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Barbara L. Miller
Western Washington University

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“Apoleptic” Ironies and “Accident-ed” Realities: World War I and Berlin Dada Photomontage

Barbara L. Miller

“We pipe, squeak, curse, and laugh out the irony:
Dada! Because we are – Antidadaists! . . . To us the
world makes no deep sense except that of a most
unfathomable nonsense; we don’t want to hear about
spirit or art . . . we finally recognize perfect mastery of
nonsense as the only sense in the world!”

– Raoul Hausmann, “The German Philistine is Annoyed”

“The Dadaists acknowledge as their sole program the
obligation to make what is happening here and now –
temporally as well as spatially – . . . which is why
they do not consider *A Thousand and One Nights* or
‘Views of Indochina’ but rather the illustrated
newspaper and the editorials of the press as the
source of their production.”

– Wieland Herzfelde, “Introduction to the First International
Dada Fair”

Introduction: World War I and the Logistics of Perception

Historically, popular accounts of World War I began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. While still recollecting this event, most post-1990s scholarly examinations use what John Horne refers to as “a kind of cultural archaeology” (xxiv) – a methodology in which more extensive international

relationships and broader sequential events are considered.¹ Focusing on a decades-long history of imperial expansions and intercontinental exchanges, these newer interpretations contextualize prewar regional border disputes and international military rivalries. Most significantly, authors look at the brewing socio-political conflicts that led to a continent-wide polarization, splitting European countries into two large bloc powers: the Triple Entente (France, Britain, and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire). Rather than fostering a political balance, the bloc alliances only served to agitate the existent political instabilities and to entrench cultural antagonisms (Krumeich 3).

Besides considering a wider prewar context of ill-fated coalition-building and calamitous decision-making, the cultural-archaeological approach also led many to address the role that emergent media technologies, such as radio, cinema, newsreels, and the photo-illustrated press, played in the conflict. For example, as soldier-writer Ernst Jünger first suggested, it was in World War I that photography and film first became an influential factor; since then, no important event has occurred that “is not captured by the artificial eye” (qtd. in Dickerman 7). Technologically reproducible images gained strategic importance, prompting Paul Virilio to conclude that the war industrialized optical technology (*War and Cinema* 15), advancing aerial surveillance and weapon systems to the degree that a war of pictures replaced “the war of objects (projectiles and missiles).” Simultaneously, the war of pictures also accelerated informational communications (5). An arsenal of uninterrupted imagery streamed from battlefield to home front; newspapers, almanacs, posters, and illustrated magazines “were flooded with fictional documents [and] cleverly touched-up photos.” Thus, World War I was the “first great military-industrial conflict” (*Vision Machine* 48-49), in which film and photography were increasingly used to help shape public opinion. As Annette Becker argues, film and photography were used propagandistically to promote the war as a path, to peace and socio-economic stability (“Faith, Ideologies and the ‘Cultures of War’”).

These more inclusive cultural-archaeological approaches have led some authors to consider a disturbing supposition that World War I may have been an unintentional war. John F. V. Keiger provocatively argues that prewar “decision-makers” may have lost “control of events, not because of greater forces bearing down on them, but for perfectly understandable short-term reasons – speed of events, lack of communication, error, misinterpretation, incompetence” – and of course, the intrusion of mass media (21). Putting aside the machinations of power-

¹ In the 1990s academic studies of the war became comparative, transnational, international, and multi-disciplinary. Very notably, an international group of historians became attached to the Historial de la Grande Guerre at Péronne, and shortly thereafter the International Society for First World War Studies began attracting researchers and publishing anthologies. See Jones, O’Brien, and Schmidt-Suppran.

hungry politicians and ill-advised social leaders, Keiger surmises that the war may have been the result of “crisis management”; it may have been as much “accidental” or “system generated” as it was “willed by governments” (25).

In any case, the result of such flawed decision-making was “the great blood sacrifice of the twentieth century” (Horne xxii). Physically maiming, psychologically scarring, and essentially eliminating a whole generation of soldiers and civilians, the staggeringly high death tolls and injury rates decimated families, undermined communities, and destabilized economies. Moreover, as Gerwarth and Horne conclude, at its cessation, Europe became a less “peaceful place” (489): the war dethroned kings, czars, Kaisers, and sultans, and produced political voids or “shatter-zones,” “large tracts of territory where the disappearance of frontiers created spaces without order or clear state authority” (493). As a result, Horne further surmises, World War I is now seen as “the epicenter of a larger cycle of violence that went from 1912 to 1923, from the Balkan Wars in 1912-13 to . . . the collapsed border zones of the former empires in Eastern Europe” (Introduction xxv). Even now, well beyond the Second World War, World War I’s fragile peace treaties and provisional armistices continue to foster socio-ideological disputes and generate deep-seated, unbridled volatilities that help instigate widespread, societal displacement within global politics (xx).

This essay argues that just as revisionist studies reframe World War I as an “epicenter,” in which unresolved disputes continue to inform Europe’s physical, national, and ideological landscapes, the artistic responses that were produced within its shatter-zones, and particularly within “loser-nations” such as Germany, captured the war’s indelible volatility and continue to shape and leave traces within many different visually critical practices today. The essay closely considers the decidedly antagonistic and unabashedly raw responses of the avant-garde group that was, arguably, most caught up within an epicenter and most embroiled in a shatter-zone. It reexamines the Berlin dadaists’ strategic practices in order to demonstrate the degree to which the group’s anti-art tactics and obfuscating syntax profoundly addressed “the intense phonic and optical activity” that “continued unabated,” as Virilio states, long after the Armistice (*Vision Machine* 49). Standing in a battle zone of postwar social derision and political violence, the Berlin dadaists used inflammatory publications, confrontational posters, critical photomontages, satirical essays, deterritorialized syntax, and anarchistic politics to register a shift to “the logistics of perception.” The war’s reliance on optical technology produced a “growing confusion between ‘ocular reality’ and its instantaneous, mediated representation,” whereby “the intensity of automatic weaponry and the new capacities of photographic equipment combine to project a final image of the world, a world in the throes of dematerialization and eventual total disintegration” (*War and Cinema* 73).

At the close of the war, to cope with and respond to what Leah Dickerman calls “a postwar mass-media explosion” (7), Berlin Dada embraced a “monstrous irony” (Hausmann, “German Philistine”). To demonstrate a disintegrating time and

space, they self-consciously adopted “apoleptic” irony (Morton 146),² telescoping past into present and present into past (Virilio, *Vision Machine* 4-7). Distances, dimensions, and meaning collapsed and traditional modes of representation became immaterial. Using media-based imagery, their cut-and-paste portraits made real the obscene effects of trench warfare. Berlin dadaists like Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Wieland Herzfelde, George Grosz, and Hannah Höch registered the degree to which opposites in their world insufferably coexisted and brutally separated. War and peace, hero and cripple, saboteur and revolutionary, sense and non-sense and, most pertinently, Dada and Anti-Dada were apoleptically “*joined as well as separated*” (147). Embracing radical fragmentation, lawless disjunction and, most radically, indeterminate syntax – or as Hausmann put it, using nonsense to make sense of postwar insanity (“Philistine”) – their works demonstrate, to borrow Virilio’s term, an “accident-ed” sense of reality, the shock of which continues to resonate today.

Photomontage and Apoleptic Irony

It can be argued that the identity of the Berlin dadaists, to a greater extent than their Zurich counterparts, evolved distinctly out of their engagement with media-based activities, through which they moved from passive “armchair” responses or “weak-kneed” resistances to what group members called a full-fledged “hatred of the press, hatred of advertising, hatred of sensations.” Berlin Dada actively began to engage with everyday life, which Huelsenbeck referred to as “the noise of the street” (40).

Early on, the soon-to-be Berlin dadaists published a number of covertly critical articles in anti-establishment journals such as *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm* (Zervigón 84). Finding the constraints of these politically understated publications too limiting and vulnerable to censorship, in 1917 they established their own publishing house, Herzfelde’s Malik-Verlag. Taking matters into their own hands, the group revived the defunct art journal *Die neue Jugend* and established a number of short-lived journals in 1919 and 1920 (Simmons “*Neue Jugend*” 46). The Malik-Verlag also published several of George Grosz’s lithographic portfolios, featuring openly critical depictions of the military and paramilitary’s use of force; these images were sarcastically blasphemous, cynically anti-militarist, and pitilessly brutal.

By February 1918, while the war was still raging, the small network of artists involved in these publications formed the short-lived Berlin Dada Club. Two years later the group staged its most celebrated event, the First International Dada Fair.

² Poleptic irony, states Timothy Morton, is when the viewer knows something that a character in a narrative doesn’t know yet. Apoleptic is its “weird sister.” This second form of irony is retroactive; apoleptic irony is when we feel “a narrative’s ending causes us to look back differently at the narrative.”

In the midst of the postwar social and political upheavals, with the help of international cohorts, the Dada Club exhibited a spectrum of politically motivated anti-art visual productions and anti-war media-based works. While as a group Berlin Dada more or less disbanded shortly after the event, the Dada Fair's importance lived on. Not only did the 1920 event represent an all-inclusive "climax" of their incendiary anti-art and text-based activities but, through the group's inclusion of extensive self-documentation, it also preserved their political critiques and confrontational strategies.

For example, Huelsenbeck edited a 160-page commemorative *Dada Almanach*, which included contributions from Zurich, Paris, and elsewhere. Additionally, Heartfield and Herzfelde published a four-page exhibition catalog. Along with Heartfield, Grosz, and Hausmann's written essays and images, the catalog included the group's attack on all previous modernist expressions and avant-garde movements; in particular the Berlin group railed against German Romanticism and German expressionism. As Huelsenbeck put it, such movements were a "moral safety valve" and "compensatory phenomenon" that dangerously promoted patriotic ideals, sustaining the status quo of the middle class and the political instability of Germany (43). Herzfelde also published a list of the 174 works by seventy-seven German and foreign artists included in the Fair.³

Unsurprisingly, many of the works installed in the Dada Fair were media-based publications. Along with Grosz's published portfolio *Gott mit uns*, the group also displayed a large number of posters. With antagonistic slogans such as "Art is dead," "Down with art," and "Everyone can Dada" ("DaDa kann JEdeR"), these posters were meant to subvert the trafficking of art and to reveal, as Huelsenbeck stated, the "large-scale swindle" (43) of a socially complicit art market. More directly, the group attacked the very codes used to produce meaning and the laws that structure language. Strongly believing that the German language had irreparably degenerated, Hausmann began using letters as abstract shapes. Rather than treating them as building blocks that produced words, he used letters to reference guttural noise. In many of his media-based works, language became deterritorialized from its national context (Biro "Raoul Hausmann's Revolutionary Media" 37) and meaning reverted into indeterminate acoustical sounds. But of all the irreverent and combative art forms exhibited, the one that is recognized as most typical of Berlin Dada was the photomontage.

Though there are contradictory accounts as to which group members first formulated the practice of photomontage (Grosz and Heartfield versus Höch and

³ However, as Doherty points out, the number of actual works in the show was much greater; a couple dozen extra works, not cited in the catalog, appeared in photo-documentation and were referenced in critical reviews (Translator's introduction 96).

Hausmann⁴), most writers agree that at some point in 1917 Berlin Dada artists began snipping, ripping, and pasting images from the illustrated pages of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and *Der Querschnitt*. Very quickly, as Hausmann himself recalls, the group formed a consensus: “in agreement with George Grosz, John Heartfield, Johannes Baader, and Hannah Höch . . . we decided to call these works *photomontages*” (“New Painting” 61). Beyond the debate on attribution, there continues to be some discussion as to the term’s practical application, particularly in regard to individual Dada Club members’ interpretations of the cut-and-paste practice.

Some authors point out that Heartfield’s photomontage superficially differs from Höch’s and Hausmann’s works. Very visibly, Heartfield, the *monteur* (mechanic or fitter) re-photographed his source images and then assembled his negatives, producing an integrated, surprisingly seamless pre-Photoshop photomontage. In contrast, Höch and Hausmann cut out and glued together ragged-edged source materials. Their generally text-heavy images appear to be directly derived from collage practices. (The French root word *coller* in fact means “to glue.”) Additionally, as Arndt Niebisch observes, Höch and Hausmann assembled a wider variety of “heterogeneous material such as photographs, writing, and . . . other images” (96) and, at times, referred to their works as *Klebebilder* or “glue images” – a still-popular 19th century, craft-based “women’s” pastime, more generally known as scrapbooking. As it turns out, while there is clearly a distinction between the various dadaists’ more developed formulations, during the War *all* Berlin dadaists (along with a wide swath of the German population) participated in the production of *Klebebilder*, which early in the War evolved into a popular covert messaging practice.

During the war, as Brigid Doherty documents, groups of German women “gathered in so-called *Klebestuben* (glue rooms) to assemble albums composed of newspaper and magazine clippings, postcards, and reproductions of works of art,” producing what they called “*Klebebilder*” (glued-pictures) and “*Klebebücher*” (glue albums) (“Berlin” 94-95; Zervigón 40). Some also produced handcrafted picture postcards, many of which found their way into *Liebesgaben* (gifts of love) or care-packages sent to the front. Correspondingly, frontline soldiers not only took pleasure in receiving these communiqués, as Herzfelde later recollected, but also “attempted to make something similar” to send back home. The soon-to-be Berlin dadaists took note of these postcard communications and began to send their alternative “*liebesgaben*” messages.

⁴ Competing accounts suggest each of these pairs of Berlin Dada members was the first true advocates of photomontage. However, in 1964, “forty years later,” dadaist Hans Richter argued, “it is impossible to ascribe the invention with certainty to one or other of them,” and, in true Dada fashion, ambiguously suggests that both claims are valid (117).

At first, volunteer-soldier Grosz was caught up in the war. However, by 1915 he had become contemptuous⁵ and began “specializing,” as Herzfelde puts it, “in sending care-packages to annoy soldiers at the front.” In one particular “care-package,” which Herzfelde had received after being drafted and stationed at the Western front, Grosz included a number of useless and inappropriate items, such as a dainty shoehorn and a pair of black sleeve protectors. Additionally, as Herzfelde relates, Grosz clipped and combined at will a series of unconnected images, “advertisements for hernia belts, student song-books and dog food, labels from schnaps- and wine-bottles, and photographs from picture papers [illustrated press],” haphazardly assembling them into a glued-picture (qtd. in Richter 117). Grosz also sent glued-picture-postcards to Heartfield, and the two began using “similarly hand-finished postcards” in their personal correspondence.⁶

Clearly, as Doherty and others argue, Herzfelde, Grosz, Heartfield, Hausmann, and Höch understood the “inflammatory” potential of this widespread popular pastime; they saw how messages that “would have been censored had they been said in words” readily circulated as media-sourced glued-pictures (Herzfelde qtd. in Doherty “Berlin” 94). As Heartfield put it, glue-pictures were a way to get messages “to relatives back home, covertly, so to speak.” Definitively, The collective employed such subversive practices to crack open the closed system of pervasive pro-war representational communiqués, which in turn put them on the path “toward the invention of photomontage” (Heartfield qtd. in Doherty “Berlin” 94; also see Zervigón 43). Or as Grosz put it, what started as inflammatory jokes were redeployed as a “conscious artistic technique” (qtd. in Richter 117).

Very convincingly, Benson argues that the craft-based *Klebebild* format had a wide structural effect on the whole group’s approach to image-making, and can be applied not just to their photomontages, but a variety of the Club’s media-based practices: “Dada handbills, journals, announcements, invitations and the like” were all provocatively related, Benson attests, to *Klebebild* productions (*Raoul Hausmann* 125). The group’s incorporation of “the ‘anonymous masses’” interventionist form of communication was strategic, for as Hausmann stated, the adoption of a popular practice demonstrated the Club’s aversion to playing artist, in favor of assembling work like an engineer or fitter (Hausmann, qtd. in Ades 12; Richter 118). In short, the pastime was the foundational strategy that propelled

⁵ In 1914, Grosz enthusiastically enlisted but was released six months later for medical reasons. In January 1917, Grosz was recalled to the war, but after a month was transferred to a mental hospital and later discharged.

⁶ Heartfield and Grosz’s “postcards” may also have been in response to their wartime employment. During the war, Heartfield worked as a film set designer for the Grünbaum brothers, producing propaganda films. In 1917, Heartfield and Grosz (after his medical discharge) worked on animated films for the Military Educational Film Service (later renamed UFA). See Biro, *Dada Cyborg* 86-87.

Berlin photomontagists to rip apart news media's manipulative messages, ironically reassembling the dispatches and exploiting the ever-widening gap between actual events and propagandistic messages. Using a purposefully obfuscating visual syntax of deformed sentences, discombobulated words, and amputated or out-of-context images, they ridiculed postwar political leaders – revolutionary and counter-revolutionary. Finding flaws on all sides and at every level of the devastating upheaval, they inserted guttural utterances and nonsensical phrases. Hence, regardless of preference for seamless or ragged edges, as Niebisch concludes, “the term ‘photomontage’ is, within the Dada discourse, also justified for images that do not exclusively consist of photographs, but combine photographic elements with other media such as writing or painting” (96). It is justified for works such as Hausmann's *Klebebild (aus dem Dadaco)* [Glued-Picture (from the Dada Atlas)], in which the Berlin dadaist, early on, used apoleptic irony to crack open propagandistic communiqués and brutally expose the shatter-zone experiences of a postwar Berlin on the verge of collapse.⁷

Hausmann's Anti-Portrait-Portrait⁸

Hausmann produced *Klebebild (aus dem Dadaco)* (or *Gurk*)⁹ in early 1919, the moment in which media censorship was somewhat lifted and photos from a variety of private, official, and medical sources “began to appear publicly and to be collected” (Hüppauf 50). He subsequently published his melee of French and German phrases sitting diagonally, horizontally, and vertically across an ovoid shape, all residing on a blue construction paper background, in *Der Dada 2* (1919) (fig. 1). Though he does not directly use recently released disturbing wartime

⁷ Though Huelsenbeck did publish his *Almanach* as part of the Dada Fair in 1920, *The Dada Atlas* remained an incomplete, unpublished project that, in some ways, parallels other dadaists' attempts to produce international anthologies; these include Huelsenbeck's *Dadaco* and Tzara's *Dadaglobe*. In 2016, however, curators Samantha Friedman and Adrian Sudhalter reconstructed Tzara's *Dadaglobe* for an exhibition/catalog at the MoMA.

⁸ Michel Giroud uses the term “antiportrait.” However, as Benson states, he uses the term to suggest anonymity. In contrast, I use the longer “anti-portrait-portrait” to refer to the notion that identity in Dada photomontage was radically under erasure, though ironically still present. Caught in the context of horrific daily experiences, Hausmann's anti-portrait-portrait is more associated with identificatory alienation and the growing postwar sense of figural ambiguity and indeterminacy (Benson, *Raoul Hausmann*, 138). In it the interconnectedness that writers such as Braidotti associate with nomadic critical thinking turns horrific. See below.

⁹ *GURK* is one of three similarly constructed “anti-portrait-portraits”; the other two are *Dr. Max Ruest* (an amalgam of Anselm Ruest, the anarchist philosopher, and an ironic reference to Max Stirner, also a philosopher), published in *Der Dada 1* (1919), and *Mynona* (philosopher, poet, and satirist Salomo Friedlaender), also produced in 1919, but unpublished (Benson, *Raoul Hausmann* 135-41).

portraits, which he and Höch had observed on vacation.¹⁰ Hausmann, though, only included the likeness to undermine the popular practice, in which families glued miniature portraits of their soldier relatives into commemorative scenes: a thick black line, running at a slight diagonal across the entire photo, obliterates most of the figure's discernable features. Instead of a likeness, the obscured miniature portrait is now a backdrop for the figure's caricatured eye. Additionally, Hausmann re-contextualized the popular practice. Rather than placing the poet alongside either a German leader or recognizable war hero, as in the commemorative pastime, Hausmann inserted the miniature photograph into a swirling soup of textual and graphic marks. Here too, his actions allude to previous dadaists' works and prewar avant-garde innovational practices, such as cubist *papier collé* and futurist "words-in-freedom,"¹¹ but simultaneously disrupt such citations.

In *Klebebild (Gurk)*, Hausmann self-consciously grabbed snippets from graphics published in *Dada 3*, a Zurich Dada publication from December 1918, reducing the clippings to pared phrases and truncated graphics. Specifically, the forehead text "pan-pan-pan" came from Pierre Albert-Biro's phonetic poem, "Crayon Bleu," and the hair and left eyebrow graphics from Arthur Segal's woodcut (Benson, "Conventions"; Hage). His act retains some of the earlier artistic innovations, while his use of rapid-fire layering moves beyond futurist exploration of dynamic tension and onomatopoeic noise¹² and Cubist investigation of material physicality and illusionistic planes (Shiff, "Picasso's Touch" and "Constructing Physicality"). Take, for instance, the long black line that runs down the center of the figure's face. Though the broken-yet-dominant mark elongates the figure's nose, it simultaneously slips behind layers of newsprint, decommissioning its ability to

¹⁰ In the summer of 1918, the year prior to the publication of *Der Dada 2*, Hausmann and Höch took a vacation on the island of Usedom. There, in the little village of Heidebrink, they noticed a large framed oleograph hanging above the bed in their rented room. In it, a youthful, highly decorated Kaiser Wilhelm stood surrounded by his notable ancestors. "Slightly higher up, but still in the middle, stood a young grenadier under whose helmet the face of their landlord, Herr Felten was pasted in." Landlord Herr Felten was one of many veterans and families who bought studio-produced oleo- or photo-lithographic mounts and, into the blanked out areas, scrapbooked in their photographic likenesses (Richter 116-17).

¹¹ Hausmann discusses his knowledge of cubist and futurist practices in "New Painting and Photomontage" (61).

¹² Taking such explorations further, in the 1930s, Hausmann developed a formal theory of "Présentismus," which, as Niebisch states, centered on hypersensitivity or haptic perceptions of words and phonetic letters and a focus on the present. Niebisch describes Hausmann's presentism as "a fresh attitude toward the world that focuses on the present moment and not on the future or the past" and quotes the artist: "'Let us sweep away all the prejudices that yesterday something was good or that it will be better tomorrow, no! Let us grasp the today by the second!'" (161). Here, however, such orientation toward the present broadsides the viewer and exposes an internal rawness.

define the nose. Likewise, on either side of the face, curving outlines give shape to two lopsided, protruding ears. Yet, a newspaper clipping occludes much of the figure's right ear. If one reads the text, the ear falls away. If not, the text merely flaps off to the side. Meanwhile, the second ear appears to be poorly secured; the left ear looks as if it is slipping down toward the gapped letters "G U R K," which independently float below the cartoonish head. These isolated four letters are, to a greater degree than the tiny photo, the most direct reference to the poet, Paul Gurk. It is on this point – the point of recognition – however, that apoleptic irony truly sets in, and the earsplitting noise of the street, what Huelsenbeck referred to as "the frenzied cataract of life" (40) percolates up, revealing a horrific form of interconnectedness.

At a slight angle to the graphical line, which represents the figure's eradicated nose, Hausmann included the text "Bessonnea[u]," a French term referring to a type of portable field-tent that was used to house frontline surgical hospitals and facilitate emergency triage treatment during the war. Once the word is recognized, the brutally graphic results of war are exposed and an ontological gap within the figure opens up. The cut-and-pasted image suddenly changes into an anti-portrait-portrait – "G U R K" is no longer Gurk the poet, but a discombobulated, surgically altered face in which the very concept of figural identity has undergone erasure and subjectivity has become a gapping mess of stitched-together features.

Unlike either Picasso's *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (1910), in which the artist portrayed a distorted but nonetheless still readable portrait of his dealer, or John Singer Sargent's *Gassed* (1919), in which the painter documented a wartime atrocity via a recognizable reference to Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1568) (Lubin 36), Hausmann moved beyond modernist flatness, allegorical allusion, and popular reference. He also avoided directly alluding to those disturbing postwar photographs of returning veterans, which Ernst Friedrich would publish in *War Against War* in 1924: an unbearably graphic though incredibly important picture book that contained twenty-four medical photographs of facially wounded veterans, taken from Dr. Joseph's wartime surgical clinic, and included captions written in four languages.¹³ Yet Hausmann's early photomontage is contextually relevant and physically explicit, though not in the way others have argued.

To be sure, Berlin dadaists made allusions to robotically augmented figures, leading some writers, very interestingly, to draw out a cyborgian underbelly of the Club's visual work (Biro, *Cyborg*). However, despite these writers' critical stance, to some degree such analyses reinforce notions associated with the industrialization of war, whereby soldiers are reduced to robotic cogs in an overbearingly vicious mechanized war-machine, and emphasize the prosthetic transformation of wounded soldiers, whose newly minted mechanical

¹³ In 1924, Ernst mounted his Anti-war Museum exhibition, which included Dix's gruesome antiwar etchings (Sontag 82-83).

appendages made them fit for “home duty” – at times returning to the very factories that had produced the weapons and fire power that sustained the war.

Berlin dadaists’ project was neither to promote prosthetic mitigation or surgical breakthroughs nor to share public sympathy or political apathy. Indeed, their work pointedly resists such an agenda. While the group may have expressed a desire “to promote both social and political change” (Biro, *Cyborg* 15), Hausmann’s *Klebebild (Gurk)* is less a response, as Bergius puts it, “to the first pictorial turn in media history when the text in magazines was replaced by sensational photography,” than an “elemental”¹⁴ reaction to the new “forces” of carnage produced by the epoch’s industrialization of combat warfare. Here Hausmann documented the degree to which a new culture of physical brutalization and linguistic deterritorialization had entered the syntax of visual art and had caused accident-ed reality to be telescoped into the work of art.

In this early photomontage, Hausmann indexed the degree to which the bodies of soldier-combatants were disarmingly caught in the crosshairs of technological barbarism, which only intensified with the stalemate of trench warfare. World War I’s signature underground battlefield led to a host of deadly technological innovations, such as air-delivered bombshells and modernized shrapnel fire. These innovations resulted in an unprecedented number of head and face wounds. Meanwhile, with the advent of frontline hospitals, housed in purpose-designed tents such as the Bessonneau, more soldiers survived ever-greater assaults.¹⁵ Postwar communities witnessed the return of veterans irreparably maimed physically and irreversibly altered psychologically. Hausmann’s glued-together fragments can be interpreted less as a documentation of these unfortunate figures than as a representational strategy in which the very notion of what counted as figural identity was technologically ripped open or, to use Virilio’s term, accident-ed.

Virilio has argued that the true measure of technological impact is not the specific invention, but the large-scale accidents that technologies cause. To invent the ship and the train is to invent the shipwreck and the train derailment. “The ship that sinks,” he explains, “says much more to me about technology than the ship that floats!” (Virilio, “Dialogues”). Extending his logic, trench warfare was the diagnostic measure of the world’s first fully industrialized war: early on, at the battle of the Marne, rather suffer a first defeat, German soldiers dug in. At that moment, troop mobility ended, and the war was “trench-wrecked”; it became a

¹⁴ With Hans Arp, Ivan Puni, and László Moholy-Nagy, Hausmann wrote a brief manifesto, “A Call for Elemental Art” (1921, originally published in *De Stijl* 4) (reprinted and translated in Mertins and Jennings 241). The manifesto proclaims the need for artists to use the experiential forces and elemental dynamism of the present epoch in which the artist resides, and to reject style, beauty, and usefulness.

¹⁵ Strikingly, at least fifteen percent of all injuries were classified in the new category, the face and head wound (Spiller 74-86; Fineman 85-114).

circular war in which battles were fought and refought. Trench warfare derailed World War I and turned battlefield advancement into a circular vortex of escalating barbaric intensity. Moreover, its resultant “signature” war wound, the “broken face,” “accident-ed” the very concept of historical portraiture and the future of identificatory representation.

Hovering on a starkly vacant blue background, Hausmann’s gapping ovoid contains the tattered remnants of a past representational ideal; though the hodge-podge of features remains structurally recognizable, his broken mirror removes any cohesive details that might have led to a positive identification. Instead of reparation, his anti-portrait-portrait reveals an experiential rawness: before the viewer’s eyes, the nose turns into a gash and the cut-and-paste aspects of the glued-picture reprise the jagged physiognomy of many returning soldiers. Hausmann’s *Klebebild (Gurk)* can only be experienced in an activity of production (see Barthes 157) within which apoleptic irony, the “waking up inside an object, of being amongst things, *in medias res*” (Morton 148) horrifically reverberates. Caught in the frenzied cacophony of postwar obscenity, his glued-portrait makes manifest the actuality of last week’s explosions. In short, it breaks the rules of rational or dimensional perception.

Hausmann’s anti-portrait portrait exposes “*gapsplotation*: the aesthetic exploitation of a gap between $1+n$ levels of signification” (Morton 146). His anti-portrait-portrait exploits the collapse of dimensions, which is “introduced when one object put its footprint into another” (Morton 147). Hausmann’s vacated glued-picture destroys the illusion of a postwar reclamation of prewar identificatory signifiers, in which surgeons attempted to repair broken faces, but most often, even after multiple operations, left veterans irrevocably scarred. His post-operational strategy of stitching together text and lines introduces not covert knowledge, the reading between the lines, but inter-objective gaps that telescope into one another and momentarily coalesce into heterogeneous hybrids. In short, photomontage is much more than merely a response that borrows the language of illustrated media. It is a diagnostic within which technologically reproduced media are accident-ed and turn in on themselves. It reveals what Hannah Höch referred to as “photomatter” (qtd. in Boswell 17), which breaks through the dialectical optics of perception to show that “failure, friction, collision and collapse have to be viewed as characteristics of substance itself” (Broeckmann et al. 3). Literally coming out of the “blue,” *Klebebild (Gurk)* activates what Virilio calls the second feature of the accident, anxiety and anguish, which resonates for generations and flips back around to its beginnings (“Museum of Accidents”). At the time, Berlin dadaists all understood the far-reaching significance of photomontage and provocatively, in a subsequent group activity, embraced a strategy of apoleptic irony and aesthetic irreverence: together the Berlin Club Dada altered Otto Dix’s already disturbing painting, *War Cripples*.

Everyone can DADA!

Although Otto Dix was not formally affiliated with the Berlin Dada group, his *War Cripples (45% Fit for Service)*, with self-portrait,¹⁶ was included in the 1920 Dada Fair. They did so less to show the work than to demonstrate the wide-ranging and mutable strategies of photomontage: photographs documenting the Dada Fair's opening reveal that Berlin dadaists "glued" (or hung) two of their photomontages onto the surface of Dix's work. They placed Grosz's *Victim of Society* (oil and graphite on canvas with photomontage and collage of papers and buttons) over the face of Dix's "parade-leader" and Grosz's *Gallery of German Manly Beauty, Prize Competition: "Who is the Most Beautiful??"* (a fan-shaped photomontage, previously published as part of the front cover in the single-issue journal *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (Everyman His Own Football) on top of the artist's representation of a prosthetic boot, changing the painting into a "rectified" photomontage. A close examination of Dix's painting and an analysis of the group's alterations disclose the degree to which Berlin Dada hacked into Dix's cynical syntax and used *War Cripples* as a footprint from which they lodged a sincerely ambiguous critique of Berlin's war-in-peace postwar culture.

In the unaltered *War Cripples*, Dix depicted four medal-and-ribbon-wearing petty-officer veterans proudly marching in a parade. Neither hero nor martyr, theirs was not a homecoming celebration. Instead, Dix used the demonstration to cynically address those "ordinary working-class soldiers who made up the majority of the frontline troops" and who, despite their extensively war-torn bodies that were increasingly seen as economic burdens to society, refused "to acknowledge their connections to the exploited proletariat" (Biro, *Dada Cyborg* 169).

Ostensibly, Dix realistically depicted a host of extremely disabled war veterans, many of whom he would have encountered on the streets (though a significant number of the most mutilated never came home, since many were interned in military hospitals and hospices). His graphic representations most likely also indexed memories of seeing frontline injuries.¹⁷ However, more significantly, Dix's source material would have come from a variety of media sources. Mechanically refitted veterans were featured very prominently in propagandistic imagery used to promote the country's "technological prowess in

¹⁶ The painting is alternatively subtitled *Four of Them Don't Add Up to a Whole Man* (4'11" x 6'6" oil on canvas). The Nazis seized *War Cripples* in 1933, and after exhibiting it in the Degenerate Art exhibition, destroyed it (probably in 1942). Dix's work, with the modifications described below, may be seen in photographs of the Dada Fair, some of which are accessible at <https://www.bpk-bildagentur.de/>. (Search, for example, item no. 2.00059445.)

¹⁷ Dix returned to this subject matter throughout his career and, in 1924, produced a portfolio of fifty etching, aquatint, and drypoint renderings.

successfully reintegrating the wounded veteran into the workforce. Parallel to the modern industrial might of the German war machine, prosthetic engineering could keep the economy going at home" by helping to rehabilitate thousands of disabled postwar veterans and returning them to the workforce (Apel 66). Besides illustrated news media, prosthetic enhancements were also highlighted in publications related to *Krüppelfürsorge*, a term for the rapidly expanding field of postwar disabled veteran care; examples include brochures issued by the orthopedics industry and the veterans relief organizations (Apel 62, 66).¹⁸ These documents, however, served a secondary purpose; they demonstrated the degree to which the manufacture of prosthetic attachments absolved the very industrial system that had instigated those life-altering injuries in the first place. In the postwar period, the mechanization of weaponry was turned around and put into reparation services, supplying disabled soldiers with a range of prosthetics. The irony of such a reversal was not lost on the Berlin dadaists, particularly Hausmann.

In "The Prosthesis Economy (Thoughts of a Kapp Officer)," Hausmann assumes the identity of an "officer" and sardonically comments that the war has made prosthetics "as necessary for the common man today as wheat beer was previously" (qtd. in Simmons, "Men of Nails" 234). He continues: "Prosthetic man, therefore, "is the better man, made aristocratic, so to speak by merit of the Great War. . . . Yes, the Brandenburg artificial arm: It fits everyone and everyone wants it" (qtd. in Borck 8). After a number of tongue-in-cheek statements on the benefits and potential abuses of "awarding" everyone the devices, Hausmann takes his ventriloquism to an eerily prophetic conclusion: perhaps a prosthesis-driven reconstructive economy is better than its alternative, a "council [or military] dictatorship" (Simmons 236).

In *War Cripples*, veteran Dix brutally attacked the government's and industry's woefully inadequate efforts to rehabilitate multiply maimed soldiers. Documenting those "unfortunates" who were jettisoned from the system and, ultimately, from society itself, Dix clearly demonstrated the nation's continued exploitation of working-class veterans and ironically cataloged the "advantages" of upper-class officers.

The three frontline veterans in the painting are missing limbs. In the place of amputated arms and legs, they sport a variety of mass-produced yet crudely designed prostheses: ill-fitting peg-legs, one-size-fits-all crutches, almost-useless single-purpose metal-hooks, and pram-like wrought-iron wheelchairs. In contrast to these mass-produced prostheses, which clearly offer each war-modified-veteran only a *modicum* of reclaimed mobility and functionality, the fitted attachments shown on the frock-coated figure bringing up the rear (representing Dix) are of a different caliber and class.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the flood of postwar prosthetic-wearing veterans in media imagery and the political struggles associated with disabled soldiers, see Poore and Fineman.

Upper-class Dix is a “well-heeled” amputee: the dotted-line schematics sketched onto his coat and pants reveal a specially handcrafted, mechanically jointed left leg and arm. Instead of a peg, Dix imagined his veteran-other-self as a fully outfitted amputee, complete with a functioning artificial leg. His prosthetic walking appendage keeps pace with his intact right leg (though its misplaced spring suggests that the prosthesis swings in the wrong direction). Similarly, Dix envisioned a working prosthetic left arm. Instead of a mass-produced truss, used as a universal base for interchangeable attachments such as hooks, rods, drills, claws, hammers, and eating utensils, Dix’s amended arm is permanently affixed to an articulated mechanical hand, able to push his comrade’s wheelchair.

Dix’s pageant of physically maimed veterans gives any viewer pause. As one scrutinizes the work, the “horror” within the image resides less in the loss of limbs – which to be sure represents great devastation and personal anguish – than in the numerous facial mutilations. As others point out, unlike the loss of limbs, which was already known in the civilian context of factory accidents, farming injuries, and arterial diseases (Pichel 26), the unprecedented type and number of facial injuries – caused by shrapnel fire, trench warfare, and aerial bombing – were among the most terrifying injuries, many of which also included a loss of sensory functionality. Indeed, face wounds were deemed more socially and psychologically devastating than limb amputations (Biernoff 668-69). As much as trench warfare continues to distinguish World War I from all other wars, the “broken face” is that war’s signature wound.

In *War Cripples*, Dix disturbingly rendered these horrendous facial mutilations. For example, the parade captain’s cheek is partially missing. Ghoulishly, reparative surgery has left his pearly teeth permanently exposed, protruding from his cheek. A mass of raw scar tissue, possibly an improperly healed tubular flap, highlights the area and extends over his missing ear. Cruelly suggesting an attempted return to normalcy, the veteran impossibly puckers together what remains of his lips and smokes a lit cigar, which is held aloft by a ridiculous, “purposely-designed” attachment, a small hook-orthesis. Ironically though, the torpedo-shaped cigar (or perfecto) in its holder serves less to emphasize the soldier’s regained functionality than to accentuate the figure’s *exploded* facial features. The veteran’s gaping features reveal how, for facially wounded soldiers, the battle was far from over, and affirm the degree to which early surgical procedures at best offered only a modicum of amelioration. However, it also addresses a broader cultural complicity.

World War I was “a vast laboratory” not only for psychiatric but also surgical doctors (Linden and Jones 629). It led surgeons such as Harold Gillies to attempt innovative procedures and, in the process, modernized reconstructive surgery. Without doubt, the New Zealand-born Gillies was the most innovative and determined war surgeon. Operating first in temporary field hospitals and then in a special division at Queen Mary’s Hospital in Sidcup, England, he stressed the importance of teamwork (Bamji). Gillies performed alongside a collaborative team

of creative individuals: dentists, radiologists, painters, sculptors, and photographers.¹⁹ Significantly, Gillies is credited with advancing and popularizing the use of “tube flaps” or “pedicles,” which, before the discovery of penicillin, enabled skin grafts to remain connected to living tissue and take hold without infectious rejection, thereby making restorative surgery possible. Gillies, however, was not alone: on the Continent, facial reconstructive services were available under the direction of individual practitioners such as Hippolyte Morestin (Paris), Varaztad Kazanjian (northern France), Johannes Esser (Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna), and Jacques Joseph (Berlin).

In postwar Germany, facially disfigured veterans were caught in an impossible aesthetic bind with political implications for the Right. Long before contemporary performance artist Orlan would critique feminine ideals in art and plastic surgery, Dr. Joseph’s approach to reconstructive surgery was about visualizing unrealistic artistic principles of beauty. He based his work on “a selected combination of classical Greek sculpture, the high art of Leonardo da Vinci and the nationalist racial aesthetics of prewar Germany” (Feo 21). Parallel to the realities of available one-size-fits-all, low-functioning postwar prosthetic devices, Dr. Joseph’s well-meaning aspirations, ideologically trapped in idealist aesthetics, far outpaced the actual possibilities of early restorative surgery.

Plastic surgery was still a nascent profession, and soldiers often endured up to thirty painful operations with no guarantee of success. Even after multiple procedures, despite ongoing surgical advances, post-operational disfigurement remained profound. Dr. Arbuthnot Lane, an associate of Dr. Gillies compassionately referred to many of his veterans as “unfortunates”; other surgeons, and sometimes the patients themselves, used terms such as “Frankenstein’s monsters,” “gargoyles” (Van Bergen 322), and, more commonly, “broken faces.” Nevertheless, no mass rehabilitation industry developed.²⁰ Instead of being patriotically willed back into the workforce through work (*Arbeiter*) campaigns and programs, the rapidly developing rightwing government designated these unfortunates as sites of political contestation. Too shocking to be rehabilitated into the workforce, these veterans were deemed potential foci of revolution and social disruption and, particularly in Germany, were forcibly, though often willingly, prohibited from “reintegrating” into society. As a result,

¹⁹ Though most of these documentary photographs were censored in Germany during the war, twenty-four of the photographs from Dr. Joseph’s wartime surgical clinics accompanied Ernst Friedrich’s 1924 pacifist work, *War Against War*” (Feo 24).

²⁰ In the postwar period, a number of tin masks were produced. However, unlike today’s more scalable and customizable 3D printing services, in this period cosmetic mask making was craft-based and only a few practitioners, like Anna Coleman Ladd and Francis Derwent, worked to help facially deformed veterans. Furthermore, the non-flexible materials limited the usefulness of the masks and, as a result, few were produced (Bierhoff).

thousands were interned in army hospitals where they sat out the remaining days of their now shortened, physically and psychologically painful lives. With little recourse and no hope, some even committed suicide.²¹

Registering Dix's cynical critique and seeking to expose its self-ironic complicity, the Berlin dadaists used *War Cripples* as a launching platform or supportive footprint and placed Grosz's framed, mixed media photomontage *Victim of Society* (which he later renamed *Uncle August, the Unhappy Inventor*) over the parade leader's head and upper torso. In doing so, the group exploited the gap between the reclamation of physical functionality and the imposition of unrealistic aesthetic ideals. Grosz's mechanically retrofitted and facially disfigured, white-coated medical charlatan sincerely and ironically portrays Dr. Joseph's "beauty" gone awry.

Most prominently, rising out of the would-be surgeon's forehead, Grosz's Victim-Uncle nonchalantly sports not an Athena-like goddess leaping from Zeus's forehead, but a doughnut- or bagel-shaped growth oozing from a viscous bulge. To this were added several useless attachments: Grosz permanently affixed a rotated question mark to the protruding yet concave calcification. Stitched into place with real-world buttons, which punctuate either end of the grammatical glyph, the symbol reads as either a caricatured hairdo or a flipped-up concave mirror (which early physicians used to funnel light into cavities, as they examined ears, noses, and throats). Buttoned down for dress-code normalcy, the rotated question mark ironically adds uncertainty to the construction.

Along with the grotesque head-lump and ambiguous graphic-affectation, Grosz also included a flap: a Goodyear rubber tube, reminiscent of the "tube" pedicles mentioned above. Hideously rolled up for extended use, the Victim-Uncle's rubber strip runs the length of his left shoulder; its spongy spool-end butts up against and supports the figure's artificially extended chin. To his right, above the figure's head, a spare tube hangs on a clamp, waiting for additional surgical action.

Further emphasizing the quackery of some in the medical profession, Grosz inexplicably added a straight razor. Though possibly poking fun at those disparate few soldiers who wounded themselves to escape combat, the razor also invokes barbaric barber-surgeons who operated in the medieval period. The blade hovers around the figure's neck, seemingly, about to lop off the excess skin of Uncle's flapping jowl.

Additionally, Grosz attached a nonsensical series of photographic extras. For example, he pasted a mechanical device, possibly a spark plug, over the figure's

²¹ From her studies of medical archives, Apel concludes that doctors dominated the lives of postwar veterans and "thousands of disabled soldiers never left the medical world." In particular, those with facial wounds were "hidden away, ashamed and grotesque, in secret hospitals. Many soldiers reported as dead or missing were in reality living in these hospitals" (61).

nose. The mechanism serves no rehabilitation function and would permanently disable an actual subject's ability to smell. Grosz also added two eyes, rotating one almost 180° and gluing it on top of the Victim-Uncle's left eye. The other, ghoulishly invoking an imaginary trove of spare body parts remaindered in the war, covers the figure's left ear. Anticipating Stelarc's body art experiments, Grosz' non-functioning, arbitrarily situated third eye appears to be a bizarre attempt to repurpose the lost functionality of a hearing organ, which he turns into a synesthetic seeing-ear. Likewise, a pair of tonally out-of-sync lips covers much of the figure's appended heavy moustache. Though aesthetically pleasing, the fake lips interrupt the fictitious Victim-Uncle's capacity to speak and, rather than mitigating, worsen the figure's functional impairment.

Grosz's victim of society ambiguously oscillates between doctor and patient, surgeon and butcher, aesthetic portrait and horrific obliteration, collapsing dimensions and staging differences between them. Simultaneously joined and separated, "Uncle August/ Victim of Society" is a Frankensteinian mad scientist self experimenter, insanely hatching post-human surgeries outside the scope of normative restoration, *and* an unfortunate at his rope's end, voluntarily undergoing endless operations in the hopes of any modicum of improvement. Placed on top of the parade leader's face, Grosz' Victim-Uncle photomontage-painting suggests a general sense of medical complicity but also implies a wider notion of social befuddlement and professional collusion. Fundamentally though, like many of the group's text-based works, the hybrid conglomeration remains critically indeterminate, fiercely maintaining its internal nonsense and resisting any holistic form of interpretation. This indeterminacy is further emphasized by the group's second alternation of Dix's painting: the dadaists attached Grosz' *Gallery of German Manly Beauty, Prize Competition: "Who is the Most Beautiful??"* (previously published on the front cover of *Everyman His Own Football*) (fig. 2).

To further undermine the gap between beauty and reparation, the reproduction of Grosz's work was situated on top of Dix's prosthetic boot advertisement, between an idealized representation of a male face in profile and a pointing finger. In the original text-based work, Grosz positioned portraits of six officials, associated with the newly formed Weimar Social Democratic Party (SPD), across the surface of a Japanese fan. Philipp Scheidemann and Friedrich Ebert (the new republic's leading politician and strategist) sit prominently in the center; lower down, toward the handle of the exotic commodity, Gustav Noske, Erich Ludendorff, and Matthias Erzberger (defense and finance minister) dangle slightly to one side. Mashed into one figure, the conglomeration appears as a three-headed Cerberus. The *Gallery of German Manly Beauty* sat perched just above the heads of the second and third marching veterans in Dix's painting.



Figure 2: George Grosz, *Gallery of German Manly Beauty*, as published in *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1919; reprinted in *Expressionismus* (Kraus Reprint, 1977). University of Iowa Libraries.

In his original painting, Dix used the profiled representation of idealized aesthetic beauty to raise the postwar issue of figural perfection versus physical deformity. Even though the original text associated with Grosz's journal image is omitted, the insertion of a bevy of politicians' faces next to the ideal profile and the pointing finger still raises the question, "who is the most beautiful?", collapsing the gap between the politicians who continued to uphold the system of values that caused the war and those irreparably scarred veterans who remained ideologically supportive of postwar policies that were clearly at odds with their physical well-being. Adding a layer of apoleptic irony, the placement of the "most beautiful" poster next to Dix's pointing finger simultaneously suggests that these same politicians used irreparably scarred veterans as political "footballs."

Though Grosz's *Gallery of German Manly Beauty* hovered above Dix's second and third figures (the "shell shocked" soldier and the blind quadriplegic), it relates most directly to Dix's self-portrait, the figure for whom Dix reserved the most gruesome facial distortions and the most extreme sensual impairments.

Most prominently, the upper-class veteran has a metal jawbone improbably screwed into what is left of the figure's cheekbone. Even though its spring-joint alludes to regained agility, the device is clearly nonfunctional. The metal jawbone

swings downward, leaving the figure's mouth to gape permanently open. Rather than a functioning replacement jaw, war-torn soldier-Dix flashes a cartoonishly toothy grin. Additionally, Dix layered his face with an artificial eye, which now visually rhymes with Grosz's extra eyes (and many of Hausmann and Höch's photomontages, in which they also glued mismatched eyes onto cutout figures). Enlarged and incompatible with his remaining features, the false implant looks less like a sculpted prosthesis than a distorted mask; the painted eye barely covers the shriveled skin beneath it. Onto this melee of parts, Dix implanted a tin ear. Hearing- and voice-disabled, ex-soldier Dix has recalibrated himself to use the alphabet chart pinned to his chest (see Reily, Panhan, and Tupinambá). Presumably the low-cost communication chart for the now dysphonic soldier covers an Iron Cross, which the artist was actually awarded during the Battle of Somme; as such, the chart functions doubly as a parody of rehabilitation and as a badge of prosthetic honor.

Ultimately, Dix's viscerally unmodified "horror" is an unstable critique. As Grosz himself pointed out: "People quickly get used to dreadful and disgusting sights" (qtd. in Fineman 93). More importantly, as Bernd Hüppauf argues, when artists and documentary photographers showed the suffering soldier they most often represented him as "a victim of war rather than exposing the structure of violence and presenting soldiers as elements of it" (63). And, to some degree, the Berlin Dada artists interpreted Dix's work in this way. In strategically making it the basis for a collage work, however, they turned the representation into a political critique, suggesting that any return to prewar modes of cultural expression and figural aesthetics was impossible. Through apoleptic irony they showed that traditional modes of depicting figural unity or identity were now immaterial and, in the face of postwar surgery, identity was now horrifically deterritorialized – interconnected to the industrialized world of things and the post-operational realm of reduced probabilities. Rather than calling for stability, they used the strategies of apoleptic irony and gapsploitation to expose cultural collapse, social incongruity, and the disintegration of representation. More importantly, through their practice of gluing pictures, they not only displayed irreverence toward art and language, but also showed that a chaotic yet productive form of ambiguity was a viable method of resistance to outdated aesthetics and divisive propaganda, a method that others could embrace: "Everyone can Dada."

The Telescoping Legacy of Berlin Dada's Photomontage

As counter-revolutionary, right wing forces brutally eradicated potential revolutionary leaders, silencing oppositional voices and installing an oppressive regime, Berlin dadaists embraced left wing politics: anarchism, communism, Marxism, and a myriad of associated permutations. Within a context of socio-political fragmentation and geo-political alienation, Berlin Dada redeployed the Zurich dadaists' language of transnational heterogeneity in order to expand their

strategy of photomontage. They used apoleptic irony and gapsploitation as a tactic to address the interconnectedness of politics, art, and the here-and-now of everyday experience. They ripped into the ubiquitous propagandistic imagery and political advertising circulating in the illustrated press. Breaking the rules of representational structures and phonological speech patterns, they transgressed boundaries, short-circuiting coercive messages and making manifest the brutality of their revolutionary context. In their photomontages, they profoundly captured – no, they palpably encapsulated the unstable reality of living in a shatter-zone, experiencing a catastrophic space-time distortion. However, as Virilio observes, catastrophes never “just affect current reality, but produce anxiety and anguish for coming generations” (“Museum of Accidents”); they always radiate outwards, through time and space.

Berlin Dada’s extraordinary thinking and heterogeneous language remain viable strategies for exposing the current disintegration of social communities and collective identities. Holding within it the language of resistance to hegemonic rules and values, photomontage contains what Braidotti refers to as a “critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (26). Such a language remains critically relevant today as new shatter zones emerge, displacing émigré populations and generating local geo-political dislocations. Berlin Dada photomontage teaches that the destabilizing effects of cultural dispossession, alienation, and fragmentation relate not only to nomadic, émigré, and post-colonial communities, but also to geo-politically stationary subjects who are nonetheless trapped in current shatter-zones. Simultaneously, Berlin Dada’s lawless abandonment of dualistic oppositions and logo-centric formulations shows that interconnectedness is relative and risky; it can lead to more inclusive political formulations but it can also expose a flip side. Particularly for those trapped in alienated geo-political space, the intense awareness of interconnectedness can equally expose obscenity – the waking up amongst a horrific world of things.

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