

4. See Sabine Kriebel, 'Manufacturing Discontent: John Heartfield's Mass Medium', *New German Critique*, vol. 36, no. 107, Summer 2009, pp. 53–88.

5. Thy Phu and Linda M. Steer (eds), 'Affecting Photographies', special issue of *Photography and Culture*, vol. 2, issue 3, 2009, p. 236.

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New German Adventures in Realism and Modernism

Esther Leslie

Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 52 b&w illns, 416 pp., ISBN 9780262017718, cloth \$34.95.

Sarah E. James, *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures Across the Iron Curtain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 10 colour illns, 170 b&w illns, 280 pp., ISBN 9780300184440, cloth \$65.00.

Some books appear written to throw up in the air the cards of knowledge, as they are currently stacked, in order to let them fall again in a new ordering, sometimes one that bears the marks of present interests. This may be the meaning of the prefix 'post'. It is not that, in the process of an analysis becoming 'post', the former modes of conception are made redundant. Rather, those modes are rearranged, defamiliarised, and amongst them new accents become audible. This is what Devin Fore's book seems to do, mobilising a Brechtian approach to raking over the past. It tracks the very well ploughed ground of the 1920s and 1930s, of European cultural practice and theorisation, especially in its German and Soviet varieties, of the avant-garde, of the relation between politics and aesthetics, at just that moment when the non-objective vogue in art gave way to the apparent return of figuration and, specifically, the human figure. Modernism is followed by Realism or, more specifically, a return to Realism, as some read it at the time, such as Lukács, in relation to work by Bertolt Brecht in the 1930s, delighted that the fragmentary, self-reflexive nightmare of Modernism appeared over, exhausted, a shore too far from concrete political concerns, which now pressed in. Fore explores and undermines the assertion that the return to the human form is a return to humanist concerns, to the rational, acting individual. Fore does not deny the return to some sort of figuration, in his case studies, which include Carl Einstein, John Heartfield, Lázló Moholy-Nagy, the industrial novelists Franz Jung and Erik Reger, Ernst Jünger, Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein, but he skews its meaning such that it comes to signify the opposite of what might be assumed by this. The re-emergence of Realism in the interwar years is no peddling back to fully rounded nineteenth-century forms of human life

existing in a three-dimensional world, a recomposition of totality after the wholeness was shattered in the First World War. It is instead Realism embedded in Modernist abstraction, in self-aware criticism of all that Realism had come to represent. It is Realism played out and cancelled. When Brecht absorbs the banalities of everyday conversation into the scenes of his *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*, it is not in order to emulate more accurately the real-life, urgent horrors of the epoch, but rather to expose and alienate all articulation as a performance, to render social reality – as much as art – as the lie it pretends not to be. And more than this, this subtle rethreading of Realism and Modernism is prophetic, an inauguration of a mode yet to come. It is the post before the post. The Realism they outline is hollow, empty, faux, flat – though nonetheless significant for that. It is the Realism of mimicry, which is itself a pre-aping of the Postmodern pastiche yet to emerge.

It makes sense to consider this book from the end, its postface, so to speak, as this reveals most starkly the pressures that direct the theorisation. A final chapter considers a photograph by Lewis Hine, titled 'Man at Dynamo', from 1921, depicting a technician dwarfed by a machine, alongside an image of a spider mite, which is providing some element of scale for an even tinier set of nanogears, which are machines the size of molecules, from the late 1990s. This latter image has been taken using a Scanning Electron Microscope. At interest, here is the shift in the unit of measure. Where photography established man as a measure, as a standard, our age of nanotech and atomic scales deals in the post-human, which seems best exemplified in the insectal. Or at least that is the argument that can be made using these two photographs and it fits well with a wider turn towards insect logics, swarms, hives, and webs that have become reference points in our epoch of media technologies and the network society. Neatly, Fore can trace it back to two ideologically opposed writers of great longevity, the fascist Ernst Jünger and the Marxist Ernst Bloch, who both composed new works in almost every decade of the twentieth century.

Jünger, we are told, foresaw the epistemic shift that separates the 1920s from the 1990s in his novel *The Glass Bees*, from 1957. This work of science fiction, with its dominating abstract ratio and its robotic bees that super-efficiently collect nectar, logs the displacement of the mesoscopic scale of the human being by the microscopic scale of the insect. This is a shift in the technological order that was begun in the first half of the century, or even before that, in the adoption of metrics in place of bodily measures, but was only completed in the atomic age and amplified in the digital age, which reveals the glass bees to be premonitions of microprocessors. Strangely, Jünger, who once forwarded with some sense of thrill this abstraction, in his militarised worker-soldier bodies of the 1930s, becomes the voice that laments it in the postwar epoch, and his thoughts are, implausibly, annexed to those of Ernst Bloch on 'de-organisation', the notion that the actions of contemporary machines are ever further removed from the operations carried out by human limbs. Or not so strangely and implausibly, as this is what can happen if a consistent political frame is largely absent from the telling, as is the case here. Everything occurs within the grand 'epistemic shift', which is variously articulated.

It is the transition from a symbolic economy based on the referential sign to one based on the simulacrum, the result of the saturation of everyday life with technical media, and the loss of a distinction between original and copy. This is the broad-brushed quasi-situationist reading and it sounds a critical note, and yet this plummet into simulacra is not to be lamented. Melded with a Foucauldian stance, what it means is that we have shifted, epistemically, from a representational semiotic to a semiotic of similitude. In this semiotic, what art does – where everyday life simply, blandly ‘loses’ out – is to generate prototypes, matrices of resemblance, nodes of correspondence. Art no longer seeks to depict life, but rather restores the cultural authority of analogy and physiognomy, modalities of thought that had been repressed with the emergence of the classic episteme inaugurated in the seventeenth century and of which Modernism was the last gasp.

Whatever the specific context of the innovations and reanimations of activist Modernists or avant gardists, not to mention those whose practice cannot be articulated easily within the stern logic of Fore’s systematising reading, we go forwards to go backwards and shake off the nightmare that was oppressive Modernism, highpoint and point of exhaustion of the Enlightenment. But what if that Modernism were itself a response and a channelling of something else, of newly possible democratic and revolutionary impulses? There is little room for that here. What has been comes to have been about the sign and its transformation into Foucault’s terms. Through this Fore can – most elegantly and learnedly – re-read John Heartfield, for example, as responding not to the Russian Revolution and the politics of anti-fascism, but rather to a transformation in the relation of knowledge and power in the twentieth century. Whereby in the bourgeois sphere of the previous two hundred years power operated in secrecy and darkness, in the ‘refeudalised’ conditions of the mass media, with its emphases on celebrity and display, misdeeds are carried out in plain view. Such a Foucauldian reading ignores economy in favour of power. Power might be conceived as a quality that can be tracked as open or closed, according to Fore’s reading, but for the communists among Fore’s case studies, it is economy that counts, and which continues through this epoch to operate as a structural secret ripe for exposure, as an obtuse, dumb violent fact of life. For Fore, this is irrelevant, as Heartfield’s practice does not operate according to a metaphor of surface and depth, economy and epiphenomena, whereby a truth, a communist one, is revealed in the cross-fire of meanings generated by image and text. Instead, in the age of the information bomb, which precedes and segues with the atomic bomb, signs are set in motion, overcoded, hypercharged, condensed, quivering unstably, uttering collectively and paradoxically, in dialogue with power’s naked articulations. Meanwhile, caricature and physiognomy are mobilised to invoke the inauthenticity of all signification and the contemporaneous displacement of the human by the model, the cliché, the type – sometimes even simply typographic, as, for example, in Hans Richter’s substitution of the human face by typed zeroes in *Inflation* (1927). Heartfield’s grotesque head of Goering is to be captured in the same semiotic system as Helene Weigel’s blank adaptable face for

alienated acting, and Garbo’s overly made-up film face, which is deployed by Ernst Jünger as an example of the modern self as mechanical copy in his photo-book *The Transformed World* (1932). August Sander’s serial photography in *Face of Our Time* (1929) is not in this reading about particularity and specificity, but about sequences of similarity, human types as ‘stock in trade’. Similitude, a governing concept of the book, is also an impulse at work in the book. In making everything so much the same, Fore seems to lose any sense of the subtle anglings that emerge from and testify to political division, or, to use a metaphor from Walter Benjamin’s *One Way Street*: world history may blow into the sails, but it is the way that they are set that is tantamount to thinking. From such a perspective, Eisenstein’s montage might appear to share something with Leni Riefenstahl’s ‘forming’, and yet, from Benjamin’s, one is the negation of the other. There is an acknowledgement of strategy, at points, though. Discussing Brecht’s return to a certain mode of Realism, Fore recounts how Brecht’s desire, in the late 1920s, to liquidate aesthetics altogether is tempered when he realises that the Nazis are achieving a more influential unframing of the aesthetic.

According to this study, the diagnosis of what has been, what is and what should be, is as identical, and entwined with the atomic, as it is bound up with the insectal. Both atom and insect relate etymologically to division, the cut. Atom is that which is no longer divisible, the ‘not-cut’. Insect, the animal with a notched or divided body, means literally ‘cut into’. The lesson is that we are not individuals, finding shape in the human-like avatars of interwar art and culture, but rather ‘dividuals’, in Deleuze’s phrase describing endlessly divisible, highly technologically mediated selves. We are divided selves, cut ups, assemblages, equipped for an atomic and entomic age. There is little sense here that such a move, whether a fact or whether desirable, might make a different kind of sense in relation to a collective subject, a mass subject predicated on revolutionary change, than it does in relation to the gruntworker in the ongoing grind of industrial and postindustrial capitalism.

The atomic age is the setting for Sarah James’ study of the significance of serial photography in the two Germanies of the postwar age, from 1955 to 1994, when social discourse negotiated or ignored the Holocaust, the privations of ruin and reconstruction, rapid Americanisation, the Cold War and the building of the Berlin Wall, nuclear terror, dissidence and opposition and (re)unification. In this superbly illustrated volume, James is on the quest for new historical figurations of political subjectivity. Edward Steichen’s presentation of the image of a nuclear explosion in the *Family of Man* exhibition in 1955 sets it within the frame of a post-ideological, ‘a-political’ universal humanism – which of course had plenty of ideological and political uses. It is in critical response to this that James reads her examples: Brecht’s antifascist photobook *Kriegsfiibel* (War Primer), from 1955, Karl Pawek’s 1964 exhibition *What is Man?*, the photo-essays of East German photographer Evelyn Richter; Bernd and Hilla Becher’s collaborative work; the portraits of dead people, by East German photographer Rudolf Schäfer; and Michael Schmidt’s photo-essay reflecting on the divided and (re)united Germanies, *Ein-heit* (U-ni-ty) (1991–94). Like Fore, of interest here are self-reflexive forms of Realism, of

the document wrestled free from lumpenly naturalistic signification. Also, as in Fore, it appears necessary to excavate the pre-history, leaping backwards over the Nazi Third Reich, to engage the richly modulated debates that took place in Germany in the 1920s.

The book opens with Brecht's little-examined *Kriegsfibel* – his cut ups of photographs from the daily press that are coupled with ironic rhymes – in order to conceptualise the mode of seeing that should be encountered on the 'common ground' between photographer and spectator. It is 'complex seeing'. The juxtapositions of text and image and image and image 'activate seeing'. Where *Kriegsfibel*, like the photomontages of John Heartfield, achieves this from the Left, Ernst Jünger, we are told, models this for the Right, through his 'stereoscopic seeing', a mode of photographic enstaging that purported to present the material and the metaphysical, or, in other words, the *Urbild*, or underlying essences of Being. One might be rather more circumspect about how overlapping these two modes of seeing really are.

James mentions Jünger's rehabilitation in Germany of the 1960s, which serves to legitimate the use of him as, again, a prophet and legislator of the image politics of the atomic age. Indeed Pawek's *What is Man?* cited Jünger as an influence, and he appears to be a vector for blasting Steichen's smooth, harmonious humanism into a violent, conflictual image of the age. Photography had altered subjectivity and transformed the gaze. Jünger, in writing of and providing images of violence and danger, had not been an advocate for it, but rather was simply mimicking the growing incursion of violence and pain in everyday life, occasioned by militarism and the machine. Photography was mobilised to show the danger and the hardened self and was itself mechanical, providing a sharper mechanical vision. It was suited to the accumulation of perceptions, to the provision of sequences. In *The Transformed World*, Jünger splices gruesome pictures with leisure images, taken from the world of the newspapers and the illustrated magazines. Crowds at a mass hanging in Afghanistan are set next to female life savers doing skills demonstrations in Melbourne, in front of large crowds. Bodies are wounded and killed. Bodies are rescued at the moment of death. Violent juxtaposition redoubles the violence of the content. The mass age and mass reproduction meet, as Walter Benjamin observed, though he also, unambivalently, unlike here, lambasted, as a politics of aesthetics, any 'misuse' of the apparatus, that is to say, fetishistic, reactionary uses that seek to perpetuate, rather than more or less blankly mirror, the violence of industrial fascisto-capitalism.

Jünger's images work in concert. A determining focus of James' book is serial photography. James is interested in the relations between photographs, whether that occurs as part of a photographic project (as in the Bechers' practice or in Schäfer; and Schmidt), or as an exhibition (such as Steichen's or Pavek's), or in magazines or photo essays. Seriality is, so the claim goes, necessarily political, whether it proposes identity or difference across the images. In either case, it forces the establishing of connections, or rationale, of narrative. In this way, we are told, singular innocuous images,

in the context of a repressive surveillance state, such as the GDR, can accrete critical and disruptive meanings.

Both Fore and James discover photography as a peculiarly active, activating and legislative thing. For Fore, Heartfield, for example, subtly alters the perceptual alignment of viewers in his photomontages, mobilising and directing gazes. As Eisenstein observed, and deployed, there is a rhythm of looking. Serial photography, which has potentially something pedagogic about it – and James approaches it as exemplars of 'primers', 'manuals', or 'atlases of instruction', as Benjamin put it – is also about rhythm, bouncing the gaze from one site to another, to build up meanings across time, in a sort of fragmented narrative, à la Modernism. In the GDR, the documentary surface of photography becomes an unstable wobbly ground and what it mirrors is not the ideal-typical life of the GDR, but rather the double lives – public virtues, private vices – of its citizenry. This is not the only mirroring. Through exploration of the photographic output, we find mirrorings of East and West Germany, as both refer back to the common ground of the photographic legacy of Weimar, but, more precisely, one is reflected in the other. At one stage James puts it blankly: bourgeois individualism and capitalism beat at the heart of East German society. James' text has political ambition. It wants to fix these photographic narratives within the turbulence of political, economic and ideological pressures, including the pressure of the self-proclaimed 'post-ideological'. Politics is like a quality, or perhaps, a quantity that fills up and cannot be ignored in certain moments. Thus, 'if Steichen's exhibition drew on empathy and pleasure to eradicate political identification, using the threat of nuclear holocaust as a sublime unifying principle, Pawek's show grappled with the idea of universals after Auschwitz and the impossibility of securing a sense of apolitical belonging in such explicitly political times' (p. 100). One wonders what would make a time more or less explicitly political, but also what politics is. At one point, James characterises both communism and capitalism as past, utopian systems. But in what sense are they past and to what extent and from whose perspective were they or are they utopian? Still, the dismantling of the Wall in order to stage the mirrorings of one system in the other is an illuminating move and performs an excellent reordering of the cards.

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Exploring Reproducibility and Regionalism in Weimar Germany

Camilla Smith

Dorothy C. Rowe, *After Dada: Marta Hegemann and the Cologne Avant-garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 16 colour plates, 57 b&w illns, 240 pp., ISBN 9780719090073, hardback £70.00.