping to shock their viewers into confronting widely accepted assumptions about the mass-media and the "mainstream ideology" it purveyed. For both of them, photomontage was understood as a "means of infiltrating the mere picture of reality with its meaning." After all, as Bertolt Brecht once noted, "a photograph of the Krupp works or GEC yields almost nothing about these institutions...Therefore something has actively to be constructed, something artificial, something set-up."61

Höch's Cut with a Kitchen Knife combined photographs of political figures with sports stars, fellow Dadaists, and urban images. As numerous commentators have already pointed out, the montage is a veritable "encyclopaedia of every important political, military, and cultural figure in early Weimar-era Germany."62 Representatives, for example, of Höch's "anti-dadistische Bewegung" – the deposed Kaiser, the military, and the government of the new Republic - dominate the upper right corner of the montage. In contrast, images of Höch's fellow Dadaists are aligned with Lenin and the communist leader Karl Radek in the lower right. While this antinomy undoubtedly revisits Dada's well-known hostility to the status-quo politics of Weimar society, what is most striking about Cut with a Kitchen Knife

is Höch’s interest in addressing the formation of new identities for women within an increasingly ‘metropolitan’ environment.

Not only does Höch align women with the revolutionary world of her Dada compatriots, but her use of easily recognizable figures signals a more ambitious allegorical impulse: namely to thematise the ambivalences and contradictions that confronted women in Weimar Germany. In this context, the notion that Höch used images of women to embody Berlin Dada should not be seen as some art historical shibboleth. Unlike symbolic readings, allegorical methods promote multiple layers of meaning in a given text or image, a view supported by the Dadaists as Benjamin Buchloh has convincingly argued. In *Cut with a Kitchen Knife*, the juxtaposition of allegorical fragments revolves around the materialization of often incommensurable gender roles. It’s in this light that I interpret the centre of the composition (fig. 2.3) which rotates around a cut-out photograph of the avant-garde dancer “Niddy” Impevoken pirouetting headless below the tilted head of Käthe Kollwitz which has been pierced by a spear. The bodies of dancers like Impevoken are dotted throughout the work and I would agree with Maud Lavin that the instability of these disjunctive montage fragments “creates a kaleidoscopic effect of movement.” For Lavin, these movements can be quite easily read as allegorical signifiers of physical freedom and revolutionary change. Images of modern dancers within Weimar popular culture were, in any case, legion and would have certainly served as a powerful reminder of the body culture mania of the 1920s.

But if we look more closely, we soon realize that the montage isn’t a simple celebration of the relationship between women and technology within modernity. Note again the pierced

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64 Lavin, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife*, p. 23.
head of Kollwitz at the centre of the work. Kollwitz was, at the time, a professor of the
Prussian Academy of Arts and Germany’s foremost female artist, and the juxtaposition of
her severed head alongside Impekoven’s pirouetting body may be taken as an

acknowledgement of the difficult task confronting Höch as an artist, an admission perhaps of
the alienation and violence that prescribed gender roles and identities still demanded.66 All
this may seem to go quite far, but we do see in Höch’s strategies a remarkable awareness of
what Judith Butler has more recently called the performativity of gender roles, which is to
say that I ultimately read Cut with a Kitchen Knife as a critical staging of the discursive
conventions that it is working hard to negate.67

66 Richard McCormick, Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity”
67 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (London and New York: Routledge,
1990); See also Butler, Bodies that Matter.
If the basic terms of my account are provisionally granted, several points emerge that distinguish Höch’s montage techniques from those of her Dada counterparts, especially her censure of their tacit misogyny. Of course any biographical reading of her compositions is purely speculative though one can’t help but wonder to what extent her sensitivity to the illusionary emancipation of Weimar’s New Woman was a consequence of her own personal disappointments. Höch’s male colleagues, after all, accorded her work little if any respect. George Grosz and John Heartfield opposed her participation in the Dada-Messe while Hans Richter later described her only real contribution to the movement as the “sandwiches, beer, and coffee she managed somehow to conjure up despite the shortage of money.” It was, however, her turbulent and abusive relationship with Hausmann that was, in the end, the main source of her disillusionment. While Hausmann, at least in his essays, represented the movement’s spokesman for women’s rights, he not only ridiculed her work but was often violent, hitting Höch on several occasions.

Höch’s experience and understanding of the deeply misogynist violence embedded within modernist thinking and art forms was not only remarkably prescient but reflected, in no small part, in the work of her peers. One need only consider the chaotic Dadaist visions of Grosz, Dix, and Schlichter, well-known for their impressions of extreme domestic violence, of women murdered in the tenements and back streets of modern Berlin. Whatever the meaning of these images, I want to suggest that this ‘fascination’ also carried over into the concerns of Dada montage. Works like Grosz’ Tatlinischer Plan (fig. 2.4) were

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69 Höch and Hausmann were lovers from 1915 to 1922 at which point his abuse and refusal to end his marriage prompted her to leave him.

symptomatic of an engagement with traumatic shock as it emerged in German culture during and immediately after World War I. To the extent that Berlin Dada aimed to be mimetic of this shock in both form and content, it also proposed a particular approach to the war’s violent challenge to the illusion of masculine inviolability.\(^7\) In Tatlinischer Plan, this is staged, as Doherty has rightly suggested, by way of a regression fantasy, an abandonment of adult sexuality imagined through an encounter between a man resembling John Heartfield and a woman who offers him her breast.\(^7\) Here, the interdependent function of impotent rage and masculine regression are clearly exhibited, a point widely noted by contemporary art critics. “Grosz has developed a style appropriate to his rage,” notes Max Osborn, “he swims in the tide of infantilism.” “[Grosz’s] childishness,” added another reviewer, “is a deliberate

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\(^7\) Doherty, “The Trauma of Dada Montage,” p. 111.
and intentional stylistic form taken from the drawings that streets kids scrawl on the walls of buildings.”

While Grosz was making a statement about the relationship between trauma and regression, Raoul Hausmann’s contemporaneous compositions belie a desire to resecure the coherence of masculine authority. Montage compositions like Mechanical Head and Tatlin at Home (fig. 2.5) are clearly torn by a conflict between machinic rationalism and traditional notions of a coherent, heroic masculinity. Hausmann’s technophilia was well-known and certainly in evidence in his synthesis of organic and technological elements. As Matthew Osborn, “Dada,” Vossische Zeitung, 17.07.1920; Leo Zahn, “Über den Infantilismus in der neuen Kunst,” Der Ararat 1 (1920), pp. 1-2.
Biro has suggested, “Hausmann emphatically rejected the expressionist nostalgia for a human condition untouched by modernization, urbanization, and mass culture.” In contrast, he countered with an image of a “man who had nothing in his head but machines, cylinders and motors,” as he himself described Tatlin at Home. Thus the figure of the cyborg to borrow Biro’s awkward appellation, a ‘portrait’ of the Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin intended, on the one hand, to serve as a “positive self-image or ego-ideal for Hausmann.” On the other hand, one could hardly have expected the presentation of ‘the artist-cyborg’ at the Dada-Messe to have been consistently positive. Tatlin at Home may have anatomised the “New Man” lauded by Hausmann and his fellow Dadaists, but anxiety about mechanical intervention in the body remained an equally powerful element of their sculptural assemblages. Indeed, if we consider Grosz and Heartfield’s The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild, just how idiosyncratic Berlin Dada’s materialism was becomes abundantly clear.

Photos from the Dada-Messe (fig. 2.6) show Grosz and Heartfield pictured in front of the The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild holding up a placard proclaiming the death of art and the rise of the new “machine art of Tatlin.” If the latter claim owes more to Konstatin Umanski’s description of “Tatlinismus” as a “conquering materialism” than on any real encounter with the art of Vladimir Tatlin, it was certainly typical of Berlin Dada’s

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75 Biro, “The New Man as Cyborg,” p. 81.
76 As George Grosz himself stated in a 1921 article in Das Kunstblatt: “Man is no longer represented as an individual to be psychologically dissected, but rather as a collective, almost mechanical concept [mechanischer Begriff].” George Grosz, “Zu meinen neuen Bildern,” Das Kunstblatt 5 (1921), pp. 11-14, p. 11. At the same time, I would also insist that Grosz’s portrayal of the New Man was not without a sense of biting parody, especially in the context of its ecstatic Expressionist counterparts. See Lothar Schreyer, “Der neue Mensch,” Der Sturm 10 (1919), p. 18; Walter Rilla, “Der neue Mensch,” Die Erde 1 (1919), pp. 9-15.
77 The original placard read “Art is dead/Long live the new/machine art/of Tatlin.” The source of Grosz and Heartfield’s slogan is most likely the Russian art critic Konstantin Umaski, see n. 78.
ironic iconoclastic tendencies. The assemblage (fig. 2.7) is made up of a child-sized tailor's dummy to which a number of objects have been fastened: a doorbell, a revolver, a knife and fork and a military medallion. Perched peg-legged on a pedestal, the montage's main thematic is undoubtedly the bodily trauma of the war though a recent reading by Doherty suggests that its rich allegorical content afforded an equally "ironical identification with the militant middle-class philistinism and petit-bourgeois revolutionism" that accompanied the collapse of revolutionary politics in the early years of the Republic.

I find little to quarrel here with these readings not the least because, as Doherty herself suggests, Berlin Dada montage was always intended to sustain such multiple understandings. If we can set aside the details of these interpretations, what is consistent is their attentiveness to the medium of montage – in two dimensions and in three - as the privileged means by which the Dadaists were able to challenge the pieties of the traditional work of art. Of course in saying of all this, we also need to remind ourselves that, while montage was employed in the early 1920s by the Dadaists as an embodiment (often literally) of their politics, by the late 1920s it was also widely used in the mass media and had become a definitive sign of the most modern style in graphics.

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79 Doherty, "The Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada," p. 90. Doherty locates *Der wildgewordene Spießer* within contemporaneous debates about the nature of making and viewing artworks in circumstances that no longer subscribed to an auratic understanding of artistic production. This was, of course, most clearly stated by Grosz and Heartfield in their now infamous polemic, "Das Kunstlump" that appeared in the journal *Das Gegner* in April, 1920. See Grosz and Heartfield, "Das Kunstlump," *Das Gegner* (1920). For a discussion of "Das Kunstlump" debate see Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party: Art and Radicalism in Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).


Fig. 2.6
Grosz and Heartfield at the First International Dada Fair, 1920.

Fig. 2.7
By this time, the political investments that accompanied the montage procedures of Berlin Dada had arguably found other vehicles of expression. Heartfield, for one, had begun in 1930 to publish his photomontages in the communist-run and Berlin-based magazine *AIZ* (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*). In the course of eight years, Heartfield was able to produce two-hundred and thirty seven photomontages before he was forced into exile by the National Socialists (fig. 2.8). Grosz, on the other hand, had largely abandoned the medium, though his Dada colleague Höch did continue to refine her montage practices as a form of “social commentary concerning the typology and conditions of the modern woman.” Indeed, Höch’s scrapbook activities demonstrated the use of the medium as a mode of archiving and

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83 Lavin, *Cut from a Kitchen Knife*, p. 159.
registering the compendium of mass cultural images which circulated on the streets of Berlin. Admittedly, even the conventions of photomontage had themselves begun to saturate the metropolitan public sphere, appearing on commercial and political posters, journal illustrations, colour magazine spreads, page layouts and book jackets, advertisements, photomurals, exhibition catalogues, industrial-product brochures, department-store promotions, and film advertisements.84

This shift of photomontage from the activities of a small group of artists to a medium of magnitude can be seen in the work of modernist advertising designers that took up the techniques of photomontage, especially the leading trade group, the Circle of New Advertising Designers, as they called themselves – NWG or ring “neue werbegestalter.” Founded by the former Dadaist Kurt Schwitters in 1928, the neue werbegestalter included well-known artists like Willi Baumeister, Jan Tschichold, Walter Dexel, and Max Burchartz. Unlike their Dada counterparts, the ring was relatively successful in promoting their designs to a wider audience. As Lavin has pointed out, from 1928 to 1931 members of the ring exhibited constantly; their were often two collections of works touring Germany and the Netherlands at the same time.85 Members of the ring played a key role too in the organization of a major 1931 International Fotomontage exhibition in Berlin which included works by Heartfield, Höch, and Hausmann as well as key Soviet photomontagists (fig. 2.9). Attempts by the ring to bridge the position between avant-garde and mass culture were also extended to the circuits of the popular press, most notably with the publication of

85 Exhibitions were held in Berlin, Bremen, Dresden, Essen, Köln, Hamburg, and München to name just a few locations.
the 1930 book, *Gefesselter Blick*, undoubtedly the period’s definitive survey of advertising design.\(^8^6\)

Stylistically, the graphics produced by the *ring* were marked by an engagement with the ubiquitous geometric form and grid composition of modernist typography and photomontage. What distinguished, however, their work from their Dada predecessors was an enthusiastic, even utopic, appraisal of industrial rationalization and technology. Working

![Fig. 2.9](image)

César Domela,
Catalogue cover: Fotomontage Exhibition in Berlin, 1931.

often in conjunction with high-profile industrial clients, members of the *ring* produced graphics that extolled the virtues of advertising, new technology, and mass communication. Unfortunately, this fascination with means of production often worked “to block discussion among cultural modernists about industrial ownership, labour practices, and profits.”\(^8^7\) This elision is not only striking among those who were actually producing graphics for industry

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\(^8^6\) Heinz and Bodo Rasch, eds., *Gefesselter Blick: 25 Kurze Monografien und Beiträge über neue Werbegestaltung* (Stuttgart: Verlag Dr. Zaugg & Co., 1930). The contemporary periodicals, *Die Form* and *G - Material zur Gestaltung* were also important in advocating and popularizing the montage as an icon appropriate to the circumstances of Weimar modernity. See Jan Tschichold, “Fotographie und Typographie,” *Die Form* 3 (1928), pp. 140-150; Lavin, “Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity,” p. 40.

\(^8^7\) See Lavin, “Photomontage, Mass Culture, and Modernity,” p. 46.
as Lavin rightly suggests. It, in many respects, also served as an effacement of those "innumerable and meaningful acts of fabrication" that were synonymous with the notion of work, the techne, to which the practices of the Dadaist avant-garde actively subscribed. While these practices were originally intended to rail against the suspension of living concrete labour, they finally revealed a more ambitious goal: to explore the metropolitan conditions in which new modalities of perception had come to take place; to, in other words, attend to the problem of vision and modernity.

To be sure, one may be tempted at this point to ask, to what extent a history of art effectively coincides with a history of perception? Or whether the changing forms of artworks themselves provide the most compelling record of what Jonathan Crary has elsewhere described as the "modernization of vision?" The following pages suggest that a history of vision depends on far more than the internal conditions of particular artworks. Indeed, the relationship between the formal properties of Weimar montage and the modern metropolis was neither purely mimetic nor wholly immanent to the works themselves. In the words of Crary, "vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification." Admittedly, Crary is interested in a broader and more important transformation "in the makeup of vision" that he dates to the early decades of the 19th century. If we can accept that the arena of modernist art making represented a later symptom of this shift, then we certainly find in the characteristically

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90 Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer, p. 5.
heterogeneous juxtapositions of material in Dada montage, a wilful confounding of traditional modes of perception.

According to Walter Benjamin, the Berlin Dadaists were simply reacting to the innervating shock effects produced by a rapidly modernizing city. For them, the state of contemplation that might have been the *petitio principii* of traditional artworks was no longer valid as a model of visual attention. Hence, their montage practices which rendered contemplative immersion impossible and achieved a "ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced." What Michael Fried has famously described as "absorption" is here opposed by Benjaminian "distraction." This opposition between distraction and absorption was, for Benjamin at least, only one aspect of a wider social dialectic. It is, nevertheless, clear that Fried's ideal of aesthetic perception is antithetical to the model of vision or attention that Benjamin attributed to the Dadaists, most notably in the Artwork Essay. Indeed, Fried's version of pictorial coherence is completely internal, the type of painting he ultimately admires is "self-sufficient, a closed system which in effect seals off the space or world of the painting from the beholder." If the beholder or spectator was emphatically excluded from the model of absorption proposed by Fried, Dadaist montage, by its very nature, "guaranteed a quite vehement distraction by making artworks the centre of scandal." As Benjamin made clear, Dadaist montage not only posited a spectator, a viewing

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92 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 62. Margaret Iversen is right to point out, in this respect, that all of Fried's work represents a "sustained mediation on the problematic of spectator/depiction relationships" from Caravaggio and Diderot to Stella and Judd. At the heart of this project is a close engagement with what Fried understands as an 'antitheatrical' tradition within French painting stretching from the time of Diderot to Manet. See Margaret Iverson, *Alois Riegl*, p. 131. See also Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1997), pp. 13-56. Earlier works by Fried that explored this relationship include *Manet's Modernism or the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) and *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
subject, but in fact depended on one, and for Fried this means “it is caught up in the bad faith and corruption of theatricality.”

The theatricality so charted was never limited to the internal properties of Dada montage and, if anything, promoted a form of reception adequate to the shock-sensations of modern metropolitan life. For Benjamin, however, the activities of the Dadaists were only anticipatory. “The Dadaists,” he concluded, “turned the artwork into a missile. It jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile quality. It thereby fostered the demand for film, since the distracting element in film is also primarily tactile, being based on successive changes of scene and focus which have a percussive effect on the spectator.” In the end, although Benjamin likened the perceptual modality initiated by Berlin Dada to the production and reception of film, the tactile and distracted model of vision that he proposes here was a source of widespread interest to the Weimar avant-garde.

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94 Margaret Iverson, *Alois Riegl*, p. 135.
Haptics

My power of imagining is nothing but the persistence of the world around me.
–Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In experimenting with the disjunctive form and aggressive content of montage, the Berlin Dadaists were able to ‘re-animate’ and ‘embody’ the alienating experiences of modern metropolitan life and war trauma. Not only did the production of Dada montage lend itself to the articulation of traumatic shock and give concrete form to a dismembered, emasculated male body, but, as Doherty emphasizes, its reception by a beholder issued its own traumatic shock. For the Dadaists, traditional medium boundaries were meant to be violated and transgressed with Dada work spilling out into the realm of performance, media pranks, and new forms of site-specificity. “The point,” writes Dickerman, “[was] not so much virtuoso object production, although this [was] at times a consequence, but intervention and activation of the terrain of modern culture itself.” The transformation of audience relationships was tantamount to the concerns of the Berlin Dadaists, their “assault on the institution of art” converging with a new regime of perception advanced by the media of technical reproduction. Again, it was left to Walter Benjamin, ever the prescient interlocutor of the Weimar avant-garde, to link the Dada object with a new and explicitly aggressive form of spectatorship. Benjamin’s comments were, in this respect, made from the retrospective vantage point of a decade or so, though his interest in the reorganization of human sense perception already appeared in a variety of earlier contexts including One-Way

Street and the essay on Surrealism.\footnote{Walter Benjamin, “One Way Street,” SW 1, pp. 444-488; “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” SW 2, pp. 207-221.} Benjamin may have ultimately seen film, with its montage techniques, close-ups, and variable framings, as the medium most adequate to a dynamic visual, sensorial environment. But in typically Benjaminian fashion, this linkage detoured, as Miriam Hansen has recently suggested, through another set of terms, notably “image-space” [Bildraum] and “body-space” [Leibraum]. It was the “increased imbrication of both as a signature of urban-industrial modernity” that interested Benjamin (and the Dadaists for that matter) and while I do not want to rehearse the idiosyncrasies of his argument, I do want to retain its broad contours for the ensuing discussion.\footnote{Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. 21. Also see Sigrid Weigel, Body-and-Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin, trans. Georgina Paul (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).}

The impact of the new media, especially film and advertising, is most clearly visible in the pages of One-Way Street where a reconfiguration of physical space – the space of the body – is closely associated with a transformation of perceptual space - the space of images:

Today, the most real, the mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement. It tears down the stage upon which contemplation moved, and all but hits between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions, careens at us out of a film screen. And just as the film does not present furniture and façades in completed forms for critical inspection, their insistent, jerky nearness alone being sensational, the genuine advertisement hurls things at us with the tempo of a good film.\footnote{Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” SW 1, p. 476.}

Such a transformation of corporeal and perceptual space under the sign of an incipient modernity was certainly exemplified by the shared methodologies of film and advertising during the Weimar era.\footnote{See Janet Ward, Weimar Surfaces, especially chapters 3-4.} At the same time, it is easy for a theoretical placeholder like the ‘embodied’ spectator of early Germany cinema to mask the fact that Weimar spectators passively experienced and actively pursued a variety of visual attractions and entertainments. This was a period, after all, that witnessed the development of new recording technologies,
an increased circulation of mass-produced images, and a bewildering proliferation of optical devices all of which recalled cinematic forms of moving images, projection, and animation. The Berliner Luna Amusement Park and the Kaiserpanorama on the Unter den Linden were only the most notable of numerous new sites on which one could credibly locate an 'industrialization' of visual consumption: urban spaces in which the individual Berliner faced a new intensity of sensory stimulation (fig. 2.10).¹⁰⁴

The Dadaists were quick to realize the possibilities that characterized this new perceptual regime defined, as it was, by nearness, shock, and tactility. Their shock-driven montages were not only allegorical in content, but, unlike many forms of modernist painting, they also exploited the viewer’s sense of touch, they were, in other words, resolutely "haptic." Haptic perception is usually defined as "a combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of an inside our bodies." In haptic visuality, as Laura Marks, has recently argued, it is the eyes themselves which are meant to function like "organs of touch." This is in contrast to "optical visuality" which for Marks, "sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space." The separation that Marks makes between the "haptic" and the "optic" owes much to its highly original treatment within Benjamin’s Artwork essay. It was, however, the work of the nineteenth-century art historian, Alois Riegl, who isolated these terms as they found their expression in art history. In Riegl’s *Late Roman Art*, the separation of the haptic and the optic was applied to the artistic ideals of antique relief. In the case of the haptic, the organization of a figure upon its ground was marked “by a distinct sculptural contour treated as an isolated body in space, and, as such, perceived by the beholder as a tactile and individualized entity.” Over time, the relief in antique art grew shallower until the differentiation between figures diminished and an increasingly homogeneous space appeared, one that gestured toward illusionist figuration and the ascendancy of optical representation that was so crucial to later developments in Western art.

107 Lee, *Chronophobia*, p. 177.
108 In *Late Roman Art*, Riegl divided the evolution of antique art into three phases which, broadly speaking, coincided with what understood to be a shift from the haptic to the optical. This development, inspired by Riegl’s well known Hegelianism, was exemplified in the concept of the *Kunstwollen* according to which "the
The gradual demise of tactility that Riegl chronicled within late-Roman works of art may seem to be at some considerable remove from Weimar-era concerns surrounding the embodiment of new modes of perception not to mention Marks’ more recent engagement with video’s “haptic potential.” Riegl’s rhetoric nevertheless informs this section in crucial respects not the least in connection to the particular (read Greenbergian) version of high modernism which saw the optic as superseding the haptic. Thus the notorious “flatness” which the American art critic Clement Greenberg repeatedly espoused as the apotheosis of modernist painting, a view that brackets the complexity of modernism’s varied preoccupation with haptic visuality. Marks’ attentiveness to tactile modes of representation is, in this context, commendable though I do have reservations about what I take to be her ontological privileging of contemporary video as the haptic medium par excellence. To simply update Riegl in terms dictated by the development of advanced media technology only evades the widely-taken view that a historically specific concept of the haptic cannot be easily adapted, let alone applied, in the age of the digital. I will, in contrast, restrict my attention to the haptic character of Weimar visual culture and only step beyond these historical coordinates in order to sketch in their connection to the modernization of vision that had already begun decades earlier.

transformations of certain highly formal characteristics of art are the result of shifts in aesthetic sensibility or of changes in the way people regard their relationship to the world.” Margaret Iversen, Alois Riegl, p. 72. See also Riegl, Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn (Wien: Verl. der Kaiserlich-Königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901).

109 Marks, Touch, p. 11.


111 This is not to diminish recent work by video artists that has explicitly engaged with the medium’s haptic potential. See Mark B.N. Hansen, New Philosophy for New Media (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004). A condensed version of Hansen’s argument can also be found in Mark B.N. Hansen, “The Time of Affect, or Bearing Witness to Life,” Critical Inquiry 30 (2004), pp. 584-626.
With this in mind, I would like to return briefly to the montage practices of Berlin Dada by way of a foray into Benjamin's now canonical Artwork essay turning to the second (German) version which Benjamin considered to be the “ur-text,” the typescript manuscript that he finished in 1936. Benjamin saw in Dada montage, a forerunner to the revolutionary potential of film. For Benjamin, this was, in part, on account of their respective materialities which, in his eyes, drew attention to their provenance within an urban industrial society. But the affinity between the two was not limited to the level of their production. Instead Benjamin valorised film in particular for making the self-alienation aggravated by war, inflation, and urban transformation “materially and publicly perceivable;” available, in other words, at the level of reception. As Benjamin indeed noted, “in the representation of the human being by means of an apparatus his (sic) self-alienation has found a highly productive utilization.”

In this way, Benjamin made a case for film as the single medium that could at the very least negate and neutralize, on a mass basis, the traumatizing effects induced by modernity. This was not only because of its technological foundations but more

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112 Miriam Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. 4. There are numerous versions of this essay each differing significantly from the other. The second version superseded the handwritted first draft (1935) and was only published in German in 1989. The third version is the most famous and first appeared in English in Illuminations (1968). The second version has only now appeared in English in the recently published Third Volume of the Selected Writings. There was also a French version, translated by Pierre Klossowski, which was published in 1935 in the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung. The second version is probably the closest to Benjamin’s original intentions and is the one with which this chapter is predominantly concerned. For a further discussion of the essay’s reception and publication history, see Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, 7 vols., eds. Rudolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1972-91), 1:2: pp. 982-1028. For the French version, see “L’Oeuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée,” in Gesammelte Schriften 1:2, pp. 709-739.

113 Miriam Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. 25.


115 Though Benjamin made similar comments about photography. As he noted in “On some Motifs in Baudelaire,” “Amongst the various gestures of switching, inserting, imprinting, etc. the photographer’s snapping has been the most consequential. One press of the finger is enough to fix an event for an unlimited time. The apparatus delivers the moment, so to say, a posthumous shock.” Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” SW 4, pp. 313-355, p. 328.
importantly, as Benjamin wagers, its ability to make psychic states that are normally restricted to individual experience accessible to public events of reception:

If one considers the dangerous tensions which technification and its consequences have engendered in the masses at large—tensions which at critical stages take on a psychotic character—one also has to recognize that this same technification has created the possibility of psychic immunization against such mass psychoses. It does so by means of certain films in which the forced articulation of sadistic fantasies or masochistic delusions can prevent their natural and dangerous maturation in the masses.¹¹⁶

Benjamin could easily have been talking here about the reception of Berlin Dada in the immediate afterwar period and where the only major difference would have be the substitution of a shock-like transference between screen and audience (what Benjamin referred to as ‘innervation’) for one between artwork and beholder.¹¹⁷ This is perhaps not surprising given the extent to which the montage form, according to Benjamin, was in both instances of equal therapeutic value.¹¹⁸

The main point, however, to grasp about the mode of reception promoted in the Artwork Essay is its visceral almost tactile quality countering, so Benjamin believed, the numbing of the human sensorium, the withering of experience [Erfahrung] and “state of emergency in the visual field” that was an indispensable feature of contemporary metropolitan life.¹¹⁹ That Benjamin, writing in the aftermath of the Weimar Republic and the rise of National Socialism, should turn to the already compromised medium of film is not immediately at issue here. What is important, for our purposes, are the contributions to the haptic tradition—

¹¹⁷ In other words, their shared “theatricality” to return to Fried’s original usage of the term.
¹¹⁸ Montage, like many other monikers with the Benjaminian lexicon, appears in various guises. Beyond, the mode of visual reception already discussed, it is also finds expression as a mode of writing history (Arcades Project, “On the Concept of History,” SW 4, pp. 389–400), a form of dramurtical training (“Bert Brecht,” SW 2, pp. 365–371; “What is the Epic Theatre,” SW 4, pp. 302–309), and a literary praxis (“The Crisis of the Novel,” SW 2, pp. 299–304; “The Author as Producer,” SW 2, pp. 768–782).
¹¹⁹ I would, however, concur with Schwartz when he suggests that Benjamin (in relation to Kracauer) makes relatively little effort to unpack and confront the nature of vision in the quotidian forms in which they actually existed. See Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” p. 424.
the inversion of Riegl’s original schema - that form the backdrop to Benjamin’s theory of cinema. Which is to ultimately say that Benjamin’s observations, their characteristic brilliance notwithstanding, can be made historically intelligible only to the extent that they are seen as having emerged out of his engagement with the avant-garde of the visual arts in the 1920s.

And yet, when examined closely, the alleged perceptual revolution of the advanced arts in Weimar Germany (and Berlin), was itself considerably more complicated than the fanfare surrounding the ‘myth’ of modernism has usually suggested. Michael Fried, for example in a remarkable book on the nineteenth century Berlin artist Adolf Menzel, has compellingly staked the claim that the “heart of Menzel’s practice as both painter and draftsman consists in its relation to his own, and implicitly to the viewer’s, embodiment.” Menzel is probably best known today for the realist paintings and drawings that bore witness to the city in which he spent the majority of his life though he has often been caricatured for a style seemingly inspired by the nationalistic values of Wilhelmine Germany. Recent work on Menzel has begun to distance itself from these earlier prescriptions. In the case of Fried this has meant an exploration of what distinguishes Menzel’s realism from the structural and pictorial norms of the contemporaneous French Art already addressed by Fried in earlier work and which “clearly took a considerable part of both its motive and its interest from the terms and

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120 Benjamin’s deployment of the haptic/optic schema inverts Riegl’s original dialectic. Cinema, after all, has no tactile properties of its own and it was instead the shock effect of images on spectators that was deemed physical and haptic. See Antonia Lant, “Hapticial Cinema,” *October* 74 (1995), pp. 45-73, p. 68. See also Thomas Y. Levin, Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History,” *October* 47 (1988), pp. 77-83.
122 Menzel was born in Breslau in 1815 but spent most of life in Berlin where he died in 1905. His father ran a lithography workshop which Menzel took over after his death. See Fried, *Menzel’s Realism*, p. 10.
judgments of his controversial criticism of the 1960s.”\textsuperscript{123} Through indeed that work, Fried was able to track the evolution of what he described as an antitheatrical tradition within French painting from the middle of the eighteenth century to the work of Manet in the 1860s. “At the heart of that tradition,” to quote Fried in full,

was the requirement, first articulated theoretically by Denis Diderot in the late 1750s and 1760s, that the figures in a painting... appear to take no more notice of the beholder than if the latter did not exist... the represented figures had to be made to appear entirely engrossed... absorbed in their actions, feelings, and states of mind; figures so absorbed were felt to be oblivious to everything but the objects of their attention, including, especially, the beholder standing before the canvas.\textsuperscript{124}

While the illusion that a beholder did not exist was crucial to artists working in an antitheatrical tradition (Fried mentions David, Géricault, and Daumier), Menzel’s artistic mode was bound in various and complex ways to the artist’s and viewer’s embodiment, not to mention the broad historical ground on which the 19th century would bring the question of embodiment to a problematic centrality. Take for example, the oil painting, \textit{Garden of Prince Albert’s Palace} (fig. 2.11) singled out by Fried for its “lived perspective.”\textsuperscript{125} Unlike the lateral view common to Impressionist painting, the \textit{Garden of Prince Albert Palace} is very much keyed to the phenomenological verities of embodied vision with its emphasis on the staging of spatial cues “whose ultimate point of reference is the viewer’s body.”\textsuperscript{126} By this I am referring to the way in which the various angles of vision that inhere to the painting’s elevated point of view imply a perspective that anatomises the actual physical movements with which an embodied viewer would have occupied the scene in question.

\textsuperscript{123} Melville, “Menzel’s Realism,” p. 174. See for example Fried, \textit{Absorption and Theatricality} and \textit{Courbet’s Realism}.


\textsuperscript{125} Fried is quoting Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Menzel’s Realism}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{126} Fried, \textit{Menzel’s Realism}, p. 20.
Fried, moreover, broadens this view of embodiment to suggest that what Menzel’s art continually asserts is in fact the “primacy of situatedness as such.” “It is,” he writes, “as if Menzel’s concern with embodiment called for thematising the fact that the lived body is always someplace, in some particular spatial, actional, and orientational relation to the world, which therefore is never present to artist or viewer as pure “spectacle.””¹²⁷ In Menzel, this often found expression in views from above like the one we saw in Garden of Prince Albert Palace though a work like the much later pencil drawing, Kurhausstrasse at

¹²⁷ Fried, Menzel’s Realism, p. 22.
Kissingen After a Storm (fig. 2.12) also comes to mind here with its virtuoso pencil work intimating the tactility of the street’s gritty surface.

![Fig. 2.12 Kurhaussstrasse at Kissingen After a Storm, 1889, pencil.](image)

What Fried provocatively described as the “somatic tenor” of Menzel’s work was, in the end, predicated on its exposition of the uneventful and mundane as we strikingly see in works like Comb with Hairs and Marks on a Urinal Wall (see fig. 2.13, 2.14) though there are numerous other examples of his interest in ordinary metropolitan life. In fact, despite his talents in oil painting and gouache, Menzel’s lasting expertise was as a draftsman (no less than 6,405 drawings were included in the posthumous exhibition of 1905), a talent perfectly suited to his flâneuristic wanderings through the streets of Berlin. While Menzel’s carefully executed paintings were composed in his studio, sketchbook drawings like Marks on a Urinal Wall and Comb with Hairs were largely spontaneously sketched scenes and it is

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128 Fried, Menzel’s Realism, p. 34.
Fig. 2.13 Adolph Menzel, *Marks on a Urinal Wall*, 1900, pencil sketch.

Fig. 2.14 Adolph Menzel, *Comb with Hairs*, 1886, pencil sketch.
tempting to already see in these nineteenth century works something of Berlin's almost exclusive identification with the experience of modernity, what the art critic Karl Scheffler would later lament as the city's penchant for always becoming and never being. The arduous procedure that characterised Menzel's artistic methods was not based, however, on a naïve realism. Menzel actually fused studies and drawings that were made at different times and different locations in a "collage-like process" that would only culminate in the final painterly work.

Such a working method – constructing a "lived perspective" from a host of fragmentary moments – would no doubt seem to constitute a practice congenial to the strictures of modernity not the least for its broader implications to the reorganization in the makeup in vision that was taking place at the same time. But the extent to which the relationship between 'image' and 'body' space that we find in Menzel was able to mirror contemporaneous debates about the bodily experience of art is not my only concern here. If anything, a discussion of the affective modality of Menzel's paintings and drawings is also intended to signpost the embodied mode of vision that was to become so important to the later activities of the Weimar avant-garde.

If the work of Menzel formed part of the historical curve to which the concerns of this chapter are primarily linked, his images of the metropolis differed considerably from those of his Weimar counterparts. Menzel was working on the cusp of a remarkable urban

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129 Karl Scheffler, *Berlin: Ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: Reiss, 1910), p. 267. It is also tempting to see in these scenes a precursor to the sketches of everyday metropolitan life produced by the well-known Berlin artist, Heinrich Zille.


transformation that would find a much more anxious imaginary in the visual culture of the early twentieth century. Viewed in this context, the shock-driven montages of the Berlin Dadaists are certainly exemplary though there were many other notable attempts to construct what may be plausibly described as a ‘haptic aesthetics.’ Consider, the drawings and paintings of artists like George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Rudolf Schlichter which carried over, in particular, Dada’s propensity for iconoclasm. Indeed, their violent and uncompromising representations of the metropolis were equally visceral in their attempts to approximate what Grosz once called the “emotions of the city.”

For Grosz, it was the “suspicious and bestial world” of city streets that was to become the dominant subject in works dating back to his discharge from military service in 1917. As he wrote in a letter to Otto Schmalhausen in June 1917:

Work is the way to formulate powerful ideas and to organise gigantic tableaux, to layer an array of colours, to organise line like a general, entire battlefields full of bleeding reds and black vertical lines – for me this means the thousand things that happen at the same time in one banal day – how hard it is to represent the movement of the turbulent streets, the curious movement of the types there: people, their machines, animals, the flowering of trees…

In practice, we see these imperatives in paintings like Metropolis (fig. 2.15) and Dedicated to Oscar Panizza though it was also a major influence on Grosz’s drawings and lithographs. As Beth Irwin Lewis has pointed out, in the Erste George Grosz Mappe (1917), seven of the nine lithographs were street scenes while in the Kleine Grosz Mappe (1917) fourteen prints were likewise dedicated to scenes in which city windows were made to reveal the acts of seduction, murder, and suicide taking place within. Contemporary critics were quick to take note of Grosz’s use of these windows as a framing device through which the pathologies of the modern metropolis were put on categorical display. Theodor Däubler, in

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134 Grosz, Briefe, p. 49-50.
an early review in *Das Kunstblatt*, pointed out that in Grosz’s drawings, one did not look out of a window as was the traditional artistic convention, but instead into windows “like stacked boxes containing quarrelsome, sentimental, murderous people.”

While Däubler may have seen in Grosz’s work a passionate affirmation of the violence of modern urban life, other commentators detected a more critical message. “The distance from a pure *l’art pour l’art* couldn’t be greater,” wrote Leo Zahn, “here things are registered and commented on with an unsparing truth, of course not in an ‘objective’ manner as the

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136 This is most clearly articulated in Däubler, “George Grosz,” *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung* 1 (1918), pp. 153-154.
harmless naturalists at the end of the 19th century intended, but tendentious, accusing, not with pathos but satire.” For Zahn, Grosz’s grotesque caricatures expressed the views of a “physiognomist of subhuman baseness” while, for another reviewer in Der Tag, his raging visions dramatized the day-to-day circumstances taking place on the streets of Berlin:

One knows, or rather one has heard, one suspects and believes that everything is different in Berlin. One only sees the other side which challenges to look south. Stress and strife, rash judgement become enemies of the breathless pace and ruthless competition of one’s existence. The Berliner can’t take a true picture of his city to Munich. Rough and torn from the past, George Grosz’s art appears to be a child of the Berlin revolution. But this matter of contrasting material worlds is a child without roots or a rootless pupil of the new Berlin. The lingering scream between the destruction is his best and his worst.

There is no doubt considerable merit to the notion that Grosz’s work offered a scathing “look behind the scenes of the German demimonde.” A view that would align his images of bourgeois debauchery with a particularly vicious form of satire, fails, however, to take note of the full significance of the social critique embedded in his pictorial excesses. It is also misses a more important point about the way in which Grosz’s images work to make the particular gazes that inhere to them so menacing. In saying all of this, I do not to mean to revisit (pace Lacan) old debates about the “subject’s entry into the social arena of visuality.” To claim Grosz’s numerous images of violated and dismembered women in bleak urban settings as examples of a structuring male gaze only elides the question of why Grosz and other avant-garde artists chose to visit such violence on the female body in the first place. It also sidesteps what, in the end, makes these images so “terroristic.” For my part, I would suggest that this is, in no small measure, incumbent upon what Brian Massumi

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138 Marks, Touch, p. 54.
has recently described as "the primacy of the affective in image reception." By affect, I am referring specifically to the intensity of an image’s effect, its sensate assault on a spectator’s mode of perception in ways that are not, irreducible to its content. That visions of extreme domestic violence, of women murdered in the tenements and back streets of modern Berlin, testified to the pervasive social anxieties shared by many of the artists in the period is not in question here. I am simply proposing that these anxieties acquired much of their force through an affective register that virtualised a viewer’s bodily identification with the violent actions that we see so disturbingly on display in Grosz’ street scenes. Formally, this was achieved through a process of what Georges Bataille once referred to as “altération” in order to illustrate what he understood to be taking place in the drawing process, and in representation more generally: namely that each time a trace was committed to a piece of paper or canvas, the surface was “altered,” in the sense of being spoiled, destroyed, or disturbed. Bataille’s comments were echoed by Grosz himself who noted in an exhibition catalogue to his 1923 Berlin show at the Galerie Flechtheim that

in order to achieve a style...that captured the extreme, plain hardness and charmlessness of my subjects, I studied the extreme products of the compulsion to make art. In pissoirs I copied folkloristic drawings which seemed to me to be the most direct expressions and shortest translations of powerful feelings. I was stimulated, too, by children’s drawings because of their lack of ambiguity. I thus

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142 Affects, for Massumi, are “virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in...the actually existing, particular things that embody them...Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the most intense...expression of that capture.” Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 35. For our purposes, these comments help to explain how certain emotional registers work to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social. My understanding of ‘affect’ shares many points of contact, therefore, with Sara Ahmed’s recent work on emotions. See Sara Ahmed, “Collective Feelings, or the Impressions Left by Others,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (2004), pp. 25-42; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

gradually arrived at this blade-sharp drawing style which I used to depict what I saw, dictated as it then was by an absolute hatred of humanity.\textsuperscript{144}

Indeed, it was precisely Grosz’ turn to a faux-naïf style derived from his close study of graffiti that energised his use of counterposed lines and violently arranged curves and angles ("blade-sharp drawing style") and was, in turn, characteristic of his most important street scenes including \textit{Berlin – Friedrichstrasse} (1918) and \textit{Menschen im Café} (1917) (fig. 2.16).

In spite of their obvious exaggerations, Grosz’s images were widely heralded for their verism. As Hannah Arendt remembered, Grosz’s “cartoons seemed to us not as satire but realistic reportage: we knew these types; they were all around us.”\textsuperscript{145}

\textit{Disturbed} images of disfigured women and masculine aggression were not, however, limited to the work of Grosz. They also appeared in the contemporaneous paintings of Otto Dix, Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, and Heinrich Maria Davringhausen. The work of Dix, in particular, was fixated on a depiction of death and dismemberment as a cycle of works portraying the grotesque murder of women makes shockingly clear. But, ultimately, as much as I wish to draw attention to the range and intensity of images created by a small coterie of artists against women in post-war Germany – Deleuze would have described these images as “affection-images” – I do not mean to imply that the tactile quality that we see in many of the new representations produced by the Weimar avant-garde was, in any way, \textit{ontologically} disposed toward a violent voyeuristic point of view.\textsuperscript{146} Not only was their affectivity tethered to the social and cultural context out of which they emerged, but there were many less shattering attempts to exploit a haptic form of visuality.


Fig. 2.16 George Grosz, *Berlin Friedrichstrasse*, 1918, pen, brush, and ink.
Take, for example, the Hungarian Lazlo Moholy-Nagy’s experiments in tactile vision conducted largely through his activities as a member of the Bauhaus movement for whom he was a prominent professor from 1923 to 1928. Moholy-Nagy is probably best known for his endorsements of photography and film as the media most suited to overcoming the crisis of representation that accompanied, in his view at least, all aspects of Weimar Modernismus. While his interest in the technical capabilities of film and photography has meant that his advocacy of a “New Vision” has often been incorrectly identified with the formalist assumptions that characterised the work of many of his Weimar-era counterparts, Moholy-Nagy remained committed to the cultural demands of a modernizing urban society. That these commitments were developed in the early 1920s as a result of Moholy-Nagy’s encounter with Berlin’s industrial cityscape was a view promoted by Moholy-Nagy himself. As he later remarked:

In 1919, I lived in Vienna, lost among the depressed conformists of the post-war period. Coming from a farm in the agricultural centre of Hungary, I was less intrigued with the baroque pompousness of the Austrian capital than with the highly developed technology of industrial Germany. I went to Berlin. Many of my paintings of that period show the influence of the industrial “landscape” of Berlin. They were not projections of reality rendered with photographic eyes, but rather new structures, built up as my own version of machine technology, reassembled from the dismantled parts.

Anecdotal evidence notwithstanding, the relationship between industrialization and urbanization did indeed provide the subject matter for many of Moholy-Nagy’s earlier works including the paintings Bridges (ca. 1920-21) and Large Railway Painting (ca. 1920-21). What Moholy-Nagy described as a “widened range of present and future visual experiences” was also developed with greater sophistication in his 1925 Bauhaus book Painting.

Photography, Film (Malerei, Photographie, Film) especially in the section titled “Dynamic of the Metropolis” in which Moholy hoped “to construct a paradigm for the vibrant simultaneity of sensory experience in [an] urban environment.”

If the film script format of “Dynamic of the Metropolis” allowed Moholy-Nagy to explore the movement, dynamism, and simultaneity of an increasingly cinematic city, it was his third Bauhaus Book, The New Vision (Von Material zu Architektur) which afforded him the opportunity to explore the full range of visual sensations that were now accessible to the new modes of technical reproduction. Coinciding with many of the components of the Bauhaus Vorkurs, the first section of “The New Vision” was devoted to an analysis of the physical properties of different materials, including their strength, flexibility, and texture. Moholy’s students even explored the nature of tactile sensations with a specially constructed machine. This attempt to exploit the materiality of photography and film meant more, however, than a rigorous and programmatic exploration of new formal techniques, more than an emphasis on the “necessary self-referentiality of pictorial signifiers” that had already become a routine gesture of the modernist avant-garde. Given Bauhaus’s wider remit, one should not take an interest in haptic vision as anything less than an “indication of the potential involvement of artists with materials and objects in actual space and the social processes that occur within it.”

In many respects, the various forms of haptic visuality explored here represented a historically aesthetic correlative to the ongoing struggle over the meaning of modernity in Weimar Germany. But insofar as these methods often aspired to incorporate and concretise

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149 Hight, Picturing Modernism, p. 183.
150 The film was never produced though elements of the films Berlin Still Life and The Old Port of Marseilles adopted many of the prescriptions of Moholy-Nagy’s original storyboard. See Hight, Picturing Modernism, p. 184.
151 Hight, Picturing Modernism, p. 189.
the means of production within society at large, they were also tied to a *problematic of reception*. Indeed, Benjamin Buchloh has summed this up rather well in noting that the fundamental crisis within a modernist paradigm was not only a crisis of representation but "a crisis of audience relationships, a moment in which the historical institutionalisation of the avant-garde had reached its peak of credibility, from which legitimation was only to be obtained by a redefinition of its relationship with new urban masses and their cultural demands."\(^{153}\)

As Benjamin makes abundantly clear, there were many different strategies that the Weimar avant-garde considered capable of establishing new modes of collective reception from theatre to radio, film to architecture.\(^{154}\) In due course, Benjamin may have singled out film as the model for the distracted and tactile mode of visuality that he increasingly invoked as an antidote to the vicissitudes of modern life, but he also attributed these qualities to the reception of architecture:

> Architecture has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and through the collective... Buildings are received in a twofold manner: by use and by perception. Or, better: tactilely and optically. Such reception cannot be understood in terms of the concentrated attention of a traveller before a famous building. On the tactile side, there is no counterpart to what contemplation is on the optical side. Tactile reception comes about not so much by way of attention as by way of habit... Under certain circumstances, this form of reception shaped by architecture acquires canonical value. For the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at historical turning points cannot be performed solely by optical means – that is, by way of contemplation. They are mastered gradually – taking their cue from tactile reception... through habit.\(^{155}\)

That there exists a strong relationship between the nature of film spectatorship and architecture (fig. 2.17) is perhaps inevitable as Giuliana Bruno once suggested. "Film is always housed," she writes. "It needs more than an apparatus in order to exist as cinema. It

\(^{153}\) Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," p. 94.

\(^{154}\) See for example Benjamin, "Theatre and Radio: The Mutual Control of their Educational Program," *SW* 2, pp. 583-586; "The Author as Producer," *SW* 2, pp. 768-782.

\(^{155}\) Benjamin, "The Work of Art," *SW* 3, p. 119-120.
needs a space, a public site – a movie ‘house.’” But the spacings that come to my mind here were never confined to the public architecture of the movie theatre nor for that matter the foreshortened modes of dwelling which characterised Weimar Berlin’s Neue Bauen and Neue Wohnkultur. They also encompassed the widespread entrenchment of new (successful) models of reception – be in it architecture, film, or radio - in more spurious forms of ‘haptic regulation.’ The so-called ‘Rappel à l’ordre’ and subsequent alignment of many avant-garde artists with the aesthetic needs of the National Socialists not only testified to the nature of totalitarian propaganda, it also introduced a rather different connection between image

Fig. 2.17 Architecture and Distraction: Titania Cinema, Berlin.

and body space than the one Benjamin had earlier posited. In the words of Esther Leslie, “mimesis was turning bad.”¹⁵⁸ Benjamin himself was well aware of these transformations, made all the more so through the efforts of Adorno to persuade Benjamin that the dominant aesthetic in film was less a “modernist series of [physical] shocks” than a realist aesthetic of invisible editing and naturalism. As Adorno pointed out in response to the typescript manuscript of the second version of the Artwork essay, “the laughter of a cinema audience...is anything but salutary and revolutionary; it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism instead...and in spite of its startling seductiveness, I cannot find your theory of ‘distraction’ at all convincing, - if only for the simple reason that in a communist society, work would be organized in such a way that human beings would no longer be so exhausted or so stupefied as to require such distraction.”¹⁵⁹ Distraction, for Adorno and many others, could thus never be a progressive or revolutionary force in cinema as long as it continued to submit a viewing public to the uncritically unitary effect of the work of art, as long as the unique “modality of being” attached to the traditional work of art - its aura - was able to exploit a new more potent mode of existence.¹⁶⁰ “If anything can be said to possess an auratic character now,” writes Adorno, “it is precisely the film which does so, and to an extreme and highly suspect

¹⁵⁸ Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, p. 120.
¹⁶⁰ In the end, Siegfried Kracauer’s important account of the “social phenomenology” of filmic spectatorship in his essay on the “Cult of Distraction” remained ambivalent regarding the notion of “distraction.” While Kracauer challenges the usual equation of film and mental lassitude (that something like a self-articulation could perhaps take place within the cinema), he still ends up aligning himself with the accepted view that distraction was ultimately an immobilizing mode of collective reception. See Kracauer, “The Cult of Distraction” [1926], in Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 323-328. Also see Schwartz, “The Eye of the Expert,” p. 420.
degree."¹⁶¹ Benjamin may have ultimately underestimated the "technical character of autonomous art," this was certainly Adorno's view. Nevertheless there still remained a whole host of aesthetic procedures predicated on maintaining a peculiarly modern version of auratic experience.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Adorno to Benjamin, 18.3.1936, p. 130.
¹⁶² Adorno to Benjamin, 18.3.1936, p. 131.
Aura

The image carries within itself an irreducible and original dualism: it is, by essence, that which is repeatable and reproducible, and yet, at the same time, it is also a unique apparition.

-Giorgio Agamben 163

What I have been building up to proposing is that the range of attempts to represent Weimar Berlin encompassed an enlarged understanding of what Walter Benjamin originally meant by the word Spiel [play]. Benjamin’s reflections on the category of Spiel, in short, help us to better understand why and how performative energies came to play such a crucial role in the visual representation of the modern city. In an arresting reading of these reflections, Miriam Hansen has argued that Benjamin’s interest in Spiel in the sense of play is most programmatically developed in his book reviews and exhibition reports on children’s toys written in the late 1920s. 164 In these articles, as Hansen points out, Benjamin “argues for a shift in focus from the toy as object [Spielzeug] to playing [Spielen] as an activity, a process in which, one might say, the toy functions as a medium.” Subsequent reflections in One-Way Street, Berlin Childhood and on the “Mimetic Faculty” emphasize the child’s affinity for creative mimicry, for undercutting “the ideological abuse of technological progress by [re]investing the discoveries of modernity with mythic yet potentially utopian meanings.” 165 This notion of play as creative mimicry furthermore shades into Benjamin’s later reflections on the new media of technological reproduction. Hence, the second version of the Artwork essay in which Benjamin transposes his reflections on Spiel from the children’s room to the picture palaces of Berlin. By the same token, he also discerns an

165 Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. 7.
increase of ‘elements of play’ in recent modernist art such as futurism, atonal music, poésie pure and to which I would also append the examples treated herewith.

But as Benjamin makes clear the category of Spiel that figures in these examples does so as an aesthetic alternative to what he describes as Schein or semblance by which he is referring to the traditional valences attached to a work of art. Many of the works charted in this chapter were similarly opposed to the “auratic” quality of the traditional autonomous artwork - the aura being that mode of contemplative perception, that “strange weave of space and time” with which the qualities of an artwork were customarily absorbed. For Benjamin, the social basis for the decay of aura was a resolutely metropolitan one linked to “the increasing emergence of the masses and the growing intensity of their movements.” At stake here was a “desire of the present-day masses to ‘get closer’ to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness [Überwindung des Einmaligen jeder Gegebenheit] by assimilating it as a reproduction.” As has been often argued, there is considerable evidence to support Benjamin’s view here that the destruction of aura found a dialectical obverse in the perceptual possibilities that accompanied the new means of technical reproduction. But pushing this in the other direction, I would like to suggest that one may well attribute to certain products of Weimar modernism, the development of a “complicatedly auratic artistic experimentalism.”

Such a counterintuitive view owes much to the intercessions of Theodor Adorno, whose well-known criticisms of Benjamin’s Artwork essay builds on and “subtly refunctions Benjamin’s initial analysis of the loss of aura in modernity.” As Adorno contends, contra Benjamin, it is, in fact, the dynamic character of auratic or autonomous art, that enables

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critical thought rather than those ‘playful’ modernist tendencies to one-sidedly indict or eschew aesthetic autonomy. In Adorno’s words,

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\text{the rebellion against semblance did not . . . take place in favour of play, as Benjamin supposed, though there is no mistaking the playful quality of the permutations, for instance, that have replaced fictional development. The crisis of semblance may engulf play as well, for the harmlessness of play deserves the same fate as does harmony, which originates in semblance. Art that seeks to redeem itself from semblance through play becomes sport.}^{170}
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It would be perfectly possible to quarrel with Adorno’s conclusions and counter with a whole host of examples of auratic art which are a testimony to an “unreflective acquiescence” to the status quo. Benjamin was himself well aware that the huge gain in “room-for-play” seemingly inaugurated by mass media was more than matched by the industrial production and circulation of phantasmagoria. To the extent that Adorno treats the relation between semblance and play as a binary opposition, he ignores Benjamin’s insistence on a dialectical relation between the two and that it is actually the tensions between these views that point toward a “renewed vocation for auratic modernism” within the Weimar avant-garde.\(^{171}\)

But unlike Benjamin whose comments are largely sutured to his interest in the medium of film, for this view to hold, a particularly modern version of ‘aura’ must also be linked to one of the dominant cultural trends in Germany during the mid 1920s, usually known as the \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} (New Objectivity).\(^ {172}\) Broadly troped as a particular brand of realism, the

\[^{170}\text{Adorno, }\textit{Aesthetic Theory},\text{ p. 100.}\]
\[^{171}\text{Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. Adorno’s argument is most fully developed in the unfinished }\textit{Aesthetic Theory} hinging, as it was, on the capacity of auratic art to make possible the development of those faculties that were tantamount to sociopolitical critique and praxis.}\]
\[^{172}\text{It is worth pointing out that Adorno himself was very critical of the activities of the }\textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} which he impugned on several occasions in the pages of }\textit{Aesthetic Theory}.\text{ He writes, for example, that “}\textit{Neue Sachlichkeit’s} polished extirpation of expression contributes to universal conformism and subordinates antifunctional art to a principle that originates entirely in functionality.”\text{ Adorno later refers to the “drossless}\]
movement’s general orientation toward fact (Sache) and objecthood, seemed to offer a clear alternative to the spiritual excesses of Expressionism. Operative across all areas of design, art, and photography, an understanding of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* cohered around notions of “sobriety, detachment, and unemotional matter-of-factness” as well as a commitment to registering the gritty materialities of quotidian life. Family resemblances notwithstanding, such a term posed certain difficulties when unilaterally applied across a variety of cultural practices though a few summary characterizations can be made. The first is a recognition that the chronological boundaries of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* were indeed porous. Even a cursory glance at the genealogy of the word ‘Sachlichkeit’ will show that it had already been used before the war by the Deutsche Werkbund and that a rigid correspondence between the stable years of the 1920s and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* is misleading. The second is a reminder that, unlike Expressionism and Dadaism, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* did not represent a ‘movement’ in the sense of having self-consciously formulated goals and the institutional framework which sustained a single metropolitan base and a determinate public sphere.

Alternatively, if such a formulation is to retain its status as a legitimate aesthetic marker, it

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unity” to which *Sachlichkeit* pretends. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 117-8, p. 156. Benjamin, for that matter, treated the art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* with equal derision. See especially his comments in the “The Author as Producer,” *SW* 2; and “Left-Wing Melancholy,” *SW* 2.


176 It was Hubert Muthesius, a key player within the Deutsche Werkbund, who most vigorously promoted the notion of “objectivity,” a concept that he understood as an alternative to the debased positivist sense of “style” that was already in wide usage amongst art historians and other cultural commentators. Muthesius’s *Sachlichkeit* is perhaps most programatically developed in a well-known passage from his *Stilarchitektur und Baukunst*: “In seeking a new Style, the Style of our age, one is most likely to find hallmarks in those new creations that serve newly developed needs: in our railway stations, exhibition halls...In fact it is precisely here that we see manifestations of truly modern ideas and principles of creation that give us much to think about. We note a rigor...
does so principally as a "structure of attitude and reference" and one according to which the
Weimar urban experience came under increasing scrutiny.\(^\text{177}\)

In this way, the tendency to see the "Neue Sachlichkeit" as a \textit{Weltanschauung} or as an
embodiment of the era's \textit{Zeitgeist} should not detract from an understanding of its
iconographic conventions as deeply serious experiments in themselves. A profane encounter
with many of the more important aspects of Weimar modernity, furthermore, did not
condemn the art of \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} to the kind of "ideological instrumentalization (or
blackboxing)" that was famously charted by Horkheimer and Adorno in their reflections on
the "culture industry."\(^\text{178}\) The relationships and mediations between the apparatus of ideology
and the apparatus of artistic production were, in this instance, markedly more complex and
in turn pressed up against any strict division between forms of high and mass culture.

There was, however, considerable confusion and disagreement over the appropriate
terminology to use in discussions of \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} art. \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} was itself a
term which only gained widespread circulation as a result of an exhibition organized by the
art dealer Gustav Hartlaub in Mannheim in 1925 and which carried the title \textit{Die neue
Sachlichkeit: Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus} (The New Objectivity: German
Painting since Expressionism). The exhibition, which travelled to cities throughout Germany
well into 1927, was a resounding success and it was during this time that \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit}
became the popular slogan which came to designate Weimar cultural life in the period of
relative economic and political stabilization (1924-1929).\(^\text{179}\) And yet, while Hartlaub may
have coined a new term for a movement which was broadly post-expressionist in remit, he
was reluctant to bog himself down in the semantic impasse which seemed to plague

\(^{179}\) Dennis Crockett, \textit{German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924} (University Park,
contemporaneous art criticism. As he wrote at the time, “we do not want to commit ourselves to the new catchwords. All that we are showing is that there is still art [daß die Kunst noch das ist]... That it lives, in spite of a cultural situation that seems hostile to the idea of art as few ages have been, and that artists – disillusioned, sobered, often resigned to cynicism, almost giving up after a moment of unbounded, almost apocalyptic hopes – are, in the midst of catastrophe, recollecting what is the nearest, most certain, and most durable: truth and craft [die Wahrheit und das Handwerk]”

Hartlaub’s comments are remarkably vague, gesturing if anything toward a revivified version of autonomous art. Hartlaub is also at pains to emphasize that the work on display in the Mannheim exhibition should in no way be seen to represent a backlash against the extremes of German Expressionism: “no position against Expressionism and the generation of artists who belong to it is being taken. Indeed it is highly doubtful whether Expressionism is dead at all. [...] Soon it will be recognized that the seed of the new art was already contained in the old, and that even today’s ‘Verism’ retains much of the visionary fantastic quality of the older art.” Hartlaub thus differed from many of his contemporaries regarding the distinction between the Neue Sachlichkeit and Expressionism, most notably the critic Franz Roh whose important study, Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus went so far as to claim that the new art represented an antithesis to the principles of expressionist art. Roh even included at that back of his book a list of “twenty-two Wölfflinesque, Expressionist/Post-Expressionist binary opposites” which were applied throughout his study

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182 Hartlaub, “Zum Geleit.”
in order to spell out some of the formal differences between the former and the latter (ecstatic objects vs. sober objects, loud vs. quiet, dynamic vs. static and so forth).\textsuperscript{183}

Of course, many artists were adamant that they could no longer derive inspiration from the goals of expressionism. As Ludwig Meidner wrote in 1920, “the manner in which many of us lived and worked before the war was not right. [...] What we need for the future, all of us, is a fanatic, fervent naturalism...”\textsuperscript{184} This was the same Meidner who only a few years earlier had implored that

we must finally start to paint our home, the metropolis, which we love forever. Our feverish hands should paint all the marvellous and curious things, the monstrous and dramatic nature of avenues, railway stations, factories, and towers upon countless canvases the size of frescos...A street is not composed of tonal values [as for the impressionist] but is a bombardment of whizzing rows of windows, racing beams of light between vehicles of all kinds and a thousand hooting spheres, scraps of humanity, advertising hoardings and threatening, formless masses of colour.\textsuperscript{185}

An abiding interest in what the art historian Wilhelm Hausenstein described in 1919 as a “world of outer \textit{Gegeständlichkeit}” did, nevertheless, extend Meidner’s earlier appeal to artists to select their themes from the various aspects of modern city life.\textsuperscript{186} This applied, in the first instance, to artists previously associated with the activities of the Berlin Dada movement. The caricatural realism of Grosz, Schlichter, and Dix, for example, not only appeared in Hartlaub’s exhibition, it was also singled out, by numerous critics for its

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{184} Ludwig Meidner, \textit{Septemberschrei} (Berlin: P. Cassirer, 1920), p. 16. Especially noteworthy here is the special issue of \textit{Das Kunstblatt} from September 1922 which explored the emergence of what the journal’s editor, Paul Westheim described as a “neonaturalist movement.”
\end{flushright}
sensationalist treatment of a Berlin governed by the garish excesses of violence and crime, nowhere more so perhaps than in Dix’s *Big City Triptych* (1927/28) (Fig. 2.18).\(^{187}\)

![Fig. 2.18](image)

Otto Dix, Detail from *Big City Triptych*, 1927, oil on canvas.

Other artists were less polemical in their cityscapes though they certainly retained what had by then become a “fairly universal condemnation of the anonymity, soullessness, and capitalist money culture of the metropolis.”\(^{188}\) The influence of foreign artists like Picasso, Rousseau, Utrillo and de Chirico was also evident and testified to their considerable reputation among German art historians and artists alike.\(^{189}\)

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\(^{187}\) In the original Mannheim exhibit there were 7 works by Grosz, 7 by Dix and 2 by Schlichter. By the time the exhibit had reached Chemnitz in November 1926 there were 13 works by Grosz, 12 by Dix, and 8 by Schlichter.

\(^{188}\) West, *The Visual Arts in Germany*, p. 163.

\(^{189}\) The work of many foreign artists was largely inaccessible to the German art scene in the immediate postwar period with illustrations of Picasso’s neo-classicist phase only appearing for the time in *Der Ararat* in 1920 and *Das Kunstblatt* in 1921. Henri Rousseau was probably the most influential French artist in Weimar Germany, his work the subject of monographs by Wilhelm Uhde and Helmut Kolle. On the other hand, Italian art - *pittura metafisica* in particular - quickly found a popularising voice in the pages of *Der Ararat* and *Der Cicerone* leading to a major exhibition that took place in the Kronzprinzenpalais in Berlin in 1921. See
If artists such as Hans Baluschek, Karl Hubbuch, and Frank Lenke highlighted the borrowing of such stylistic mannerisms, for the prominent critic Paul Westheim it was actually the work of Gustav Wunderwald which came to most closely approximate the full impact of Berlin’s urban transformation. Wunderwald’s work, it has to be said, has received little art historical attention and while I realize that this isn’t the place to make a plea for his revaluation, I do want to briefly acknowledge the significance of his numerous urban landscapes which were able to so felicitously reproduce the atmosphere that accompanied “the tenement blocks and factories of the new Berlin.” For Paul Westheim, Wunderwald had an eye for what is characteristic of today’s Berlin whether you look at the pictures of the Funkhallen and the Witzleben radio station, the street corner at the Kaiserdamm, the wall-sized advertisements at the Landsbergstrasse, the factory in Moabit, or the idyllic backyards in Spandau. All these expressed the typical Berlin mood... It is not the attractive Berlin of the Schloßbrücke and the Pariser Platz, not the entertaining Berlin of the Tautzienstrasse [...] it is the Berlin of everyday life.  

It would be tempting, following the lead of Westheim, to conjoin Wunderwald’s mode of realism to the embodied point of view that had found full expression in the earlier work of Adolf Menzel. However, to position the two within a strongly vectored historical narrative would exaggerate the technical affinities that link their work together. More modestly, we see in the work of Wunderwald a less accomplished attempt to depict what Michael Fried has already identified as Menzel’s unique ability to conjure up the disenchantment of the modern world. Thus, the representational mission of a painting by Wunderwald like Landsbergstrasse (1926) or Underpass in Spandau (1927) which might...
indeed be said to be "the evocation of that disenchantment in all its ground zero nondescription, repudiation of transcendence, and lack of any perspicuous principle of order" (figs. 2.19, 2.20). But this can be pressed still further as Fried himself suggests and in a way which may well apply in equal measure to a reading of the work of Wunderwald. ¹⁹¹ For Fried, the disenchantment, so vividly evoked in the work of Menzel, "turns out to be a compelling source of fascination, even reenchantment, in its own right." ¹⁹² In Fried's estimation the setting of many of Menzel's city scenes, for all their ordinariness, or perhaps because of it, was ultimately just as "sacred," to borrow his own words, as various more alluring vistas.

What Westheim described as Wunderwald's "eye for what is characteristic of today's Berlin" concurs I believe with Fried's insistence that Menzel's art gives us a way of conceiving of modernist reenchantment, one approaching the concept of 'aura,' the experience of which had seemingly atrophied with the encroachments of modernity.¹⁹³ But unlike the circumstances which shaped Menzel's sense of the metropolitan everyday, Wunderwald's Sachlichkeit was part of a widespread return (Dada notwithstanding) to traditional modes of representation in post-war German painting. In this context, it is widely agreed that the first major crisis of a modernist idiom in twentieth-century painting had already begun at the beginning of the First World War, heralded by a rejection of cubism and futurism by the very artists who had originally promoted those movements.¹⁹⁴ As Benjamin Buchloh explains, "facing the deadlock of their own academization and the actual exhaustion of the historical significance of their work, Picasso, Derrain, Carrà, and Severini – to name

¹⁹¹ Fried, Menzel's Realism, p. 232.
¹⁹² The original German phrase derives of course from Max Weber and before him Schiller. The German phrase is "die Entzückung der Welt" which can be literally translated as the "de-magicking" of the world.
¹⁹³ Fried, Menzel's Realism, p. 233.
Fig. 2.19 Gustav Wunderwald, *Underpass in Spandau*, 1927, oil on canvas.

Fig. 2.20 Gustav Wunderwald, *Landsbergstrasse*, 1928, oil on canvas.
but a few of the most prominent figures – were among the first to call for a return to the traditional [read auratic] values of high art.\textsuperscript{195}

By the post-war years, a return to easel painting and iconic figuration had all but regained its privileged position within the various circuits of the European avant-garde. According to Buchloh this shift has continued to prompt many questions not the least regarding the connection between growing political oppression and traditional representation. Did, for example, the uncertainties in socio-economic and political life unavoidably result in the calculated anonymity and passivity of the obsessively mimetic forms that we witness in German painting during the mid-to-late 1920s and early 1930s? Where there other ordering systems outside of aesthetic discourse that were responsible for securing the 'authenticity' of new visual configurations?\textsuperscript{196}

On the face of things, the activities of the \textit{Neue Sachlichkeit} would certainly appear to confirm what Georg Lukács had in mind when he described the realism of the movement as “obviously apologetic” leading clearly away from “any poetic reproduction of reality [so] that it can easily merge with the Fascist legacy.”\textsuperscript{197} Attempts to usher in a new aesthetic orthodoxy also coincided with the hypostatisation of longstanding art historical traditions. Consider the renewed interest in classical portraiture that we see in the work of Otto Dix and Christian Schad among others, work that was heavily modelled on Italian Renaissance antecedents though with a new emphasis on the Weimar hautemonde (figs. 2.21, 2.22). As Dix himself noted, “the new element of painting for me resides in the intensification of forms of expression which \textit{in nuce} exist already as givens in the work of old masters.”\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{195} Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” p. 42.
\textsuperscript{196} Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” p. 40.
\textsuperscript{198} Dix quoted in Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” p. 49.
Schad, a former Dadaist like Dix, was equally explicit about his influences: "it is so easy to turn one's back on Raphael. Because it is difficult to be a good painter. And only a good painter is able to paint well. Nobody will ever be a good painter if he is only painting well. One has to be born a good painter...Italy opened my eyes about my artistic volition and capacity... In Italy the art is ancient and ancient art is often newer than the new art."\(^{199}\)

George Grosz, however, was far less complementary to the new achievements in painting impugning what he saw as an aestheticizing of political life, to borrow Benjamin's

\(^{199}\) Schad quoted in Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” p. 49.
well known phrasing. “The return to French classicist painting,” he noted in 1922, “to Poussin, Ingres, and Corot, is an insidious fashion of Biedermeier. It seems that the political reaction is therefore followed by an intellectual reaction.”

Almost a decade later, Grosz was even more acerbic in his criticisms though his attention had shifted to the essential features of avant-garde practice. As he added in a remarkable about-face:

The art of our time is pale. A child with an overgrown head and horned-rim glasses. Anaemic and very contemplative...a proper big-city stay-at-home. It is obvious from his looks that he broods a lot. Estranged from nature and reality, he creates from within himself exact circles and mathematical-looking figures. And takes all of this terribly seriously. Observers from a later time will smirk in genuine astonishment at what today’s clever propaganda has passed off to the gullible people as the ‘latest’ art.

In response to what he saw as the baleful predicament of German art and society, Grosz, like his predecessors, turned to “our good and not inconsiderable tradition of painting and drawing.” “I consider a return,” he concluded, “to the formal power of the great medieval masters to be precisely as appropriate...as what the French do training their people and cultivating their tradition by inspiration from old Neapolitan frescoes, from Oriental tapestries, from Ingres, or African sculpture or Bushman paintings.”

Whatever political entailments were involved here, Grosz’s petitioning for a recovery of a “German tradition” signalled something of a renewal of that very aura that was understood to have been created through an artist’s imaginative labour. We are also, it should be said, at considerable remove from Adorno’s defence of a negatively approached aura, an aura whose critical value Adorno “deems to have survived Benjamin’s proclamation of [its]

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201 Quoted in Buchloh, “Figures of Authority,” p. 50.
supervention by technical-mechanical reproducibility.” It would be easy, in this respect, to recast Weimar-era disputes about the persistence of aura into a drama between, on the one hand, those committed to the notion of aesthetic autonomy and, on the other hand, those on the side of a popular engagement with the new media of mechanical reproduction. Benjamin was himself equally ambivalent here about the nature of aura. For one thing, Benjamin’s positions on film and mass-mediated modernity could not be reduced to an antinomic opposition of a “liquidationist” versus a “culturally conservative” point of view. “For both positions,” writes Hansen, “hook into each other in ways that may generate a dialectic, but may just as well turn into a mise-en-abîme. The problem Benjamin recognized is that each position contains within itself another antinomic structure whose elements combine with those of its opposite in more, or hopefully less, destructive ways.” Simply put, while Benjamin may have welcomed the historical demolition of aura that accompanied advances in film and photography, he also attributed to the same technical media, psychic, physiognomic, and psychoanalytical qualities that were still invested with the peculiar structure of auratic experience.

The association of such attributes to the camera was a notable feature of early 1920s film theory, part of what Rachel Moore has described as a belief in the apparatus’ “curative magic.” Hence, Benjamin’s invocation of an “optical unconscious” in his “Little History of Photography” in which he described “the ability of the apparatus and particular photographic techniques to register aspects of material reality that are invisible to the

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unarmed human eye." These comments in turn owe much to the influence of Benjamin's acquaintance, Siegfried Kracauer, whose earlier essay on photography explored the radical possibilities of the medium in the face of its popularisation. For Kracauer, "photographibility" had become the primary condition under which an increasingly metropolitan reality was perceived where "the world itself has taken on a 'photographic face.'" And yet, according to Kracauer, the readymade visual clichés of the Weimar-era press did not preclude the auratic capacity of photography to capture a modernity at once alienated, a society, in other words "that has reverted to the state of nature." 208

In the end, these photographic imperatives represented an extension of those attempts to bring the medium of post-war German painting into a "living and unequivocal relationship with modern life." As Moholy-Nagy once noted,

> The creative potential of the new is for the most part slowly revealed through old forms, old instruments, and areas of design which in their essence have already been superseded by the new, but which under pressure from the new as it takes shapes are driven to a euphoric efflorescence. Thus, for example, futurist (structural) painting brought forth the clearly defined problematic of the simultaneity of motion, the representation of the instant, which was alter to destroy it – and this at a time when film was already known but far from being understood...Similarly, some of the painters (neo-classicists and verists) today using representational-objective methods can be regarded – with caution as forerunners of a new representational optical form which will soon be making use only of mechanical, technical means. 209

As was indeed the case, there soon emerged a wide range of photographers who identified with the Neue Sachlichkeit movement and shared Moholy-Nagy's conviction that photography constituted the "sole representational medium adequate to a new, technologized urban landscape" (fig. 2.23). 210 That a photographic medium should be made to articulate

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Fig. 2.23 "The world as picture," circa 1930, B/W photo.

this new reality and thus approximate the "apperceptive level of the average city dweller" was perhaps not surprising. As the writer Alfred Döblin noted in 1929, "society is undergoing a transformation. There is enormous growth in the cities. While one can still find a few 'originals', new types of people are already appearing." Döblin, it should be said, was speaking of Weimar Germany more generally, but Berlin was never far from his mind. The city had doubled its size from two million inhabitants in 1910 to almost four million by the mid 1920s by incorporating outlying areas and absorbing huge ways of migration from rural districts as well as a sizable number of immigrants and exiles. Amid the confusion and disorientation which accompanied such rapid urbanization, photography was undoubtedly

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seen as a potential instrument of knowledge. This was certainly the view of Béla Bálazs, the Hungarian-born film theorist who declared that “at present a new discovery, a new machine, is at work to turn the attention of men back to a visual culture and give them new faces.”

For Bálazs and many others, photography provided a visual means through which the diverse and anonymous masses that surrounded the city dweller could be classified “into types that not only were stable but easily recognizable, an attempt that gained urgency as the fluid contours of a modern world made such methods of classification increasingly difficult.”

That the decade of the Neue Sachlichkeit “turned to a rhetoric of visible behaviour of physiognomy and pathognomy” was certainly supported by the way in which the photographic medium came to occupy a prominent place within the aesthetic activities of the Weimar era. It is also worth noting the extent to which popular Weimar photo-essays like Erna Lendvai-Dircksen’s Das Deutche Volksgesicht or Erich Retzlaff’s Menschen am Werk eerily anticipated the physiognomic orderings that would not only serve as the pretext to political discrimination but as the pseudoscientific legitimation of racist persecution (fig. 2.24). The faces in Lendvai-Dircksen’s were, in particular, meant to represent as Gerhard Richter has recently suggested, “what is German about German faces, the essence of the Volk” avoiding in the process, the suspiciously ‘degenerate’ countenances of city dwellers in

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215 Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, Das Deutsche Volksgesicht (Berlin: Kulturelle Verlagsgesellschaft, 1932); Erich Retzlaff, Menschen am Werk (Göttingen: Verlag d. Deuerlichschen Buchhandlung, 1931).
favour of those German faces that were still to be found in a countryside uncorrupted by the advancements of modernity.\textsuperscript{216}

If there existed at all a counterweight to the völkisch imaginings of "exemplary" German faces, it was in the form of August Sander's \textit{Antlitz der Zeit: Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts}, a folio that included not only portraits of the German bourgeoisie but also images of the unemployed, communists, students, women, and other marginal groups (fig. 2.25). Sander's images in \textit{Antlitz der Zeit} were part of a larger project to create a photographic typology of Weimar society of which he was able to amass negatives in the tens of thousands. While his work was later censored by the National Socialists, Sander did find a champion in Walter Benjamin whose "Little

History of Photography" reserved particular phrase for Sander. Writing of his images, Benjamin noted how "the human face appeared on the photographic plate with new and immeasurable significance. But it was no longer a portrait."\(^{217}\) In the work of Sander, the traditional aura of the photographic portrait enacted its own retreat. Images like "Disabled Man, 1926" or "Unemployed Man, 1928" were hardly of the kind to be found within the growing gallery of "glorified German faces." If anything, Sander’s photographed subjects can be more accurately read along the lines of what Benjamin described as a "nameless appearance that they carry in their faces." These were images less predicated on the

\(^{217}\) Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," \textit{SW} 2, p. 519-520.
presentation of a stable subject than putting “people before the camera who had no use for their photographs.”

Sander himself was a commercial photographer, a career he maintained during the Weimar era. Well-versed in the conventions of portrait photography, Sander’s ambition was to compile a compendium of portrait photographs that would catalogue “the total existing social world of Weimar.” While these ambitions may have belied Sander’s archival intentions with all of its positivist undertones, “for Benjamin,” writes Richter, “Sander’s photographs tended to remain in a space that cannot be fully measured and that is haunted by an otherness, a spectre that is on the far side of the stability promised by a conventional portrait.” As photographs such as “Unemployed Man” show (fig. 2.26), Sander’s use of typological structures were in stark contrast to that of his reactionary counterparts even in the very nature of the overall staging of the photograph. These were, in short, images that were useless to the spurious stylisations that accompanied a fascist aestheticisation of politics.

And in their critical attempt to engage the human countenance, in their promise to produce what Nigel Thrift has, in another context, described as an “affective historical geography of the city,” they perhaps come closest to the consummate negativity which Adorno once theorized and with which I wish to offer a few concluding remarks.

219 Baker, “Photography between Narrativity and Stasis,” p. 81. The final formulation of Sander’s photographic archive was to compromise 45 portfolios each with 12 photos.
Fig. 2.26 August Sander, *Unemployed Man*, 1928, B/W photo.
Negative Dialectics

What is called the philosophy of art usually lacks one of two things: either the philosophy or the art.

- Friedrich Schlegel

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practice in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.

- Theodor Adorno

I began this chapter with a quotation from the second version of Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay in which the author relocates a declining aura within a conceptual trajectory defined by a polarity between “semblance” [Schein] and “play” [Spiel]. In many respects, it has been the main purpose of this chapter to interrogate and reopen the visual culture of Weimar Berlin within precisely these terms. My intention was not, however, to adjudicate between “semblance” and “play” but rather to argue that the dialectical tensions generated through their relationship produced something akin to an aesthetics of estrangement and disfiguration, a mode of seeing sharply attuned to the contradictions of modernity. This was often a project (Habermas’ assumptions aside), with its obvious failings not to mention its investments in an ideology of naturalism and a renewed faithfulness to ‘appearances.’

But there were also many attempts to defamiliarize the circumstances of metropolitan life, to represent Weimar Berlin from the standpoint of its imbrication in a world of “distortion and indigence.” What Adorno famously described as a negative dialectics, that

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222 Friedrich Schlegel quoted in Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 366.
223 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 247.
224 It is therefore not surprising, as Christopher Prendergast has recently noted, that obituaries have become something of a standard move in connection with modernism. Prendergast, “Codewar Modernity.” New Left Review 24 (2003), pp. 95-111. “Modernism is our antiquity,” writes T.J. Clark, “a ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not remotely grasp.” In fact, T.J. Clark’s most recent book, Farewell to an Idea: Episodes in a History of Modernism can be approached as both an exposition and an instance of an exhausted modernist aesthetic with Clark revisiting many of the canonical topoi of modernism (Pissaro, Picasso, Cézanne, Malevich, Pollock) in order to stage allegorical scenes that bid farewell to such topics. See, Clark, Farewell to an Idea, p. 2.
instance on thinking critically – negatively – to think something better, was really in effect a mode of thinking which attempted to “preserve non-identity in the face of a seemingly overwhelming identity – that is to preserve difference in the face of its increasingly pervasive abolition”\(^{225}\) (fig. 2.27). While, for Adorno, this was ultimately a task for which aura remained a critical component, there was also, according to Benjamin, considerable room-for-play [Spiel-Raum]. In this context, Benjamin singled out film as the major progenitor of this Spiel-Raum, understood in both its figurative and literal meanings. As he famously wrote,

> Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.\(^{226}\)

Through the latent possibilities that the filmic medium seemingly offered, Benjamin connected the emergence of a new and different organization of space to art and everyday life. In his view, the ‘playful’ work of film at once unveiled and refracted the metropolitan everyday, “thus making it available for play.”\(^{227}\) While Benjamin may have focused his attention on the aesthetic possibilities of film, a major criticism of modern aesthetic expression in all of its all formulations, as Adorno himself noted, was sparked by its very “perception as theatrics.” It remains therefore imperative to inhabit the deserted site of those past performances, a point already touched on in this chapter and one that will take on a certain centrality in the following section of this dissertation.\(^{228}\) Their vivid presence may well be long gone but there is still a whole host of texts and images that are the occasion for

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\(^{227}\) Hansen, “Room-for-Play,” p. 38.

\(^{228}\) Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 117.
a kind of remembering, a remembering where the performance of the modern could still makes its reappearance.

Fig. 2.27 Felix Nussbaum, *Self Portrait with Jewish Identity Badge*, 1943, oil on canvas.
PART TWO:
PERFORMED PLACES
Chapter 3

Traumatic Territories: Performance, Gesture, and Geography in the Modern City

Fig. 3.1 Karl Hubbuch, Metropolitan Delirium, 1923, Lithograph.
Archiving Trauma

We’re living a makeshift existence. There seems to be no end to the crisis!

- Erich Kästner

Berlin, your dance partner is death!

- Walter Mehring

In the preceding pages, I have already made the case that representations of Weimar Berlin need to be apprehended as performances in themselves. Unlike contemporary geographical work which has sought to go beyond representation to embodied experience, I have suggested that a sense of the cultural presence of the former in the latter merits much greater critical attention; indeed, the body of images and texts that I have considered only confirms the impossibility of ever holding such categories apart. Of course, my own study of the modern city is also grounded in the conviction that the performance of modernity challenges our commonplace understandings of what constitutes an archive. Because the performative is widely assumed to leave behind no records, it demands an unusual archive, whose materials, in accommodating the performance of the modern, are themselves often ephemeral. In what follows, I seek to augment and magnify this perspective by revisiting the performative as a way of attending to certain aspects of everyday life in Weimar Berlin (1919-1933). Contrary to many accounts of the modern city which privilege the visual and textual register, I suggest that it was with precisely such everyday performances – improvised, repeated, and altered – that the words “Weimar” and “Berlin” acquired their deeply sedimented affiliation. Proposing an historical geography of performance raises,

moreover, wider questions about recent attempts within human geography to account for the performative as a way of “reimagining” or “enacting” the urban. These discussions have been largely presentist - even abstract - and would have benefited from a much closer engagement with the messiness of the historical archive. Much of this work has also drawn inspiration from a non-representational theory of practice which has diverted attention away from the interpretive aspects of bodily communication and towards the experiential fleshy presence of movement and physicality. To the extent that such frameworks have insisted on an almost “ontological faith” in the authenticity of physicality and gesture, they have remained remarkably unwilling to acknowledge the political stakes that have underwritten historical claims to the body’s presumed immediacy and vitality. In contrast, it is my own aim to revisit the performances to which the historical record attests and explore the repertoire of practices which contributed to what Peter Sloterdijk once referred to as the “theatricality” of Weimar cultural life. As the repertory figure furthermore suggests, the cultural accomplishments of the Weimar Republic also inhabit, following Sloterdijk, a certain performativity. Sloterdijk is admittedly painting in broad brushstrokes and his comments have remained tantalizingly underdeveloped. For my own part, it seemed wise and proper to scale-down the wide compass of Sloterdijk’s “theatricality” while holding on to its historical embeddedness.

Much of the inspiration for this project has come from the work of historians of performance who have addressed some of the challenges that are posed when the study of 'performativity' shifts from a "contemporary scene to past practice." In the light of these commentaries, I want to briefly clarify my own understanding of the relationship between 'performance,' 'performativity,' and 'theatricality' as there has been a great deal of disagreement over the political potential of performativity as a framework for explaining the relationship between subject formation and creative expression. Suffice to say, these debates have largely centred on the "oblique intersection between performativity and the loose cluster of theatrical practices, relations, and traditions known as performance." While I do not intend to rehearse what are now familiar developments, I do want to frame these acts of performance theory and criticism as "instances of writing history." This is, admittedly, an increasingly accepted view among performance theorists who have argued that the practical and analytic power of performance lies its structures of repetition, whether it be the repeatability of Turner's "ritual process," the productivity of Schechner's "restoration of behaviour," or the historicity of Roach's "genealogy of performance." Taken together, these theories present an interesting case of 'performativity' which Judith Butler similarly understands as a process of reiteration or citation: "performativity is... not a singular 'act' [read performance], for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals the conventions of which it is a

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repetition.” Butler is interested in the process whereby a subject is both brought into being and disciplined by power, a process she argues requires a continual reiteration of prior performances where “every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act.” But precisely because citational performance is iterative, she also argues that theatrical disruption is not only possible, it is intrinsic to the whole process. Insofar then as performativity usually works to conceal its theatricality, it is theatrical performance which incites normative discourse in order to call attention to its dissimulated power and history. The point here is not that the theatrical isn’t also citational but rather that it “mimes and renders hyperbolic the discursive convention that it also reverses.”

In the end, the performative acts to materialize the subject through an accumulated series of performances whereas the theatrical avows the persistent instability of this process. For our purposes, this notion of performativity is crucial to an understanding of a metropolitan world where “theatricality appeared to be the common denominator of all manifestations of life.” As Richard McCormick has suggested, “we find in Weimar culture a relatively open discussion of the hollowness – indeed, cynicism – of the masquerade that prescribed roles and identities seemed to demand.” Implicit in this insight is a recognition of the era’s anxious urbanism where the blurring of traditionally gendered roles was a source of considerable anxiety. This heightened anxiety was in turn very much a symptom of the

wider trauma that marked a period characterized by economic instability, social insecurity, and parliamentary crisis.\textsuperscript{15} Itself a highly visible and widely invoked concept, the collective experience of trauma, as many commentators have recently suggested, is fundamentally a performative one. "The pathology consists," writes Cathy Caruth, "...solely in the \textit{structure of its experience} or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it."\textsuperscript{16} Thus, trauma turns out to be not an event per se but rather the belated experiencing and compulsive re-enactment of an event in the mind of an individual or the life of a collective. Such an understanding of loss and trauma also links up with Butler's suggestion that theatricality is often melancholic. "If melancholia," as she explains through a close reading of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," "...is the effect of an ungrieved loss, it may be that performance understood as 'acting out' is significantly related to the problem of unacknowledged loss."\textsuperscript{17} According to Butler, Freud initially endeavours to diagnose the melancholic's sustained devotion to performing loss "as not only pathological but also antithetical to the ego's well-being, indeed, its continued survival." In contrast, mourning, is characterized by Freud as a psychic process in which the loss of an object or ideal occasions the gradual withdrawal of one's attachment to that object or ideal (\textit{decathexis}). But if Freud attempts to draw a clear distinction between these two mental states, he also casts doubt, as Butler is at pains to point out, on the division of labour that distinguishes 'normal' mourning

\textsuperscript{15} Bernd Widdig, \textit{Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, \textit{Die Kultur der Niederlage} (Frankfurt/M: Fischer Verlag, 2003).

\textsuperscript{16} Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in \textit{Trauma: Explorations in Memory}, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1995), pp. 1-12, p. 4; original emphasis.

from melancholia.\textsuperscript{18} Ultimately for Freud, a more nuanced understanding of “melancholic attachments” might not only depathologise those attachments, but also draw attention to the more unpredictable and creative aspects of ‘acting out.’\textsuperscript{19}

It is in this spirit that the next two chapters are concerned with a thick description of the kind of ‘acting out’ that we find in melancholia’s persistent engagement with the work of mourning. Naturally, I do not propose to trade in the naïve psychologising of the Weimar era that already dominate some of the period’s more canonical accounts.\textsuperscript{20} If anything, I want to reflect on the wider applicability of psychoanalytical terminology to our understanding of historical trauma. In this regard, I am in full agreement with Butler’s conclusion that an “account of melancholy is an account of how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another” and to which end melancholia “produces a set of spatialising tropes for psychic life, domiciles of preservation and shelter, as well as arenas for struggle and persecution.”\textsuperscript{21} Butler is largely interested here in providing a “redescription of the domain of psychic subjection,” but might we reinterpret her view as a means of registering the

\textsuperscript{18} See Judith Butler, \textit{The Psychic Life of Power} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Freud goes onto suggest in “The Ego and the Id” [1923] that the work of mourning is really not possible without melancholia and that it is ultimately the performativity of melancholia itself which works to establish the psychic coordinates of the ego: “[Melancholia is a] painful disorder [where] an object which was lost has been set up inside the ego – that is, an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification.” See Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in \textit{The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud}, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74), 19: pp. 1–59. It may even be as Butler has recently argued that the distinction between mourning and melancholia does not hold, not only for reasons that are already explored by Freud, but also because they are “experienced in a certain configuration of simultaneity and succession.” Judith Butler, “Afterword: After Loss, What Then?” in \textit{Loss: The Politics of Mourning}, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 467-473, p. 472.

\textsuperscript{19} For an elaboration of this argument, see David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains,” in \textit{Loss: The Politics of Mourning}, pp. 1-25, p. 3. Also see the essays by Susette Min, David L. Eng, Shinhee Hee, and Judith Butler in the same collection.


\textsuperscript{21} Butler, \textit{The Psychic Power of Life}, p. 171; Butler’s insistence on an ethical reinterpretation of the task of mourning departs from Jacques Lacan’s subsequent engagement with Freud’s corpus. In this regard, I agree with Alessia Ricciardi who is right to point out that in Lacan’s work, “mourning...loses its historicity, its capacity to register the pathos and contingency of loss, to become a sort of transcendental category of desire. The work of mourning is accomplished at the symbolic, intersubjective level in order to fill the hole in the Real.” See Alessia Ricciardi, \textit{The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 56.
traumatic history of Weimar Germany? How, for example, does this performance of trauma speak to a pathological public sphere that was constituting subjects who could be summoned in the name of what Mark Seltzer has recently described as a “wound culture.” What form did this dramaturgy of trauma assume? And how might it account for the wide range of performances, often prosaic, unregistered, and instinctive, that activate what we would understand as constituting the everyday city?

By answering these questions, I show to what extent a set of somatic and kinaesthetic vocabularies were developed to sense and adapt to the shock of urban industrial modernity. Indeed, the following two chapters explore this connection between trauma, performance, and the modern city by looking at how the traumatic was reinscribed during the Weimar period as a series of cultural practices and performances. Chapter 3 examines the traumatic re-enactments of Weimar Berlin’s post-war “inheritance” in the broader context of German military defeat, political instability, and rampant inflation. It also challenges the longstanding view of ‘Weimar’ as a culture of trauma or defeat. While such a view has continued to hold up trauma as a “transhistorical, essentialised category,” I argue that the vexed history of its reinscription demonstrates not only the category’s historical constructedness, but also the many competing discourses which attempted to encircle and

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23 That a rapidly modernizing Berlin solicited particular gestures and movements made and remembered by different bodies reflects, in turn, a more phantasmic urban geography which, as Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift have noted, comprises all “the reflexes and automatisms which make up the city’s ‘unconscious,’ and which account for the bulk of its activity.” See Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, Cities: Re-imagining the Urban, p. 28.
master the various sites of post-war trauma. In this respect, it is not surprising that the unfolding of trauma found a high degree of concentration and theatrical expansion within the performance styles of Late Expressionism, Dadaism, Kabarett, and early cinema. After all, as Alessia Ricciardi has recently reminded us, it is in the modernist Zeitgeist that “we encounter the proper ideological or cultural correlate of a psyche that is animated and defined by loss.” But as much as the performance of trauma may have represented the conditio sine qua non for a “retheatricalized modernism,” it also operated in an everyday city where the available repertoire of cultural values and deeply ingrained habits had largely broken down.

If I draw on the consequences of traumatic remembrance in an effort to attend to the metropolitan theatrics of Weimar Berlin, in the chapter that follows I broaden the remit of this study from what are indisputably cultural expressions to include other experimental embodiments through which practical, habitual knowledge of Berlin was prosecuted. Not only were the cultural affinities between an aesthetic and psychological modernism strikingly varied and detailed, but as sociologists of science have long taught us, scientific practice is itself a cultural activity earthed in “concrete historical and geographical circumstances.” In order to seek an account of the complex cultural interface that linked the aesthetic and the scientific, I have chosen to dwell on two principle lines of inquiry. First, I investigate the ways in which contemporary psychiatric theories and experimental practices seized on and transformed different aspects of the metropolitan experience. Second, I assess

the extent to which Weimar Berlin became a ‘laboratory’ tasked with shaping the conduct and activity of its subjects. In the end, these experimental arrangements not only represented another example of the period’s pervasive injunction to “perform or else,” they also spoke to the wide regulatory reach of a *pouvoir psychiatrique* through which experimental procedures for analysing and shaping a new habitus were introduced, tested, and widely circulated.  

As a whole, in this and the following chapter, I provide an account of the manifold practices and performances that, taken together, inhabit the local conditions of Weimar Berlin’s modernity. To be sure, a sustained working through of the relationship between historical interpretation and the full “liveness” of performance remains a relatively new mode of inquiry. However, my decision to accommodate this opacity and elasticity need not be seen as a methodological conundrum. In attending to the everyday in this way, I address the problem of how we as scholars can come to generate a suitable archive for registering the *performance of urban modernity*. If we can indeed accept that many kinds of attention are out of step with accommodating the everyday, my own accenting of aesthetic and scientific performances as relevant categories of historical geographical study is guided by a desire to better reference the precarious and often fleeting attempts to fashion new modes of dwelling out of the instability which characterized a Berlin already described by the art critic Karl Scheffler back in 1910 as a “nowhere city that was always becoming [*immerfort zu werden*] and never being [*niemals zu sein*].”  

A final introductory point should be made here on sources. It is of course the case that the passage of time erodes the ‘presence’ of past performances and one must, by necessity,
forgo any claims to the possibility of recovering in fullness the realm of lived gesture, touch, and emotion. I therefore take Peggy Phelan’s point that “to attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself...” And yet, if performances are for Phelan always in a state of appearing and vanishing, she also insists on the possibility of working with their historical remainders.\(^{32}\) As recent work in historical performance studies has similarly suggested, there are many creative ways to engage with existing ‘representational’ sources as conveyors of historical performance in its immediacy and evanescence.\(^{33}\) And as I show in the following pages, whether it be Dadaist experimentation or proletarian theatre, Kabarett or cinema, Ausdruckstanz or experimental psychology, there exists a sedimented history of performance styles through which the mutability and mobility of Weimar Berlin was indeed registered and contested. If these traces mark and remember the event of performance, they have largely done so by leaving their own sort of ghostly presence in a wide constellation of sources that included the performing arts, the popular press, diaries, letters, manifestoes, laboratory protocols, and scientific papers. Most importantly, to retrace these remainders is to recall the words of Walter Benjamin, who once suggested that Berlin possesses more – not less – than some other cities of those places, moments, and practices which bear witness to the uncanniness of its past.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) I am referring to an observation made by Walter Benjamin in “A Berlin Chronicle,” *SW* 2, pp. 595-637, p. 613.
**Gestural Geographies**

Words evoke a keener sympathy, but it is at the same time figurative, intellectualised, and generalised. Music, on the other hand, evokes a fiercer sympathy, but it is vague, longingly extravagant. But the sympathy summoned by gestures is clearly all-embracing, contemporary, gratifying.

-Hugo v. Hofmannsthal

The psychopaths are always around. In calm times we study them but in times of upheaval, they rule over us.

-Ernst Kretschmer

One of the crucial tasks of this dissertation is an exploration of the relevance of contemporary performance studies in understanding the complexity of the modern city. In the following pages, this will come to mean a growing awareness of the traffic between highly dramatic episodes in Berlin’s Weimar history and a repertoire of performances developed to accommodate the shock of metropolitan modernity. Extra-theatrical adaptation of this kind represented in turn a powerful response to what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has recently identified as the “loss of gesture” that characterized European culture at the fin-de-siècle. Agamben notes that an age that “lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them...The dance of Isadora Duncan and Sergei Diaghilev, the novel of Proust, the great Jugendstil poetry from Pascoli to Rilke, and finally and most exemplarily, the silent movie trace the magic circle in which humanity tried for the last time to evoke what was slipping through its fingers forever.” Whether or not this is acceptable as social analysis, Agamben’s diagnosis was certainly shared by many writers of the period, namely the view that the traumas of modernity coincided with a fundamental

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37 I am adapting a phrasing from Jackson, *Lines of Activity*, p. v.
withdrawal of the possibilities of gesture and a peculiarly modern failure of ethos and character.

Agamben is painting in broad brushstrokes and I do take a certain distance from his universalising form of theorizing about the nature of modern gesture. And yet, despite the fact that Agamben flattens out the specificities of gesture in a given historical and political context, his argument remains suggestive insofar as it identifies a crucial moment in European history where “the simplest and most everyday gestures had become as foreign as the gesticulations of marionettes.”

Agamben is, in other words, at pains to pinpoint a breakdown in a bodily hexis, that is, in the sedimented set of dispositions which were intended to be durable, context-bound, and indeed embodied responses to an incipient modernity. But more than this, he suggests that a loss of gesture was also accompanied by a phobic explosion of gestural experiments, what Harold Segel has in a related context described as “the extraordinary modernist preoccupation with physicality.”

In the end, much more could certainly be made of Agamben’s prescient observations in their own right especially their relationship to his ongoing work on the constitutive potentiality of language. By contrast, I seek to remain alert to the ways in which they hook into (or resonate suggestively with) the geographical field I am examining. Weimar Berlin, I argue, offers a way of historicizing and spatialising Agamben’s provocative if perhaps equivocal set of observations. This is not a retrospective fantasy and as elusive as Agamben’s comments are, they do ventriloquize a concern that was already a source of considerable discussion and debate among Weimar intellectuals who were themselves drawn

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to the gestural as a way of coming to terms with the period’s social and political uncertainties. While Theodor Adorno singled out his friend Walter Benjamin as the first person to shed critical light on the central importance of gesture to an understanding of Weimar modernity, Benjamin was, in fact not alone. Quite to the contrary, and, if anything, there existed a wide-ranging web of interventions which included not only the intercessions of Adorno and Benjamin but also Béla Bálazs, Bertolt Brecht, Max Kommerell, Siegfried Kracauer, and Karl Jaspers among others. Building on this work, it becomes possible to understand the traumatic history of Weimar Germany precisely in the terms which Agamben outlines – i.e. with respect to the changing gesturality of a fractured society. It is, moreover, with the restorative capacities of a ‘new’ habitus that the remainder of this chapter is concerned, exploring its anxious attempt to occupy an increasingly unfamiliar milieu. This was especially acute in the context of the Weimar Republic, where the collective trauma of World War I and the hyperinflation of the early 1920s only exacerbated existing fears and anxieties about the dissolution of established social norms and conventions. Indeed as Helmut Lethen has recently pointed out, “the twenties are a moment of far-reaching disorganisation in which the familiar reference points of Wilhelmine Society are no longer valid.” In a similar context, the writer Alfred Doblin referred to the period as a “republic without direction” and Walter Benjamin could also very easily have had the Weimar Republic in mind when he wrote that the “tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state

41 As Theodor Adorno noted in a letter to his friend Walter Benjamin in 1934 regarding his recently drafted essay on Kafka: “It is this perspective...which first properly illuminates the very function of theatre and gesture to which you were the first person to ascribe it the central importance which it deserved... If one were to seek out the origin of such gesture, one would look for it less in the Chinese theatre, so it seems to me, than in modernity itself.” Theodor Adorno to Benjamin, 17.12.1934, published in Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 70. Adorno goes on to note that “Kafka’s novels are not screenplays for experimental theatre...They represent rather the last connecting texts of the silent film.” It is precisely this constellation of the filmic, the gestural, and the theatrical which has recently been taken up by Agamben. See his latest collection of essays, Image et Mémoire: Écrits sur l'image, la danse et le cinéma trans. Marco Dell’Omodarme et al. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2004).
of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” Ultimately, in the words of Karl Jaspers, it was “gesture – not being” that came to frantically rule over all sectors of republican life.\(^42\)

If the Weimar Republic disclosed an “inoperative community” in the strongest sense of the word, it is perhaps unremarkable that I chosen to focus my attention on Berlin, the rapidly modernizing metropolis which was in many ways the privileged landscape for the spatial imaginary of Weimar modernism.\(^43\) And yet, it was at the municipal level that the reconstitution of the nation was most vigorously contested.\(^44\) Greater Berlin, numbering over 4 million inhabitants, was naturally at the centre of debates about the efficacy of municipal democracy on the one hand and the viability of the Republic on the other.\(^45\) Aside from its political significance, the city also represented, as Janet Ward has argued, a stunning moment in the historical geography of urban modernity. In other words, it would not be a stretch to see in the city’s nervous performativity a spatial correlate to the “transcendental homelessness” and “radical uprootedness” that Georg Lukács and Martin Heidegger (among others) saw in the 1920s as the predicament of metropolitan modernity.\(^46\) That the vagaries


\(^{43}\) Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)


\(^{45}\) It was in 1920 that municipal incorporation took place and the contours of a Greater Berlin were first established. The geographical significance of incorporation was charted to great effect by the contemporary geographer Friedrich Leyden. See Leyden, *Groß-Berlin: Geographie der Weltstadt* (Berlin: Gebr.-Mann Verlag, 1933).

of bodily habitation prompted Heidegger, in particular, to “retrieve the question of being” need not be seen simply as an admission that the world of Weimar Berlin was more “excessive” than its commentators could possibly theorise. In certain ways to be sure; however, it is still more useful to recognise in an excessive habitus, heightened tensions about modernism and urbanization which where part of a “crisis of classical modernity” whose origins date back to at least the late 19th century. After all, rapid urbanization in the years after the founding of the German Reich in 1871 had already sedimented the city’s identification as a metaphor and model for a runaway modernity. At the same time, the trauma elicited by Berlin’s transformation from Residenzstadt to Industriemetropole was undoubtedly magnified by the serious privations which governed everyday life during World War I and the vitalist imperative which had sent soldiers to the Front was quickly replaced by mass demonstrations, street riots, and food queues. As the practical foundations and habits that organized daily life disintegrated, repeated street-level protest was already promoting the formation of an alternative public sphere which not only contested existing social norms but anticipated the November Revolution of 1918 and the political foundations of the Weimar Republic.

At another level, the pervasive trauma that accompanied military defeat traded in the conviction that the experience of the Great War had “thoroughly contradicted, and thereby

Political,” *Political Geography* 19 (2000), pp. 407-422. As Elden rightly notes, Martin Heidegger’s predilection for the rural was well-known and in turn signaled an anxious anti-urban bias. “People in the city,” Heidegger commented in a 1933 radio broadcast, “often wonder whether one gets lonely up in the mountains among the peasants for such long monotonous periods of time. But it is not loneliness, it is solitude. In large cities one can easily be as lonely as almost nowhere else.” Heidegger, “Creative Landscape: Why do We Stay in the Provinces?” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Anton Kaes et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 426-428, p. 427.


impoverished... 'inherited' experience – that body of memories, habits, and informal knowsledges accumulated before the war.”  

As Walter Benjamin famously commented:

Experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world. Perhaps this is less remarkable than it appears. Wasn’t it noticed at the time how many people returned from the front in silence? Not richer but poorer in communicable experience? ...For never has experience been contradicted thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers. A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its centre, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body.

While the liquidation of taken-for-granted experience prompted Benjamin to belatedly advocate a “new barbarism” and a decisive break with invalid principles, what was in fact most noteworthy about a post-war “culture of barbarism” was its striking literalism among contemporary observers. As Richard Bessel’s study of the immediate post-war period suggests, the significance of how the war was remembered in Germany is perhaps more accurately reflected in the persistent political violence, economic instability, and ‘exaggerated’ moral decline which characterized the early years of the new Republic.

According to such a view, big cities (Berlin, Munich, Hamburg) were said to be especially gripped by a “mass psychosis,” their citizens “hysterically habituated” to uncontrolled pleasure-seeking and licentiousness. Significantly, hopes for the manufacturing of a Neue

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*Gesellschaft* were soon replaced with a hysterical urge to rehabilitate a shell-shocked nation.\(^56\)

That the Weimar era was understood, *in toto*, as a long bout of war neurosis was a view shared by many writers and thinkers of the period and, in using terms like ‘trauma,’ ‘hysteria,’ and ‘psychosis,’ I do not mean to treat them merely as loose, figurative categories, but rather as objects of historical analysis. The psychosomatic memories of war trauma which interest me were thus grounded in a particular historical moment part of the broader effort to reimagine “the place of the war in Germany’s collective memory and national identity.” That soldiers returning from the Front often suffered from sleeplessness, uncontrollable shaking, and disorders of speech, sight, hearing, or gait was, naturally, of grave concern to psychiatrists and neurologists alike.\(^57\) However, as I will argue in the following chapter, diagnosing the cause of “war neuroses” was soon geared into larger controversies about social insurance, the welfare state, and its purportedly pathological effects on war veterans. Indeed, the causal connections that veterans claimed between wartime events and subsequent post-war disabilities was consistently overturned by leading psychiatric practitioners.\(^58\) Awarding pensions for nervous disorders was seen by many

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\(^{56}\) The post-war mood for manufacturing a new “Gesellschaft” was captured most perspicaciously in Walther Rathenau’s vigorous polemic for a new socialist republic set out in a trilogy of works: *Die neue Wirtschaft* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1918); *Der neue Staat* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919); *Die neue Gesellschaft* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919).

\(^{57}\) Paul Lerner, “An Economy of Memory: Psychiatrists, Veterans, and Traumatic Narratives in Weimar Germany,” in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, eds. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzschke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 173-195, p. 176. The official Reichswehr statistics list the number of soldiers who were hospitalized for nervous illness at 313,399. As Paul Lerner rightly points out, this is only a record of hospital admissions and overlooks the possibility of many patients who were never treated. If one includes reserve soldiers, the number jumps, according to Lerner’s calculations, to 613,047 patients. See Lerner, “Rationalizing the Therapeutic Arsenal: German Neuropsychiatry in World War I,” in *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Manfred Berg and Geoffrey Cocks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 121-148, p. 148.

psychiatrists as unpatriotic and important doctors including Karl Bonhoeffer, Robert Gaupp, and Max Nonne turned to the "Heimat" as a more representative source of these neuroses, seeing combat as a healthy and invigorating alternative to the 'debilitating' influences of an 'effeminate' urban society. Recuperating the health of a national Gemeinschaft betrayed, therefore, a biopolitical calculus under which the active treatment and rational management of patients became a priority. Therapeutic goals were redefined around national utility and, as labour shortages reached crisis proportions, psychiatric therapy was increasingly focused on the task of efficiently re-channelling patients into the nation's war economy. Ultimately, the nexus of trauma, psychiatry, and modernity that this kind of rationalization implied reflected a deep concern with re-establishing the professional and scientific credibility of psychiatry while asserting medical control over a populace deemed "pathologically vulnerable to nervous illness, criminal behaviour, and sexual depravity."\(^{59}\)

But the performance of trauma, as Ruth Leys has recently pointed out, was also widely understood as an experience of hypnotic imitation or mimesis and, in this regard, German health officials were especially worried about a dramatic upsurge in public demonstrations of 'quack' psychology.\(^{60}\) These complaints were most often levelled at travelling hypnotists and the post-war proliferation of 'hypnotic' performances in variety acts and cabarets and especially at metropolitan fairgrounds. For the Berlin psychiatrist Karl Bonhoeffer, these performances literally contributed to the hystericizing of the population. What so troubled Bonhoeffer and some of his colleagues was the possibility that performative re-enactments of war neurosis heralded a more general contagion. And yet, attempts made by psychiatrists like Bonhoeffer to serve the biopolitical ambitions of the state also threw into sharp relief the

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\(^{60}\) Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 8.
contradictions that characterised the psychiatric profession's pretensions to scientific credibility. While the professionalization of German psychiatry coincided with its evolution into a university discipline, it remained ill suited to military conflict and the therapeutic requirements that the treatment of traumatic neuroses demanded. Amidst such a crisis, psychiatrists quickly turned to whatever approaches actually seemed to offer a cure. For Max Nonne, a doctor working at Hamburg's Eppendorf Hospital, this meant a return to the discredited methods of suggestive hypnosis that he had witnessed as a young trainee at Paris' famous Salpêtrière Hospital. Nonne soon reported success rates of over 80-90 percent with his patients and he quickly gained national notoriety performing live hypnosis sessions in front of military authorities. To publicise and showcase his clinical successes, Nonne even went so far as to produce a brief training film in which he documented the treatment of patients in scenes which juxtaposed the depiction of soldiers, each of whom exhibited the trademark symptoms of traumatic neurosis, and their subsequent "miraculous" cure. In the absence of evidence that showed or even described his therapeutic sessions, Nonne was able to shroud his hypnotic cure in mystery, "imparting the impression that these peculiar, debilitating conditions were cured instantaneously, effortlessly, and indeed magically."

And yet, to the extent that Nonne's introduction of magic into the arena of German mental medicine recalled the antics of the metropolitan fairground, the repetition – or acting out – of nervous tics, spasms, and somnambulistic gestures was also made strikingly manifest in canonical post-war films such as "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1919) and "Dr.

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61 Nonne's stay at the Salpêtrière Hospital coincided with the development by Jean-Martin Charcot of hypnosis as a therapeutic cure to the causes of hysteria. While Nonne, at the time, viewed the theatricality of Charcot's demonstrations with scepticism, his own treatments undoubtedly reflected the influence of Charcot's 'performances.'

62 Lerner, Hysterical Men, p. 123, p. 87. What is, however, especially interesting about the making of Nonne's film is that he used patients whom he had already treated and purportedly cured. He hypnotized them so that they would 'perform' their original symptoms for the camera, and then he hypnotized those very symptoms away again. I am indebted to Paul Lerner for this observation. See Lerner, Hysterical Men, p. 266n3.
Mabuse, Gambler’” (1922) (fig. 3.2). Not only did these films reflect widespread fears in Germany about the nature of the psychiatric sciences, they also heralded a *literal* displacement of trauma from the trenches and clinics to the sites and venues of post-war metropolitan culture. In fact, the restoration of traumatic behaviour in a delimited ‘wound culture’ like Weimar Berlin was characterized by its multiple borrowings and stagings. And while a catalogue raisonné of these performance styles is admittedly beyond the compass of this chapter, some of the more important points of tension within Berlin’s “nervous system” are highlighted in what follows. In this way, it will become clear to what extent the anxious urbanisms of the city had themselves become a kind of “performance

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63 It is worth noting that one of the writers of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was himself treated for war neurosis. See Lerner, *Hysterical Men*, p. 219.
64 See Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 9; Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture.”
machine" whose compensatory gestures and bodily stylistics strengthened the association between highly local moments in Berlin's history and their increasingly theatrical rehearsal.\footnote{Joseph Roach, \textit{Cities of the Dead}, p. 14.}
Troubled Re-Enactments

Gesture escapes us; it is an automatism. -Henri Bergson  

Society is imitation. -Gabriel Tarde

Stage Expressionism re-appeared in a perceived context of cultural emergency with “the implicit mandate of articulating a new, historical understanding of contemporary German society.” Unlike pre-war Expressionism which had negotiated the decay of Wilhelmine culture in resolutely spiritual terms, late Expressionist Theatre in Berlin temporarily engaged a newly politicised polity. Indeed, military defeat, economic collapse, and revolutionary unrest prompted many artists to transform a notoriously slippery term like ‘expressionism’ into a “valid criterion of political life.” Notwithstanding the complexities and divergences of the expressionist movement, Berlin became a significant “nerve centre” for the organization of expressionist artists’ councils which included the Arbeitsrat für Kunst and the Novembergruppe. In bringing together the aspirations of various leftist perspectives, the organization of both not surprisingly resembled the councils of revolutionary workers and soldiers who in late 1918 and early 1919 challenged the legitimacy of parliamentary democracy on the streets of Berlin. What David Kuhns has therefore identified as a “late Expressionist activism” represented an organized struggle over a field of cultural production no longer confined to the autonomous sphere of art (fig. 3.3).

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In the theatre, this meant a decisive shift from the overt spirituality of early Expressionism to the political commentary of post-war productions. And yet, at the same time, a common feature of both modes was an explicit concern with how to tell “historical truth performatively,” allowing a performing body to be a privileged medium of transmission. In stage expressionism, the “theatricalization of the human body,” to borrow Joseph Roach’s useful phrasing, channelled the performer’s expressive powers into a capacity to perform and bring about some effect in real life. In this way, theatrical expressionism carried on the growing demand by German modernists to “retheatricalize the theatre” and “restore visual and gestural vitality to the stage,” “[Thus],” writes Peter Jelavich, “spoken drama was revitalized by a host of theatrical forms that ranged from ritual

71 Kuhns, *German Expressionist Theatre*, p. 53.
gesture to boisterous play, and its expressive repertory was broadened to include pantomime, clowning, acrobatics, ballet, song, and even plays of pure light and inanimate objects” (fig. 3.4). In the case of pre-war performance, a new focus on “ecstatic gesture” (Gebärdenekstase) dramatized a series of practical postures ranging from a defiant, emotional rejection of Wilhelmine patriarchal values to a more mystical transcendence of them. By the end of World War I, the desire for a ‘new life’ had, however, taken on a more sombre significance and “assumed the much more sharply defined function of expressing battle trauma.”

| SCHEME FOR STAGE, CULT, AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT ACCORDING TO: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLACE | PERSON | GENRE | SPEECH | MUSIC | DANCE |
| TEMPLE | PRIEST | RELIGIOUS CULT ACTIVITY | SERMON | ORATORIO | DERVISH |
| | | | | | |
| ARCHITECTURAL STAGE | PROPHET | | | | |
| STYLIZED OR SPACE STAGE | SPEAKER | | | | |
| THEATER OF ILLUSION | ACTOR | | | | |
| WINGS AND BORDERS | PERFORMER (COMMEDIAN) | | | | |
| SIMPLEST STAGE OR APPARATUS & MACHINERY | ARTISTE | | | | |
| PODIUM SCAFFOLD | ARTISTE | | | | |
| FAIRGROUND SIDESHOW | FOOL JESTER | | | | |
| Fig. 3.4 Re-theatricalizing Modernism: Oskar Schlemmer’s Bauhaus Scheme for Stage Entertainment. |

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74 Jelavich, Munich and Theatrical Modernism, p. 4.
75 Felix Emmel, Das ekstatische Theater (Prien: Kampmann, 1924), p. 41
76 Kuhns, German Expressionist Theatre, p. 102.
As a consequence, the “kinaesthetic imaginary” developed in well-known Berlin productions of Georg Kaiser’s *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, Ernst Toller’s *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch* deviated from the uncritical subjectivism of early performances in favour of the combinatorial, abstractionist movements of a choral element. Late Expressionist Theatre turned increasingly to emblematic presentation and ensemble acting in order to fully address the urgencies of a post-war political agenda (fig. 3.5).

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Fig. 3.5 Scene from Ernst Toller’s *Die Wandlung*, produced at the Berlin Tribüne Theatre in September 1919.
On the expressionist stage, such a shift culminated in Jürgen Fehlings’ 1921 Berlin première adaptation of Toller’s Masse Mensch. Earlier expressionist plays may had focused on the solitary spiritual quest for authenticity. The ambiguity inherent to the title of Toller’s play – variously rendered as “Mass Humanity” or “The Man of the Masses” signalled, however, that it was in fact the choral ensemble which had become the play’s main protagonist. The play’s putative heroine, Sonia Irene L., was a woman who had abandoned her middle-class upbringing in order to encourage non-violent resistance within the proletariat only to find herself engulfed in the anarchy of mob violence personified in the play by a character simply referred to as the “Nameless One.” While the Nameless One was devised by Toller in order to emblematically represent the multiple persona of the metropolitan masses from “Might” and “Madness” to “Destiny” and “Guilt,” Fehling drew heavily on ensemble acting in order to mould the composite image of ‘Mass Humanity’ into a “moving ensemble” whose collective ‘body’ was united into a single “kinetic emblem of desperation.”

That such emblematic embodiments took on an allegorical quality was not lost on contemporary commentators and was even to eventually find an uncanny doppelgänger in Walter Benjamin’s timely observations on the nature of German tragic drama.

In the final analysis, attempts to meet the demands of a young republic via a polemicised expressionism were largely unsuccessful. Benjamin was perhaps right to note that “at bottom the reaction of expressionism was more pathological than critical. It sought to overcome the times that gave rise to it by making itself the expression of those times.” In narrowly aesthetic terms, the spectre of a failed political revolution prompted many artists to concede

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77 I am drawing here on Kuhns, German Expressionist Theatre, p. 192-3.
that expressionism was never able to address the new complexities of the Weimar Republic. Alternatively, calls for an immediate return to what Max Weber referred to in 1918 as a “sober, moral propriety” (nüchterne moralische Anständigkeit) shifted attention away from expressionism’s self-professed cult of authenticity. In its place, Walter Rathenau’s 1919 prolegomenon for the new republic was already promoting “objectivity and justice” (Sachlichkeit und Gerechtigkeit) as a binding code of conduct. Yet despite a growing interest in ‘objectivity’ and ‘sobriety’ as the motivating structures for a post-war habitus, the residues of German expressionism continued to popularise a kinaesthetic acumen no longer confined to the limited circumstances of theatrical performance. Indeed, the “outflow of ‘theatre’” into larger political and cultural circuits highlighted a persistent theatricality which opened up new and often foreshortened modes of dwelling within the contours of a modernizing society. This is especially important in the context of a Weimar Berlin in which the coordinates of such a new habitus were vulnerably exposed and hardly sedimented. Indeed, the contemporaneous development of an extensive ‘body culture’ was crucial in inculcating new gestures and movements; or what Pierre Bourdieu would have referred to as “those embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own ‘obviousness.’” In the absence, therefore, of a reliable practical world, the Weimar era cultivated an attitude toward the body “unprecedented in its

80 Benjamin puts this rather well when he writes that “Expressionism exhibited the revolutionary gesture, the raised arm, the clenched fist in papier-mâché.” Walter Benjamin, “Left-Wing Melancholy,” SW 2, pp. 423-427, p. 424.
82 Tyrus Miller makes a similar point about the trajectory of modernism in the post-war period. See Tyrus Miller, Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 43.
83 Bourdieu quoted in Judith Butler, Excitable Speech, p. 152.
modernity, intensity, and complexity." This new belief in the primacy of the body was summed up rather well by one contemporary commentator who noted that,

something new has appeared. It could be called a movement, a wave, a fashion, a passion, a new feeling for life... No one knew from whence this new tendency came. It seeped through almost unnoticed, and its pervasive presence was alike an unstemmable tide. It had no name but was called by a hundred old names and hundred new ones, and ultimately the old expressions were unable to capture the new sensibility: body culture, gymnastics, dance, cult dances, the new corporeality, the new physicality, the revival of the ideals of antiquity, the new gymnastics, physical exercise and hygiene, sport in all its incarnations such as those played in the nude, nudism, life reform, functional gymnastics, physical education, rhythmical exercise with all its countless expressions, and so on.  

While many German commentators understood the body culture mania of the 1920s as a critical response to the rationalization of a metropolitan milieu, body culture — especially gymnastics and dance — was hardly lacking in enthusiasm for a mechanistic modernity (fig. 3.6). It is not surprising then that, in institutional terms, Berlin enjoyed a prominent coordinating role. The city alone had 151 dance schools in 1929, the most important devoted to the teachings of Rudolf Laban, Emile Jacques-Delacroze, and Bess Mesendieck. By the end of the Weimar Republic, Germany had 5,122 professionally registered dancers, over 30 percent of whom lived in Berlin. Within an increasingly crowded and confused cultural space, there were, naturally, various “schools of bodily expressivity” advocating different forms of embodied expression and bodily attunement. Structured regimes offered the kind of systematic bodily education preferred by the rhythmic gymnastics movement (Emile Jacques

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Delacroze, Rudolf Bode).\textsuperscript{87} Other modes of performance were more interested in recovering repressed modes of expression (Dorothee Günter)\textsuperscript{88}, exploring the relationship between gestures and expressions (Mary Wigman); codifying the dynamic affiliations between bodies and spaces (Rudolf Laban); or restaging the mechanistic qualities of modern life (Oskar

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{schlemmer_figure_plan_tridic_ballet}
\caption{Schlemmer's Figure Plan for the \textit{Triadic Ballet}, 1926, ink, watercolour, zinc white and bronze on paper.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{87} See Rudolf Bode, \textit{Neue Wege in der Leibserziehung} (München: Beck, 1923); \textit{Ausdrucksgymnastik} (München: Beck, 1925).

\textsuperscript{88} Dorothee Günther, \textit{Gymnastik Gründübungen nach System Mensendieck} (München: Delphin, 1926).
Schlemmer). There is, in other words, ample evidence that points to the different forms of Weimar body culture. A detailed exegesis of its many affinities and discontinuities is, however, not my primary purpose. Rather, I simply wish to draw attention to the wide range of work which took the city and metropolitan life as such as chorographical subjects through which to explore the “disturbing new spaces and rhythms of modernity.”

For proponents of Ausdruckstanz such as Laban and his protégé Wigman, this was largely achieved through choreographic techniques which dispensed with traditional ballet’s emphasis on the dancing persona in favour of a performative mode which framed the dancer as a “dynamic configuration of energy in space” (fig. 3.7, 3.8). While such methods centred on direct emotional expression, they also demonstrated an interest in the apprehension of the spatial and dynamic dimension of movement. The key figure here was Laban, whose effort to develop a way of systematically understanding and representing the expressive movement of the body provided an expansive framework through which the entire spectrum of movement from technique to expression to composition could be notated and analysed. For Laban, the problem of how to write and record motion proved to be extraordinarily difficult passing through several preliminary phases before his “Kinetographic” system was presented at the Second Dancer’s Congress in Essen in 1928. And yet, if Laban’s dance notation was

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Fig. 3.7
Choreographisches Institut, Laban, 1928.

Fig. 3.8
Masked solo figure from Wigman's Totentanz, 1926.
able to provide a way of capturing and registering the mechanics of dance movement, we know little about how these notational arrangements were in fact historically performed. Indeed, the tension between live performance and its figuration was put rather well by Laban’s colleague and assistant, Fritz Klingenbeck. “For the written recording of dances,” he noted, “the individual interpretation of an artist should be much less important than the actual composition. For reconstructing only the latter is considered, for we find only the composition in the written recording of all other arts. The expression of personal performance is scarcely possible with signs or words, it is the unrepeateable, unique possession of the living artist.”

What we do know about original dance performances often came by way of Laban’s own descriptions such as the few sentences he devoted to recalling his 1927 dance-play *Die Nacht*:

The play opened with a crowd of mechanically grinning society men and women, followed by all I had experienced and felt when I first met life in the big city. It was built round a fantasy on work which showed money being earned without work. Greed, covetousness, adoration of three idols: dollars, depravity, and deceit. The whole wild orgy found no solution and ended in madness. The music was a caricature of jazz.

Evoking the depravity of the big city was, of course, a common theme among Weimar artists and in *Die Nacht*, Laban set out to capture what he described as

The violent storm and evil spirits of our time. What the revues and films of our days made out to be charming and chic, sophisticated and smart, what people took for terribly sweet and amusing, I portrayed this with its true bitter aftertaste, with its obnoxious flavour and its degrading nastiness.

Efforts to embody the perceived excesses of the modern city also figured prominently in the work of many other dancers including Kurt Joos and Valeska Gert not to mention the theatrical experiments undertaken by Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus School. Surprisingly,

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stage work wasn’t even mentioned in the original manifesto of the Bauhaus published in 1919. Theatre work did, however, acquire a central role within the design course, especially under the stewardship of Schlemmer who ran the theatre workshop from 1923 until 1929. Such performances, as Juliet Koss has recently shown, became an integral element of Bauhaus life occurring frequently both on and off the School’s premises and often in the context of other cultural events. And unlike their contemporaries within the Ausdruckstanz movement, Bauhaus performances “recreated the human body – literally and symbolically, onstage and off – in the shape of the doll, its childlike simplicity combining a comforting and seemingly animate charm with an unnerving absence of human personality.”

These incarnations were most famously captured by Schlemmer in his Triadic Ballet though his subsequent experiments with space, gesture, and movement testified to an abiding interest in the playful potentialities of the human physis. As he himself proclaimed, “the history of the theatre is the history of the transfiguration of the human form.” We see this applied, for example, in the dancing figures of Schlemmer’s Space Dance and Gesture Dance (figs. 3.9, 3.10, 3.11) who were undoubtedly devised to exemplify Schlemmer’s prescriptive remarks. Clad in monochrome unitards, ballet slippers, and wearing metallic ovoid masks, Schlemmer’s figures clearly resembled storefront mannequins or oversized dolls. These were, in short, hardly the prosthetic figures, dismembered bodies, and robots that populated much of the Weimar imaginary.

If anything, as an ensemble of padded automatons, the stiff mechanistic poses orchestrated by Schlemmer’s dancers gave the impression that they were intended to parody

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97 It is worth noting that dolls, marionettes, and puppets had long substituted for humans in the German literary imagination from E.T.A Hoffmann to Heinrich von Kleist. Unlike, however, Schlemmer’s theatre dolls, other examples from the Weimar era testified to widespread anxieties about the nature of female subjectivity (Hans Bellmer). See Hal Foster, Prosthetic Gods (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).
Fig. 3.9-3.10 Scenes from Schlemmer's Gesture Dance.
Fig. 3.11 Oskar Schlemmer, multi-media score for *Gesture Dance*, 1927.
the era’s obsession with physicality and rationalised subjectivity. While Schlemmer’s later work suggested a rapprochement to National Socialism, a position, I might add, he would share with Laban and Wigman, the figures designed by Schlemmer in the 1920s were certainly not the harbingers of an active athleticism. Rather, as Koss has rightly pointed out, they seemed to optimistically “embrace the mounting mechanization of Weimar Germany; their robotic poses softened, literally, by their costumes [which] stave[d] off the threat of dismemberment with a denial both charming and disquieting.”

The performers of Space Dance and Gesture Dance did, however, share with their expressionist counterparts an interest in “non-representational movement” abandoning naturalism and its psychologist overtones, in favour of an abstract interest in the relationship between contemporary life and modern dance (fig. 3.12, 3.13).

Of course, it would be misleading to suggest that expressive attempts at re-establishing belief in what Martin Heidegger referred to as the “hegemony of habituatedness” did not occur without severe instabilities and ambiguities of perception. The performativity interpellated through Weimar physical culture and its successors often proffered an imaginary body that was pellucidly intact as a means of reinforcing established hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Schlemmer’s dolls aside, attempts at “renewal through rhythm” more often that not risked locating the quest for bodily reform in an idealized physicality rather than in the economic and political structures that created a deleterious urban environment in the first place.

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98 Laban and Wigman were actively involved in the opening ceremonies for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. See Manning, Ecstasy and the Demon, especially Chapter 5.
Fig. 3.13 Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, part of the Revue *Metropolis Again*, 1926.
Cabaretic Modernisms

As an expanse of stone this city is more or less like it used to be but with respect to its inhabitants it has long resembled an insane asylum [Irrenhaus].

-Erich Kästner

That the residues of expressionism ultimately fostered a spurious bio-politics, ill-equipped to accommodate the economic and social chaos of the post-war period, was not lost on its detractors. For members of the Berlin Dada movement, expressionism represented "the gestures of a tired people bent on escaping the times, the war, and the misery." "In expressionism," Richard Huelsenbeck added, "Dadaism, saw nothing more than a shrinking back, a flight from the harsh edges of things." Berlin Dada, on the other hand, was quick to understand itself as an unruly product of difficult material circumstances offering what Huelsenbeck, in retrospect, hailed as an "image and index of a collapsing, post-classical bourgeois culture (zusammenbrechende nach-klassisch bürgerliche Kultur)." As the Berlin Dadaists would collectively proclaim in 1920:

By way of parapsychology all the Dadaists of the world have transferred their psychotechnical elasticity to the Berlin representatives of immortal Dada. Everyone must see the wonders of this psychical metalogic [...] Dada is the clarity of insight into the outlook of every opinion about politics and economics, art, medicine, sexuality, erotics, perversion, and anaesthetics.

In the end, the Dadaist, writes Huelsenbeck, "loves life because he can throw it away everyday. [He] loves the noises of the Métro, he likes to hang around Cook's travel bureau, and he knows the practices of Engelmacherin [female abortionists] who behind closely

103 Erich Kästner, Fabian, p. 99.
drawn curtains dry out foetuses on blotting paper in order to grind them up and sell them as ersatz coffee.”

The Dada critique of modernity did not, however, stop at lurid sensationalist generalities. Rather, as Brigid Doherty has argued in a series of important articles, Berlin Dada “produced an art of failed revolution” in which the destructive energy as well as the actual collapse of revolutionary politics in Germany circa 1919-1920 figured prominently within the formal conventions of Dada montage itself. To be sure, the miming of Dada extended beyond the techne of montage and was tantamount to the insistent pursuit and reworking of a whole series of strategies – collage, readymade, chance, and other forms of automatization – that were foundational to the project of the post-war avant-garde, broadly defined. And yet as much as Dada was able to cohere around what Benjamin once referred to as a form of “negative expressionism,” the work of Berlin Dada was ultimately preoccupied with a traumatic working through of the unprecedented and senseless slaughter of World War I. War trauma must be counted among the “most basic concerns of Berlin Dada.”

Berlin Dada thus dramatized a kind of symptomatology or gesturology for rehabilitating a shattered habitus within a city in which the First World War remained a vivid horizon of

108 While my comments are made with the activities of Berlin Dada squarely in mind, it is worth stressing, as Leah Dickerman has recently suggested, that “Dada was notably diffuse, with activities in a handful of city centres created by a network of itinerant, often politically displaced, artists of diverse nationalities.” For Dickerman, Dadaism’s cosmopolitanism was its defining characteristic, facilitated, as it was, by a media network “that served both as conduit of ideas and images and site of practice.” See Dickerman, “Dada Gambits,” October 105 (2003), pp. 4-12. p. 8.
experience and compulsory re-enactment. The link between trauma and Berlin Dada's new institutional 'home' figures prominently in the movement's founding manifesto, its most important passage highlighting Dada's fixation with shock and dismemberment:

The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, an art which one can see has let itself be thrown by the explosions of the last week, which is forever gathering up its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, holding fast to the intellect of their time, bleeding from hands and hearts.¹¹⁰

As Doherty persuasively argues, Dada's obsession with trauma signalled much more than a heightened conditioning to the exigencies of a metropolitan modernity. For the Dadaist, an experimental encounter with modernity meant a return to the original scene of war neuroses, what undoubtedly should be seen as a shell shocked mimesis of those who had quite literally been thrown by 'explosions.' This is a view supported by Hal Foster who recently noted that the traumatic mime was a "key persona" of Dada charged with the task of assuming the dire conditions of his time — "the armouring of the military body, the fragmenting of the industrial body, the commodifying of the capitalist subject" — while inflating them through hyperbole or hypertrophy. But as a parodic set of strategies, Dadaism was not nihilistic in so much as it was defensive and immunological. After all, the Dadaist was modelled, as Hugo Ball, one of the movement's founders pointed out, to a much lesser degree on the absolute anarchist as it was on the "perfect psychologist [who] has the...power to shock or soothe with one and the same topic."¹¹¹ Cases of war neuroses were, in this way, not only a source of concern for the medical profession in post-war Germany but they also furnished Berlin Dada with clinical repertoire of physical and psychic symptoms. It should


¹¹¹ Foster, p. 170; Hugo Ball quoted in Foster, "Dada Mime," p. 170.
hardly come as a surprise then that a Dada focus on the simulation of war trauma was immediately seized upon by a number of contemporary observers. In one remarkable ‘diagnosis,’ a doctor at Berlin’s famous Charité hospital noted several formal qualities shared by Berlin Dada and art made by patients suffering from mental illness. He writes: “A red thread runs through all of them...In the mental ward of the Charité. [And now] we have [found] in the Dadaist artworks a borderline case of a symptom complex somewhere between an organic mental illness and a more generalized psychopathology, and so we psychiatrists are grateful to the Dadaists for their exhibition. Whether one does right by the people by letting them see it, is questionable: the collection belongs in the Charité.”

Contrary to the doctor’s wishes, the ordinary language games, installations, and photomontages of the Berlin Dadaists did not find a permanent place in the Charité Hospital but rather fashioned an improvisational existence in the city’s galleries and revues. Most representative perhaps of these performances was the First International Dada Fair, a mixed-media exhibition of roughly two hundred objects that was held at the Dr. Otto Burchard art gallery from June 30 until August 25 1920. Participants included Richard Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Otto Dix. In the fair, Dada achieved its most spectacular public profile. The event resulted in charges being levelled against the artists for slandering the German military, an offence for which they were convicted and fined. It is here that the relationship between the fragmented montage materializations of Berlin Dada and the bodily materializations of the traumatic psychic shock of war neuroses is decisively evident. Take for example, the famous publicity photos

112 Quoted in Doherty, “The Trauma of Dada Montage,” p. 91. It is worth noting that Huelsenbeck went on to specialize in neuropsychiatry in Berlin in the 20s and later practice psychoanalysis in the United States under the name Charles R. Hulbeck. Huelsenbeck even interned with Karl Bonhoeffer at the Charité Hospital in Berlin. Further discussion of the relationship between the experimental life sciences and avant-garde art is discussed in Chapter 4.
from the fair (fig. 3.14, 3.15). Hung from the ceiling is Rudolf Schlichter’s Prussian Archangel, a stuffed officer’s uniform fitted with a plastered pig head. On one side, a tailor’s dummy has been installed with a lightbulb for a head, a metal pole for a leg, and numerous military decorations glued to its torso. The two largest paintings of the show are clearly visible: on the left hand side, Otto Dix’s War Cripples (45% Employable) with its procession of maimed veterans, one shaking wildly, clearly a victim of traumatic neurosis; in the background, George Grosz’s Germany, A Winter’s Tale, its angular lines and use of collage evoking the turbulent events taking place on the streets of Berlin. A subsequent publicity photo shifted focus to a series of large-scale posters, verbal experiments, and sound poetry in striking bold-face topography recalling perhaps Walter Benjamin’s assertion that “the typographical experiments... undertaken by the Dadaists stemmed... not from constructive principles but from the precise nervous reactions of these literati.”115

If the Dada fair prompted its audience, at the level of both form and content, to re-live the shock of the trenches, Doherty presses the argument further. For Doherty, materializing trauma “compels the viewer’s bodily identification with the traumatic shocks it simulates.”116 Not unlike site-specific art, Berlin Dada actively sought to coordinate the conditions in which an audience inhabits, rehearses, and acts out its oeuvre. Such a phenomenology is made abundantly clear by Raoul Hausmann:

In Dada you will recognize your real situation: miraculous constellations in real material, wire, glass, cardboard, tissue, corresponding organically to your own utterly brittle fragility, your bagginess. Only here, and for the first time, there are no repressions, no anxious obstinacies, we are far from the symbolic, from totemism, electric piano, gas-attacks, manufactured relations, men howling in military hospitals, whom we with our wonderful contradictory organisms for the first time help along to some kind of just compensation, spinning central axle, reason to stand or fall.117

Fig. 3.14-3.15 Publicity Photos from the Dada-Messe.

According to Hausmann, the “real situation” Dada offered to its spectators was not limited to the circumstances of war trauma alone but extended to the equally volatile experience of modern life which, in the case of Weimar Berlin, traded heavily on the relation of shock and nerves to life in the metropolis.

Dada's ability to recuperate and mime trauma was not without its shortcomings. While Doherty is certainly right to note that Berlin Dada represented a “form of parodic affirmation which reveals itself finally not as affirmation at all, but as negation,” these negative energies were unquestionably limited and contradictory. “For other creatures,” as Hal Foster has pointed out, “mimetic adaptation is a biological technique of survival through camouflage in a hostile environment. With humans, however, it can be pushed to dangerous extreme, indeed to the point of pathological ‘detumescence’ of the subject.” According to Foster, Dada’s anti-art stance might well have anatomised Marx’s famous call that “petrified social conditions must be made to dance by singing them their own song.” But in doing so, it also risked an excessive identification with the corrupt conditions of the very symbolic order that it parodied. Thus, if Berlin Dada virtualised dehumanisation as a form of defence against world war, industrial rationalisation, and commodity culture, its preoccupation with bodily dissolution often signalled an unsettling fascination with violence directed against women and their bodies. Indeed, the range and intensity of violent misogynistic images produced by artists including Dix, Grosz, and Schlichter presses up on any simple understanding of these images as exaggerated reports of urban atrocities (fig. 3.16).

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Visions of extreme domestic violence, of women murdered in the tenements and back streets of modern Berlin, can only make sense as Beth Irwin Lewis argues “if they are viewed in the context of the pervasive cultural and social struggle over sexual roles that took place in German industrial society in the first decades of the century.” And yet, as much as Lewis is right to link proliferating images of “Lustmord” to the changing social geography of a modern metropolis, the impact of the war experience cannot be underestimated. *Kriegsküppel* and *Prosthetiker* were, of course, legion on Berlin streets and, for many artists, the war as *lived* experience only deepened a crisis of male subjectivity and bodily integrity whose compensation found anxious form in a magnifying aggression “trained on the female

![Image](image_url)

▲Fig. 3.16 Otto Dix, *Sex Murderer: Self-Portrait*, 1922, oil on canvas.
Klaus Theweleit’s disquisition on the mental world of Freikorps soldiers seems particularly pertinent in this respect. According to Theweleit, for many of the soldiering men returning from the horrors of trench warfare, women and femininity more generally, represented a source of considerable fear and dread symbolising the softness, fluidity, and fragility that was already exemplified in the irrevocably damaged body of the worker soldier. In response, such soldiering men developed a notion of their own bodies as a “hard organized dam against the streams, torrents, and floods of femininity.” But, in doing so, they only displaced the decisive impact of the Great War onto the abjected bodies of women who became increasingly the objects of a violent re-membering.\(^{122}\)

To the extent that ‘traumatic re-enactment” was openly performed in images of violated and dismembered women in bleak urban settings, the nervous energy of Berlin Dada was equally canalised into other spaces and produced other modes of subjectification including the seedy cafés, clubs, and dance-halls documented in Curt Moreck’s well-known underground guide to Berlin nightlife, *Führer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin* (1931).\(^{123}\) As Cornelius Partsch has recently argued, Dada’s provocative movement between conventional artistic forms of dissemination (exhibitions, manifesto and periodicals) and the sites of a vernacular modernism (mass media, advertising, cabaret, pulp fiction) signalled an expanding geography of performance, one which clearly participated in the production of a

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\(^{121}\) Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 126. Also see Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). In this regard, Brigid Doherty is right to suggest that there was a considerable effort within Weimar mass culture to reconstruct the prosthetic male body as strong and virile. Doherty, “Berlin Dada.”


“counterpublic” to borrow Michael Warner’s phrasing.\textsuperscript{124} According to Warner, “counterpublics” are by definition “formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment.” In such an oppositional sphere - what Raoul Hausmann dubbed as “des Kabarett(s) zum Menschen” - Dada found an increasingly receptive audience.\textsuperscript{125}

Hausmann’s acknowledgment of Dada’s affinity to cabaret and vaudeville performance is also telling insofar as the existing traditions of Berlin cabaret thrived on an ability to anatomise or mimetically reproduce the frantic process of modernization and rationalization which characterized the city’s development during the 1920s. “For the big-city dweller,” as Maximilian Sladek noted in 1924, “the true ‘mirror and abbreviated chronicle of the age’ has always been the revue, that colourful, whirring, easy-going, incredibly mobile, suggestive replica of existence aswirl in a storm.”\textsuperscript{126} The revue, with its Taylorized chorus lines and large stages, certainly represented the most commercially successful form of cabaret entertainment (fig. 3.17). Berlin Cabaret was characterized, however, by the multiplicity of its performative styles ranging from the political sensibilities of agitpop to the erotic entertainments of nude dancing. In fact, what had come to define cabaret as a distinct theatrical form, a small stage and audience where the relationship between performer and spectator was one of intimacy and hostility, participation and provocation, only accounted for a small proportion of cabaret performances. Despite the abolition of statist censorship,


cabaret in Weimar Berlin also tended, for the most part, to avoid political commentary in favour of the gender and sexual politics overwhelmingly preferred by their audiences. At the same time, artists like Walter Mehring and Kurt Tucholsky were able to carry into cabaret Dada's combativeness and sensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of metropolitan life. "They are Berlin," wrote one cabaret performer while the author Alfred Richard Meyer noted that: "here is a completely new style of song. Current events are raised to a literary height." Performances of Mehring's work in particular were singled out by critics impressed with their use of "staccato tempo, paratactic antigrmman" and their mélange of Americanisms, high German, and Berlinisch. Songs by Mehring like "Berlin Simultan," "Gleisdreieck," "Heimat Berlin" thus carried their own 'formative geographies,' gathering

127 Lisa Appignanesi, *Cabaret* (London: Studio Vista, 1975); Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, p. 2, p. 5. Cabaret was subject to strict censorship during the Wilhelmine era and it was only in the post-war period that performances were no longer required to seek prior police approval. Obscenity laws were nonetheless occasionally enforced.
into themselves the “hard-mouthed” (hartmäulig) realities engulfing Berlin in the earlier years of the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{130}

While the unstable spaces of the city were mined for the paratactic structures of Mehring’s political chansons, the ability of this kind of satire to find humour in the increasingly volatile state of the Republic drew fire from Marxist critics who saw little occasion for laughter.\textsuperscript{131} Walter Benjamin, in particular, excoriated Mehring, Tucholsky, and Erich Kästner for their “mimicry of the proletariat” and “grotesque underestimation of the enemy.” He contended that

[their] political significance was exhausted by the transposition of revolutionary reflexes (insofar as they arose in the bourgeoisie) into objects of distraction, of amusement, which can be supplied for consumption... In short, this left-wing radicalism is precisely the attitude to which there is no longer, in general, any corresponding political action... For from the beginning all it has in mind is to enjoy itself in a negativistic quiet. The metamorphosis of political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure, from a means of production into an article of consumption – that is the ultimate hit of this literature.\textsuperscript{132}

For Benjamin, much of what counted for political cabaret was nothing more than a feeble carnivalesque, a form of “play-acting at politics” to which he, in contrast, advocated the more activist and uncompromising form of performance that could be found, on the one hand, in the political theatre of Piscator and Brecht, and, on the other hand, in the revues of the communist [KPD] party (Revue Roter Rummel) and in the dozens of popular Agitprop Troupes (fig. 3.18) that toured and performed at KPD events, at factory meetings and in the Mietskaserne courtyards of the predominantly working-class districts of Mitte,

\textsuperscript{130} Kurt Tucholsky was in fact one of the first interlocutors of Mehring’s songs. “Never has there been anything like such rhythm,” he remarked. He did, however, fault Mehring for seeing Berlin as too “hard-mouthed.” Tucholsky quoted in Jelavich, \textit{Berlin Cabaret} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 149. For another discussion of Mehring, see Alan Lareau, \textit{The Wild Stage: Literary Cabarets of the Weimar Republic} (Columbia: Camden House, 1995), pp. 87-96.

\textsuperscript{131} Peter Jelavich, \textit{Berlin Cabaret}, p. 209.


Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, Wedding, Lichtenberg, and Prenzlauer Berg. Anticipating more recent forms of ‘oppositional theatre,’ highly mobile Agitprop troupes, in particular, were able to carve out a successful existence within an increasingly volatile political climate.

Fig. 3.18 Agitprop group about to perform at workers’ sports meeting, movie still from Brecht-Dudow, *Kühle Wampe*, 1932.

133 See Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitpop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997); Jelavich, Berlin Cabaret, pp. 187-227. In this context, Benjamin also espoused the possibilities of a *politicised* children’s theatre: “The children’s theatre contains a force that will annihilate the pseudorevolutionary gestures of the recent theatre of the bourgeoisie. For what is truly revolutionary is not the propaganda of ideas, which leads here and there to impractical actions and vanishes in a puff of smoke upon the first sober reflection at the theatre exit. What is truly revolutionary is the *secret signal* of what is to come that speaks from the gesture of the child.” Walter Benjamin, “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre,” *SW 2*, pp. 201-206, p. 206.
By 1931, a complete ban on Agitprop performances by local Berlin authorities meant that the ‘performers’ were forced to often play unannounced, to which they adapted by using incognito actors in order to start spontaneous political discussions in the city’s public spaces. While the KPD hoped that these “actuals” – to borrow Richard Schechner’s apt phrasing - would act as an entertaining form of political persuasion, many contemporary observers noted that their success was in fact attributable less to their message than in their ability to replicate the accumulated repertoire of movements and gestures which encompassed the range of performance styles of Berlin cabaret from bourgeois satire to popular revue.\textsuperscript{134}

Of course, the kind of corporeal stylistics that I have in mind here were notoriously varied though the various forms of cabaret did share a common concern with producing in the spectator certain emotional shocks.\textsuperscript{135} Such insights have already proved to be immensely profitable in research on popular forms of cultural expression and spectatorship in the first two decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{136} Much of this research has benefited from the work of the film historian Tom Gunning whose studies of early cinema have highlighted a “cinema of attractions” capable of generating “visual shocks” and exerting an “uncanny and agitating power...on audiences.”\textsuperscript{137} But as important as these observations have been to an understanding of film spectatorship, more recent work has shifted attention to other forms of somatic shock. Indeed as Rae Beth Gordon, in an impressive study of French cabaret and early film comedy reminds us, there were significant connections between comic

performance style and contemporary psychiatric and physiological theories of psychological
automatism and unconscious imitation. “Experimental psychology, clinical observations, and
psychiatric theory in late-nineteenth-century France,” she writes, “furnished the Parisian
cabaret and early film comedy with a new repertoire of movements, grimaces, and gestures.”
For Gordon, the importance of varied physiological responses in the “production of affect in
aesthetic experience” cannot be overemphasized, a conclusion that she argues was mirrored
in contemporary scientific studies of suggestion and imitation. From Charles Henry to
Gustav Fechner, Pierre Janet to Henry Marshall, research in psychophysiology not only
ascribed specific emotions to certain gestures but also showed that the perception of
“aesthetic objects” not only produced specific sensations, but also somatic reactions that
retraced the form and movement of those very objects.138 As Henri Bergson similarly
concluded, “[we] may not be able to consciously comprehend an emotion that an artist tries
to express but we can be made to feel it; artists set down those outward manifestations of
their emotion that our body will mechanically imitate, however lightly, so as to place us in
the undefinable psychological state that caused them.”139

In the end, it is perhaps not surprising that the kind of unconscious imitation that
Bergson was describing had strong links to the pathological bodies that were the primary
source of medico-scientific scrutiny in late 19th century France. The convulsive movements,
cataleptic poses and facial contortions of ‘epileptics’ and ‘hysteric’ all became ubiquitous
aspects of French cabaret and, in so doing, contributed to the “carnivalesque atmosphere of
raucous audience participation with its vital exchange of energy between performer and
spectator.”140 While Gordon’s argument is largely limited to a study of the Parisian cabaret

140 Gordon, “From Charcot to Charlot,” p. 524.
and café-concert in fin-de-siècle France, she does at one point wonder what the fate of this population of "automatons, somnambulists, hysterics, and idiots was after 1912?"¹⁴¹

Interestingly for our purposes, Gordon’s preliminary and speculative response is to posit their reappearance within the contours of post-war German cinema, in the expressionist aesthetics of Pechstein and Schiele, and in the histrionics of Dada performance.

There is certainly evidence to support such a view and it is clear that a considerable imitative legacy extended across the various forms of Berlin Cabaret. We see it in the increasing popularity of jazz music as well as the series of dance crazes, beginning with the fox-trot and tango in 1918, continuing with shimmy in 1921, and culminating with the Charleston in 1925.¹⁴² We see it in the synchronized movements of the major revues, the mass ornamental patterns that Siegfried Kracauer sharply impugned.¹⁴³ And finally we see in the popularity of Charlie Chaplin, the iconographic figure whose idiosyncratic gestures were widely re-interpreted as a dramatization of the automated reflexes of an anxious and increasingly cinematic urbanism. “Chaplin’s way of moving [Gestus],” Walter Benjamin once noted,

is not really that of an actor. He could not have made an impact on the stage. His unique significance lies in the fact that, in his work, the human is integrated into the film image by way of his gestures – that is, his bodily and mental posture. The innovation of Chaplin’s gestures is that he dissects the expressive movements of human beings into a series of minute innervations. Each single movement he makes is composed of a succession of staccato bits of movement. Whether it is his walk, the way he handles his cane, or the way he raises his hat – always the same jerky

¹⁴² See especially Cornelius Partsch, Schräge Töne, and Uta Poiger, Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). It was Dr. William B. Carpenter, a nineteenth-century British physiologist, who first made the discovery that we tend to unconsciously mimic the movement of another person whom we are observing.
sequence of tiny movements applies the law of the cinematic image sequence to human motorial functions.\textsuperscript{144}

Ultimately, like the reception of Chaplin, this new-found proclivity for mimeticism and role-playing was a recurrent theme in the popular press though it was summed up rather well by the writer Erich Kästner who likened one particular cabaret producer to a "modern physician attending to Berlin’s nervous disorders" and described cabaret more generally as a "padded cell for the metropolis."\textsuperscript{145} In Kästner’s ‘therapeutic scene’ we, of course, find one more allusion to the war experience, specifically the [active] treatment of traumatic war neuroses.\textsuperscript{146} Soldier-patients were often administered electric current as a means of shocking them out of their neurosis, what was clearly one of the most aggressive forms of ‘traumatic re-enactment.’ I am not proposing that we can see, in the ‘treatment’ of Berlin’s “nervous disorders” an exclusive concern with the reproduction of frenetic, anarchic movements, and the restoration of traumatized forms of behaviour. The methods of active treatment (including electrotherapy) developed in World War I and elaborated on by the psychiatric reform movement of the 1920s were, as I will later argue, also part of a rationalized system that responded to Weimar’s economic crisis by prioritising the treatment of the mentally ill based on their perceived value to society.\textsuperscript{147} To be sure, the demands of rationalization suffered during the rampant hyperinflation of the crisis-ridden early 1920s. What many psychiatrists and neurologists diagnosed as the nation’s ‘nervous collapse’ encouraged - in their eyes at least - the kind of excessive acting-out of trauma that not only found expression across a variety of cultural practices but a high degree of concentration within major

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\textsuperscript{144} Walter Benjamin, “The Formula in which the Dialectical Structure of Film finds Expression,” \textit{SW} 3, pp. 94-95, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{146} See Doherty, “The Trauma of Dada Montage,” p. 121.
\textsuperscript{147} Paul Lerner, “Rationalizing the Therapeutic Arsenal,” p. 148.
\end{flushright}
metropolitan centres. The victory and success of a "dictatorship of psychopaths" was, however, short-lived. By the mid-1920s, and in the wake of economic stabilization, the performative idiom which I have troped under the heading "traumatic re-enactment" was giving way to a practical consciousness more in tune with the mundane superficies of a modernizing city.

148 Bonhoeffer quoted in Lerner, Hysterical Men, p. 194.
Chapter 4

Governing Performances: Science and the Everyday in Weimar Berlin

Fig. 4.1
Psychophysiology and Urban Modernity: Popularising Neurophysiological Research.

1 Excerpts from this chapter will be appearing in a forthcoming article in Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.
Experimental Embodiments in Weimar Berlin

Herr Bertolt Brecht maintains: A man’s a man
And this is something anyone can say.
But Herr Bertolt Brecht goes on to prove
That you can make as much of a man as you want.
This evening you’ll see a man reassembled like a car,
Without losing anything by it.
The man is humanly approached;
He will be asked calmly, but with force,
To adapt himself to the world and its wants
And let his private fish go for a swim.
Herr Bertolt Brecht hopes you will see the ground on which you stand
Melt beneath your feet like snow
And that the case of the packer Galy Gay will make you aware
That life on this earth is a dangerous affair.

-Bertolt Brecht²

One should learn from psychiatry. The only science which deals with all aspects of
the human soul.

-Alfred Döblin³

The preceding pages drew attention to the “exemplary histrionics” generated by Late
Expressionism, Dadaism, Kabarett, and Ausdruckstanz during the Weimar Republic. In each
instance, I have made the case for a “dramaturgy of adjustment” that found a practical
performativity in the frantic co-ordination of words, gestures, and images.⁴ Not surprisingly,
the embodied skills, sensibilities, and dispositions that I have been describing registered a
general Krisenstimmung, and they did so largely in response to the trauma of the First World
War and the economic and political instabilities of the early years of the Weimar period. My
main aim, however, has been to show how the gravitational pull of social necessity had
brought unpredictable audiences together in Berlin and produced ‘performers’ from their

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midst. By following the "counterpoints of dwelling" through which the bodily disruptions of the modern city were indeed accommodated, I wanted particularly to revisit the traumatic moments when the habits of an earlier habitus were "all too vulnerably exposed."  

In one way or the other, a consideration of 'metropolitan theatrics' has therefore concentrated on the volatile situation immediately after the capitulation of German forces in 1918. And yet, as much as the "overheated social mobility, blurred class distinctions, and exaggerated reassertions of old orientating values" made sure that Berlin remained a focal point of social disorganization, the adaptive performances which I have elaborated on paint a necessarily incomplete picture. To augment this perspective, I argue that the period of relative stabilization after the inflation crisis of November 1923 strengthened another of the city's performance genealogies. Where there were once unruly enactments, there were now a series of experimental embodiments appropriately fashioned to dissimulate the impact of a modern urban experience. Where avant-garde cultural production had been traditionally tethered to a strictly demarcated field of cultural production, it now gained prominence and credibility in and through Berlin's public and scientific sphere.

With this in mind, I hope to show, to what extent a particular regime of everyday conduct was itself crafted in the day-to-day routines of the psychiatric sciences. This is not to imply that such 'subjection' was regulated and formed by an exterior relation of power "whereby an institution takes a pregiven individual as the target of its subordinating aims." On the contrary, as Judith Butler has rightly argued, subjection is quite literally, the "making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or

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produced.” Whereas discussions of the formative character of power have been notoriously taciturn on the topic of psychic regulation, the main contention of this chapter is to offer an historico-geographical account of psychic subjection and argue that much of what goes on in the modern city is in fact crucially centred on “the practice of biopolitics.” Following Giorgio Agamben, I revisit and unpack the process that “brings homo laborans – and with it, biological life as such – gradually to occupy the very centre of the political scene of modernity.” Of course, Agamben’s commentary owes much to the work of Michel Foucault who introduced the heterogeneous assemblage of problems, methods, approaches, and objects that focused on the care, regulation, and shaping of individual bodies and the collective “body” of national populations. But this was also, according to Agamben, a process in which certain subjects were quite deliberately stripped of their “ontological status” as political beings and placed within a suspended state of exception outside the “constituting condition of the rule of law.” For those deprived of particular rights, such a zone of abandonment presupposed a condition of “bare life,” that is life conceived as a biological minimum always vulnerable to the sovereign exercise of power. The persistence of sovereignty, in this way, depended upon a “structurally inverse relation to the rule of law.” As the sanctioning framework of law was suspended, sovereignty was exercised to the extent that it was able to carve out a space of exception immune from law, an operation

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that, for Agamben, culminated *pace* Foucault in “the birth of the camp,” the event, which he argues, decisively territorialized the biopolitical arrangements of modernity.\(^{11}\) If it can, therefore be said that Agamben’s recent work attempts to revise and extend the compass of Foucault’s later writings, it has also opened up, in my own view, a space which does not so much bear witness to the full plenitude and facticity of the concentration camp as to instead testify to the ethical principles with which we have come to “register the decisive lesson of the [past] century.”\(^{12}\)

Admittedly my aim here is not to attempt a comprehensive survey of the ethical entanglements that underwrite Agamben’s argument. After all, these imperatives themselves amount to a kind of ongoing commentary on the legal inimitability and representational crisis which have formed much of the ethical territory through which the Shoah is usually remembered. The general claims which structure Agamben’s argument also tell us relatively little of their actual *spacings* and it is, for this reason, that I propose to draw attention to the unseemly affinities between National Socialist biopolitics and the experimental production of what may be referred to as the ‘everyday city.’ Thus, while for Agamben it is not “the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West,” the present chapter is an attempt to enlarge and magnify the matrix of projects and practices which bind these two spaces together.\(^{13}\)

Ultimately, what animates my interest in the techniques of biopower is a desire to convene a discussion on the relationship between the materialities of scientific practice and the history of the modern city. In any case, as Nigel Thrift and Ash Amin remind us, cities

\(^{13}\) Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 181.
are means of mass producing, acculturating, and re-engineering the body and the senses.\textsuperscript{14}

More importantly, this is a contention borne out by the evidence of current historical research into Germany's pre-1933 modernity.\textsuperscript{15} We know, for example, that Germany during the Weimar era was characterized by a "scientising of social phenomena" and the handing-over to psychiatric and medical experts the task of identifying and resolving the problems caused by rapid modernization and deleterious urban circumstances.\textsuperscript{16} This is not to suggest that social problems were pathologised solely in clinical terms, when they were in fact also shaped by legal, bureaucratic, and economic rationalities.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, I wish to build on what I take to be the axiomatic view regarding the nature of scientific production: namely that the particularities of scientific practice encompass multiple epistemic, institutional, and social settings. What further motivates this study is recent work in the history of geography which explores the ways in which scientific "fieldwork" is to be understood as a "placed activity."\textsuperscript{18}

While these discussions have focused largely on the role of fieldwork in the production of geographical knowledge, the modern metropolis became an equally appropriate place for

\textsuperscript{14} Thrift and Amin, \textit{Re-Imagining the City}, p. 28, p. 103.


“the intervening presence of field scientists.” In particular, I want to emphasize the extent to which the uncertainties of the Weimar metropolitan experience – down to the level of posture, habit, and gesture - were increasingly subject to the exigencies of scientific manipulation and experimental scrutiny – most notably among practitioners of German mental medicine. While I do not want to retrospectively stabilize a broad field of often unrelated scientific activities, I do hope to broaden the remit of Sloterdijk’s “theatricality” from what are ostensibly cultural practices to include a concern with the experimental life sciences, understood in this context as also doing ‘fieldwork.’ I am especially interested in whether Berlin became a fieldscape of psychological conditioning? And on what terms did the experimental work of Weimar psychiatry offer an additional set of performances for inhabiting Berlin’s consummate modernity? I also propose to question the ways in which the epistemic authority of Weimar psychiatry was secured and/or contested. And how did research in the experimental life sciences seek credibility outside the strict confines of the laboratory and in the city?

If I can answer these questions, I hope to provoke a conversation about science and the city which builds on David Livingstone’s recent appeal for a “geography of science.” More specifically, I argue that it is possible to show how the practices and objects of Weimar psychiatry, on the one hand, and material and social and cultural forms of a rapidly modernizing Berlin, on the other, are co-produced. To account for such an accretion of research fields and experimental set-ups, this chapter begins with a brief genealogy of

20 A recent discussion of the cultural geography of the laboratory and the field sciences can be found in Robert E. Kohler, Landscapes and Labscapes: Exploring the Lab-Field Border in Biology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). The case for geographies of science have most forcefully been made by David Livingstone. See Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Science, Space and Hermeneutics: Hettner-Lecture, 2001.
Weimar social policy out of which I identify at least two ways in which scientific expertise responded both to the traumatic effects of modern urban life and the alienating realities of industrial capitalism. First, I consider how contemporary psychiatric theories and experimental practices (Psychotechnik in particular) seized on and transformed different aspects of the German metropolitan experience. This is, however, an incomplete view and in the next section I go on to suggest that, if Weimar Berlin became a “field laboratory” tasked with shaping the conduct and activity of its subjects, this was largely achieved through the widespread dissemination of popular “codes of conduct” promulgating the skills needed for “strategic self-enactment” within a treacherous metropolitan terrain. Ultimately this study, rather than attempting straightforwardly to add to accounts of Weimar psychiatry, traces a web of scientific exchange that was not only inseparable from local practices and interactions but in effect operated as a form of “local knowledge” staging one strain of Berlin ‘dramaturgy’ in some of its more important incarnations and embodiments.

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23 Helmut Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 18. While there are significant differences between the spatial practices of the laboratory and the field, the lab/field boundary with which this chapter is concerned was necessarily porous. If we accept, following Peter Galison that experiments are in a sense “elaborate filters set up in the space of phenomena,” then we must acknowledge that the present study is an attempt to enlarge and magnify the milieu in which contained procedures for producing or soliciting “experience” were introduced and widely propagated across all areas of Weimar social life. Peter Galison, How Experiments End (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 13.
"Experimental Cultures" in an Age of Nervousness

No one is more infectious for his [sic] environment than the irritable and nervy
-Paul Cohn

In order to explore the extent to which cities and ‘experimental cultures’ intersect, I
need to distil the main features which characterized the development of German mental
medicine during the Weimar era. While the activities of its many practitioners were
inseparable from local practices and interactions, the history of mental medicine also reveals
a complex international network of scientific exchange and knowledge-production. To claim
the exemplarity of Berlin as an epistemic space requires an examination of the ways in
which mental medicine became entrained in a diffuse range of materials and discourses. If I
have chosen here to use the term “mental medicine” here to encompass all of its highly
intertwined specializations (neurology, psychology, psychiatry), particular emphasis will be
placed on the development of experimental psychology and what was commonly called
“psychotechnics.” Taking a cue from historians and sociologists of science, I argue that the
consolidation of the psychotechnical movement in Germany took place at the intersection of
medical, scientific, fiscal, and legal reasonings. This, admittedly, places psychotechnics
firmly at the centre of historical discussions over “biopolitics.” And yet, if historians of
German medicine and public health have recently begun to assess the influence of natural
science and clinical medicine on the development of the modern welfare state (Sozialstaat),
psychotechnics has remained largely absent from these discussions. At the same time, it

has become a commonplace for historians to speak primarily of the medicalization of the
Sozialstaat, a thesis which “has often been driven by a teleology that reads the spectre of
National Socialism into the nineteenth century.” The result is another version of a German exceptionsalism in which, writes Geoff Eley, “the dramatic and undeniable difference of
Nazism, the peculiar violent resolution of the interwar crisis in Germany, are made the basis for a deeper-rooted historical pathology that made German history in general different from the history of the West.”

My goal in this chapter is not, however, to adjudicate between contending views of the
German Sonderweg [Special path]. To narrow the analysis down to manageable dimensions, I will focus instead on the place of psychotechnics within a genealogy of modern German social policy. This is a history which has its roots in the long nineteenth century and especially in the years following German unification in 1871 – most notably in the period famously troped as the age of “classical German modernity” (1895-1933). The narratives of German economic history have taught us that this was a period of rapid industrialization, one which became an emblem of the Schrecken des Industrialstaats and presented itself to many contemporary observers in the form of a “risk society” [Risikogesellschaft], to borrow Ulrich Beck’s felicitous expression. Not surprisingly, the administration of social uncertainties -

Weindling, Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945
27 Eghigian, Making Security Social, p. 20.
28 Geoff Eley, “Is There a History of the Kaiserreich,” in Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870-
29 The main protagonists in the debate over a German Sonderweg have been Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973); and David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany
31 Ulrich Beck, Risikogesellschaft: Auf der Weg eine andere Moderne, Neue Aufl. (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 2003). I have borrowed the phrase “Schrecken des Industrialstaats” from Kathleen Canning. Canning,
widely framed by mid-century as the “Social Question” - was posed as a question of “how to administratively manage the reorganization of a society stripped of its traditional, corporate ties, while assuring social and economic vitality.” As Greg Eghigian has recently shown in an elegant conspectus, social policy during the Kaiserreich was largely envisaged as a rational, systematic, and scientific attempt to institutionally oversee a stable and productive society. In this way, the development of modern welfare in Wilhelmine Germany was to function as one component of an “ideological state apparatus” tasked with addressing the risks and afflictions generated by industrial society. State intervention in Germany took many forms (public health agencies, maternal and infant welfare centres, housing inspectors, youth welfare officers), though it was the introduction of insurance legislation in the 1880s and 1890s which, above all else, represented an “effort to therapeutically and pre-emptively manage social change.”

The implementation of state-sponsored, compulsory worker’s insurance has traditionally been described by many historians as a partly cynical attempt on the part of the ruling elite to stifle the labour movement and preserve an authoritarian social order. While there is certainly evidence to support the prominent roles played by the chancellor Otto von Bismarck and leading industrialists, social insurance was an integral part of a much wider colonization of the lifeworld. Like other normative technologies of the 19th century, the

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33 Eghigian, *Making Security Social*, p. 26, p. 64. See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971). State-sponsored, compulsory worker’s insurance was introduced through legislation in the 1880s and 1890s: first sickness insurance in 1883, then accident insurance in 1884 and finally invalid and old-age insurance in 1891. I am simplifying, for the sake of brevity, the wide compass of welfare reforms during the Kaiserreich. For a wider-ranging discussion of these reforms see Christoph Sachße and Florian Tennstedt, *Geschichte der Armenfürsorge in Deutschland*, 2 Vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988).

34 For a recent version of this view, see Lothar Machtan, ed. *Bismarcks Sozialstaat: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sozialpolitik und zur sozialpolitische Geschichtsschreibung* (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1994). A discussion of
new insurance regime provided an idiom by which the pathologies of modernity could be transformed into purely technical matters. What this meant, in practical terms, was that German social insurance became principally a knowledge-making or epistemic enterprise which took certain human afflictions and translated them into specific policy problems and their corresponding therapeutic measures. At first glance, accident insurance would seem to provide workers little opportunity to reappropriate the system for their own purposes. In practice, the everyday life of Wilhelmine social insurance was neither able to provide a simple conduit for policy initiatives nor where pensioners, workers, and the disabled the passive objects of superimposed rationalities. Quite the contrary as even a cursory glance at the traffic of correspondence between insurance claimants, insurance providers, physicians, and state officials shows. Ultimately, it is perhaps more appropriate to talk of an improvisational sphere of “credibility contests” where the authority of the German Sozialstaat was constantly contested, defined, and refined.

In the end, public trust and scientific legitimacy was largely solicited through the “expertise” of German clinical medicine which enjoyed its own “institutional revolution” during the Gründerzeit. This was itself a tenuous and heterogeneous affair even if there is much to recommend the view that “radical changes had taken place in the institutional...
Despite the foundation of more rigorously “modern” factory-like laboratories (fig. 4.2) by Wilhelm Wundt, Emil du Bois-Raymond, Carl Ludwig, and Max Virchow, the experimental life sciences in Wilhelmine Germany continued to operate across an array of different venues. Indeed, the reciprocal influences of medicine and social security prompted the creation of a therapeutic geography of convalescent homes, sanatoria and medico-mechanical institutes (mediko-mechanische Institute) which, taken

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39 The laboratory in Leipzig was founded by the prominent psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. For discussions of Wundt and the foundation of the modern psychological laboratory see Kurt Danziger, Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). German cities saw the construction of sixteen laboratories for experimental physiology between 1870 and 1890.
together, formed a vast and uneven network of rehabilitation and regeneration. The convergence of social policy and clinical nosology was crucial here, especially since establishing liability was contingent on the definition and isolation of a debility. Insurance benefits were, moreover, paid out on an individual basis, and it was left to the experimental practices of clinical medicine to provide an "epistemology of disability that privileged the visible, the observable, and the scientifically verifiable." Of particular concern to insurance boards were growing fears of malingering or simulation (with all its performative connotations). The distrust on the part of insurance boards also meant that emphasis was placed not only on diagnosing individual pathologies but on restoring the health and productivity of the disabled worker. Thus, clinical therapeutics attempted to provide social insurance with the means to regenerate individual labour power. This was especially the case within a growing number of German medico-mechanical institutes where patients were systematically reintroduced to the bodily gestures of mechanized industrial production (fig. 4.3, 4.4). Within such a setting, clinical apparatuses were developed which placed the disabled body within a "rehabilitative circuit" that standardized movements and skills for "eventual use in the production process." These methods, of course, recall Karl Marx's understanding of the factory machine and his description of the "technical subordination of the worker to the uniform motions of the instruments of labour." They also reflect a new

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41 For a contemporary discussion of the apparatuses developed in German medico-mechanical institutes, see Dr. Hönig, "Über die Behandlung und Begutachtung der Unfallverletzten," Die Berufsgenossenschaft 9 (May 1901), pp. 92-96; Eghigian, Making Security Social, p. 83, p. 64, p. 136.
"science of work" *(Arbeitswissenschaft)* which focused on the systematic study of the relationship between human beings and the mechanics of industrial labour.  

While these developments were European-wide, they emerged in Germany as a cross-disciplinary field of research involving both the social and experimental sciences. In their very different ways, investigators emphasized the physical economy of labour power and shifted attention away from the moral properties of labour to "the physical tasks of work and the

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physiological and psychological capacities of the labourer’s body.\textsuperscript{44} "Ergotherapy" of this kind went far beyond the organizing assumptions of industrial paternalism.\textsuperscript{45} If anything, the clinical recovery of labour power revealed the extent to which the practices of the experimental life sciences were characterized by a new emphasis on the physical health and regeneration of the German “social body” (\textit{Volkskörper}).

The construction and expansion of the German \textit{Sozialstaat} at the end of the nineteenth century thus promoted a “regenerative” style of government increasingly preoccupied with “regulating the social.”\textsuperscript{46} Regulation, in this sense, referred not only to the partially conscious use of political and cultural authority to shape and regiment collective practices, but, more importantly, to the intervention of the “human sciences” so famously described by Michel Foucault.\textsuperscript{47} From this perspective, regulation was also a \textit{multi-scalar enterprise} which, on the one hand, stitched together national, regional, and local policies. On the other hand, it could be said that the development of the modern interventionary state occurred primarily at the municipal level during the \textit{Kaiserreich}. Following George Steinmetz, one could therefore speak of municipal governments as “experimental fields” for social strategies which were later adopted by the central state.\textsuperscript{48} This is, admittedly, hardly an exceptional view in an era of rapid urbanization. Germany’s so-called second industrial revolution of the late 1850s and 1860s was, after all, characterised by widespread demographic change. Between 1871 and 1910, the population of the unified Reich had expanded by some 60 percent. While roughly one-third of Germans lived in cities at the beginning of the period, the number reached 60 percent by 1910. Not surprisingly, the strident realities of the new

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Dennis Sweeney, “Work, Race and the Transformation of Industrial Culture in Wilhelmine Germany,” \textit{Social History} 22 (1998), pp. 31-62, p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{45} I have borrowed the phrase ‘ergotherapy’ from Michel Foucault, \textit{Le Pouvoir Psychiatrique}, p. 127.
\item \textsuperscript{46} See George Steinmetz, \textit{Regulating the Social}.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Steinmetz, \textit{Regulating the Social}, p. 152.
\end{itemize}
metropolises had indelibly refashioned the contours of the social question. By the turn-of-the-century, "metropolis" or "Großstadt," had quickly become a word that implied both a physical site and a pathological state. The policies and strategies of the German Sozialstaat were, moreover, linked to a series of imaginative geographies which traded in the belief that the modern urban experience produced nervous malady and posed a threat to the regulatory order of the state. As in the case of social insurance, "medical responses to this belief took hold in a variety of discourses, institutions, and therapies, whose emergence in the years after the founding of the Empire in 1871 institutionalised the coupling of modernity and nervous illness in German society."

The relation of nerves to modern urban life was thus a recurrent theme in German newspapers, scientific journals, and fiction from the 1870s on. In an "age of nervousness," doctors became increasingly preoccupied with the relationship between Stadt [city] and Gesundheit [health, well-being] and the extent to which the very social geography of the city was implicated in the nature of particular psychological afflictions. State statistics testified to growing fears among the ranks of the medical profession. In Prussia, between 1880 and 1910, the number of asylum patients, for example, rose 429 percent, from 27,000 to 143,000; the population during the same period only rose 48 percent. While in 1880, 98 out of every 50

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49 Lerner, Hysterical Men, p. 19.
52 This was similarly the case in France as Rae Beth Gordon has argued. See Gordon, "From Charcot to Charlot: Unconscious Imitation and Spectatorship in French Cabaret and Early Cinema," Critical Inquiry 97 (2001), pp. 515-549.
100,000 Prussians were admitted to asylums in 1880; in 1910 the number had reached 356. Alarmist articles began to appear with increased frequency within the popular press decrying the problems posed by the growth in the insane population and the paucity of resources available to care for them. Some conservative jeremiads went so far as to posit an *Irrenboom* (madness boom) blamed, as it was, on the corruption of values "endemic to city life."\(^5^4\)

If many social critics turned to the modern city as the overwhelming source of modernity’s mental dangers, these diagnoses were also influential to the research concerns of Wilhelmine psychiatry. In 1901, Karl Bonhoeffer, soon to be director of the Berlin University Neurological Clinic, published a study exploring the etiological role of the urban in producing criminal deviancy.\(^5^5\) Bonhoeffer was hardly alone in his diagnoses. A few of the very large number of works that treated the psychopathologies of urban life during this period included articles and monographs by prominent specialists like Albert Moll, Willy Hellpach, Albert Eulenberg, Otto Dornblüth, and Robert Gaupp.\(^5^6\) What Gaupp described as "the extraordinary fruitfulness of the big city in producing mental illness" was furthermore not limited to a strict superimposition of urban and psychological spaces.\(^5^7\) As a recent study of the incidents of nervous breakdown among switchboard operators in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany has suggested, the *material culture* of urban modernity was similarly understood as a potent source of psycho-somatic shock and traumatic neurosis.\(^5^8\)

Shock and its sequelae were, by many accounts, symptomatic materializations of a

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\(^{5^4}\) Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men*, p. 19.


\(^{5^8}\) Killen, "From Shock to Schreck," p. 203.
phenomenal world that was markedly quicker, more chaotic, fragmented, and disorientating than in previous phases of German history. The young women employed at Germany’s telephone exchanges simply added an important new (and gendered) figure to an already dense network of texts and techniques for which the visceral facticity of the modern city was very much a pathological condition. These were also commonplace observations part of a larger citationary structure perhaps most famously troped by Georg Simmel. And yet for all its discursive force, the credibility of shock as a clinical heuristic rested on fragile epistemic foundations. This was the case for a couple of reasons. In the first place, a somatic, mechanistic explanation of shock operated largely within a “highly-charged social space” constituted by the convergence of social insurance and clinical psychiatry and where the economic stakes involved in diagnosis were considerable. In the second place, psychiatry not only played a decisive role in helping to interpret “the socio-structural crisis phenomena that accompanied German industrialization,” it also eagerly promoted the emergence of what Foucault once described as a “society of normalization.” The compass of psychiatric research consequently targeted groups and individuals who did not conform to the socio-cultural norms of their observers - namely the urban déclassé: criminals, delinquents, vagrants, prostitutes, single mothers, and political dissidents. Ultimately, these

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considerations were often folded into each other and by 1900, many doctors and psychiatrists had began to advocate a psychogenic understanding of traumatic neurosis theory. Crucial to this view was the belief that it was *internal* rather than external circumstances that played the decisive role in the genesis and evolution of shock-induced disorders. These assumptions often took on explicit moral overtones with the result that psychiatrists began to see themselves as "the guardians of the nation’s mental and moral health." 64

It is not difficult to understand than that, on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, the majority of Germany’s medical professionals had come to the conclusion that the psychological and moral condition of the urban “masses” was potentially improvable through the rather different kind of moral geography that war allegedly provided. Indeed, Germany’s entry into the First World War was seen by many medical scientists as a “grand experiment with the nervous and mental health of the [German] people.” 65 Robert Sommer, head of Giessen’s university clinic for nervous disorders described the war as a “kind of world historical experiment in the area of national psychology [Völkerpsychologie] and termed it a “massive experiment in the functioning of affect and in the activation of mental characteristics.” 66 Other prominent doctors including Otto Binswanger, Karl Bonhoeffer, and Robert Gaupp invoked military combat as a healthy and invigorating alternative to the “debilitating” influences of an “effeminate” urban society. As Binswanger himself concluded, “the most urgent task of our time consists without a doubt in freeing the mind of the people from the damaging effects of modern developments…and this task is the common

64 Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men*, p. 33.
responsibility of doctors and teachers.”

The verities of modern industrialized warfare meant, however, that the responsibilities of German psychiatrists were considerably different from their own prognoses. As the war bogged down, hospitals began to quickly fill up with soldiers suffering from sleeplessness, uncontrollable shaking, and disorders of speech, sight, hearing, and gait. Not only where doctors unprepared for the epidemic numbers of “hysterical” patients, they also continued to operate within the relatively haphazard network of therapy and rehabilitation to which the case histories of numerous field dispatches (Feldbeilage) urgently testified. The administration of neuropsychiatric treatment depended, therefore, on the development of new approaches for dealing with war neurotics. To this end, psychiatrists and neurologists supervised the construction of a rationalized system for screening, treating, and rehabilitating their patients. In the words of the Berlin neurologist Max Lewandowsky, the new measures aimed to “systematically construct a net through whose meshing no neurotic not rid of his symptoms could slip.” What this meant in practical terms was that the somatic memories of shell shock were largely discredited in favour of the active treatment and rational management of patient care. To be sure, the methods of active treatment varied from

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68 Beginning in 1914, the *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift* published a supplementary field report which documented the latest treatments, surgical procedures, and prosthetic aides.
70 Diagnosing the cause of “war neuroses” was eventually geared into larger controversies about social insurance, the welfare state, and its purportedly pathological effects on war veterans. According to an 1889 ruling by the Reich Insurance Office, the existence of traumatic neuroses was sufficient grounds for accident-insurance compensation. Nevertheless, pensions were rarely granted while numerous psychiatric experts began to express scepticism over the genuine existence of traumatic neuroses. Not surprisingly, during the First World War, the causal connections that veterans claimed between wartime events and subsequent post-war disabilities were consistently overturned by psychiatric practioners increasingly unwilling to diagnose shell shock as a form of traumatic neurosis. For further discussion of Weimar war veterans and pension neuroses see Jason Crouthamel, “War Neurosis versus Savings Psychosis: Working-class Politics and Psychological Trauma in Weimar Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002), pp. 163-182; and Paul Lerner, “An Economy of Memory: Psychiatrists, Veterans, and Traumatic Narratives in Weimar Germany,” in *The Work of Memory*:
suggestive hypnosis (Max Nonne) to electrotherapy (Fritz Kaufmann).\textsuperscript{71} The cumulative result, however, was an “assembly-line” approach designed to simultaneously reclaim “potential labour power, trim burdensome pension obligations, and free up overcrowded hospital facilities.”\textsuperscript{72} What amounted to a form of “psychiatric Taylorism” was, in this way, not limited to a new aggressiveness in treatment but also involved the transinstitutional collaboration of hospitals, neurosis stations, and workshops with the broad aim of guiding patients through treatment and back into the industrial workplace. “The therapy of the war’s hysterical disorders,” as one doctor summarily put it, “had gradually grown into a scientific specialization which governed the entire military organization through to the methods of discharging from duty and setting pensions.” \textsuperscript{73}

In the end, attempts to align psychiatric treatment with occupational rehabilitation were not confined to the war effort. They also reappeared amid the very different conjunctures of the Weimar era and were widely incorporated into the psychiatric reform movement of the 1920s. More importantly, it is precisely out of these rehabilitative techniques and organizational methods that what was commonly called “psychotechnics” [\textit{Psychotechnik}] was first employed extensively in the urban centres of post-war Germany.\textsuperscript{74} For my present purposes the significance of \textit{Psychotechnik} is twofold. First, it contributed an additional set of experimental procedures for analysing and accommodating the \textit{effective} character of


\textsuperscript{74} Lerner, “Rationalizing the Therapeutic Arsenal: German Neuropsychiatry in World War I,” p. 148.
urban industrial modernity. Secondly, it was enrolled in a larger project of policing and recuperating a national *Gemeinschaft*, a pressing predicament, and one in which the field of psychiatry was deeply implicated. Ultimately, I will suggest that contemporaneous developments in experimental industrial psychology were entangling a labouring body “ever more deeply within a mechanical register of measurement and analysis.”\(^{75}\) The key here lies in a certain dramatization of what the performance theorist, Richard Schechner, has in another context defined as “restored behaviour.”\(^{76}\) For Schechner, the practical and analytical power of a performance paradigm lies in its structures of repetition and restoration. In Schechner’s case, these interests may have been largely confined to the dramatic arts and intercultural performance. However, they also signalled the activities of a scientific milieu whose compensatory gestures considerably revised the nexus of relations linking the everyday practices of the modern city to the regulatory policies of the Weimar *Sozialstaat*.

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\(^{75}\) Andreas Killen, “From Shock to Schreck,” p. 215.

Experimental Urbanisms: Psychotechnik in Weimar Berlin

More than ever...doctors will have to participate in the healing process of our nation and, in this work, I think we should not ignore practical psychology.

-H. Marx

The political splintering of a people promises a reduction of their capacity to collectively perform.

-K. Tramm

Psychotechnik emerged out of the historically distinctive set of terms which characterized the development of the German Welfare State during the long nineteenth century. This was an uneven process in which responsibility for the interpretation and regulation of "the social" was increasingly handed over to the psychiatric community. Hence, the body of psychological knowledge produced during the Kaiserreich which dramatized the biopolitical arrangements of the German Sozialstaat—a heterogeneous assemblage of problems, methods, approaches, and objects—themselves inextricably bound to the provenance of new forms of "government" and to which the psychiatric fields served as "regulatory sciences" intervening in the reconfiguration of the social order.

Building on these summary characterizations, I want to engage this matter more directly on the geographical front. The geography of the experimental life sciences in Wilhelmine Germany was, after all, fractured and psychiatric knowledge was accordingly produced in a vast array of different spaces, real and symbolic. Besides the circumscribed sites in which nineteenth and early twentieth century German psychiatry primarily manifested itself (the laboratory, the workshop, the sanatorium, the war clinic), rapid modernization favoured the

emergence and propagation of a more expansive culture of experimentation. As an exemplary territory one must point to the modern city, which allowed "human and non-human actors of all kinds to enter into interactions with a huge experiential potential." 

Thus, the city of Berlin in the 1920s with its many metropolitan laboratories: clinics, hospitals, department stores, factories, cinemas, and housing developments. As I hope will become clear in what follows, the epistemic circuitry of Psychotechnik was arguably wired into all of these venues. This is not to suggest that Psychotechnik was the ne plus ultra space around which psychological experimentation was primarily prosecuted. Rather, in analysing how psychiatric practices were produced in and about Weimar Berlin, I hope to clarify how features of the "social world, and more generally of everyday life, become played upon and turned into epistemic devices in the production of knowledge." For this reason, I will associate the metropolitan laboratories of Psychotechnik with the notion of reconfiguration and with the setting up of an order "that is built upon upgrading the ordinary and mundane components of social life." At the very least, I am supported by the prominent psychotechnician Fritz Giese who himself defined psychotechnics "as the application of psychological principles to the entirety of practical life including social reform, public health, economic activity, law, education, art, and science." If these ambitions are granted, it also follows that social life in Weimar Berlin was hardly ordinary nor was it mundane. As Belinda Davis has tellingly shown, the serious privations which governed everyday life in Berlin during World War I had already fomented the formation of a public sphere in which social norms were not only contested but in which the attenuation of these performatively

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effectuated bonds had indeed become chronic.\textsuperscript{83}

The pervasive trauma that accompanied military defeat only reinforced the conviction that the experience of the Great War had "thoroughly contradicted, and thereby impoverished...‘inherited’ experience – that body of memories, habits, and informal knowledges accumulated before the war." Indeed, the "liquidation" of experience so famously troped by Walter Benjamin ("Experience and Poverty") and Siegfried Kracauer ("Those Who Wait") was, in the eyes of many medical and state officials, chiefly responsible for the political violence, economic instability, and "moral" decline which characterized the November Revolution and the early years of the new Republic.\textsuperscript{84} This is, on the one hand, a rather conventional view and has, in turn, been rehearsed by numerous historians of the Weimar era. On the other hand, that anxieties about the dissolution of established social norms and conventions generated a "groundswell of meditations among mental health professionals" is notable. For the most part, Germany’s psychiatrists responded to the street scenes of November 1918 with "fear, confusion, and stalwart opposition." Big cities (Berlin, München, Hamburg) were, with few exceptions, said to be gripped by a "mass psychosis," their citizens "hysterically habituated" to uncontrolled pleasure-seeking, licentiousness, and violence.\textsuperscript{85} Karl Bonhoeffer, for one, warned of a "dictatorship of psychopaths," while Robert Gaupp spoke of Germany’s "nervous collapse"

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and Emil Kraeplin noted a wearing down of "the national soul." Robert Sommer even went so far as to conclude that "the state of nervous exhaustion and overstimulation – which lies at the basis of the radical and violent explosions currently coming to the surface, especially in Berlin – will continue to worsen and will lead to general destruction."

Among many doctors, hopes for the manufacturing of a Neue Gesellschaft had thus been quickly replaced with an almost hysterical preoccupation with rehabilitating a shell-shocked nation. And yet, as Paul Lerner has also cautioned, concerns among psychiatrists for the nervous health of the German nation were, at the same time, concerns about their own professional status and security in the immediate aftermath of war and revolution. Many doctors were quick to cast themselves in the role of "protectors of the general public," uniquely equipped for improving Germany's political prognosis. As one doctor urgently noted, psychiatrists had "become the apostles of a better future for our Volk." The choice of words is, of course, striking and gestures towards the kind of 'biologised' or 'naturalized' form of social regulation which was gaining increasing support among the nation's neuropsychiatric community. That many leading psychiatrists and neurologists actively participated in the "racial hygiene" and eugenics movement during the Weimar Republic raises, moreover, the question of continuity between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The literature on the race hygiene/eugenics movement in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany is admittedly immense, reflecting the reception of eugenic ideas within the various political-ideological milieus in early twentieth-century Germany. It does, however, highlight

87 Paul Lerner, Hysterical Men, p. 217.
the extent to which the movement echoed "assumptions which were shared by a wide range of psychiatrists, namely, that mental health professionals had a particularly important role to play in national reconstruction and that collective, national solutions should be sought for medical-economic problems." 89

In other respects, the close connection between mental health and national economy extended beyond the development of prophylactic activities whose singular focus was the prevention and elimination of social problems. If anything, the role of the psychological sciences during the Weimar Era evolved in the two basic forms which, taken together, constituted what Michel Foucault once described as the "poles around which the organization of power over life was [mainly] deployed." The first, and a crucial determinant of Weimar social policy, focused on the "species body" and was principally concerned with supervising and correcting the mechanics of life. The second, "centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls." 90 To be sure, these are not hermetically sealed categories. Rather they are linked by a whole series of interventions, regulatory controls, and procedures of power. And yet, I want to leave aside the biopolitical arrangements of the former and concentrate on the latter for which, experimental industrial psychology (and Weimar Psychotechnik) was a significant exemplar. In so doing, I realize that I cannot hope to reproduce nor question the intricacy of Foucault's understanding of biopower. Still it is possible to explore its


implications with respect to the role of *Psychotechnik* in Weimar Berlin and how psychotechnical methods were themselves *performances of the everyday city*.

In this way it should be clear that, cities, as Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, remind us, “are rarely the site of disinterested practices.” To a large degree, they are, recalling Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power, punctuated by a whole series of devices and strategies which order and manage what we tend to call everyday life. Many of these devices were developed in relatively enclosed spaces – institutions like clinics, hospitals, laboratories, schools, and workshops – and were only later more widely dispersed. This was, certainly the case with *Psychotechnik* which replicated the historical curve of Foucault’s argument with remarkable precision. A number of its experimental methods were, after all, developed within the highly ordered confines of wartime psychiatry and were only later enrolled in the conditioning of the Weimar metropolis. The net result is that psychotechnical *ordering* ultimately manifested itself in a series of overlapping spatial formations which increasingly tied the psychotechnical laboratory to the fieldscapes of a modernizing metropolis. Fritz Giese was himself explicit about this connection between everyday life and the psychological sciences noting that: “observations into everyday life need to be taken up by the...[psychotechnical] experts themselves. This will include attending sportscentres and other public meeting places (coffee houses, cinemas, etc), observing people in railways, cars, streetcars and hotels, people in conversation or reading the newspaper, on holidays or on their official daily routines: all these are in fact sources of psychological study.”

Generally speaking, the first wave of psychotechnical examinations were still developed with the workplace in mind and prepared veterans for various occupations including street-

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car conductors, typesetters, and plant engineers. This was not surprising given that the psychological testing enterprise that emerged out of wartime psychiatry traded in the bodily skills of modern industrial management. One of the more extensively documented examples can be found in Karl Tramm’s work as chief engineer at the Fahrschule der Berliner Strassenbahn. Tramm was an important proponent of Taylorist methods and workplace Amerikanismus and produced a number of monographs espousing the merits of psychotechnical testing. In a series of articles published in Praktische Psychologie, Tramm detailed how in the Fahrschule, trainees were “wired” into a streetcar “simulator” and required to repeat the mechanical gestures of streetcar conducting while viewing a real-time film of their itinerary through the streets of Berlin. Their gestures were then plotted against an ideal curve of the city’s topography and repeated until they had acquired a rote familiarity and unconscious adaptability (fig. 4.5, 4.6). Trainees were also subjected to various external stimuli that were intended to simulate what Walter Benjamin has elsewhere described as the shock effects “that are experienced at a personal level by every pedestrian in big-city traffic.” If Benjamin was predominantly interested in the capacity of the mass media to accommodate the uncertainties of modernity, it was Tramm who actually developed the appropriate psychotechnical procedures to test his trainees for these abilities measuring, in his own words, their “fright reaction” [Schreckverhalten] and “decisiveness” [Entschlußfähigkeit]. As it turned out, roughly 70-80 percent of Fahrschule applicants failed to react in accordance with the ‘correct’ standards of performance though those who made it

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93 Karl Tramm, Psychotechnik und Taylor-System (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1921); E. Klockenberg, Rationalisierung der Schreibmaschine und ihre Bedienung (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1926); G. Wagner, Beiträge zur psychotechnischen Untersuchung des Vertriebswesens, sowie Aufstellung von Eignungsprüfungen für Akquisitions-Ingenieure und Kontrolle der Prüfungs-Ergebnisse (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1927).
through Tramm’s regimen were able to halve their training times from 3 weeks to 10 days.\(^{94}\)

Tramm was admittedly not alone in his exacting methods. Similar techniques were gaining widespread popularity across Germany. While in 1918 testing stations were limited

to those developed by the industrial firms AEG, Loewe, and Zeiss-Jena, by the early 1920s, no less than 170 psychotechnical testing stations had sprung up while more than sixty firms had established their own stations (fig. 4.7). Psychotechnical testing was also adopted by the German railway where potential applicants, like their counterparts in the Berliner Fahrschule, were repeatedly tested for their attentiveness under what were judged to be specifically “modern conditions of motion.” One of the principal tests, as recently described by Schwartz, involved an instrument known as a tachistoscope, an apparatus for exposing briefly to view a screen bearing letters or figures. Railway signalmen, in particular, needed

Fig. 4.7 Map of Psychotechnical Testing Stations in Weimar Germany, circa 1930.
to be able to quickly assess the marks on trains passing by in order to send them onto the correct tracks. The tachistoscope subjected those examined to high-speed tests that showed only segments of city names, many of which were chosen for their similarity (fig. 4.8).

Those who were not able to adapt to these rapid-fire conditions were denied employment. The stakes were, after all, high. Misreading a word could cause considerable damage and loss of life. Ultimately, whether it be railway signalmen or streetcar drivers, psychotechnics was concerned with measuring those aptitudes and competencies already saturated by the experiences of everyday life in the city, namely “vision that was tired, attention that could no longer focus, minds that no longer registered like machines but wandered.” It was also widely used in the “training” of the “salaried masses” that formed the core of Weimar Berlin’s anomic, bureaucratised society though its popularity even extended to the

![Tachistoscope and Test](img)

1. ichstaben ausgefallen, also etwa:

Von Berlin über Mönchengladbach, Münster nach Düren, Dort.

rgeführten Städte sind neben einer Anzahl ähnlich lautender in
curriculum of the Bauhaus school in Dessau. While laboratory and office-based testing included the use of time and motion studies [Zeitstudien], it, more importantly, divided each minute component of the work process into individual mental and sensory-motor tasks which were subsequently compiled into what one psychotechnician referred to as a "psychophysical profile" (fig. 4.9).

Fig. 4.9 Sample Aptitude Test.


96 Fritz Giese, Berufspychologische Beobachtungen im Reichstelegraphendienst (Leipzig: Barth, 1923).
Testing was usually divided into two categories. The first focused on sensory-motor skills while the second was preoccupied with the ‘higher faculties.’ Taken together, key points of the resulting profiles included records of attentiveness, memory, spatial cognition, and dexterity which were subsequently transformed into a series of “comprehensive measures for economizing energy and improving [workplace] efficiency.” As the psychotechnics professor Walther Moede made clear, the project of psychotechnics was the incorporation of the labouring subject into the capitalist machine. “The purpose of the aptitude test is obvious,” he writes, “to help a man [sic] to get to where he can use his abilities well and effectively and where he can earn good money while taking pride in his work.”

All of this is not to say that testing was limited to the productive capacities of the human motor nor was it geared exclusively toward the modern workplace and the calibration of physical and political economy. Other schemes focused on the “administrative regulation of traffic” which as one psychotechnician in Berlin noted, “[brought] as far as possible psychological laws into harmony with the mental condition of city dwellers.” More generally, it is important to question Anson Rabinbach’s assertion that the activities of the psychotechnician had lost favour by the mid 1920s or that they were simply the re-enactments of an earlier Arbeitswissenschaft. Alternatively, if anything, it would seem that such activities had begun to find a wider applicability within the various spaces of modern consumer culture and notably among the “Weimar surfaces” vividly described by Janet Ward.

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97 Andreas Killen, “From Shock to Schreck,” p. 215; For a detailed breakdown of standard testing procedures, see Hans Freund, Psychotechnik (Berlin: Stilke, 1928).
notwithstanding, their comments thus take on a certain forensic precision when we consider the degree to which prominent psychotechnicians like K. Marbe and CH. Von Hartungen devoted their attention to the minutiae of advertising and everyday consumption.\textsuperscript{101} Journals of applied psychology were filled with articles on advertising and department store displays that focused on the regulation of faculties like attention, memory, and the visual integration of complex stimulus fields each treated in turn as "something entirely quantifiable and predictable" (fig. 4.10). As one such study concluded, "the effectiveness of advertisements was not conceivable without a close examination of its psychological principles" and,

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Fig. 4.10 The Psychology of Advertising: Measuring Appropriate Colour Combinations.}
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indeed, we tend to find in the psychotechnical literature an overwhelming desire to measure, isolate, and control the entire spectrum of human responses, and produce a world of “administered sensory conditions.”

The socio-sensory imaginaries which prompted Marbe, Hartungen, and others to reflect on advertising’s ability to create a particular “sensory environment” were also geared into the wider circuits of Weimar mass culture. As Dominik Schraege has recently argued, this included experiments with radio broadcasting, a point that was again not lost on Walter Benjamin who, in one of his own broadcasts, noted the extent to which we have already gained “insight into the great system of tests” [das große System der Tests] and “the colossal laboratory of a new science that has quickly established itself in Germany: the science of work.”

Benjamin, so it would seem, imagined an audience that not only had insight into vocational aptitude and performance tests through the attention paid to those technologies in the mass media, but also through direct experience in the laboratory and in a city where one’s fitness to withstanding and accommodating the shocks of metropolitan modernity had increasingly become the ultimate “test.” To be sure, Benjamin’s gloss on Berufsberatung and Psychotechnik was largely directed at reversing their intentions and developing a rather different “form of expertise” through complementary experiments in radio, film, and theatre.

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104 See Brigid Doherty, “Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin,” MLN 115 (2000), pp. 442-481. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in Benjamin’s now canonical essay on the “Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.” “Meanwhile the work process,” he writes, “especially since it has been standardized by the assembly line, daily generates countless mechanized tests. These tests are performed unawares, and those who fail are excluded from the work process. But they are also conducted openly, in agencies for testing professional aptitude.” See Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” SW 3, pp. 101-133, p. 111.
comments on *Psychotechnik* provide an historical frame of reference for what is usually subsumed under the capsule phrase “colonisation of the everyday.”  

The point here is that all the different timings and spacings which directly made up *Psychotechnik* were themselves constitutive of everyday life in Weimar Berlin, i.e. of its rhythms and daily, repetitive practices. And more than this, these different timings and spacings produced their own material culture of technological intermediaries which accompanied, extended, and contributed to the durability of the testing process. Graphical devices like tachistoscopes, kymographs, pneumographs, and optometers quickly became the prosthetics aides to the various components of the psychotechnical enterprise (fig. 4.11).

This is not to see the instruments of testing as mere “reified theories” and to therefore ignore the extent to which they were themselves the by-products of urban industrial modernity. It is, however, to acknowledge, as Sven Dierig has recently argued, that the “biographies” of these instruments, reflected Berlin’s rapid transformation from *Residenzstadt* to *Industriemetropole*. Thus for Dierig, “laboratory life” was always an ongoing achievement in which local conditions promoted the substitution of one instrument or experimental set-up for another and in which the context of testing often changed. If nothing else, the laboratory’s physical and institutional boundaries could no longer isolate its researchers from...
a rapidly modernizing world. Filled with an ever-growing numbers of pipes, cables, tracks, traffic, streets, and sites of production, Wilhelmine Berlin had already developed a “technology-rich environment to whose noise, vibrations, and electromagnetic fields, the experimental practices within the laboratory’s walls had constantly to be adjusted.”

Fig. 4.11 The Material Culture of Weimar Psychotechnik.

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In the end, while it is important to acknowledge that the history of psychotechnics was tantamount to the history of Berlin’s technological development, it would be mistaken to limit our attention to what David Livingstone has referred to as the “production segment of the science circuit.” The practices, skills, and objects of the psychotechnical laboratory where after all wrapped up within systems that promoted their warranting. That Psychotechnik was quickly sedimented as an ordinary tacit space and geared into the repertoire of practices which ordered everyday life in the Weimar metropolis owed much to its widespread use. Rapid institutionalisation also facilitated the making of “warranted credibility” especially in Berlin where the Institut für Psychotechnik at the Technische Hochschule played a prominent role in conferring authority to the psychotechnical movement. Here under the directorship of Dr. Walter Moede, programs were designed to introduce the techniques of testing to the general public, and training courses were also developed for representatives of government agencies and private industry which aimed to teach participants the principles and methods of psychotechnics in less than a week.

What we might wish to call the enactment of credibility thus encompassed a reservoir of meanings selectively used to locate the epistemic authority of Weimar Psychotechnik. These meanings were not restricted to the immediacy of their performance. Attempts to secure warrant circulated in textual form as well. New scientific journals such as Praktische Psychologie, Psychotechnische Rundschau and Psychotechnischer Zeitschrift published the latest research findings and in many instances they also offered a glimpse into the “scrips and scribbles” of the laboratory whether they be the sketches of experimental set-ups, the

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111 Georg Chaym, “Psychotechnik,” Sozialistische Monatshefte (20 December 1920), 1107. The Institut für Psychotechnik at the Technische Hochschule was headed by Walther Moede. Moede was responsible for some of the field’s most prominent monographs well into the Nazi era. See Moede, Lehrbuch der Psychotechnik (Berlin: Springer, 1930); and Moede, Arbeitstechnik (Stuttgart: Enke Verlag, 1935).
arrangements of data deriving from various experiments, or the designs for new apparatuses (Table 4.1). The textual meaning of Psychotechnik extended, moreover, beyond the compass of research writings and the different forms and tools of rhetorical enhancement that they usually provided. A map of what was ostensibly a space of textual multiplicity would have included journals devoted to particular professions, the reports and newsletters of various firms, the local press which often sensationalized the latest techniques and instruments of psychotechnical testing, and popular scientific periodicals like Umschau and Technik für Alle which also reported to a wide readership.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Philosophische Studien (later Psychologische Studien)</td>
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<td>1890</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane (later Zeitschrift für Psychologie)</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für pädagogische Psychologie</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Psychologie der Aussage</td>
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<td>1908</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie</td>
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<td>1910</td>
<td>Untersuchungen zur Psychologie und Philosophie</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>Fortschritte der Psychologie und ihrer Anwendungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Arbeiten zur Entwicklungspsychologie (Serie)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Schriften zur Psychologie der Berufseignung und des Wirtschaftslebens (Serie)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Praktische Psychologie</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>Psychologische Forschung</td>
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<td>Psychotechnische Rundschau</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Jahrbuch der Charakterologie</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Industrielle Psychotechnik</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Psychotechnische Zeitschrift</td>
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113 See Rabinbach, The Human Motor, p. 278-279.
Apart from these texts, the popular psychologising of the experimental sciences also promoted the proliferation of a series of steely *codes of conduct* appropriately fashioned to dissimulate the impact of the modern, urban experience. No longer the privileged subject of psychotechnical testing, a more guarded fascination with bodily comportment now entered into the scientific study of everyday practice. "In such circumstances," writes Helmut Lethen, "codes of conduct [operated] as written receptacles for external directives to guide individual behaviour."¹¹⁴ They appeared in numerous forms: as philosophical treatises, as the manifestos of architects and city planners, as how-to guides squarely located in a popular print culture, as literary experiments and new principles in political anthropology. All of these, and many more, drew attention to the place of the body as a practical means for "[re]negotiating the challenges of interpersonal contact in [an increasingly] complex urban environment."¹¹⁵ In order to discern something of the significance of these texts, my own purpose in what follows is to consider the extent to which the experimental life sciences were *popularised* as a means to inculcate the habitual behaviours and dispositions of a "better habitus" (fig. 4.12). This is not to reduce the modalities of power which coursed through these texts to a singular set of calculations, projections, and interests. The aim is to simply suggest that the ordering of everyday life in Weimar Berlin cannot be understood

apart from a certain interweaving of conduct, psychology, and environment and the various moral geographies to which such performances collectively subscribed.\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Popularising the Psychotechnical Laboratory.}
\end{figure}

Cool Conduct in the Everyday City

The gesture with which someone opens up a newspaper is more informative than all the lead articles in the world, and nothing is more instructional than standing for a quarter hour on a street corner.

- Ernst Jünger

Part from your friends at the station
Enter the city in the morning with your coat buttoned up
Look for a room, and when your friend knocks:
Do not, oh do not, open the door
But
Cover your tracks!

-Bertolt Brecht

My subtitle is borrowed from a remarkable book by Helmut Lethen in which he explores the widespread fascination during the Weimar Republic with what he refers to as “codes of conduct.” Unlike Alfred Döblin who once described the Weimar Republic as “a republic with no instruction manual,” Lethen is at pains to show that, in contrast, there arose during this period a wealth of codes to guide behaviour “from architecture to philosophical anthropology, from sexuality to theatre.” For Lethen, the performative force of such codes amounted to a veritable dramaturgy of adaptation. Their proliferation, after all, thrived during an era in which the collective trauma of the First World War and the hyperinflation of the early 1920s exacerbated fears about the dissolution of established social norms and in which sharpening class antagonisms and changing gender roles challenged the ordering of everyday routines and dispositions.

117 Ernst Jünger quoted in Helmut Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 155.
119 Helmut Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 42.
120 This argument is forcefully made by Bernd Widdig, Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
Reconstituting the “structures of expectation” which governed the circuits of everyday life turned to the promise of certainty and security which codes of conduct allegedly offered. Such promises were “largely calls to order, rites and procedures of symbolic investiture whereby an individual is endowed with a new social status, is filled with a symbolic mandate that henceforth informs his or her identity in the community.” The social and political stability of post-Wilhelmine society as well as the psychological “health” of its members was, as a consequence, dependent upon the “efficacy of these symbolic operations – to what we might call their performative magic – whereby individuals ‘become who they are.”121 If this amounts, to a tacit admission of the anxious performativity of the Weimar era, one certainly finds in Weimar culture a relatively open discussion of the regulatory fictions – or “masks” – that prescribed roles and identities seemed to demand.122 Lethen, for example, writes of a composite “cool persona:” alert, armoured, and free of the “complexity of deep psychological structures.”123 According to Lethen, it is precisely this injunction to behave in certain ways, that was eventually taken up by the literature of the interwar period whose insistent performativity traded in a set of gestures functioning to preserve and shore up – “stiffen” – a subjectivity that was at risk of dissolution. Such ‘coldness’ and ‘hardness’ promoted a defensive mode of ‘behaviour’ to which the textual apparatus of the Neue Sachlichkeit provided a cast of “cold personae” and a rather more protective “care of the self” than Foucault’s more recent formulation would have it. To be sure, Lethen’s account is largely limited to the contours of a select corpus of texts. His ‘protagonists’ are virtually self-selecting: Kästner’s Fabian, Kracauer’s Ginster, Serner’s Hochstapler, Braune’s Erna, Jünger’s worker, and Brecht’s citydweller. I want to, however, leave aside Lethen’s focus on

121 Eric Santner, My Own Private Germany, p. xii.
123 Lethen, Cool Conduct, p. 33.
the Neue Sachlichkeit movement and attend to a more expansive set of texts and therefore speak to the notion of the experimental life sciences in and as popular culture.

As such, theoretical constructions of the cool persona spawned countless popular publications each offering readers their own vade mecum for navigating the insecurities and instabilities of Weimar modernity. These practices travelled beyond the circumscribed arena of the experimental laboratory to which they owed much of their performative force, multiplying in other spaces and appearing in various forms, codes, and gestures. They also fuelled the classification mania ["Furor des Rasters"] that gripped Weimar culture in the 1920s. Classification schemes of the period ordered every aspect of Weimar life, from physique to handwriting, in order to give recognizable contours to the complexity of post-war society. At the same time, they promoted the invention of a whole world of objects and texts — a veritable geography of anticipation — which only added to the innumerable alternatives already purporting to ‘read’ [and write] Berlin.\textsuperscript{124} Classification schemes thus provided the individual with “means for differentiating and discriminating, for drawing new boundaries and putting up barriers for security.”\textsuperscript{125} And according to Helmut Lethen, such schemes “help to draw elementary distinctions: between what is one’s own and what is other...They mark separate spheres; they regulate forms of expression and realize the self’s equilibrium. They recommend and describe techniques of mimicry in the face of a violent world.”\textsuperscript{126} In short, the function of such typologies was twofold: they operated as both

\begin{footnotes}
\item[125] Lynne Frame, “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne?” p. 13.
\item[126] Lethen, \textit{Cool Conduct}, p. 18.
\end{footnotes}
hermeneutic tools and *technologies of the self*, condensing the urban experience into a repertoire of strategies and learnable techniques.  

Ultimately for Lethen it was to “study ritual - not belief” which represented the binding axiom for the period’s fascination with codes of conduct, classifications schemes, and typologies. Lethen’s decision to transpose a classical Malinowskian dictum to a resolutely metropolitan context is noteworthy. On first inspection, the archetypal image of the lone, white, male fieldworker would seem hardly appropriate to the modern spaces of Weimar Germany. On further scrutiny, the omnipresence of codes of conduct, their common emphasis on visible phenomena, behavioural patterns, and the rituals and gestures of everyday life amounted to a form of fieldwork appropriate to the “complexly related time-spaces” of the modern city. While these were never practices to be cumulatively troped under the “field sciences,” as methodological strategies, they clearly understood bodies as “meaningful *fielding* places” echoing perhaps Theodor Adorno’s timely observation that “mass culture is a kind of training for life.”  

Focusing on seemingly unremarkable actions and everyday encounters, these included theories on physiognomy and mimicry, most notably those formulated by Karl Bühler, Philipp Lersch, and Ludwig Klages; though there were many others including the psychiatric ‘profiling’ that characterised the development of diagnostory and electroencephalography. Lersch’s work on the experimental psychology

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of expression was especially notable. Lersch filmed unsuspecting subjects taking personality tests and analysed their eye behaviour for particular expressive valences (fig. 4.13). As a result, Lersch was able to develop a detailed archive of photograms which he used in order to make measurements of eyelid coordinates and eye movements. The photograms were, in turn, manipulated by Lersch using scissors in order to cut out suggestive frames and isolate

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the eyes from the rest of the face. Lersch believed that these calculations and procedures
were best suited to the identification of basic expressive tendencies and they that provided a
means of classifying the sphere of “mimetic expression” and the affective city to which it
belonged. As he himself suggested, “with its examination of particular forms of expression,
it is scientific psychology which comes closest to the experience of everyday life [in engstem
Anschluss an das Leben des Alltags].” 130

The focus on codifying the gestural language of the body also encompassed the
publication and widespread circulation of crude psychological and sociological
characterizations which “placed” people, physical attributes, and routine gestures on a roster
of social roles and expectations. Exceptionally popular was Ernst Kretschmer’s
Konstitutionspsychologie. Kretschmer was a former war psychiatrist whose post-war
research was predicated on plotting the correlation between character variations and
measurable physical traits.131 Drawing on research in endocrinology, psychiatry, and clinical
medicine, Kretschmer developed a system of morphological constitutional types each of
which corresponded to a series of healthy and pathological psychological states. There were
three primary types: the leptosome (or asthenic), the athletic, and the pyknic (see fig. 4.14-
4.16). While some of the more vitalist voices within German medical community were
happy to align these categories with the racialist assumptions of the eugenics movement,
Kretschmer emphasized that none of these types was superior to any of the others.
According to Kretschmer, all three constitutions were “predisposed to different diseases”

131 Lethen, p. 153-154. Kretschmer’s Konstitutionspsychologie is most clearly articulated in Körperbau und
Charakter: Untersuchungen zum Konstitutionsproblem und zur Lehre von den Temperamenten (Berlin:
Springer, 1921); this was translated into English into 1925. Körperbau und Charakter went through at least
twenty-six printings up to 1977 and remains an important text in the Physikum, the first set of comprehensive
examinations for medical students in Germany.
Fig. 4.14-4.16 Kretschmer's Konstitutionspsychologie: The Leptosome, Athletic, and Pyknic Types.
and applied in equal measure to both men and women. They were, moreover, ideal types, and between them there were many transitions and gradations.¹³² In this respect, Kretschmer's "constitutional medicine" reflected the synthesizing gaze adopted by a number of physicians during the Weimar Era. The popularity, however, of his work hinged on its ability to translate the metropolitan condition into a "vast categorical landscape."¹³³ "We must," in his own words, "plod along the bitter, wearisome road of systematic verbal descriptions and inventory of the whole of the outer body from head to foot... we must take hundreds of observations... we must learn again to use our eyes, to see at a glance, and to observe without a microscope or a laboratory."¹³⁴ Such prescriptions were eagerly taken up in more popular texts like Gerhard Venzmer's Sieh dir die Menschen an! in which a reading public was encouraged to incorporate Kretschmer's analytic into their observations and adjudications of everyday life and go "botanising on the asphalt" to borrow Walter Benjamin's famous phrasing.¹³⁵ By the mid 1920s, these characterological profiles had achieved such common cultural currency in the mass media that even the activities of graphologists enjoyed a revival, a point not lost on Benjamin in his review of some of the field's more important contributions (fig. 4.17).¹³⁶ That the hand was an 'honest skin,' worthy of serious scientific

¹³³ I am borrowing a phrasing of Arjun Appadurai's. See Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," SW 4, pp. 3-92, p. 19. While Benjamin is interested in the 19th century 'physiologies' which underlaboured to make a modernizing Paris legible, I would argue that the 'codes of conduct' explored in this chapter served a similar function.
attention was, however, limited to texts which traded in a curious mixture of psychology, occultism, and astrology.\textsuperscript{137}

To those familiar then with Michel Foucault’s ideas, an abiding interest in numerous theories of physiognomy, characterology, and graphology may seem to represent a worrisome form of “autogovernmentality, a combination of self-surveillance and self-enumeration, truly insidious in its capillary reach.”\textsuperscript{138} But my own view of these “governing effects” is that they simply do not add up to any definitive order despite the fact that we have often come to understand the history of the modern city as “a story of imposed surveillance and attempted mastery, as the progressive emergence of the classified and regimented city

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
under the aegis of an irresistibly powerful ‘carceral’ ideology.”

In contrast, I would still prefer to argue that the modern city, echoing Thrift and Amin, provides a set “of ecologies of ignorance: gaps, blind spots, mistakes, unreliable paradoxes, ambiguities, anomalies, invisibilities which can only ever be partially taken in, since they, are, to an extent, one of the means by which knowledge itself is created and justified.”

According to this formulation, codes of conduct and schematic typologies were perhaps more accurately understood to highlight and reinforce a persistent crisis in occupying the space of the modern city in an unproblematic way. The point is not to argue that everyday life in Weimar Berlin can be reduced to the ambitions of such devices, but to suggest that it also cannot live without them, for they are themselves a constitutive part of the everyday city.

To the extent then that these codes brought some measure of certainty to the everyday urban experience, they also began to turn to a new, “less materialist paradigm,” one that rejected the mechanist body-machine of the experimental life sciences for a more vitalist vision of the self. Admittedly, motor-reflexes, automatisms, and everyday gestures were still the sine qua non of popular guides and schemata, though they now operated as a set of performative dispositions functioning to preserve and shore up those subjectivities “invested in brutally clear ‘biological’ identities based on racial, gender, and sexual categories.”

The tendency to order racial, sexual, and class physiognomies also reflected changing attitudes among practitioners of German mental medicine for whom the science of psyche and soul had come to designate “a purely mechanical form of expertise.” Thus, many practitioners shifted

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140 Thrift and Amin, Re-Imagining the Urban, p. 92.
141 While beyond the scope of this particular chapter, a study of the hermeneutics of reading that emerged around conduct codes merits greater attention. That codes of conduct had their own publics and counterpublics is certainly clear given their rates of circulation during the course of the Weimar era. Charting the geographies of readership would also draw attention to the realm of ‘counter-conduct’ that they actively produced.
142 Andreas Killen, “From Shock to Schreck,” p. 211.
143 Richard McCormick, Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Germany, p. 5-6.
their attention from a putatively somaticist psychology to an ostensibly more vitalist praxis which sought to restore ‘life’ and ‘will’ to their proper place within the experimental life sciences. Earlier views and assumptions about work, production, and therapeutics yielded to the conviction that the pathologies of a degenerative German welfare state lay at the heart of the problem. In other words, the very mechanisms created to cushion the shocks of urban industrial society were becoming implicated in a more general social crisis which fostered a rather different alignment between “the psychological, the governmental, and the subjective.”

These reappropriations were not, however, limited to the precarious geography of the everyday city. They also reciprocally shaped the constrained spaces of the Weimar laboratory and the psychotechnical testing enterprise which were quickly conceived within the “framework of a neo-vitalist economy of labour.” New psychotechnical manuals and revised laboratory protocols devoted whole sections to characterology, graphology, and physiognomy and their inclusion in testing procedures became a real desideratum. In this way such performances worked their social power in order not only to regulate bodies, but to form them as well. An increasing emphasis on prophylactic activities and social hygiene, also became a central reference point, foreshadowing the strict regimentation of minds and bodies that Siegfried Kracauer would later impugn as a leitmotif of late Weimar culture. Rationalization of this kind, as Andreas Killen has furthermore suggested, had its immediate and obvious counterpart in the “recuperation of [a] sovereign, male self and of a gendered social order.” Indeed, the compensatory purpose of this idolization of a male labouring self

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may, in part, be traced back to the wartime inversion of gender roles, a moment that had
dramatically increased the visibility of women within the public sphere. More often than
not, these anxieties crystallised around the image of the "Neue Frau," the partly mythical
notion of the modern sexually emancipated woman who provoked such intense derision
among a wide range of medical officials and cultural commentators. But such fears also
testified to wider concerns over the forces, techniques, and devices which purportedly
worked to regulate the sphere of social reproduction and to which a hygienicist, natalist
enterprise of identifying and eradicating social pathologies was often elevated as the most
logical solution. Ultimately, it is the [speculative] wager of this chapter that the biopolitical
arrangements of the Weimar metropolis presented themselves not only as conspicuously
therapeutic gestures (to overcome the horrors of the First World War, to come to terms with
the anxious urbanism of Weimar Berlin, and to advance the social policies of the German
Sozialstaat); but, also as awkwardly anticipatory ones, preparing citizens for an uncertain
and violent urban future. This speaks not only to an inversion of war trauma as the
historian Michael Geyer has suggested, but also to a much larger series of questions which
bring us, arguably, full circle to the figure of Agamben’s "camp." While such an
"impassable space" would seem rather removed from the psychotechnical laboratory, the
importance of a constitutive nexus between the modern city, the laboratory, and the camp
braces against another of Berlin’s performance genealogies and, in concluding, I wish to
briefly outline such an "exceptional city.

147 Killen, “From Shock to Schreck,” p. 216.
148 I am indebted to Derek Gregory for this observation.
149 Michael Geyer, “The Place of World War II in German Memory and History,” New German Critique 71
(1997), pp. 5-40; Agamben, Homo Sacer, p. 123.
The Exceptional City: Gestic Experiments in Weimar Germany

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

- Walter Benjamin\(^{150}\)

Individuals who had once been political subjects were frequently turned into the pathological objects of demagogues. The “simple man of the people” was resurrected as the “national comrade” [Volksgenosse] – moulded from the stuff of neurosis, malnutrition, and misfortune.

- Walter Benjamin\(^{151}\)

One of the principle aims of this chapter has been to sketch one genealogy of the psychiatric sciences as they developed in interwar Germany and demonstrate how the apparently ‘public’ issue of governmental regulation was linked to the apparently ‘private’ question of how one should conduct oneself. As it has been argued, the rise of psychological expertise during the period of classical German modernity (1890-1930) played “a key role in providing the vocabulary, the information, and the regulatory techniques for the government of individuals.” \(^{152}\) Not only were the performances of a metropolitan habitus crafted and embedded in the day-to-day routines of the experimental life sciences, but the practicalities of urbanising science depended upon a move beyond the places in which psychiatric research was usually conducted.

If I have desisted from focusing on the historical geography of Weimar psychoanalysis, I do not mean to diminish the value of recent contributions to the relationship between the ‘geographical’ and the ‘psychoanalytical.’ \(^{153}\) Two important points must, nevertheless, be made here. First, the adoption of Freud’s theories in mainstream German medicine was

\(^{152}\) Nikolas Rose, *Inventing our Selves*, p. 103.
ambiguous at best and would require a detailed exegesis in its own right. Second, whether it be Freudian psychoanalysis or its more behaviourist counterpart, German mental medicine as an array of techniques and systems of judgments, emerged out of a metropolitan milieu in which the basic tenets of the psychiatric sciences were themselves seen as increasingly phobic gestures. Indeed as Sander Gilman, Eric Santner, and most recently Lawrence Rickells have argued, pathologising of this kind was never far from the experimental cultures to which this study has been primarily concerned.\textsuperscript{154}

Insofar then as it was “gesture – not being” which came to frantically rule over the everyday city, I wish to conclude by briefly invoking two encounters whose fictional mise-en-scène serve quite deliberately to mime and incarnate the ‘staging’ of the experimental life sciences in Weimar Germany.\textsuperscript{155} The first one involves the figure of Galy Gay, the protagonist of Bertolt Brecht’s canonical experiment in epic theatre, \textit{Mann ist Mann}. The play recounts the “reverse-engineering” of Gay, a benign Irish packer into a ruthless British soldier in a colonial machine-gun regiment (fig. 4.18). As Brigid Doherty has suggested, the techniques that effected the transformation of Gay’s \textit{physis} were crucial to the operations of epic theatre as it developed during the late 1920s and early 1930s. For Brecht, epic theatre was intended as an alternative to the tenets of Aristotelian drama with its inevitable plotting of “the hero into situations where he [revealed] his innermost being.” Epic theatre was dedicated to the foreclosure of spectatorial empathy and with it an audience’s


identification with a play’s principal protagonist not to mention their surrender to the “suspense and consolations of the well-made play.” Brecht associated these conventions with the categories of “mimesis” or “catharsis” and the anaesthetizing of particular emotions. In contrast, he advocated a new “epic” style that would transform an “audience from ‘a mass of hypnotized test subjects’ [eine Masse hypnotisierte Versuchpersonen] into ‘a theatre full of Experts’ [ein Theater voll von Fachleuten].” “The new school of drama,” he added, “must incorporate the ‘experiment’ into its form.” 156 The accent on the language of vocational instruction and training was not arbitrary. By the late 1920s, Brecht had become increasingly interested in the findings of behaviourist psychology not to mention the

development of logical empiricism. 

"Psychology," as he suggested, "is an important field for the dramatist" and in *Mann ist Mann* this is explored through an adaptation of the techniques of *Berufsberatung* and psychotechnics. If *Mann ist Mann* was dependent upon the same understanding of occupations, habits, posture, and gestures that characterised the psychotechnical enterprise, it reveals that understanding through the crude and violent reverse-engineering of Galy Gay in which he is forced to re-enact, through a scripted series of experiments and tests, the conduct and gestures of the vocation he is forcibly made to take up. 

"Bit by bit," writes Benjamin of Gay, "he assumes possessions, thoughts, attitudes, and habits of the kind needed by a soldier in war; he is completely reassembled."

If these performances allegorised an alternative version of vocational aptitude testing, there were other similarly exemplary encounters. The influence of clinical psychiatry on the Berlin Dadaists comes to mind though I am thinking in particular of Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a story which itself functions as a ‘trial’ in the full sense of the word, that is as a laboratory test and as a moral examination. As Eva Horn has recently pointed out, the experiment performed on the main subject Franz Biberkopf - his re-admission into the everyday metropolitan world of Weimar Berlin - was remarkably similar to those conducted in the behavioural research laboratories of early twentieth-century Germany. "The subject," writes Horn, "is exposed to various stimuli - in Biberkopf’s case progressively more intense - in order to test his reactions." This is most obviously the case near the end of the novel where experimental testing has come to take on a striking literalism. Biberkopf,

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by now a patient in the Buch insane asylum in Berlin, resists all attempts to analyse and pinpoint his ‘disturbance’ according to well-worn psychopathologic categorizations. Ultimately, his doctors seek recourse in more decisive methods and, like the shell-shocked patients of the First World War of whom he was himself one, Biberkopf is made to repeatedly endure electrotherapy.

These shattering experimental encounters were hardly coincidental. Whether it be the props, scripts, and gestures of Brechtian theatre or the montage techniques of Döblin’s novel, neither was far removed from the scientific arrangements with which this chapter is predominantly concerned. And for good reason perhaps. After all, Brecht himself served in 1918 as a medical intern in a military hospital near Augsburg while Döblin studied in Freiburg with the prominent völkisch psychiatrist Alfred Hoche and later worked as a doctor in an insane asylum in Berlin-Buch. But these affinities can, I think, still be pressed further and I would contend that both were also astute observers of the relationship between what Gilles Deleuze referred to as “the critical and the clinical.” As symptomatologists of an increasingly anxious urbanism, Brecht and Döblin were well aware of a “reactionary modernism” which formed a certain degree of stability around what I refer to as the “exceptional city.” To make sense of what I mean by “exceptional,” I briefly return to the work of Agamben with which I began this chapter. For many critics, Agamben’s recent foray into the nature of political sovereignty presents us with a highly abstract argument about the metaphysics of power. This is, however, to forget that his is a project marked by the horrors of National Socialism. “The importance,” he writes, “of [a] constitutive nexus

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between the state of exception and the concentration camp cannot be overestimated.” As a “pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space,” it was the camp that ultimately bore witness to a state of exception where “an unprecedented absolutisation of the biopower to make live intersect[ed] with an equally absolute generalization of the sovereign power to make die.”

If the camp, according to Agamben, represented the space that was made possible when the state of exception began to become the norm, the historical curve of his argument remains cruelly abbreviated. Thus the aim of this chapter which has been to draw attention to some of the histories and geographies out of which the biopolitical arrangements of the camp were operationalised. In his original discussion of the camp, Agamben suggested that the space of exception remained “topologically different from a single space of confinement.” As he explained, “the sovereign exception is the fundamental localization (Ortung), which does not limit itself to distinguishing what is inside from what is outside but instead traces a threshold (the state of exception) between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible.”

In the end, while such topological spacings were undoubtedly enacted, consolidated, and normalized within exceptional circumstances, they also found a suitable testing ground in the ‘metropolitan laboratories’ of the psychiatric sciences. Here, as I have made the case, even more radical biopolitical encounters were rehearsed, and in the end, absolutised in a matrix of practices, tests, and regulations which bound the banal to the exceptional, the everyday city to the concentration camp, the biopolitical to the thanatopolitical. And it was, finally, here that the physician and the psychiatrist began to move in that no-man’s land in which the techniques of governmental

rationality had themselves turned to the most radical and final of solutions.\textsuperscript{168} As the Weimar-era critic, Alfred Polgar, concluded, “even in times of peace, medicine was, sadly, powerless against death. But today to a much greater extent, life is powerless against medicine.”\textsuperscript{169}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Fig. 4.19 George Grosz, \textit{Die Gesundbeter: The Faith-Healers or Fit for Active Service}, 1916-1917, pen, brush, and Indian ink. An army doctor uses an ear trumpet to examine a corpse. He pronounces the corpse “Kriegsverwendungsfähig,” (abbreviated KV), literally meaning “capable of war use,” in other words, ‘fit for active service.”}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{168} Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{169} Polgar quoted in Lerner, \textit{Hysterical Men}, p. 194.
Conclusion

Goodbye to Berlin

*Berlin, paleontologically*

Here all the sediments are exposed:
History laid out in layers –
Blood, sweat, and filth, permeated with hope
that leads through the strata of bygone era.

The city: fossil on every side –
Deceased time locked within itself.
You dare not avert your eyes.
So they remain: as the present.

-Günter Kunert¹

Berlin is a large building site. One erases all and one starts again, one
liquidates, one makes disappear, one re-arranges

-Régine Robert²

There is no politics without an organization of the time and space of
mourning.

-Jacques Derrida³

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I returned to Berlin in July 2004 for the first time in over three years. I needed to check up on some archival sources that I was unable to track down during my earlier stay in the city. At least that was what I told myself at the time. As I began to read my fieldnotes on the plane over from Newcastle – their pages already worn like a well-thumbed Baedeker – I realized that this research trip was also motivated by something else. Namely a desire to overcome the pathology of distance which had left me feeling at a considerable remove from the archival materials that were somehow meant to bear witness to the palpable presence of past performances. I also wondered whether the wish to get a hold of Berlin’s Weimar past was an ultimately nostalgic enterprise, voicing a desire to secure the connective imperative between a “then” and “now” or whether the kind of memory-work that I have in mind was less ambitious in its insistence on the past as a “performative category.”

I remember flicking through the pages of my fieldnotes and coming upon a page scrawled in large highlighted letters. At the top was a circled quotation from the performance theorist Peggy Phelan:

If I told you, I love this city, love the way it opens its dirty limbs to me, love the way it absorbs me without noticing me, love the way it gives rhythm to my walk, gives purpose to my plots, would you be jealous? I know you refuse to be jealous of people, but I wonder how you would feel if I swear my utter devotion to a place.

Below the quotation a shorter passage from Phelan was also highlighted: “Here, grammar is a poor cartographer…Its not a place that stays still.” I was struck re-reading these lines, how they dramatized something of the conundrum facing a historian or geographer coming to terms with Berlin’s unsettling past: trying to write of then and there, of that that was and that

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4 It was Jean Starobinski, as Derek Gregory reminds us, who suggested that nostalgia was originally a sort of homesickness. See Starobinski, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” *Diogenes* 54 (1966), pp. 81-103.
that is all the while experiencing a desire to inhabit and fully absorb that which was already lost.

Of course, in the case of Berlin, it seemed that one was always arriving too late as there is undoubtedly no other city "more symbolic of the issue of rebuilding the city on the city."\(^8\) That Berlin is often troped as a city of constant fragmentation, what Philip Oswalt has called a \textit{Stadt ohne Form}, has, to be sure, become something of a commonplace in recent years even axiomatic to our understanding of the city’s push to reinvent itself as the capital of a re-united nation.\(^9\) And yet, while ‘experiment,’ ‘spontaneity,’ ‘edgy,’ ‘unconventionality’ are all words that have been used to describe Berlin’s “reborn identity,” these are not new appellations and have often been invoked in the past to describe the provisional geography of the city. Berlin, it would appear, remains tethered to the temporality of \textit{performance}, a work-in-progress, inventing itself again and again, always becoming never being.

It is therefore not surprising that I have found myself for some now trying to integrate historical scholarship with performance. While \textit{Metropolitan Theatrics} may not, strictly speaking, be a historical geography of performance, it is very much a study of geographies, histories and performances and what it means “to long for bodies now absent, to pore over photographs, to read firsthand accounts.”\(^10\) Having had to engage in that precise labour for many years, I quickly found that the power (and seductiveness) of a performance paradigm lay in its ability to engender a form of writing adequate to the challenges posed by performance’s “tattered archives.” “The historian,” as Jane Blocker reminds us, “plies a shuttle through the tattered threads of a wide range of artefacts, what Barthes would call

\(^8\) Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen, \textit{Spaces of Uncertainty} (Wiesbaden: Müller + Busmann, 2002), p. 70; original emphasis.
\(^9\) Philip Oswalt et al., \textit{Berlin, Stadt ohne Form} (München: Prestel, 2000).
collectively 'texts.'” From these written pages the past might flash by, as Benjamin once proposed, but only to tauntingly disappear once again. This is not to suggest that one must see performance as disappearance tout court. Rather it is to question what many historians of performance have described as the “domineering logic of the archive,” a logic that authorises performance to disappear in favour of the reassurances that a “concrete material reality,” in this case a ‘real’ city of stone and blood, would seem to promise.\(^{11}\)

I too often longed for the comfort that such a materiality offered. I certainly did so on the flight to Berlin reminded all of the recent talk within cultural geography of “dead geographies” and of the growing animus to conjoin the performative and the spatial.\(^{12}\) I did, however, realize that my own attempt to write Berlin remains in many respects a conscious retreat or withdrawal from any desire to claim knowledge of a Weimar past in any of its substantial fullness or plenitude. There are already many texts on the history of Berlin which have endeavoured to do so though they struggle to do justice to the complexities of their subject. David Clay Large’s Berlin, Alexandra Ritchie’s Faust’s Metropolis, and Anthony Beevor Berlin: The Downfall all reveal the limitations that accompany an anecdotal approach preoccupied with famous citizens and events and to which ‘modernity,’ ‘Weimar,’

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\(^{11}\) Blocker, What the Body Cost, p. xi, p. 106. This is not to suggest that I am interested in repeating and reinstating the powerful myths surrounding Weimar Berlin that have emphasised a city of fragmentation at the expense of a sense of the material reality that inspired the modern city of the imagination in the first place. If anything, I would argue that the historically specific tendencies toward social engineering, technical infrastructure, and management testify to the ‘Janus-faced nature’ of modernization, the constant interplay between order and disorder. Indeed Martin Wagner, the city planner of Berlin between 1926-1933, insisted on the limited lifespan of the modern city and that the constant need to renew and rebuild had to be a crucial variable within the planning process from the beginning. See David Frisby, Cityscapes of Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), esp. pp. 264-302; Ludovica Scarpa, Martin Wagner und Berlin (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1986).

and even ‘Berlin’ were consigned to their all-too-familiar positions within the standard narrative of German history.\textsuperscript{13}

If anything, the preceding pages were intended to underscore, what James Donald has described as the importance of a “methodological” attitude based on a broad commitment to imagining a different politics for the city.\textsuperscript{14} For Donald, there is much indeed to be said about the haunted spaces of the city and about their power to affect how we live in cities, and how we live together in cities. This is a project, I would argue, that refuses to draw boundaries between the political and the poetic, between both the “thingness of the city” and the city as a “state of mind.” As such, Donald’s commitment to a critical poetics of place is all about this “traffic between urban fabric, representation, and imagination which fuzzies epistemological and ontological distinctions and, in doing so, produces the city between, the city where we actually live.”\textsuperscript{15} To be sure, Donald is not interested in a throwaway poeticism, but rather a sober acknowledgement that the city we actually live in conjures up the creative – \textit{and yet constrained} – interchange between the individual and the political.

“Imagination,” writes Donald, “is concerned with the exploration of possibilities, not merely the record of what is. Imagination is not limited to the mimesis of images sanctioned by the Law. Imagination is inherently ethical insofar as it always operates in the register of \textit{as if}: as if I were another, as if things could be otherwise.”\textsuperscript{16}

Donald’s advocacy of what he describes as “the creative openness of cosmopolitanism” is not, however, an exceptional view as recent calls to “reimagine” the urban have made

\textsuperscript{14} James Donald, \textit{Imagining the Modern City} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 21.
\textsuperscript{15} Donald, \textit{Imagining the Modern City}, p. 8, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{16} Donald, \textit{Imagining the Modern City}, p. 9.
abundantly clear. I also take issue with Donald’s desire to treat the city as an abstraction, as a generalizable category. To the extent that we differ in our methodologies, it is because I am convinced that telling the story of the modern city always begins with the history and geography of particular cities. Indeed, there is much at stake here given the prevarications of German historiography. What the historian Robert Moeller has felicitously described as the “search for a useable past” in Germany has already provided its share of grand récits together tasked with the writing of Germany’s twentieth century history alongside the ruins of an unspeakable past and against the pressures of a palpable loss. But as Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have rightly, I think, pointed out, “ignoring the ruptures and fracturing would write out of [German] history the widespread absences that are not just an intrinsic but also an essential aspect of the twentieth-century German past.”

A major if unstated aim of the preceding pages has been therefore to think critically about how to write a history of Weimar Berlin which is at the same time a history of memory in Germany. The basic imperatives of German memory are, as I have suggested, well-known and a distinguished body of literature has already begun to explore Germany’s contested and still evolving collective memory of the Third Reich and the Second World War. Yet while this focus on Vergangenheitsbewältigung has been important, historians (and geographers) are only just beginning to apply critical approaches to memory to other

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17 Donald, Imagining the Modern City, p. 176.
20 Jarausch and Geyer, Shattered Past, p. 11-12.
periods of German history. To this end, I would argue that a greater emphasis on the historical geographies of the Weimar era encourages deeper probing into how we historicize the production of memory. It also augments recent attempts to explore the interplay between memory and the city. The main point here, I would argue, is to offer a critical alternative to all-encompassing ‘views’ of Berlin; a pressing predicament given the extent to which a contemporary Berlin is regularly treated by planners, policy-makers, and other stake-holders as a place to locate dramatic and sweeping narratives of urban transformation. Urban space has, in this context, become a strategic cipher, an ideological figure which is always already concerned with anticipating and containing what the ‘New’ Berlin is meant to become. Indeed, the imago mundi of the present city remains the hypervisibility of its constructedness.

If I have, in the pages of *Metropolitan Theatrics*, attempted to invoke the traumatic history of Weimar Berlin, I have done so then largely in order to avoid the nostalgic fantasies and anaemic set of lieux de mémoire which have characterised a flourishing attempt to polish up and eviscerate historical differences in Berlin’s cityscape, a process that has certainly straitjacketed all those other efforts to claim what may plausibly be described as an alternative “right to the city.” One could say that another kind of historiographic impulse is

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24 A clear sign of this constructed visibility was the so-called Info-Box, the temporary red cube which stood on a series of 15 metre pillars, built in order to provide Berliners with a point of purchase over the city’s metamorphosis at Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz during the late 1990s.

at work here, one telling me that writing the city must continue to acknowledge "an excessive past that escapes history, or, in any case, conventional ways of retelling," and that writing the city must also accommodate the work of mourning in the wake of so much trauma, to include the traumatic event(s) in one's efforts to reformulate and reconstitute a rather different space of urban politics. As Judith Butler has compellingly argued, mourning in a phenomenological sense "is part of any epistemological act that 'intends' or 'anticipates' the fullness of an object, because that 'end' cannot be reached, and that fullness is elusive." For Butler, "mourning is the relation to the 'object' only under the conditions in which history, and the narrative coherence and direction it once promised, has been shattered." Butler's comments are, it should be said, part of a close reading of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, a work itself heavily indebted to the crisis years of the Weimar Republic though her comments also, I would argue, frame much of my own engagement with the irreversibility of loss, of coming to terms with the nature of Berlin's past.

Ultimately, these imperatives are not about so much about rewriting or redeeming the past as they are about bearing witness -- testifying -- to that which is lost by holding onto the enigmatic trace of that loss. Loss, according to such a view, does not to amount a transcendental lack or absence but, rather, remains driven by the hermeneutic specificities of particular events. Indeed I would concur with Dominick LaCapra who noted that "it is misguided to situate loss on an ontological or transhistorical level, something that happens

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27 My own understanding of what we mean by *bearing witness* is in sharp disagreement with recent attempts within cultural geography -- notably from the perspective of non-representational theory -- to invoke the figure of the witness, what I see as a phenomenological move to immerse oneself in a pre-discursive apprehension of the world's "eventhood." This would seem to be at a considerable remove from the ethical imperatives to which many earlier injunctions to bear witness have already worked so hard to acknowledge. See for example J.D. Dewsbury, "Witnessing Space: 'Knowledge without Contemplation,'" *Environment and Planning A* 35 (2003), pp. 1907-1932. For a remarkably different view see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2003).
when it is conflated with absence and conceived as constitutive of existence....The conversion of absence into loss gives anxiety an identifiable object - the lost object - and generates the hopes that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome.”

This is why so much of this dissertation has focused on what has been “performed with performance’s remainders” with its wide constellation of sources whether they be the performing arts, the popular press, diaries, letters, manifestoes, laboratory protocols, or scientific papers. What results, we might say in the end, is a “melancholic agency who cannot know its history as the past, cannot capture its history through chronology, and does not know who it is except as the survival, the persistence of a certain unavowability that haunts the present.” Maybe, in the final instance, it was really that animating absence that I was after when I returned to Berlin, a desire to make sensible the past but also a desire which I soon realized was under an obligation to keep itself alive as desire, and not to resolve itself through satisfaction or degenerate into a manic triumph over the past. After all, there were, still many more stories to tell and ghosts to find a way to live with.

_The Jewish Cemetery in Weißensee_

On granite slabs
Fallen leaves. Under their touch
The gravestone sinks over more
into the earth: strangeland
that naturalises only the dead
ruled by the silent vampires
oak yew and laurel.
With the passing seasons illegible
your name. No one
lifts the ivy above your uniqueness
any more out of curiosity.
For you have returned
to the enigma

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that remains forever
motionless and hidden
beneath fickle impressions.

-Günter Kunert\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Kunert, \textit{Berliner Beizeiten}, p. 12.
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