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The American Reception of Weimar Culture 1918-1933

So much of the compelling literature, film, music, and art of the Weimar Republic have been absorbed into American culture during the last fifty years that it is curious to realize the chilly reception accorded it during the 1920s and early 1930s. Not all the artistic works exported from Germany to the United States received outright condemnation, for a few were judged meaningful contributions. But during this period of our nation's history, when the arts reflected a new national consciousness and American tastes were largely influenced by our own cultural assertiveness and growth, Weimar culture largely failed to be communicative and was perceived as "ugly" and "decadent."

In a sense Weimar was a kind of rehearsal for what later became the common experience of Europe. Though much of the stridency which characterized Weimar culture stemmed from its experimental features, we must remember that a good deal of it reflected tremendous anxiety and a rising sense of doom.[1] The United States, obviously, had not suffered the same disastrous experiences after World War I, nor would most of her writers and artists engage themselves in similar styles or social criticisms as those of the Weimar Republic.

Where Weimar, during these years, exerted its greatest influence in the United States—in architecture—the reception, understandably, was warmest. Other artistic media, however, were not nearly as accessible, and music, for example, was disliked more intensely by American critics and audiences than any other art form. Thus, the various styles of each of the arts as well as our own level of sophistication affected our reception of Weimar culture as well.

I

No doubt, the stormy reception which greeted much of Weimar culture in the United States was also a result of the transformation of relations between the two nations brought on by the war. Prior to the onset of World War I close cultural ties were maintained. Since the 1680s, the various waves of German emigration to the United States

precipitated close bonds between the two countries. Over the years, as important men, movements, and ideas of modern Germany made their way into America, few failed to have an impact on American cultural development.

Germany's industrialization during the latter part of the nineteenth century fostered new trade relations and the German government was able to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with America until the war clouds gathered. However, the emergence of blood and iron stirred rifts in our cultural relations with Germany. Our previous image of her as the world leader in cultural pursuits—as the land of poets and musicians—was slowly losing its grip, and by the end of the nineteenth century, German intellectual influence had waned and had given way to more vital English and French stimulation.[2]

With America's entrance into World War I, our impressions of Germany changed drastically and all German influence in American life was finally brought to a halt. During 1917-1918 German books were deleted from many libraries and publicly burned or sold as trash, and German language instruction in schools and universities was prohibited in a number of states.[3] German cuisine was eliminated from our finest restaurants and hotels and even the innocuous sauerkraut, as much Scotch-Irish as German, now became known as "liberty cabbage." Indeed, the reaction against all things German among Americans as a whole was more far-reaching than in any other allied country in Europe.[4]

After the war ended, the vast majority of Americans still felt that both the German government and people were guilty of committing the most outrageous crimes, and only after we were made aware of Germany's terrible economic conditions, did we gradually become less severe in our dealings with the war-torn nation.[5] Much like her allies, America's feelings toward the newly formed Weimar Republic were initially divided and our foreign policy with Germany continued to follow a less than uniform pattern. While good business and relief measures initially guided our diplomacy on friendly terms, whenever our interests were threatened by political or social turmoil, new apprehensiveness was quite naturally voiced.[6]

Most of our impressions of Weimar society then reflected great adversity. Indeed, European culture and society as a whole were sneered at by many Americans for its political upheaval, economic chaos, and social breakdown.[7] Sometimes, even the more sympathetic "high-brow" journals expressed reproval for Europe's (and especially Germany's) social malaise.[8] Germany's social unrest was frequently depicted in the most pejorative terms. The *Literary Digest* in 1924, for example, referred to Weimar society as "decadent, . . . bizarre, fantastically emotional, wildly German."[9] True, other accounts were sympathetic to Germany's desperate situation. Writing for the *Living Age* in 1921, H. de Man admitted: "What impressed me in Germany was the universal evidence of great suffering, great weariness, and great despair."[10] However, given the general mood of our nation which generally viewed European culture and society as "decadent" and even

"dangerous" to the wholesomeness of American civilization, it is not difficult to see why the most negative vision of German society prevailed throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

As the anti-German hysteria slowly abated by the beginning of the twenties, the boycott on German culture was lifted. But when the newest of the German novels, plays, films, music, and paintings made their way to America, and especially to New York City, the cultural capital of our nation, they understandably attracted only a limited audience. A few artists, intellectuals, and critics responded enthusiastically but most shared the feelings of the more popular audience which was, as expected, either hostile, perplexed, or at best indifferent.

II

Literature, usually the most approachable art form, posed some problems for the American reader. Much German prose of the period remained untranslated until later, and during the twenties, when American editions of some works were first made available to the American public, their content generally proved too complex and "other-worldly."[11] However, more German literature was read in the United States than any other foreign prose and German writers were reviewed prominently in the *New York Times.*[12]

The more conventional German war and historical novels especially drew a fair number of American readers. One such work, Erich Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front,* was read by more Americans than any other war book, and it along with Vicki Baum's romantic *Grand Hotel* made the *American Best Seller List* in 1929 and 1931 respectively.[13]

The more stylistically innovative works of Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Leonhard Frank were met less enthusiastically though admired by a select few. For example, German expressionist literature often received favorable reviews by its friendliest American critic, Ludwig Lewisohn, who admired its "supreme intensity" and "deep inner necessity."[14] And some of the avant-garde journals of the day occasionally published the latest from the pen of Alfred Döblin and Rainer Maria Rilke.[15] For the most part, though, American literary tastes were provincial and conventional and out of touch with European experimental writers.

The two giants of twentieth-century German literature, Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse, were the most representative and best-liked novelists in Germany. In the United States, the reception of Mann's works varied from one part of the decade to the next. During the early 1920s, Mann remained virtually unknown in this country. As late as 1925, only two of his earlier works, *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and *Death in Venice* (1911), had won some praise with American critics.[16] With the publication of *The Magic Mountain* in the United States in 1927, and Mann's award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929, more literary critics in America were persuaded by his international reputation. Of course, *The Magic Mountain* never reached the American educated public as it had its own native audience, but it attracted much attention in

journals of opinion. Both Ludwig Lewisohn and J. W. Krutch writing for the *Nation* hailed the novel as one of the most important of its time, while Robert Lovett of the *New Republic* wrote: ". . . it comes to a full symphonic utterance that is grandiose in its scope, tumultuous and overwhelming in intensity." However, other journals, such as *Dial* and the *Saturday Review of Literature,* gave the novel only tepid reviews, while *Living Age,* in fact, found the work "laborious."[17] For now, Mann's masterpiece, as well as some of his other important novels, failed to engross most American readers and critics. Both his social content and literary style were beyond their grasp.

Perhaps because Hermann Hesse's literary style was far more traditional and romantic, his novels became more accessible in America. In fact, a fair number of his novels were hailed in the popular press. But aside from his romantic narration, setting, and characters, which seemed to hold a certain fascination over American readers, Hesse's *Weltschmerz* remained distant from American intellectual life.[18] Though his two best novels, *Demian* and *Steppenwolf,* received excellent reviews in some of the leading dailies, certain literary journals remained critical. For example, in a review of *Steppenwolf* entitled, "For Madmen Only," the *Literary Digest* commented: "It reflects a certain current in the intellectual life of Germany that is altogether too neurotic."[19] What was said about Hesse's major work reflected to a greater degree America's feelings toward the rest of Weimar culture.

III

The theater of each nation also reflected the temper of its audience and many German plays were far too topical to sustain the attention of many American viewers. However, a number of American playwrights, intellectuals, and critics like Eugene O'Neill, Matthew Josephson, and Ludwig Lewisohn looked upon German theater's technical innovations with greater interest.[20] But the record of actual performances and subsequent reviews of some of the leading German plays performed in New York City reflected mostly a negative impression.

Under the spell of anti-German hysteria the Broadway stage was closed to German drama during the 1918-1919 and 1919-1920 seasons. During the following season, when hostile feelings abated, a few German plays were produced, and expressionist dramas were some of the first Weimar plays to be performed in New York, our theater capital. Across the country, however, few expressionist plays were produced.

> The highly metaphysical aspect of expressionism never found a stage in the United States. The plays seen here were the ones of protest, those of the "shriek." The Germans always admired the intensely personal and the philosophically abstract on their stage, and these phases of expressionism were never too well received outside German speaking areas. Philosophical drama in New York in the 1920s was chiefly the province of the little theaters and of the guild, and it was in these houses that the German dramas were played.[21]

George Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* was a qualified artistic and commercial success.[22] It was presented by the Theatre Guild on 14 May 1922 at the Garrick Theater for two special performances and then was extended for eighty performances there and later at the Frazee Theater. However, the particularly German milieu of this work was effectively adapted for British and American audiences—an alteration which unfortunately was not made to most other German dramas.

For example, Ernst Toller's plays were too "excessive" in their revolutionary style and content for American audiences. When *Man and the Masses* was produced by the Theatre Guild on 14 April 1924 at the Garrick Theater, it was proclaimed as too "strident" and "overwrought."[23] Toller's other dramas, *Bloody Laughter* (which premiered in New York on 4 December 1931 at the 49th Street Theater) and *The Machine Wreckers* (which was not performed in New York until 11 April 1937 at the Henry Street Settlement) fared no better since the majority of the audiences was unable to sympathize with the themes of the plays.[24]

Bertolt Brecht's "epic theater" was a dramatic genre that was almost totally ignored in America until after World War II when followers such as Eric Bentley made New York more aware of the dramatist's work. Brecht's modern stagecraft and concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* along with his radical politics proved too raucous for American presentation during the 1920s and 1930s. When *The Mother*—one of Brecht's few American-produced plays—premiered at the Civic Repertory Theatre, New York, on 19 November 1935, it received more critical condemnation than any other previous German play performed on the American stage during this time. Joseph T. Shipley in his *Guide to Great Plays* called it "an over-strained hyper-emotional kindergarten for Communists." Even the *Daily Worker* panned Brecht's work.[25]

Other forms of theater including German "new realism" also failed in America. Carl Zuckmayer's plays were totally ignored in this country, and actually the dramatization of Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel* was one of the few "new realism" plays successfully produced in America. It ran for 459 performances at the National Theater, New York, during the 1930-1931 season, and unlike the brutal social realism which typified most German plays of that time, its warmed-over romance and melodrama catered more to American popular tastes across the nation.[26]

IV

Many German films also proved too turgid and ponderous to win much popularity in a nation so caught up in its own Hollywood images, though a number of them were viewed as photographically striking and thematically sophisticated, and their technical advances were hailed by filmmakers and critics alike.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, one of the most artistically significant films of the decade, drew much attention from American artists, intellectuals, and critics. Its expressionistic style would later have a tremendous impact on American filmmakers. The New York premiere which took place at the Capital Theater on 3 April 1921 and received more advanced

publicity than most other films shown at the time, firmly established *Caligari*'s world fame.[27] Yet certain critics, such as those writing for the *New York Herald* and the *New York Tribune,* recognized the film more for its ''shock'' value rather than for its artistic merits. Though some other New York critics emphasized *Caligari*'s technical brilliance, few others entered into any serious discussion about the film's essential themes. In Germany, at the time, the film's major concern—the soul faced with the alternatives of tyranny or chaos—evoked tremendous fascination. But, as one may have expected, for the average American moviegoer *Caligari* was merely ''a hair-raising'' horror film.[28]

Though F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*—another ''horror film''—received only mixed reviews at its New York premiere, his *The Last Laugh* proved to be a more popular success enjoyed throughout the nation. Despite the unique absence of captions (except for a few words) which might have befuddled some members of the audience, the film's lighter texture was very well received. More importantly, the film's complete camera mobility, among other innovations, strongly influenced Hollywood's motion picture industry. The Committee of the National Board of Review said of the film:

> Its influence on future picture-making should be as provocative as was that of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.* Unlike *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* its expressionism is that of the rational world conveyed in terms of everyday objects. It raises no barrier of doubtful meaning.[29]

Fritz Lang's films, on the other hand, were heavily laden with imagery and political allegory and therefore saw only limited success in this country. His *Die Nibelungen* (or *Siegfried* as it was known when it was first released in New York in August 1925) received only tepid reviews both in the press and journals of opinion.[30] Though *Metropolis* was noted for its technical brilliance, it was, according to most American reviewers, overshadowed by the film's ''muddled'' plot and theme. It could hardly be judged by its narrative, since for most American critics, it was unconvincing, unsuspenseful, and overly theatrical. The *New York Times* said: ''It is a technical marvel with feet of clay, a picture as soulless as the manufactured woman of its story.''[31] *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* failed to get much attention at all when it premiered in New York in August 1927. The sequel, *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse,* which was made in 1932, was not released here until March 1943, when it still received only mixed notices. Not until 13 October 1973, when Lang's full four-hour version of *Doktor Mabuse* was shown at the Eleventh New York Film Festival, were American audiences fully receptive to one of the great film classics.[32]

The arrival of German ''talkies'' offered a new kind of film to American viewers. During the early 1930s, a host of kitsch films played to the delight of entertainment-hungry audiences, especially in New York where a sizable German-speaking public patronized the small theaters where they were shown. In addition, a few of the more salient sound films of the Weimar Republic won some critical and popular acclaim. *The Blue Angel,* for example, was quite successful in America as

it was throughout Europe. But while German audiences may have been drawn to the film's eroticism and themes of torture and humiliation, the main attraction here were the captivating performances of its stars, Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings. The *New Yorker,* among many other magazines and newspapers, found *The Blue Angel* to be the best picture shown at the time. Even the conservative *Commonweal,* which found the sexual details ''disagreeable,'' praised its dramatic and technical aspects.[33]

Fritz Lang's *M,* though it found enthusiastic responses everywhere in Europe, received mixed reviews in the United States. If film critic Richard Watts, Jr., writing for the *New York Herald Tribune,* recognized the film as ''one of the authentic masterpieces of the cinema,'' other noteworthy critics, along with the general audiences, found the plot and theme to be ''shocking . . . morbid . . . revolting . . . and irritating.''[34] Perhaps it went too far in its incisive dissection of criminal pathology for most American ''gangster movie'' fans. Most German ''art'' films (in Germany the cleavage between the ''art'' and ''commercial'' film hardly existed) therefore attracted a very limited audience in the United States.

V

No other expression of Weimar culture was subject to as many strictures in this country as was music. Certainly, music, the most abstract art form, would have a very limited audience, but most of the compositions of revolutionary and cerebral composers such as Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, and Anton von Webern were inaccessible to even some of the most esoteric American audiences during the 1920s and early 1930s. Much of the music of Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, and Ernst Krenek was also dissonant but it was their works' overt social criticism that most American critics and audiences found foreign and jarring. Of course, our musical tastes, so long wedded to the nineteenth-century repertoire, grew more sophisticated after World War I as our musical life expanded and embraced more conductors, musicians, and composers who articulated the modern age. Indeed, Stravinsky and the modern French school had a much greater influence on our own composers than did Weimar composers and were more frequently performed and appreciated as well.[35]

As with the other art forms, though, the music of the Weimar Republic found a few earnest champions in the United States like conductor Leopold Stokowski, critic Paul Rosenfeld, and composer Adolph Weiss. Indeed, there were even a few unusual instances of success such as when Berg's opera, *Wozzeck,* was splendidly staged in Philadelphia and New York in 1931.[36] For the most part, however, other Weimar works hardly fared as well and, indeed, were considered ''ugly,'' ''morbid,'' and ''decadent.''

With their renunciation of tonality and establishment of a new musical vocabulary—the twelve-tone row—members of the Second Vienna School (Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, and Anton von Webern) presented listeners with sonorities which were repugnant. Already

Schönberg's earlier atonal pieces, the String Quartet No. 2 in F Sharp Minor, op. 10 (1908), *The Book of the Hanging Gardens,* op. 15 (1909), Five Orchestral Pieces, op. 16 (1909), and *Pierrot Lunaire,* op. 21 (1912), had aroused major criticism in the United States when they were first performed during the twenties.[37] Not surprisingly, his later, more strident serial compositions nettled Americans even more. For example, when Schönberg's Variations for Orchestra, op. 31 was premiered by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia on 18 October 1929, many outraged members of the audience stormed out of the concert hall during the performance.[38]

Webern's atonality and serialism was even more austere and acrimonious, and very little of his music was even performed here until after World War II when a better critical appraisal coincided with his enormous influence on American composers. Among the few compositions which were played during the twenties, his Five Orchestral Pieces, op. 10, Five Sacred Songs, op. 15, and the Chamber Symphony, op. 21, all were failures.[39]

If Berg's music was somewhat romantic and more approachable, few of his compositions succeeded in America besides *Wozzeck.* His suite to the opera, *Lulu* (the complete work was successfully performed at the Santa Fe Opera in 1979 in its American premiere), with its dense, lugubrious, and feverish score dissuaded even those who had earlier acclaimed *Wozzeck.* And though the colorful Lyric Suite for String Quartet moved a few critics, it hardly silenced Berg's American detractors.[40]

Weill's special brand of musical theater was ill-suited for American performers and audiences during the 1920s and early 1930s. They could not be easily produced for the Broadway stage nor was the cavernous Metropolitan Opera House willing to mount such intimate and highly political works. To be sure, Brecht's hard-boiled and sardonic lyrics were as much a challenge as Weill's pungent scores. Even composer Marc Blitzstein, who during the 1950s was most reponsible for promoting Weill's music in this country, was initially reluctant to embrace the German composer's aesthetics.[41] Of the many stage works, so successfully produced in Germany and other European countries, only one, *The Three Penny Opera,* was performed in the United States by 1933. It was a total failure. After briefly previewing at the Garrick Theater in Philadelphia, it ran for only twelve performances on Broadway at the Empire Theater. This inferior adaptation was poorly translated and vastly overproduced. For almost all attending its performances, *The Three Penny Opera* proved to be a "dreary enigma."[42]

Hindemith's social satires (known as *Zeitopern* in Germany) also had little appeal here. *Neues vom Tage,* which was quite provocative even for German audiences, did not make it to the American stage. When *Hin und Zurück* was performed in Philadelphia on 22 April 1928, a few found it entertaining, but most agreed with the *Nation*'s assessment that it represented "the last phase of decadence."[43] Hindemith's earlier expressionist compositions, written during 1918-1923, were full of grotesque sounds and jerky rhythms and few of these were successfully performed in the United States.[44]

One would have expected the more sober neo-classical compositions of Hindemith to be less provoking—the neo-classical style generally had greater influence and appeal during the twenties than did serialism—but this was not the case. When such pieces as his *Kammermusik* No. 2, op. 36, no. 1 and the *Konzertmusik* for Wind Instruments, op. 41 were first performed here, the reception was stormy.[45] Only when Hindemith wrote in a more diffuse and conservative style during the 1930s did his reception in the United States improve. The overwhelming popularity of his Concert Music for Strings and Brasses, op. 50 and the Symphony *Mathis der Maler* were proof of that.[46]

In many ways the reception of Krenek's music was similar to that of Hindemith. The iconoclastic compositions of the early postwar years rankled most American critics and audiences and Krenek's neo-classical works left mostly negative impressions.[47] Though the American premiere (19 January 1929) of Krenek's most famous opera, *Jonny spielt auf,* amused Metropolitan Opera audiences with its "comic" and "variety" elements, the composer's satirical commentary on technology and industrial society went over their heads. If a few critics writing for such journals as the *Literary Digest, Review of Reviews,* and *Nation* took the opera more seriously and lauded Krenek's musical and dramatic profundity, most other journalists misunderstood it and found the piece dreary and ugly.[48]

More melodic and lighter were the operettas of Franz Lehár, Oscar Straus, and Imre Kálmán which during the twenties helped make Berlin the entertainment capital of Europe. Prior to the war, Central European operetta also appealed to American audiences and Lehár's *The Merry Widow* and O. Straus's *The Chocolate Soldier* became huge hits in the United States. Though these prewar works continued to be successfully revived here, many newer operettas failed. A number of them, like *The Land of Smiles* and *The Circus Princess,* were poorly adapted and were not what most Americans wanted in terms of lighter musical entertainment. Rather, the homegrown more contemporary Broadway shows of Gershwin, Kern, and Porter were clearly preferred and outran all the imported operettas.[49]

VI

German painting would also have little appeal. Most museum goers, art collectors, art critics, and other intellectuals were much more appreciative of impressionistic and post-impressionistic paintings than they were of expressionism or new-realism. During the twenties, French modernism also dictated the styles of many American artists and with few exceptions, German expressionism had little impact on American painting.[50]

There were a few Americans, however, who tried to call attention to the important activities of some Weimar painters. Matthew Josephson, whose enthusiastic visits to Germany, during 1922-1923 and 1927, imparted the most faithful observations of any American intellectual living in Berlin, felt that some German painters were "engaged in rather

bolder thinking and planning than their contemporaries of the School of Paris."[51] Alfred Frankenstein, the noted art and music critic for major publications in Chicago and San Francisco, was especially taken with the work of Oskar Kokoschka, who for him, was "the most characteristic painter" of the Weimar Republic. According to Frankenstein:

> He opened up my eyes simultaneously to both Weimar music and Weimar visual art . . . . I realized that once there was a similarity in spirit, a similarity in intensity . . . between the style of his painting and the style of Arnold Schönberg.[52]

Prior to the end of the decade, only a few exhibits displayed a sampling of such important artists as Kandinsky, Klee, Feininger, and Grosz. The mood toward these painters at the time was merely polite respect.[53]

With the December 1929 nationwide tour of an exhibition of the Blue Four (Klee, Feininger, Jawlenski, and Kandinsky) which received much critical attention (especially along the Pacific Coast), American critics and art circles began to give Weimar art the notice it deserved. When two exhibits of Weimar paintings were shown in New York during 1930 and 1931, many critics realized our sad neglect of this "rich" and "diversified" art world.[54] Works of Klee, Dix, Kollwitz, Kokoschka, among others, were shown now with greater frequency both at American museums and private galleries, but the two artists who received the most attention were Kandinsky and Grosz.

Kandinsky used a language, much like the composer Arnold Schönberg, which few in this country could decipher. He later, however, had much impact on American abstract painters of the 1930s and after, and some American art critics found his work especially "powerful" and "emotional."[55] The first exhibit solely devoted to the paintings of Kandinsky was held at the Valentine Galleries in New York City during November 1932. Many visitors to the show failed to grasp the significance of Kandinsky's canvases, and there were a number of critics who could not muster any enthusiasm for his work of 1923-1932. Yet the exhibit was quite successful in terms of drawing attention to a Weimar artist who, until then, was mostly ignored in the United States.[56]

George Grosz, largely because his work was so harshly political, also remained *persona non grata* in most American museums and private galleries during the 1920s. His biting social satire on German bourgeois ideals and morals failed to be communicative to American museum goers.[57] Several art critics and intellectuals, however, finally sensed the impact of his work during the troubled years of the Depression. Grosz's watercolors and drawings, shown at the Weyhe Gallery, New York, during January 1931, were called by *New York Times* art critic Edward A. Jewell, "ferocious." F. Turkel-Deri of *Art News* said that Grosz's colors were "handled in such a way as to mitigate brutal truth," and C. J. Bulliet, the famous art critic for the *Chicago Post,* now ranked him with other great artists: Goya, Daumier, and Toulouse-Lautrec.[58] As a teacher and artist living in this country, by 1933 Grosz was hailed by most other critics.

Seen in retrospect, the brilliant architecture of the Weimar Republic had a greater impact internationally than any other art form to emerge from that period. Only here did something like an international style appear, and members of the *Bauhaus,* along with other leading architects like Erich Mendelsohn and Ernst May, made significant contributions to that form.

Because the aesthetics of the *Bauhaus* had much in common with American architecture and design, it also enjoyed a better reception in the United States than did any other Weimar art form. If the cubistic connotations of the *Bauhaus* appealed to many American architects—Frank Lloyd Wright was enthusiastic about his visits to the *Bauhaus*—its wider popularity was based on Americans' marvel for sheer novelty and interest in solving technological problems.[59]

Most contemporary German architecture was discussed favorably in leading American trade journals and intellectual digests, but the greatest amount of praise focused on the *Bauhaus.* High marks were accorded its exhibit at the John Becker Gallery in New York in January-February 1931. Included in the display were photographs, fourteen books published by the *Staatliches Bauhaus,* five folios of lithographs and woodcuts, and watercolors of teachers of the school, Kandinsky, Feininger, and Klee. *Art News* now called the *Bauhaus* "one of the most important original movements in the fine arts during the current century."[60]

During February 1932, the Museum of Modern Art presented the largest and most comprehensive showing in this country of works of the "International School." Among the admired German architects from the *Bauhaus* were its most important members, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. So harmonious was their work, that even *Time* magazine suggested that their "functionalism" be used to solve our housing problem.[61] In fact, soon we were sitting on tubular chairs and eating with utensils all designed by members of the *Bauhaus*—some of whom had already taken up residency in the United States.

With the political demise of the Weimar Republic in January 1933 and the eventual emigration of many of her intellectuals, writers, musicians, and artists to the United States, Weimar culture was largely transplanted to our shores. Taking note of these important developments, Bruce Bliven wrote in the *New Republic* of 10 November 1937:

> Theirs is a culture as high as can be found anywhere in the world. Already, they have contributed notably to the enhancement of our civilization; but what they have done thus far is certainly unimportant compared with the great promise that stretches forward through the years. I feel that we Americans owe a profound debt of gratitude to Hitler for making possible this enrichment of our collective life.[62]

Indeed, our reception of Weimar culture would dramatically change as well.

We have earlier commented on the enormous influence of the *Bauhaus,* and now as teachers and practicing architects in the United States, Laszlo Mohaly-Nagy, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and

Marcel Breuer all found greater range for their talents. Other artists also infused the nation with the spirit of Weimar. Our own abstract expressionists were inspired by the styles of Kandinsky and Klee. Though the latter two found refuge in France and Switzerland respectively, their paintings and drawings finally became better known in this country. Feininger emigrated back to his native land in 1937 and afterwards became a familiar figure in American art circles. Many of the important filmmakers of the Republic went to Hollywood, where a number of them including Murnau, Pabst, Lubitsch, and Lang brought new techniques to the silver screen. Also important German stage figures made their presence felt. Max Reinhardt, for example, produced and directed a number of successful plays here. Carl Zuckmayer, one of the chief exponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, became an important Hollywood screenwriter during the thirties. And Thomas Mann, an American citizen in 1944, became a celebrated and esteemed literary figure. The list goes on and Weimar refugees also made important contributions to the physical, natural, and social sciences, as well as to education and the humanities.

Most startling perhaps was the tremendous influence Weimar composers had on American music. Arnold Schönberg's dissemination of twelve-tone theory and composition spread far beyond his classes in California and was, according to American serial composer, Milton Babbitt, "nothing short of cataclysmic."[63] No less important was Hindemith's role as teacher at Yale University and the Berkshire Music Center. There his tutelage spawned such rich young talents as Leonard Bernstein and Lukas Foss. American composers Aaron Copeland and William Schuman also were now influenced by Hindemith's music. And though Weill never held a teaching post, few can deny his enormous impact on the American musical stage.

The recent popular appeal of Weimar culture is exemplified by the attraction to Weill's music and Brecht's lyrics. During the 1950s, when Americans found themselves living in a world ever more elusive, *The Three Penny Opera* became a huge hit. Its off-Broadway run (for six and a half years at the Theater de Lys) broke all records for musical shows produced on or off Broadway while its box office revenues topped all previous off-Broadway productions. Misconceived in 1933, this 1954 production was not only more true to the original but its tone and message were now better perceived.[64]

In more recent years appreciation for Weill's music has further flourished as it has in other aspects of Weimar culture. During the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s—a time of great restlessness and protest—some Americans were fascinated by the specter of Weimar. *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf* became favorites of the Vietnam generation and the ideology of Lukács, Korsch, and Benjamin galvanized the New Left. Even today, during the last few years of economic uncertainty, we have been experiencing a "vogue" in Weimar culture.[65]

Cultural life in America, then, has become more sophisticated since we first deplored the "decadence" of Weimar. Especially after World War II, when the "culture boom" accelerated our thirst for foreign

culture, tastes have become more catholic. Not only do we talk more knowingly about German film, but the works of Bergman and Fellini are also discussed more intelligently. Thus, many of the barriers which Weimar initially encountered in the United States have fallen. With the heightened receptivity of this extraordinary culture, Weimar has left its mark. Its impact has been enormous and its legacy undoubtedly will continue to enrich our lives for generations to come.

Brooklyn, New York

Notes

[1] Personal interview with Peter Gay, 7 Dec. 1978; Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. xiv.

[2] Melvin Small, "The American Image of Germany, 1906-1914," Diss. Univ. of Michigan 1965, p. 455; Henry Cord Meyer, *Five Images of Germany* (Washington, D.C.: AHA, 1960), p. 4.

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[5] Schoenthal, pp. 46-47; *Nation,* 20 March 1920, pp. 367-68.

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[52] Frankenstein, taped reply to author.

[53] "Modern German Art," *New York Times,* 7 Oct. 1923, Sec. 9, p. 12; "Art Exhibitions of the Week," *New York Times,* 14 Oct. 1923, Sec. 8, p. 7; L. Lozowich, "Modern Art: Genesis or Exodus," *Nation,* 22 Dec. 1926, p. 672. Born in 1871 in the United States of German immigrant parents, Lyonel Feininger spent a good portion of his life in Germany where he received his training. There he worked extensively, emerging as a member of the Blue Four and then as one of the masters of the *Bauhaus.* For these reasons, among others, he is considered a Weimar artist.

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[63] Personal interview with Milton Babbitt, 4 Oct. 1977. See other personal interviews with John Cage, 23 Sept. 1977; Lou Harrison, 29 Oct. 1977; George Perle, 12 Dec. 1977; and George Rochberg, 23 July 1977.

[64] Stuart W. Little, "*Threepenny Opera* Adieu," *New York Herald Tribune,* 6 Dec. 1961; "Blitzstein's Adaptation of *The Three Penny Opera* Given by the Theater de Lys," *New York Times,* 11 March 1954; William Hawkins, "*Three Penny Opera,*" *New York Sun,* 11 March 1954, p. 23.

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