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Modern Visual Culture and the New Sciences of the Self

Images:

Max Beckmann, Kahlbaum, 1919

Karl Hubbuch, Wissend und Blind (Selbstbildnis), *Knowing and Blind (Self-Portrait)*, 1922

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Müssige Hetären, *Idle Courtesans*, 1914

Otto Dix, Frontsoldat in Brüssel, *Front Soldier in Brussels*, 1924

George Grosz, Menschen in der Strasse, *People in the Street*, 1920-21

Christian Rohlf, Die Werbung (Neger und Tänzerin), *The Courtship (Negroe and Dancer)*, 1913

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Chandos-Letter", 1902

My case, in short, is this: I have lost completely the ability to think or to speak of anything coherently. At first I grew by degrees incapable of discussing a loftier or more general subject in terms of which everyone, fluently and without hesitation, is wont to avail himself. I experienced an inexplicable distaste for so much as uttering the words *spirit*, *soul*, or *body*. I found it impossible to express an opinion on the affairs at Court, the events in Parliament, or whatever you wish. This was not motivated by any form of personal deference (for you know that my candor borders on imprudence), but because the abstract terms of which the tongue must avail itself as a matter of course in order to voice a judgment-these terms crumbled in my mouth like moldy fungi. (...) For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea. Single words floated round me; they congealed into eyes which stared at me and into which I was forced to stare back-whirlpools which gave me vertigo and, reeling incessantly, led into the void.

Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalytic Remarks on an Autobiographically Described Case of Paranoia (Schreber Case)*, 1911

It was no longer the sexual freedom of the male, but feminine sexual feeling; he took up a feminine position with regard to God, feeling himself to be the wife of God.

Ernst Simmel, "Regarding the Psychoanalysis of War Neurosis", 1919

One has to have experienced either the war events or their recapitulation in the analytic-cathartic hypnosis to understand what kind of assault the inner life of a person is subjected to, who has to return to the battlefield after recurrent injury, who has to be separated for an uncertain duration of time from his family during important family events, who is exposed without rescue to the murderous monster of a tank or the approach of a hostile wave of gas, who has been buried or injured by a grenade attack, who often lies for days and hours under bloody, ripped corpses of his friends, and last but not least whose sense of self has been gravely wounded by unjust, cruel superiors full of complexes, and who has to keep quiet and has to silently bear the pressure of the fact that he is worth nothing as an individual and is only an unessential part of the masses.

Film: *The Hands of Orlac* (Robert Wiene, 1924)**Film: *Secrets of a Soul* (G.W. Pabst, 1926)****Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 1929**

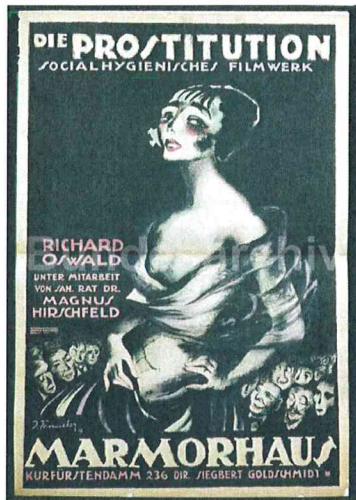
He wants to let go of her, should I hit, Ida, the man from Breslau, now it's coming, his arm becomes paralyzed, it [or he] is paralyzed, but she holds on to him like an animal, what does she want, says nothing, holds on to him, has her face on his neck, he looks across her to the window stone-faced. (...) Mieze's mouth ripped open, earthquake, lightening, thunder, the train tracks ripped apart, mangled, the train station, the station agent's booth upside down, roaring, rolling, fumes, smoke, darkness. (...) I – will – kill – her.

Lustmord (Otto Dix, 1922)

Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual History of the World War*, 1930

If we examine the relations of the sexes before the war, we see a revolutionary shift, for the whole realm of sexuality is fundamentally different than that of the past. Whereas formerly sexuality had, in accordance with concepts of bourgeois chastity, been enveloped in mystical darkness, there arose at the turn of the century, a tremendous current of thought, an erotic enlightenment movement. This was a reaction against the earlier repression of sexuality from society. We can best envisage the tremendous advances it made during the war, by inspecting the changed position of woman. In so doing we have to deal with the phenomenon which may be termed the erotic emancipation of woman.

Film: *Prostitution* (Richard Oswald, 1918/19)



Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, 1932

I am walking at night and in the morning – it's a crowded city with lots of flowers and shops and lights and restaurants with doors and felt curtains behind them – I am trying to guess what's inside, and sometimes I even go in to take a look and pretend I'm looking for somebody who isn't there, and then I leave. And sometimes I stay, if it's a very interesting place. I've even had asparagus salad in Berlin.

And last night, a man took me home in his car. Because he hadn't shaved, my face is completely prickly today, and I am as red as a tomato and kind of sunburnt. That just goes to show you that you can never be too careful when it comes to men. But it's spring, and Berlin is like Easter and Christmas combined for me. Everything is full of shimmery business. I see men and I am thinking to myself, there are so many of them. There's got to be someone for me, who's breathing Berlin. And he will have black hair and a bowtie of white silk.

I love Berlin, but my knees are trembling and I don't know what I'm going to eat tomorrow. But I don't care.

Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, 1903

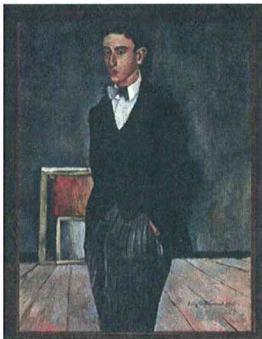
The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life. Due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. (...) Furthermore, this psychological intellectualistic attitude and the money economy are in such close integration that no one is able to say whether it was the former that effected the latter or vice-versa.

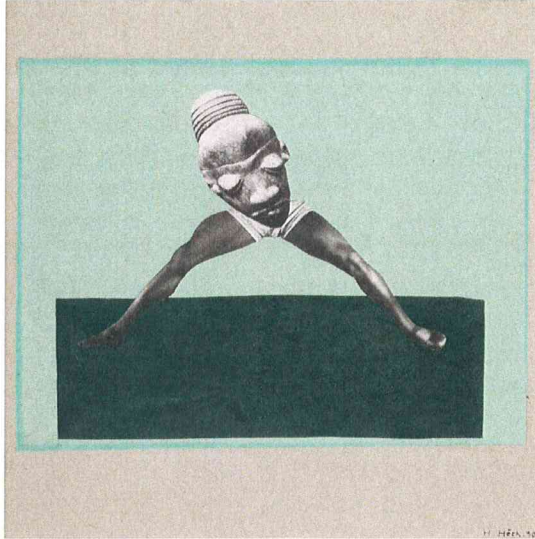
Alfred Döblin, *Two Girlfriends Commit Murder*, 1924

People are in symbiosis with others and also with other beings. This is already a reality: symbiosis with the others and also with apartments, houses, streets, squares.

Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community*, 1924

What here leads to the tendency to abolish artificiality and interpersonal distance – the impersonal in an explicit sense – constitutes the stimulus and inner being, the ethos of community [*Gemeinschaft*]. In opposition to this tendency, a societal life order [*Gesellschaft*], seeks to construct its relations impersonally. It nourishes everything that leads from intimacy to distance, from being without restraint to being with restraint, from the concrete individual to general abstraction. The community tolerates these life forms only as chores, helpful means, and paths to ends necessary for life (...) its animosity towards which is inanimate, separate, and artificial, always keeps alive the wish to destroy them, and return again to nature. On the other hand, belonging to the basic character of the societal ethos is a longing for the mask behind which all immediacy disappears.

Felix Nussbaum (Portrait of a Young Man 1927, Masquerade 1939)

Hannah Höch, Untitled, 1929)**Claire Goll, “The Beginning of a Marriage in Black and White”, 1926**

He needed at least eight days to teach her that the body is a precious instrument that can only be played correctly by an African. And he taught her. The entire first day he rehearsed with her to kiss her mouth, because she was a debutante of the senses, and he – far more experienced and gifted than a European in the variations and nuances of love – wanted to enjoy her development gradually. It was his educational intention to make art out of the dilettantism of the body, which is native to white people, as he claimed disdainfully.

