



Berlin, 8 November 2018

WALL TEXTS OF THE EXHIBITION

Museum für Fotografie

Berlin in the 1918/19 Revolution

Photography, Film, Entertainment Culture

9 November 2018 – 3 March 2018

Quotations

So ends this first day of the revolution, which in just a few hours has witnessed the downfall of the House of Hohenzollern, the dissolution of the German army, and the demise of the old German social order. One of the most memorable and dreadful days in German history.

Harry Graf Kessler, diary entry from November 9, 1918

Dearest Gretelein,

I'm just sending you a greeting today so you'll know that luckily, we have all survived these monumental events, now quickly write to us to say the same. By the way, I'm still waiting in vain for a long birthday letter from you. And we have PEACE, and a new basis in collapsing Europe, *and now, onward!!*

Hannah Höch, letter to Grete Höch, November 14, 1918

What will become of us, no one here knows. For some time, I daily expected an invasion by the Entente Powers – and considering the irrational behavior of our Berliners, that would not have been surprising. They no longer work, but instead hold meetings and romp around. Things are quiet on the streets – but the city has the appearance of an impoverished provincial town; it resembles a fourth class waiting room, and is no longer recognizable.

Kurt Tucholsky, letter to Mary Gerold, December 19, 1918

The Christmas fair carries on blithely throughout all of these bloody events. Hurdy-gurdies play on Friedrichstraße, street vendors peddle indoor fireworks, gingerbread, and silver tinsel, the jewelry shops on Unter den Linden remain unheedingly open, their brightly-lit display windows glittering. On Leipziger Strasse, the usual Christmas crowds throng toward Wertheim, Kayser, and the other big stores. It is safe to say that in thousands of homes, Christmas trees are lit and children are playing around them with presents from Daddy, Mummy and dear Aunty. The dead lie in the royal stables, and on Holy Night, the wounds freshly inflicted on the palace and on Germany gape wide.

Harry Graf Kessler, diary entry, December 24, 1918

I am well and cheerful and by no means depressed or ill-disposed, especially since now – thanks to our heroic bourgeoisie – peace and good order have been restored. Oh, but the last few weeks have been hideous; even your dutiful, middle-class heart would have truly trembled and shrunken back had you lived through the fighting here [...].

George Grosz, letter to Otto Schmalhausen, January 17, 1919

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This morning, the *Vossische Zeitung* carries a story about the »New Communist Insurrection Plans.« Yesterday and today, other newspapers have published similar reports. At the same time, one reads on the advertising columns: »All of Berlin dances and spins every Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday in the newly-opened, elegant FOX TROTT CASINO at Friedrichstraße 105 on Weidendammer Brücke (Hotel Atlas). Every Sunday from 4–7 PM, Dance Tea (Danse Intime).«
Harry Graf Kessler, diary entry, February 2, 1919

I cannot get out of head the execution of 24 sailors on Französische Strasse, where during all of these days, there has been no trouble. It is one of the most abominable civil war crimes I know of in history. This evening I tried to watch Reinhardt's production of *As You Like It*, but was not in the mood. I cannot stop thinking about these murders and shootings, which are the order of the day in Berlin.
Harry Graf Kessler: diary entry, March 14, 1919

The days passed monotonously – this is no longer the old Berlin, where today this was going on, and tomorrow that. Everyone walks around in a rather depressed state, at least the decent people – the plebs storms the cinemas, but in the end, one can hardly take part in this.
Kurt Tucholsky, letter to Mary Gerold, June 30, 1919

On the following days, the Palace was besieged by government troops, and there was a tremendous bombardment. On New Year's Eve, when my wife and I were celebrating »Sylvester« – seeing the old year out – with Max Reinhardt and other friends in a restaurant under the Deutsches Theater, the harsh sounds of the shooting close at hand broke into the melodious Italian songs which Moissi was singing to us to the accompaniment of a guitar. On Sunday, January 5, 1919, the Spartacist revolt broke out in full force.
Theodor Wolff, Through Two Decades, 1936

Fox Trot

The new flu is here – and it is not Spanish, but English in origin, and it is known as »the new popular dance« [...]. In Berlin, »Fox Trot steps« are applied to any old melody [...]. Outside, they are banging away at the Palace [...]. Machine-gun fire rattles around the advertising pillars, whose colorful posters bear invitations to Fox Trot teas.
F.W. Koebner, in: Der Roland von Berlin, 1919

Boxing

Only after the end of the war were public boxing matches permitted in Germany, and images of them accessible and familiar to broad circles. [...] But driving home through the mild spring air of the Tiergarten, I passed an advertising pillar on which a colorful poster offered a reward of 10,000 German marks to the victor of the next boxing match in Zirkus Busch.
F.W. Koebner, Der Mann von Welt. Ein Herrenbrevier, 1919

Film

In the years 1918 and 1919, the German film industry experienced pronounced growth tendencies. Among the most successful production firms

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of the era alongside Universum Film AG (Ufa), established in 1917 as a propaganda establishment by the Supreme Army Command, were the Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), the Decla-Film-Gesellschaft-Holz & Co. (later Decla-Bioskop), and the Deutsche Lichtspiel-Gesellschaft (Deulig, DLG). Alongside new, advantageous financing possibilities, it was the announcement of the abolition of film censorship in November of 1918 that inaugurated rising production figures. At the same time, lowered admission prices allowed cinema to become a leisure activity for broad social strata.

More than in any other German city, these developments were observable in Berlin: the greater part of the film industry was headquartered here, and accordingly, this continuously growing metropolis, with approximately 200 cinemas, became a center of attraction for representatives of all cinematic branches.

Immediately after November 9, 1918, the revolution played virtually no role in the city's multifarious cinematic program – primarily responsible for this was production scheduling for most films, which usually entailed intervals of many months. In the course of 1919, the film industry responded emphatically to current political events, releasing a series of feature films that either thematized the revolutionary goings-on explicitly or at least alluded to them.

Newsreel 1918/19

With their compilations of up-to-date documentary film footage, the *Wochenschauen* (weekly newsreels) were able to convey impressions of revolutionary events in Berlin to a contemporary public more quickly than other film genres. Launched during World War I, this format – which was screened in cinemas before main features – soon became the most important medium of information for large segments of the population. Only a portion of the newsreel editions produced by German firms and pertaining to the revolutionary events of 1918–19 in Berlin have survived, and in many instances only as fragments. Among them are numbered editions of the *Messter-Woche*, named for their initiator, the film pioneer Oskar Messter. With the aid of these 5-15-minute short films, produced under time pressure and with minimal technical expenditures or design features, it becomes possible to reconstruct central stages of the revolution – and the perspectives of contemporary film journalists of these events.

Joe May

Among the most productive directors in Berlin at the time was the Austrian Joe May, who – like the majority of participants in Berlin's film world – observed the revolutionary events in the city only from a distance. In his monumental films, his wife Mia May played the main role. *Veritas vincit*, premiered in April of 1919, is an elaborately outfitted historical film whose episodic plot revolves around the transmigration of souls. During 1919, Joe May intensified his cinematic approach, oriented toward spectacular entertainments, with the production of an eight-part adventure film entitled *The Mistress of the World*, outfitted with an exotic flair.

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Different from the Others

The director and producer Richard Oswald is regarded as the founder of the so-called Sitten- or Aufklärungsfilm (i.e. a film concerned with public morals or sex education) – a genre that took up socially taboo themes such as the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, drug consumption, or topics such as abortion and homosexuality, activities still subject to criminal prosecution at that time. The production of such films, propelled by an educational impetus, was intimately bound up with the abolition of censorship in Germany, announced in November of 1918. For *Anders als die Andern* (Different from the Others), the first film to take an explicit stand against Paragraph 175, which made homosexual acts between males a crime, Oswald called upon the expertise of the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld as his advisor.

The film narrates the story of the violinist Paul Körner, who is blackmailed by a male prostitute who threatens to reveal his homosexuality, and is finally charged with violating paragraph 175. In a central scene of the film, Magnus Hirschfeld – who plays himself – delivers a plea for tolerance of homosexuals. To be sure, the blackmailer is condemned, but so too is Körner, found guilty of infringing paragraph 175. In despair over the social ruin brought about by the verdict, he commits suicide.

Madame DuBarry

The director Ernst Lubitsch too sought to come to terms with the theme of revolution – albeit not, or at least not apparently, with current goings-on in Berlin. The French Revolution of 1789 provided him with a backdrop for his new production *Madame DuBarry*, furnished with the lavish resources of Ufa. In a way that was extraordinary for its time, Lubitsch narrates the story of Jeanne Vaubernier, who rose from the status of a milliner's apprentice to become Countess DuBarry, the most powerful mistress of Louis XV, but who would ultimately finish her life on the scaffold during the French Revolution.

With *Madame DuBarry*, Lubitsch overcame the style of the early silent film, it's dramatic style still oriented toward pantomime and characterized by exaggerated poses; in contrast, he concentrated more on the facial expressions of his protagonists. The crowd scenes were painstakingly choreographed. Lubitsch's decision to adopt historical material in relation to the theme of revolution was independent of the ideological demands of his time; he relied on his audience's capacity to recognize the connection between his film and current reality entirely on their own.

Folkets Ven, Die entfesselte Menschheit, and Irrwahn (Mania)

The Danish film *Folkets Ven* arrived in German cinemas in December of 1918 under the distribution title *Söhne des Volkes* (Sons of the People). In Berlin, the production of films about the political upheavals had just begun, necessitating a recourse to import films in order to entertain – and to influence – Berlin cinema-goers. In the magazine *Der Kinematograph*, the film was promoted as »a new film for a new time« with the message: »For the unification of the socialist groups, against Bolshevism.«

One of the most important feature films dating from around the time of the revolution, and at the same time a typical document of the (social) demo-

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cratic values reinforced by the film industry, is *Die entfesselte Menschheit* (Humanity Unchained). Narrated in this »key work of anti-Bolshevist film« is the story of a group of German prisoners of war who return to a Berlin that has been convulsed by Spartacist battles, and are steered toward participation in a bloody civil war by the Bolshevist fanatic Karenow. Approximately 17,000 extras took part in this ambitious undertaking, part of it filmed on Am Tempelhofer Berg, a street in Kreuzberg.

Along with their anti-Bolshevist tendencies, the principal characteristic of the »political problem films« produced around 1919 and 1922, with their references to the revolution, was a deliberate renunciation of any explicit identification of the location of the events. In *Irrwahn* (Mania), filmed in Berlin in 1919 and heralded in the press as a »socialist-revolutionary drama,« the director Hans Werckmeister maintains a certain ambiguity about whether the events are taking place in Germany, Russia, or in some imaginary fantasy land.

Nerven (Nerves)

Robert Reinert's influential silent film drama *Nerven* (Nerves) had only a brief reception among the contemporary cinema public: after its premiere in December of 1919, a number of spectators are said to have developed symptoms of madness. As a consequence, the censors resolved upon radical interventions which left the film in an utterly mutilated state. The story of Roloff, a wealthy factory owner who loses his faith in technological progress during the revolutionary turmoil occurring at the end of World War I, his sister Marja, who is committed to armed struggle against the ruling powers, and the teacher Johannes, who calls for social reforms at the people's assembly, offers a multifaceted description of the traumatic impact of war and revolution on the psychological states of human individuals. Observable in *Nerven* are design elements that are immediately reminiscent of Expressionism: close-up shots of faces registering intense emotion, gloomy, oversized buildings, dissolves suggestive of menace, as well as striking effects of light and shadow. This fateful historic document has now been successfully reconstructed from fragments.

Artistic Dance

During the revolutionary period of 1918–19, artistic or expressive dance – whose best-known exponent, Mary Wigman, was accorded considerable acclaim even before World War I – was characterized by heightened variety and intensity. The aim of the tendency was to generate a new conception of humanity through the unity of music, movement, costume, and stage design. Expressive rhythm and a natural approach to bodily experience harmonized well with the expressive forms of the artistic avant-gardes, in particular Expressionist painting. The search for modern expressive resources that were remote from classical balletic conventions was spearheaded by renowned dance reformers. Among them were Valeska Gert, with her grotesque caricature dances, Anita Berber, with her eccentric and erotic performances, and Gret Palucca, with her powerful leaps. But Hannelore Ziegler – no longer a familiar figure today – too numbered among the representatives of these new, contemporary dance forms.

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Erna Offeney

Erna Offeney (1888–1977), one of the less-known erotic dancers and ballet mistresses, who is presented here in a larger context for the first time, headed her own touring ballet company, with up to 150 ensemble members, which made acclaimed guest performances throughout Germany and Switzerland, as well as Vienna. In a way that is characteristic of the pre-revolutionary era, she wrote in her diary: »It was 1918, the final year of the war, the theater was full of soldiers on leave who wanted to forget the miseries of war during this brief intermezzo, and were delighted with every diversion and pleasure. Most were invalids, cripples who had been obliged to sacrifice arms or legs for the Fatherland. They were scattered throughout every town, and nearly every family lamented the presence of a member in such a state, and depending upon temperament, those affected – or those who were more foreseeing – were suffused with hate or gloomy resignation [...] And then came the applause, which never seemed to end. In the orchestra area, I saw two soldiers, each one-armed, slapping their single hands together in order to applaud. Seeing this, I nearly wept.«

›Nude‹ and Erotic Dance

During the revolutionary period of 1918/1919, ›nude‹ dance, erotic ballet, and erotic dance enjoyed a decided popularity. At the same time, the war wounded and war cripples filled the streets of Berlin. »The sheer profusion of *erotic dance performances* – appearing in every cabaret, in every better dance club, in every bar that offered the public music and entertainment, were nude dancers or groups of dancers – this mass phenomenon only became possible after the war,« wrote Hans Ostwald in 1931. »Favoring the movement was a lust for life that sprang from sheer misery, and the greater general freedom.« But the abolition of censorship also promoted the proliferation of such offerings. Although the dancers were for the most part clad in gossamer fabrics, with breasts and privates veiled, they appeared to be naked. Performances by dancers such as Olga Desmond and Celly de Rheydt belonged in the context of the movement toward naturism and nudism.

Ballroom Dancing

The great dance wave, the dance frenzy, the dance craze – all referred to the mass phenomenon of dance as a form of participatory entertainment among the populace of Berlin after World War I. This form of enjoyment was ubiquitous, with each dancer dancing for a different reason: for one, dancing compensated for the general misery. Another enjoyed the license to dance when and where it pleased – a freedom that accompanied the demise of the Wilhelminian moral codex. Depending upon the financial resources available, people met in the elegant dance clubs in the city center, or instead shook a leg in dives found in the northern and eastern districts of Berlin. The new popular dances – ragtime, jazz, the Boston waltz, the shimmy, but first and foremost the foxtrot – found their ways into dance clubs, dance halls and ballrooms, dance floors, and hotel lobbies, and were an essential component of the amusement and entertainment industry that expanded explosively after the war. The rapidly growing number of performances of operettas and revues meant that a public hungry for diversion was continuously exposed to new hit tunes. Thus

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primed, they spread out onto the dance floor, with dance bands providing the requisite atmosphere of exuberance.

Schall und Rauch

In the morning edition of December 8, 1919, the Vossische Zeitung announced the opening of the cabaret *Schall und Rauch* (sound and smoke) in the Großes Schauspielhaus. Its forerunner was the cabaret bearing the same name, founded in 1901 in the Berliner Künstlerhaus by the theater director and proprietor Max Reinhardt. The grotesque situation in revolutionary Berlin, with its subversives, revolutionaries, war profiteers, and war wounded, with its fashionable society and its destroyed apartment buildings, its luxury and its rampant poverty, provided the backdrop for a cabaret that brought provocative, politically and socially critical texts and songs onto the stage. For this program, Max Reinhardt engaged young artists such as Walter Mehring, Kurt Tucholsky, and Klabund, who had already made names for themselves through their DADA actions or their work at the Schaubühne or the *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zürich. As his composer and musical director, Reinhardt hired Friedrich Hollaender, who also functioned as the author of the texts. Appearing as interpreters were among others Blandine Ebinger, Gertrud Eysoldt, and Paul Graetz, and as a dancer, Lala Herdmenger.

Sheet Music Cover Pages

Originally, sheet music cover pages were little more than decorative ›accessories‹ accompanying printed music. At the same time, they mirror contemporary social and political life. Observable around 1918/19 are topical foci such as emancipation and the pleasures of dance, eroticism, fashion, beauty, and film. In some instances, sheet music cover pages were furnished with portraits of interpreters whose names were familiar through the advertisements that appeared in the daily press. Like the artist's postcards so widely disseminated at the time, these images allowed the public to see the stars at least in picture form – not everyone could afford tickets to live operetta or revue appearances.

Domestic music-making, including light music, was widespread. Inseparable from such activities were the countless popular dance forms. And all of this required accessible sheet music. With the growing vogue for revues, operettas, film operettas, and burlesques after the end of World War I, the circulation figures of printed music rose quickly. After the recent horrors, there title motifs satisfied a yearning for togetherness, harmony, happiness, and a peaceful life.

Places of Entertainment and Amusement

In 1918/19, entertainment was of paramount importance. As much can be gathered from numerous travel guides intended for visitors to Berlin, such as those by Grieben. These supplied tips for performances of operettas, burlesques, revues, promoted information on which cabarets and coffee-houses provide live music, recommended dance halls, and offered general information on other entertainment options. Providing guidance is well were the advertising pages of daily newspapers such as the Vossische Zeitung, the Berliner Tageblatt, and the Berliner Volkszeitung. Found in particular on Friedrichstraße, Behrensstraße, and Jägerstraße alongside theaters and operetta stages were ballrooms, dance clubs, dance cafés,

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concert houses, cabarets, and coffeehouses. Advertised as well were summer theater performances and garden concerts where military bands supplied the music. With seating for up to 3000 people, they were frequented by numerous visitors. In the working class district of Prenzlauer Berg, there was the Prater Summer Garden; in Treptow, the Zenner Beer Garden – every urban district had its entertainment establishments featuring concert and dance. And all promoted themselves through specially printed postcards, so that today, we have a detailed picture of the sheer variety that prevailed at the time.

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