



1 Expressionism and Rebellion

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The expressionist rebellions affirmed the primacy of a passionate subjectivity against traditional social norms and artistic forms. While maintaining a posture of artistic and social revolt, the Expressionists attacked the values and institutions of German bourgeois society and culture through provocative artistic attitudes and productions. Yet although the Expressionists championed subjectivity, passion, and rebellion, throughout this book it will be argued that Expressionism is a much more complex movement than is usually recognized. Against standard academic interpretations which reduce Expressionism to a species of irrational pathos, mystical vision, or merely a formal set of innovations in the arts, this introductory chapter — supported by many of the following studies — will attempt to show that Expressionism provides insights into the constitution of the modern epoch and social criticism of the effects on human life brought about by capitalist industrialization. Expressionism will therefore be re-interpreted as an avant-garde artistic movement which responded rebelliously to the development of bourgeois society in the era of industrial capitalism. From this perspective, Expressionism is not only important as an artistic phenomenon, but also as a social movement and integral part of the emergence of twentieth-century culture and consciousness which provides critical insights into an epoch that is not yet over.

Defining Expressionism

Over the past decades, there have been many, often contradictory, attempts to define Expressionism.¹ Sometimes Expressionism is characterized as a form of philosophical idealism or subjectivism, while both Marxists like Georg Lukacs and standard academic interpretations present it as a species of irrationalism.² For instance, Bernard S. Myers characterizes Expressionism in a way that stresses solely its subjective elements: "Fundamentally, the Expressionist artist stands for mysticism, self-examination, contemplation of the other-worldly, and speculation on the infinite — expressed in terms of great feeling or emotive tension."³ Although there exist within Expressionism elements of speculative metaphysics and emphasis on vision, intuition, and what is labelled as the "irrational," this emphasis cannot adequately define the movement as a whole. Indeed, many Expressionists sought to overcome traditional academic distinctions between rationalism-irrationalism, objectivism-subjectivism, and materialism-idealism. In others, these polarities waged fierce battles which sometimes swayed toward one pole and sometimes the other. While some Expressionists were clearly irrationalists and extreme subjectivists, others articulated a subjective experience of objective historical crisis. Their fantasies were often grounded in real potentialities; their concern for the individual was sometimes accompanied by a drive toward social transformation; their idealism was frequently tempered by materialism; and their subjective revolts often contained rational critiques of ideology and society.

Artistically, Expressionism is often presented within the history of art as a rejection of Impressionism, Realism, and Naturalism. It has been claimed, for instance, that Expressionism is characterized by "(i) the use of various anti-naturalist or 'abstracting' devices, such as syntactical compression or symbolic picture-sequences, (ii) the assault on the sacred cows of the Wilhelmine-bourgeoisie from a left-wing internationalist position, (iii) the choice of the theme of spiritual regeneration or renewal, and (iv) the adoption of a fervent declamatory tone."⁴ This description is misleading because expressionist "abstraction" often provided socio-historical insight and combined symbolist with realist elements. As a response to the prevailing norms and values of bourgeois society, the Expressionists espoused a variety of political positions from left-internationalist to right-nationalist. Some Expressionists criticized the sort of spiritual renewal, mystical apocalypse, and messianic revolution promoted by others, satirizing and attacking declamatory rhetoric in the arts, as well as artistic conventions and clichéd journalistic and everyday language.

A problem with many standard characterizations of Expressionism is that they often take the ideological pronouncements of expressionist artists, or literati, at face value as accurate descriptions of expressionist art. In fact, the avant-garde movements which flourished in Europe during the first two decades of the century gave rise to a welter of artistic ideologies

which sometimes had little to do with the best art in the movement.⁵ Intense market competition forced each new movement, or artistic tendency, to justify its novelty and importance by trumpeting its claims as a radical break with tradition which achieved a momentous artistic revolution. As part of the international avant-garde revolts, there appeared many ideological manifestoes which proclaimed the superiority of expressionist art. The expressionist avant-gardes attracted followers who produced interpretive works to publicize the movement. Wishing to more fully participate in the expressionist sub-cultures, these literati and publicists championed expressionist painting, poetry, music, theater, and film. They wrote manifestoes, reviews, and books praising and selling Expressionism to an initially inhospitable German public. Expressionist artists, too, energetically promoted both their works and the movement as a whole, producing artistic ideologies which explained and legitimized their artistic endeavors.

Indeed, Expressionism was one of the most self-conscious movements in the history of art and literature, accompanied by reams of theoretical writing and legitimating ideologies. As Geoffrey Perkins puts it, "common to both the art and literature of Expressionism, and most important for its relatively rapid success as well as for its equally abrupt end, were the 'pure' theoreticians, a band of knight-errant Doctors of Philosophy or Law, who neither painted nor wrote, but explained."⁶ Since these artistic ideologies tended toward bombastic pathos, they often mystified the achievements of particular expressionist artists and works. The many later interpretations of Expressionism which followed the pronouncements of its ideologues tended to reproduce ideologies originally conceived to promote and legitimate the movement.

Another questionable, yet standard, way of interpreting Expressionism involves dividing the movement into two stages or tendencies: an earlier critical, negative and immensely creative artistic stage contrasted with a later, allegedly naive, rhetorical, and political "activist" stage where Expressionism degenerates into cliché and bombast. This theory of "two Expressionisms" was formulated by Wolfgang Paulsen in his 1935 book *Aktivismus und Expressionismus*⁷ and by Walter Sokel in his influential 1959 book, *The Writer in Extremis*, who distinguishes between an early "sophisticated and modernist version of Expressionism" which developed a "new form" and a later "naive or rhetorical Expressionism" that haplessly preached a New Man.⁸ Although there are many conflicting tendencies in Expressionism, it is doubtful whether one can neatly separate the "naive" from the "sophisticated," the "rhetorical" from the "formal," or the "artistic" from the "political." Some of the most modernist and aesthetically creative Expressionists were among the most rhetorical and were also, in their way, "political." "Activist" Expressionists were often "modernist" and experimental in their techniques, while those accused of being "messianic" and "rhetorical" (e.g., Kaiser) were often critical of excessive rhetoric and naive hopes for the New Man.

Since both artistic and political, formal and rhetorical tendencies are often found in the same artists or works, it is really impossible to separate neatly Expressionists into two essential categories.⁹

Expressionism therefore contains an anomalous heritage. Many interpretations of Expressionism suppress its contradictions and offer one-sided and inaccurate characterizations. In view of the heterogeneity of the expressionist rebellions, there is really no "essence" of Expressionism that allows itself to be captured in a simple definition. The difficulties in defining it, however, should not lead to agnosticism over the possibility of characterizing and interpreting Expressionism as an artistic movement. In part as a reaction to earlier simplified and problematical definitions of Expressionism, a tendency appeared in the late 1950's which in one form claimed that Expressionism could not be defined,¹⁰ and in a more extreme form urged the abandonment of all literary "isms" and totalizing concepts in literary analysis.¹¹ While these positions raised serious questions about the adequacy of previous characterizations of Expressionism, they surrender, in effect, historical-philosophical analysis which might describe and interpret Expressionism as a movement with specific artistic-ideological tendencies and politico-cultural effects. Hence, while admitting that there is no simple definition, or "essence," of Expressionism, nonetheless there is still the problem of defining it as an artistic movement. This task should not be performed, however, by interpreting Expressionism as an emanation of the Teutonic soul, seeing the movement as an epiphenomenon of a peculiarly German worldview or spirit. John Willett, for instance, claims that Expressionism contains "a number of components which are seen as characteristically 'Teutonic,' not only by the outside world but also by many German critics: darkness, introspection, a concern with the mysterious and uncanny, massive metaphysical speculation, a certain gratuitous cruelty and a brilliant linear hardness, expressed by the most extravagant convolutions."¹² Others stress the primitivism inherent in Expressionism and its celebration of the natural and primordial.¹³ These interpretations fail to see, however, that Expressionism responds to experiences of an emerging "modern" mechanized, industrialized world and that "primitivism" and "modernism" are peculiarly mixed in Expressionism. The expressionist reaction to modernity often invokes shock and passionate revolt, utilizing grotesque and sometimes primitive forms to express an experience and vision. Consequently, expressionist distortion, grotesqueness and ugliness — central formal features of expressionist art — are ways of visualizing and interpreting experiences of the emerging industrial society and are not simply expressions of a "Teutonic soul."

Moreover, Expressionism should be seen as an international artistic tendency.¹⁴ The predecessors of German Expressionism came from a variety of countries, and Expressionism itself had impact throughout Europe and the United States. It was not the Germans alone who turned to the "irrational" and the "primitive" in art. The French philosopher

Rousseau is often perceived as the dominant European advocate of the "natural," and the French painters Gauguin, Henri Rousseau, and the Fauvists — as well as Europeans like Van Gogh and Munch — utilized "primitive" forms in their art. Further, expressionist painters like Kandinsky, Jawlensky, and Chagall were Russians, as were a group of "primitivist" poets. Strindberg vitally influenced expressionist drama, and Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Whitman, Dostoyevsky, and others influenced expressionist writing. Expressionism should therefore be seen as part of a series of avant-garde revolts and not as an epiphenomenon of the German "soul."

Nonetheless, an adequate interpretation must explain why the tendencies which we now call "Expressionism" took their most characteristic forms and had their greatest impact in Germany. In order to explain the origins and rise to cultural dominance of Expressionism in Germany from around 1910 to the early 1920's, one must focus on the social conditions and cultural infrastructure which shaped the expressionist movement in Germany. To begin, Expressionism had its roots in a specific German cultural tradition. Germany had a long history of artistic revolt and extreme individualism exhibited in its baroque drama and painting, *Sturm und Drang*, and Romanticism.¹⁵ The crucial philosophical influence on Expressionism was Nietzsche, whose impact in Germany at the turn of the century was extremely powerful. In music, Beethoven, Wagner, and Mahler were part of the German heritage. The plays of Strindberg, Büchner, and the proto-Expressionist Frank Wedekind were part of the German repertoire by 1910. Both Romanticism and the Gothic and Baroque traditions of painting influenced expressionist creations in the pictorial arts. Moreover, Germany possessed a cultural infrastructure which could promote avant-garde developments in the arts — a cafe culture, theaters, music halls, cabarets, art galleries, literary and political journals, and publishing houses, some of which promoted expressionist art.¹⁶ Groups of painters, *Die Brücke* and *Der Blaue Reiter*, produced, exhibited, and propagated expressionist painting, and new poets and writers had access to expressionist journals like *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*. Expressionist sub-cultures arose in Munich, Dresden, Berlin, and other German cities which provided a supportive environment for the growth and propagation of the movement. Consequently, it was the cultural tradition and infrastructure in Germany and — as I shall argue in this chapter — the peculiar development of German industrial capitalism which helped produce Expressionism as a dominant artistic movement in Germany, and not any nebulous Teutonic soul.

Romanticism, Nietzsche, and the Rise of the Subjective Orientation

To understand the origin and genesis of Expressionism, we must see it as a late development in the series of romantic anti-capitalist revolts that

emerged in the nineteenth century. The Romantics helped produce what Stephen Bronner has termed a "subjective orientation" which characterizes much of the later developments in German art and philosophy.¹⁷ Against the prosaic realism, possessive individualism, and calculating objectivism of the emerging capitalist market society, the Romantics emphasized the creative individual, artistic genius, and the powers of imagination. Consequently, in the manifold romantic rebellions, there was a growing concern for the "inner life" and the creative powers of the individual.

Earlier in the industrial revolution, the English poet William Blake had attacked the "Satanic mills" and called for spiritual rebirth in the face of the material and spiritual decay which industrialization produced.¹⁸ The English romantic poets idealized nature, withdrawing to the Lake Country and other regions unspoiled by industrialization and urbanization.¹⁹ German Romantics — like Novalis, Hölderlin, and the Schlegels — looked back to a Golden Age and fought for a revitalization of culture and spiritualizing of the personality in the face of industrialization and mechanization.²⁰ Along with the young Hegel who shared their general orientation, the Romantics were among the first to perceive the alienation of the individual in the modern world and to call for a new society and revitalized subjectivity. They believed that by completely unfettering the creative powers of the individual imagination, a new spiritualized world could be created, and they affirmed the organic wholeness of man and nature, art and life, in a period when new forces challenged and assaulted the human subject.

During the nineteenth century, the rise of the subjective orientation was thus a response to what were perceived as threats to freedom and creativity. New social powers and structures overwhelmed a sensitive, cultural intelligentsia, producing a crisis of confidence which brought about an inward turn and increased focus on subjectivity and the "inner life." The triumph of industrial capitalism, coupled with the rise of mass society, urbanization, mechanized war, and the rapid tempo of technological and social change, led many to turn from the social and political realms to a cultivation and concern with individual subjectivity. The new subjectivist philosophies attempted to set the subject free from Objective or Absolute Idealism, as well as from the Creative Imagination of the Romantics. The individual subject was proclaimed the center of the universe and the primary locus of value, resulting in the disintegration of the Absolute and the absolutizing of the Subject. Such a philosophical rebellion began with the Romantics and was continued by the young Hegelians, Kierkegaard, and Max Stirner, and assumed an even more radical form with Nietzsche.²¹

Friedrich Nietzsche anticipated the expressionist rebellions in his polemical attacks on bourgeois society and culture, coupled with his demand for an emancipatory art and philosophy. His impact was deeply felt by many Expressionists, such as the playwright Reinhard Sorge, whose

poem "Christ and Nietzsche" put them on the same level as redeemers of mankind, and the poet Gottfried Benn, who described Nietzsche as the "world scale giant of the post-Goethean era."²² Nietzsche attracted the Expressionists because they perceived in him a powerful critique of modern society and call for self-transformation.

Nietzsche's analysis of the modern era is crucial for understanding the expressionist project and its (often unarticulated) epistemological-metaphysical assumptions. For Nietzsche, the death of God was the decisive fact of the epoch, and deeply affected the totality of life. In his view, religion had declined as a viable philosophical system; consequently, many traditional values were rendered obsolete or threatened by the demise of a Deity who guaranteed value, meaning, and transcendence. In characteristically dramatic fashion, Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God in a passage that is proto-expressionist in its vigor and rhetoric:

The *Madman*. Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances. . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?²³

The death of God, Nietzsche believed, had ushered in a new era of nihilism in which the traditionally highest values were devaluated, resulting in a loss of confidence and security, leading to a weakening of the will and decline of human power.²⁴ He argued that the death of God also undermined the foundation of modern philosophy which, in his view, rested on religious assumptions. The absolute certainty of the substantial subject, which Descartes posited as the necessary foundation for modern philosophy, rested on belief in a Deity who guaranteed the subject's knowledge and even immortality. Kant's critique of reason left room for religious beliefs and assumed a transcendental subject as the foundation of universal knowledge.²⁵ Some interpreters have seen Hegel as providing a sort of philosophical theodicy which conceptualized the totality of being as the manifestation of an absolute subject, interpreted by the religious Hegelians as God. Although Feuerbach and the young Hegelians claimed that idealist philosophy was theology in disguise, Nietzsche drew more extreme metaphysical and epistemological consequences.²⁶

The death of God, Nietzsche suggested, brought about metaphysical homelessness and epistemological relativism. With no absolute grounding for knowledge and no certainty for one's perceptions, knowledge becomes a product of the individual subject. Here Nietzsche radicalized Kant, whose "Copernican revolution" maintained that knowledge is the product of a universal subject. While for Kant, *a priori* forms of cognition and knowledge guaranteed the universality and truth of claims to knowledge, Nietzsche subjectivized Kant's critique of pure reason and argued that each individual creates his/her own view of the world. Consequently, ideas and philosophies should be judged to the extent to which they promote or negate the individual's life, and not according to epistemological criteria. Nietzsche's "perspectivism" stands as one of the most radically subjectivist epistemologies in the history of philosophy, and it helped undermine the foundation of objectivistic theories of knowledge. For Nietzsche, truth is a subjective construct and knowledge is a ruse of the will to power, used to dominate and control nature and other people.²⁷

Nietzsche's epistemology had radical consequences for the concept of art and the nature of artistic activity. If there was no objective reality for the artist to "imitate," then the role of art was individual expression or creation. Classical realist art assumed the existence of a fixed and stable external "reality" which art was to picture or mirror. But if this "reality" dissolved in a flux of individual perceptions, then the artist was freed from the constraints of any fixed notions of art or reality. Nietzsche's "relativism" thus profoundly influenced the expressionist worldview and aesthetic perspectives.

Moreover, Nietzsche proclaimed that the very notion of a subject of knowledge or action is a fiction: "My hypothesis: subject as multiplicity."²⁸ In this interpretation, the "subject" becomes a bundle of drives and impulses, some of which are not even conscious. The autonomous subject is dethroned; the individual seen as a field of conflicting forces and drives. In this view, one cannot necessarily know one's own nature and cannot be sure that perceptions, ideas, or words correspond to any external or objective reality. This sundering of language and reality, thought and being, provided the foundation for many Expressionists' views of the world. For some, it created a situation of despair and extreme subjectivism, while others found Nietzsche's ideas very liberating. Freed from traditional constraints, the individual could create a novel world of thoughts and actions, as well as unique worlds of art. The poet Georg Trakl, for instance, rejected the poetic ego of lyric poetry and opened up a new field of literary expression in which dreams, fantasies, and the unconscious could function on an equal level of importance to consciousness and rationality.²⁹ Nietzsche had a powerful impact on Strindberg, Munch, and other artists who were in turn important influences on Expressionism.

For the expressionist generation, Nietzsche was one of the most

powerful critics of the modern age by virtue of his attacks against German philistinism, religion, and mass society. Practically all Expressionists followed Nietzsche in opposing the society of the "*Bildungsphilister*" ("complacent bourgeois") and, like Nietzsche, they perceived threats to individual subjectivity through new social forces and institutions. Above all, the Expressionists were entranced by Nietzsche's summons to create a superior individual, the *Übermensch*. They became fascinated with his radical transvaluation of values combined with his call for an overthrow of the highest existing values, and were impressed by his daring attempt to develop a new art and language which would combine philosophy, literature, and individual expression. Nietzsche's visionary, rhapsodic prose in works like *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* provided a liberating sense that the artist could create and express anything. His championing of the body, passions, and ecstasy inspired the Expressionists, who themselves opposed bourgeois morality and advocated a freer sexuality. Furthermore, his emphasis on spiritual renewal and advocacy of creativity as the highest value were important for the Expressionists' sense of the artistic calling. And many Expressionists were taken with Nietzsche's apocalyptic vision of a new world, of a *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Idols) and *Morgenröte* (A New Day).

Almost all expressionist artists of the period absorbed Nietzschean ideas through osmosis, if not by direct study. Nietzsche's ideas were "in the air" and helped create the intellectual atmosphere in which Expressionism emerged. Moreover, his radical critiques of epistemology, science, and rationalism were carried further by Freud, Bergson, and irrationalists like Klages. Their analyses continued the trend to "de-center" the subject and to picture human reality as a chaotic, fragmentary force-field of conflicting drives, ideas, and emotions. Bergson described the "flow" of "lived experience" and argued that immediate intuition provided a more direct access to reality than analytical reason. The philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), too, made lived experience and empathetic intuition (*Einfühlung*) of others' thoughts and feelings the key to cultural interpretation.³⁰

Tendencies in the philosophy of science also nourished the subjective orientation. Richard Avenarius, Ernst Mach, and later positivists denied that perceptions mirror external reality, claiming that all we could know are our own sense-perceptions and not any "objective" external world.³¹ Mach attacked all forms of metaphysics as untenable dogmatism, arguing that science itself is no more than a symbolic construct to help us with practical activities and therefore without any absolute status. Mach rejected all absolute concepts, believing that atoms, space, time, causality, and all our knowledge are simply instruments we use within various theories and practical behavior. The impact of Mach's relativism was intensified by Einstein's relativity theory which, to many, caused a crisis in the foundation of the sciences. Centuries of scientific certainty rooted in Newtonian physics were thus overthrown and "relativi-

ty" was one of the most discussed and disturbing concepts of the day.

In this universe, there were no absolutes or certainties; even the basic elements of experience, which were the basis of knowledge and action, themselves were perceived by the Machians as subjective sensations which did not necessarily correspond to any external reality. Nietzsche, Freud, Mach, and others put in question the concept of a substantial self as the foundation of sense-perceptions. This form of "subjectivism without a subject" (Kolakowski) helped at once to produce philosophical skepticism and relativism, as well as attempts to ground knowledge and re-establish a transcendental subject or bedrock of epistemic certainty.³² The neo-Kantians and phenomenologists, for example — who were among the dominant philosophical currents during the rise of Expressionism — followed the critical epistemologies, yet attempted to escape the dilemmas of relativism. Various neo-Kantians attempted to resurrect subjectivity and to re-establish absolute ethical values,³³ while Husserl sought to establish essential truths which would be ascertained in a phenomenological "intuition of essence" (*Wesensschau*) and grounded in a transcendental subject.³⁴

The expressionist generation grew up in the ferment of this philosophical situation, reproducing its contradictions in their thought and works. They were influenced in various ways by the relativism and perspectivism of Nietzsche, Mach, and others, as well as by the attempts to vindicate subjectivity and establish a realm of essential being and truth advocated by the neo-Kantians and Husserl. Thus Expressionism is marked by tendencies of nihilism and relativism, as well as by attempts to overcome these tendencies. Many were influenced by the ethical idealism of the neo-Kantians, while others engaged in the quest for essence that derived from Husserl and the phenomenologists. Although they may not have explicitly studied these theories, most Expressionists had some knowledge of philosophy and engaged in heated intellectual disputes in their cafes and artistic circles.

It would be a mistake of academic idealism, however, to see Expressionism simply as a reaction to trends in European philosophy and art. These trends themselves were part of a complex socio-historical development and the Expressionists — like other avant-garde movements of the period — were sensitive to the transformations taking place in their socio-historical situation. Expressionists sensed far-reaching change occurring and saw themselves moving into a new era. This "epochal consciousness" made them acutely aware of the novel features in their socio-historical environment; it also made them open to the need for radical change, and ready to create a "new art" as a harbinger of "new life." The sense of an old era passing and the resultant confusion and disorientation that such a situation created is articulated in Jacob van Hoddiss's poem "End of the World":

The bourgeois' hat flies off his pointed head,
the air re-echoes with a screaming sound.

Tilers plunge from roofs and hit the ground,
and seas are rising round the coasts (you read).

The storm is here, crushed dams no longer hold,
the savage seas come inland with a hop.

The greater part of people have a cold.
Off bridges everywhere the railroads drop.³⁵

"End of the World" suggests the end of a stable, well-ordered cosmos, where one could gain epistemological and metaphysical certainty from knowing that the world and social life were governed by stable laws and conventions. In van Hoddiss's poem, this certainty is exploded as chaos and confusion, while a lack of causal order reigns in both the poem and the world depicted: hats fly off, the air is full of screams, houses collapse, and a storm is about to break, as the complacent bourgeoisie sniffle about, unaware of the changes coming, getting their news and experience "second-hand" from newspapers. The structure of van Hoddiss's poem reflects the disconnected, disordered world which the poet envisages: the images are pungent but are not ordered in a coherent poetic structure; rather, there is a rush of simultaneous word-pictures which are assembled pell-mell, literarily without apparent rhyme or reason. A sense of coming catastrophe pervades the poem, however, and a sense of threats to the imagining subject is evoked. The poem at once suggests the end of lyric poetry — with its harmonious forms and universe of beautiful illusion — as well as the end of a society which could produce lyric poetry. Such changes in experience and poetic form and content can be read as a reaction to the alienation of the individual and "crisis of subjectivity" in the transition to industrial capitalism.

Expressionism, Industrial Capitalism, and the Crisis of Subjectivity

Expressionism arose in a period in which analyses of the alienation, reification, and dehumanization of the individual, and the fragmentation of the human personality, had become widespread. As a reaction to the crisis of subjectivity, Expressionism contained passionate reaffirmations of individuality. The expressionist rebellions contained impulses toward the fulfillment and spiritual realization of the individual combined with revolts against repressive socio-cultural conditions. Herein is contained the ambivalent heritage of Expressionism that at once attacks bourgeois society, yet is excessively individualistic, and thereby retools traditional bourgeois ideologies of subjectivity. For although most expressionist rebellions possess elements of social critique, many of their categories and solutions borrow from traditional metaphysical and religious doctrines (i.e., Soul, Heart, Humanity, Love, Transcendence, and the like).

The expressionist defense of subjectivity sought an inward realm of

retreat, whereby individuality and humanity could be preserved, protected against assaults from a repressive society and a destructive socio-economic order. As Marcuse puts it, "The 'flight into inwardness' and the insistence on a private sphere may well serve as bulwarks against a society which administers all dimensions of human existence."³⁶ The Expressionists experienced successively the triumph of industrial capitalism, the rise of the administered society, and the ravages of imperialist war. Their emphasis on subjectivity was a defensive maneuver against the oppression of the subject in the emerging organized capitalist society, although expressionist subjectivity would also take aggressive forms, advocating "activism" and artistic and social revolt.

After the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 industrial development in Germany proceeded at a rapid pace, producing giant monopolies, trusts, cartels, and a powerful "finance capital" establishment by the 1880's.³⁷ Germany's political unification and its victory in the war with France generated intense nationalism. Moreover, the French reparation payments enabled Germany to accelerate its industrialization process and to surpass other European countries in many industries. The belated industrial revolution transformed a previously provincial, agrarian society into one of the industrial-economic powers of the world. Electrical, chemical, and textile industries grew, as did mining, iron, steel, machine-tool, and arms industries. The transportation and communications systems swiftly expanded; railroads were built throughout Germany; canals were constructed; harbors were built and enlarged; and the German merchant fleet traversed the entire globe as Germany entered the race for the colonialization of the world, soon becoming a major imperialist power.

The mechanization of labor, social transformation, and war, combined with the rise of big cities and industrial regions, provided psychic shocks to those who were not sympathetic to the new industrialized world. Others were put off by the spread of the capitalist market economy, which reduced everything — even people and artworks — to the commodity-form, and which measured value by "exchange-value" as it forced market competition on every region of socio-economic or cultural life. Most of the expressionist generation was born and lived through this "great transformation," which was the subject of many popular and widely read sociological treatises. The German sociologist Tönnies described the transition as movement from organic, natural communities founded on close personal ties and kinship (*Gemeinschaft*) to a fragmented, industrialized, and egotistical exchange-society (*Gesellschaft*). Max Weber analyzed the "disenchantment of the world," the "iron cage" of bureaucracy and technological rationality, and the decline of spirituality brought about by capitalist development. Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart analyzed the impact of the rise of big cities, a market-economy, and the role of money.³⁸

Industrialization in Germany was not only relatively late and rapid,

but was also exceptionally uneven and full of tensions. In the struggle for monopolization of the major industries, the dominant economic powers were split among themselves. They faced a relatively militant and well-organized working class, as well as agricultural and upper-class quasi-feudal sectors who were hostile to industrialization. Consequently, monopoly capitalism was not able to impose its hegemony on Germany without tension and resistance. The working class remained staunchly Social Democratic, and certain German traditions of community, religion, and culture also resisted capitalist domination.³⁹

Although enough wealth and stability existed to support a leisure class of artists and intellectuals, the intelligentsia was split between those who willingly served the existing order and those who were alienated from Wilhelmine society. The critical intelligentsia, including the Expressionists, regarded the typical German bourgeois as a *Bildungsphilister* or *Spießler*: stodgy, conservative, greedy, nationalistic, and militaristic.⁴⁰ Yet although they were alienated from the bourgeoisie, most Expressionists could neither identify with the working class nor its political movement. The German Social Democrats saw themselves as the inheritors of bourgeois enlightenment and democracy. They believed that the German bourgeoisie had renounced the revolutionary heritage of the 1848 Revolution, and they saw themselves as the preservers of the progressive aspects of bourgeois culture. Thus, the Social Democrats supported realism and sometimes "revolutionary romanticism" in the arts, and called for the self-formation (*Bildung*) of the working class through assimilation of the progressive elements of bourgeois culture. The Expressionists, however, opposed what they saw as the shallow materialism and enlightenment rationalism of the Social Democrats, whom they perceived as a mere extension of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, they saw all party politics as part of the corrupt society which they opposed, and consequently renounced traditional political activity.

Expressionism is thus a complex socio-class phenomenon: many Expressionists were dependent on their rich fathers, or bourgeois art patrons, for financial support, whereas many others glorified "lumpen" elements, such as prostitutes, the destitute and unemployed, or the criminal. On the whole, the Expressionists stood between the two dominant classes. Expressionists tended to see themselves as outsiders and Expressionism was, in part, the revolt of alienated youth and frustrated artists against a society which had in effect "marginalized" them. Many Expressionists were Jews, while others were foreigners living in Germany; almost all were bohemians or non-conformists of one sort or another. As rebels and outsiders, the Expressionists rebelled at once against both tradition and conventional social practices. Their status as outsiders led them to seek refuge in artistic circles which provided the nuclei for what became the expressionist movement.

The Expressionists tended to glorify youth and its freedom against the family, school, church, workplace, and bourgeois morality. Such a

posture defined expressionist theater as a theater of revolt and made generational conflicts a central theme.⁴¹ As Jost Hermand writes, "a hunger for life" and "hatred of the bourgeois philistine" permeates expressionist literature.⁴² Against philistine values, the Expressionists advocated sexual freedom, love, artistic creativity, and the development of personality. Above all, the Expressionists championed passion and intensity. As Jost Hermand points out,

It was all the same whether one opposed the bourgeoisie, occupational oppression, positivistic sciences, or relativistic historicism: intensity was always invoked. Life, Love, Freedom: everything must lead to "fulfillment." While *Jugendstil* wrote the "beautiful life" on its banner, for the Expressionists the "delirious life" in every thread of one's being was envisioned. "I know that there is only one ethical ideal of life: intensity," Rubiner wrote. Similarly, Kurt Pinthus said that "one should not ask about the quality of this art but about its intensity." Hence, one heard from everywhere of human indeterminateness, revolutionary ecstasy, or the boundless unchaining of the individual. Everyone wanted to live in "red-hot passion," in intoxication and in dionysian orgy, dedicating oneself to the unleashing of one's desires and feelings.⁴³

The Expressionists felt that they could not express their experiences and visions in traditional artistic forms and were driven to create new ones. While art had previously provided a realm of beautiful illusion, this aesthetic sphere no longer seemed relevant to many Expressionists, who were daily faced with the ugliness of industrial society and found the aesthetic illusionism of "beautiful" art to be at once a fraud that excluded significant contemporary realities and an ineffectual escape from modern society. While some Expressionists reacted against the heartlessness and inhumanity of the emerging capitalist-industrial order with calls to increase love and humanity, others documented the ugliness and corrosive effects on human and social life of the industrial process. Although many Expressionists saw themselves as the bearers of new values, which would "renew humanity" while creating a New Man and new society,⁴⁴ they also articulated the unease, anxiety, and pent-up hostility felt by many in the expanding industrial society. The experience of war and revolution confirmed the more extreme expressionist visions, and Expressionism became a dominant artistic tendency and movement in post-war Germany, as it spread as well to the rest of the world.

In the following pages an interpretation will be offered which will present the Expressionists as an avant-garde movement anticipating, charting and criticizing momentous changes taking place in industrial society and everyday life. In this reading, Expressionism is valuable for, among other things, providing insights into — and rebellions against — the transformations which industrial capitalism helped to produce. The following interpretation presupposes that experience is integrally social and historical, and that art and artistic movements articulate

social-historical experience in a given era in ways that illuminate their socio-historical world.⁴⁵ The notion that human senses and consciousness are shaped by the social world and in turn produce artifacts expressive of this development was theorized by Walter Benjamin: "Within extensive historical periods, the type and ways of sense-perception transform themselves along with the whole mode of human existence in a social collectivity. . . . The human faculties of sense-perception. . . are not only naturally but are also historically conditioned."⁴⁶ An historical-materialist approach thus regards Expressionism as the articulation of historically shaped perceptions and visions during an important period of capitalist development, rather than the product of universal or individual subjectivity or a solely artistic revolt.

Whereas Nietzsche had anticipated the crisis of subjectivity, the Expressionists articulated a series of new experiences concerning the fragmentation and alienation of the individual, combined with attempts at reintegration. In this sense, Expressionism discloses changes in the individual subject and its experiences in the modern era. Expressionist poetry, painting, music, and film often show changes in the speed and tempo of everyday life, brought about by technological developments. The experience of oneness with nature and a closed, organic community was no longer the context for artistic production; the life of the city, factory, industrialized transportation, mass media, and modern warfare supplied a new context. Experience became quicker, more fragmented, and often chaotic and disconnected. The Expressionists either clinically dissected these experiences or tried to "re-enchant" the world through art. Some Expressionists projected new worlds more amenable to human values and activities in calling for a "renewal of humanity" and thus countered the alienation and disintegration of the individual in bourgeois society by various projects of disalienation and rebirth.

Industrialization and the Rationalization of Everyday Life

The Expressionists portrayed and attacked various features of industrialization and the market economy as part of a series of adversary avant-garde revolts which produced tensions between the socio-economic system and culture of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁷ The triumphant capitalist system required calculability in the market for survival and success; therefore, one had to be able to quantify and rationally determine exchange-value in order to conform with the rules of the market society. The Expressionists saw that the domination of quantitative-objective exchange-value led to a diminution of individuality, as the market, bureaucracy, and instrumental rationality imposed their structures on everyday life. Against this trend, the Expressionists sought to reaffirm individuality and to criticize bourgeois rationality. Expressionist painters like Kandinsky strove for the spiritual, the unique, and the transcendent,

while Klee found elements of joy in childlike spontaneity and playfulness in art, as well as in a realm of spiritual expression. Nolde, Marc, Macke, and Barlach returned to pre-capitalist primitivism inspired by the shapes of animals and natural objects. Writers like Kafka provided a devastating vision of stifling routine and bureaucracy by articulating oppressive irrationality behind the facade of bourgeois rationality.

In a series of satirical plays called "the heroic life of the bourgeoisie," the playwright Carl Sternheim attacked bourgeois egotism and the primacy of exchange-value, making fun of the greed of a class which valued the medium of exchange — money — above all else. His sardonic play *The Strongbox* shows how monetary greed becomes a force that overpowers eroticism, human and social values, and artistic creativity.⁴⁸ The male protagonists become maniacally obsessed with a rich aunt's inheritance, which she keeps locked in a strongbox. In their preoccupation, they completely forget the charms and passions of the women protagonists. Sternheim insisted that in any conflict between money and sex, or money and art, the bourgeois greed for money would inevitably triumph.⁴⁹

The very form and style of expressionist art responds to the rhythms of a new social reality. Whereas earlier romantic poetry expresses the rhythms and harmonies of nature, expressionist poetry frequently reflects the tempo and disharmonies of an industrialized society through condensed declamation, discontinuous syntax, and breathless diction. Expressionist music as well articulates the turmoil, discordant passions, and confusions unleashed by modern society. Unlike such pieces as Beethoven's *Eroica*, which captures the revolutionary passions of the Napoleonic era, or his *Pastoral* symphony, which contains a deep yearning for harmonious reconciliation with nature, the expressionist music of the early Schoenberg shrieks with the cries of a troubled and threatened subject in an unsettling world, and Berg's opera *Lulu* portrays the chaos, decay, and disharmonies of urban life. The "telegraphic style" of some expressionist drama reproduces the tempo and diction of a mechanized society. Consider the fragment describing an automobile accident by Carl Sternheim in his play *Citizen Schippel*:

Hicketier: What a wreck . . . Your grace, highness.
 The Prince: Get water, linen . . . And best of all, a woman.
 Hicketier: My wife was scared.
 Wolke: (with a deep bow) Wolke!
 The Prince: Heard you the first time. What of it? Well, Mr. Hicketier?
 Hicketier: At your service.
 The Prince: Butchers. Bloody scratches. The day started badly. Old woman ran across the road, slow rain dropping, grey cloud.⁵⁰

This reduction of events, objects, machines, weather, and people into equivalent tokens of linguistic exchange forces them into a continuum of neutral objects in which all objects are equivalent in value. Express-

sionist drama and poetry reacted to this collapse of values either by satirically reproducing the flat, clichéd language of industrial society, or by replacing it with more evocative and poetic language. Expressionist language often abstracted from the oppressive concreteness of industrial society and attempted to express the essentially human in the face of massive dehumanization. In his play *Gas*, for instance, Georg Kaiser gives the Engineer extremely formal technical language and terse diction, while the visionary social revolutionary speaks a lofty, philosophical language and the workers speak a simple, yet poetical, one.⁵¹ In these ways, expressionist language either articulates, or opposes, the inmost tendencies of industrial society and its effects on human life. Expressionist writers therefore use different types and forms of language as much to present character types, to debate issues, or to project visions, as to develop character or to advance plot.

In their quest for human and social essence, Expressionists often used character types (the Son, the Father, the Workers, etc.), or class masks, to present their fictional protagonists. This resulted, ironically, in a lack of individuality in their characters and little concrete detail with regard to their personalities and social conditions. Consequently Naturalists, like Zola, tend to surpass most Expressionists both in portraying the social conditions of capitalism, and in depicting its suffering victims as individual, human beings. The Expressionists tended, for the most part, to concern themselves with general suffering and oppression rather than particular instances. Nonetheless, their works are full of concern for the poor, oppressed, and other victims of the industrialization process. As Walter Sokel points out:

Johannes Becher sees armies of joyless workers trudging to the factory day in and day out; Albert Ehrenstein sees scrofulous children of the slums playing "telephone" by shouting down into a sewer hole; piece-time workers who dare not take time out on Sundays impress Rubiner; abandoned young women with illegitimate babies play vital roles in Sorge's *Beggar* and Johst's *Young Man*; a diseased prostitute brings happiness to Wolfenstein's Poet in *Visit of the Times*; old housemaids who have spent their lives in unceasing drudgery are by their very existence a flaming accusation of the middle-class poet Werfel, who is allowed to live a life of comfort and leisure.⁵²

The poet Paul Zech pictured the inhuman working and social conditions of the German working class, while regretting their wasted lives:

Sweat holds fast the crumbling frames;
 Sweat brewed of many men's blood
 And a pious life flows like pus from old sores.
 Many have wasted and lost their hearts here,
 Sired children with weak wives . . .
 Yet the churches and merchants stand solid as though hewn
 from ore.⁵³

Georg Kaiser developed this theme in his *Gas* trilogy where he pictures a working class forced to toil in dangerous and oppressive conditions, unable to collectively bring about its own liberation.⁵⁴ Another vivid, critical vision of the capitalist labor process is found in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*, which depicts masses of workers enslaved in an underground city by a machine apparatus, greedy capitalists, and mad scientists, while the upper classes live in luxury in a city above ground. The conclusion is extremely naive, as a series of conflicts are resolved through a sentimental reconciliation of father and son, capital and labor, and heart and mind; but Lang's powerful images of oppressed workers and their susceptibility to political manipulation are striking. Neither Lang, nor most Expressionists, however, effectively portray workers as individuals with any real sympathy or understanding. They were, nonetheless, able to portray the far-reaching changes brought about by industrialization and the urbanization process.

The City and Urbanization

Much expressionist art is the art of the city, nurtured in cafes, cabarets, and bohemian subcultures. Some of its best artists transcribe the cynicism and worldly decadence of the urbanite, or the sensitive cry of a humanity crushed by urban-industrial civilization. Here expressionist writing was influenced by Baudelaire, who, as Walter Benjamin has argued, stands as the great poet of Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Baudelaire — the bohemian poet par excellence — ironically attacked the bourgeoisie and their culture and, like the Expressionists, he sympathized with outsiders like prostitutes, ragpickers, or criminals. He too lived the bohemian life to the full, partaking of drugs, sex, alcohol and other stimulants. Paris was a central theme and backdrop to Baudelaire's poetry, which presented a variety of hallucinatory images of city life. Likewise, the Expressionists prowled through the ever-changing cityscape, portraying its alienating and dehumanizing effects. Kirchner and his comrades in *Die Brücke* painted the frenzy and decadence of city life in street scenes, cafe portraits, and pictures of harried urbanites, registering the shocks and transformations of the urbanization process, while the poets Lichtenstein, Heym, and Benn described the altered modes of experience and perception in urban life.⁵⁶ The rapid growth, electrification, and excitement of the metropolises fascinated a literary generation and produced such (different) city novels as Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.⁵⁷ The various forms of alienation in city life are also portrayed in Kaiser's plays, Brecht's *Jungle of the Cities*, Heym's novel *Der Irre*, Schoenberg's and Berg's music, and Lang's *Mabuse* films and his *M*.

Cities were sometimes mythically demonized as the source of dangers and destructive powers, as in Heym's poem, "The God of the City";

On a block of houses he spreads his weight.
The winds rest blackly round his brow.
He looks with rage into the distant solitude,
Where the last houses are lost in the land.

....

He stretches out his butcher's fist into the gloom.
He shakes it. A sea of fire surges
Through a street. And the smoke and fire roars
and devours it, till day breaks late.⁵⁸

The Expressionists often personified the city and the world of objects, giving them powers robbed from human beings. In Heym's poem "The City," he writes: "A thousand windows steal through the night/and blink with eyelids, red and small"; in his poem "Night," "the strange houses march forth" and "many a person was swept away."⁵⁹ Within the noisy, hectic, and often unfriendly cities, the Expressionists found refuge in artistic cafes, such as the one celebrated in a poem, "Cafe," by Ivan Goll.⁶⁰ Whereas many expressionist artistic circles were centered in a cafe culture,⁶¹ Gottfried Benn found the cafes of the bourgeoisie repugnant. His poem "Night Cafe" portrays a bizarre description of the night-life in a Berlin cafe.⁶² Benn clinically dissects the repulsive bourgeois figures, and then fixates on a beautiful woman, but since "a paunched obesity waddles after her," his sexual fantasy will probably remain just that: the woman in question appears to be in the company of the hated bourgeois, whose fat pocketbook no doubt compensates in her eyes for his unattractive appearance.

Benn himself glorified withdrawal from urban-industrial life in favor of an immersion in nature, as did many pre-eminent expressionist painters like Nolde and Marc.⁶³ For Franz Marc, human life was more ugly and less innocent than animal life and nature, while Emil Nolde glorified a primitivistic and atavistic regression into nature. Nolde, Barlach, and others invested nature with spiritual qualities, finding a sort of religious transcendence in a spiritualization of nature. Expressionist nature mysticism and religious tendencies should thus be perceived, in part at least, as a reaction to the emerging industrial society and not simply as an autonomous religious-spiritual quest. Moreover, most Expressionists were not nostalgic. They did not seek a return to some Golden Age, but instead confronted the novelties and, to many, obscenities of modernity.

The Mechanization of Transportation and War

The mechanization of transportation produced changes in the modalities of experience. Space and time contracted, the tempo of life was speeded

up, and new shocks were imposed on the human sensibility by trains and automobiles.⁶⁴ A series of expressionist poems record the impact of the new means of transportation: Ernst Stadler composed a poem "Train Station," Heym depicted a "Suburban Station," Ernst Blass poeticized the effects of an "Auto Trip" on the human sensibility, and Gottfried Benn wrote poems about trains.⁶⁵ The films of Fritz Lang also feature the new modes of transportation and show corrupted individuals committing murder and evil deeds in trains, cars, street trams, airplanes, and even a flight to the moon (*Frau am Mond*). Stadler's poem "Journey over the Rhein-bridge at Night" articulates the expressionist experience of the changed patterns of experience and shows their poetic response to the new industrialized rhythms:

The whole world is but a narrow gallery railed round by night,
into which conveyor positions of blue light now and then tear
sudden skylines: fiery circle of globs of light, roofs, chimneys,
smoking, rushing . . . only momentarily . . . and all black again.

Now lights come tumbling towards us . . . lost, inconsolably
isolated . . . more . . . and accumulate . . . and grow dense.
Skeletons of grey house-fronts lie exposed, turning pale in the
half-light, dead — something must happen . . .

O the curving of millions of lights, silent sentinel, before
whose glittering parade the waters roll heavily downwards.
Endless cordon, posted by the side of night in greeting! . . .

And then the long lonely stretches. Bare banks. Silence.
Night. Reflection. Meditation. Communion. And the glow and
urge towards the last, consecrating things. To the festival
of procreation. To ecstasy. To prayer. To sea. To extinction.⁶⁶

The images of the train speeding through the night to an unknown destination, and the evocative visions the experience produced, provide a symbolic picture of the expressionist worldview. A similar response is found in Benn's poem "Express Train," which reveals as well an urge to regress to primitive sexuality and nature in the face of a mechanical world:

Brown as brandy. Brown as leaves. Red brown. Maylay yellow.
Berlin-Trelleborg Express and the east coast strands.
Flesh that went naked.

Tanned even to the mouth by the sea.
Plunged ripe, for grecian joy.
In sickle-seeking: how far off summer is!
Second last day already of the ninth month.
Stubble and last tonsil thirst within us.
Unfoldings, the blood, the tiredness,
The dahlia's proximity bemuses us.
Male brown hurls itself on female brown:

A woman's only for a one night stand.
and if all went well, perhaps for one more!
Ah! and then the being-by-yourself again!
These mutenesses! This being driven on!

A woman is something with a smell.
Ineffable! Die away! Mignonette.
There lies the South, shepherd and seas.
Joy leans on every declivity.

Female light brown falls frenzied on male dark brown:
Hold me! Darling, I'm falling!
My neck has grown so weary.
Oh, this sweet feverseething
last smell from the gardens.⁶⁷

The poem begins with a rapid succession of images, much as would appear to the passenger of an express train looking out of the window. The poet fixates, however, on images of nature ("Flesh that went naked") and wished to regress to a more primitive condition ("grecian joy"). He sees a winter of discontent rapidly approaching and wishes to return to the warm days of summer. Lust arises and he fantasizes about sexual ecstasy ("Male brown hurls itself on female brown"). In such a rootless mechanized world, however, even sexuality — that powerful but fleeting merger with nature — is depersonalized: "A woman's only for a one night stand." The poet is haunted by this transience, his loneliness, his need, his alienation from nature. He wishes to return to another world in "the South, shepherd, and seas." He imagines orgasm as partial escape, as the last immersion in the "garden" of "sweet feverseething" nature allowed to the mechanized world. Benn's poem contains an irony and biting sarcasm that distinguishes it from neo-romantic and symbolist poets like Rilke and Stefan George. His regression to nature — to an *Ursein* — was an almost desperate reaction to a fiercely hated modernity. The world of eroticism in his works is thus an elsewhere, a world with different bodies, rhythms, and experience to which one could travel in order to escape industrial life, but which only provided temporary refuge.

In the view of many artistic avant gardes throughout the world, the new rhythms of industrialized-urbanized life rendered obsolete older forms of poetry which corresponded to a simpler, more leisurely, experience of life. Poets from Whitman to T.S. Eliot to Hart Crane recognized that the older forms of lyric poetry were dead, and expressionist poetry helped provide the transition to new poetic forms, content, and functions. The increasingly rapid tempo of mechanized life is expressed in their strings of adjectives, accumulated sets of strewn-together nouns, and the destruction of syntax. Whereas Marinetti and the Futurists celebrated mechanization and speed,⁶⁸ the Expressionists responded more critically and ironically to the new experiences, providing a critique of mechanized technology and its impact on human life. Likewise, although the Futurists celebrated mechanized war, the Expressionists, after some initial en-

thusiasm for World War I, provided critical visions of mechanized slaughter and the horrors of mass war.

Indeed, World War I was a crucial experience for the expressionist generation. Some Expressionists anticipated its horror and destruction in their apocalyptic poems. Georg Heym imagined war as a sleeping monster about to awaken in a prophetic 1913 poem "War," of which I cite the first strophe:

He is risen who was long asleep,
He is risen from beneath the vaulted keep.
In the dark, unrecognized, huge, he stands
And crushes the moon between his swarthy hands.⁶⁹

Expressionist war poems ranged from Heym's visions of war as a cathartic destruction of a hated society to critical attacks on the actual effects of war like August Stramm's "Battlefield":

Yielding clod lulls iron off to sleep
bloods clot the patches where they oozed
rusts crumble
fleshes slime
sucking lusts around decay.
Murder on murder
blinks
in childish eyes.⁷⁰

Stramm's collage of "word-pictures" depicts the rape of the earth by mechanized warfare and the destruction of human beings. The war destroyed many of the greatest expressionist creators, driving the survivors to write anti-war poetry, literature, and drama.⁷¹ Kafka, in stories like "The Penal Colony," prophesized the evils of the concentration camps, depicting instruments of torture which could destroy enemies and control the population. Outrage over the war drove many Expressionists to the left; they concluded that revolutionary political action and the destruction of bourgeois society were necessary to end the obscenities of imperialist wars. Some Expressionists participated in the 1918 German Revolution, but most quickly recoiled from what they perceived as the violence advocated by the communists and vacillated politically. Some, however, actively joined or supported the communists (Becher, Brecht, Eisler), while others came to embrace fascism (Nolde, Benn, Johst). Hence, whereas the war politicized many Expressionists — and prepared Germany and Europe for the expressionist vision — the political tendencies chosen varied and fragmented the Expressionists into collections of groups or individuals who took quite different positions on art and politics in Weimar Germany.

The Massification of Culture and Commodification of Art

The development of mass media of communication and the transformation of organs of discursive communication into tools of commerce were begun by the transformation of newspapers from instruments of bourgeois enlightenment (Habermas)⁷² to fragmentary, disjointed collages of sensationalistic news, pictures, advertisements, and ideological slogans. In the nineteenth century, newspapers had provided a more orderly, rational, and comprehensive articulation of news and ideas, whereas the modern newspaper became increasingly a commercial instrument of bourgeois hegemony. The Expressionists shared with Karl Kraus a concern for the degeneration of language in the new journalese and satirized it in their poetry. Van Hoddiss, in his poem "End of the World," ironically announced a catastrophe in newspaper style: "On the coasts — it was announced — the floods are ascending."⁷³ Reinhard Sorge's play *The Beggar* describes the lust for sensation of a newspaper public:

Second Listener: Listen: earthquake in Central America!
Voices: Ha, ha! Well, well! How many killed?

Second Reader: Five thousand.

Third Listener: What a filthy mess!

Commotion.

Second Reader: Skirmish near Tripolis.

Voices: How many killed?

Second Reader: About two hundred dead. Three hundred and fifty wounded.

Murmur.

Second Reader, *skimming the paper*: Crash of a French pilot.

Ninth Listener: Always those French. . .

Fourth Listener: How many dead?

Laughter.

Third Reader: Mass revolt in Spain. . .

First Reader: Mine disaster. . .

Second reader, *continuing to skim*: factory fire. . . Hurricane flood.

First reader: Train accident. . .

Tenth Reader: Stop! I'm freezing! Brr. . .

Voices: Stop!!⁷⁴

Whereas symbolist and neo-romantic poets withdrew from this mass-mediated world, expressionist artists critically confronted it and analytically dissected it in their works. The Expressionists' fascination with the film, and use of film as a vehicle for their art, showed their ability to come to terms with modernity and to use the new media for their purposes. Expressionists not only made important contributions to the art of the cinema, but also used cinematic techniques in their writing.⁷⁵ The development of German expressionist film was an important means of

communicating their vision throughout the world, and some Expressionists saw film as *the* modern art form and their age as the age of film.⁷⁶ More effectively than any other art media, film reflected the pace and affairs of city life and a mechanized environment, with its nervous succession of images which provided an appropriate analogue to the quickened tempo of modern life. Consequently, the expressionist intervention in the cinema was a natural consequence of their urge to articulate and utilize the technical transformations during their era.⁷⁷

The commodification of art and the new possibilities for public communication in the mass media provided the Expressionists with challenges and possibilities. The commercialization of art led to two opposing responses by the European avant-garde: on one hand, contempt for the art market and withdrawal from it, leading to production of "art for art's sake." This was the response of French and German Symbolists, Neo-Romantics, and others who produced increasingly esoteric art for a self-defined elite. The other response was a quasi-public intervention, in which art was to edify and aid in the transformation of individuals and society. This sense of mission, shared by many Expressionists, helps to explain why certain among them felt that provocation and shock were needed to arouse a complacent bourgeoisie, and why others adopted a consciously moralizing and declamatory tone and style. But here Expressionism fell prey to a contradiction which it never resolved: the Expressionists wanted a mass following and social change, yet they made few concessions to public taste in their abstract paintings and music, complex lyrics and novels, esoteric style, and frequent attacks on the bourgeois art public. Moreover, when their style and forms were widely accepted by the 1920's, their message was discounted and their hopes for a new society and spiritual rebirth were dashed after the failures of the German revolution and the stabilization of capitalism. Consequently, no one was more disgusted than the Expressionists themselves with their eventual popularity and acceptance as part of the official culture.⁷⁸

Scientism and Instrumental Rationality

The mechanization and industrialization of society helped produce changes in the concepts of knowledge and reason. The triumph of science as the measure and method of knowledge restricted reason to calculation of means, such that reason became an instrument of science and practical everyday affairs. The expressionist response was a critique of science and what is today called "instrumental reason."⁷⁹ This hostility toward science led to rejection of "scientific" types of art like Naturalism and Pointilism. The Expressionists opposed all forms of positivism — which was becoming the dominant ideology — in an era in which earlier liberal and humanist ideals were sacrificed by those strata interested in industrial and technical progress, streamlined class-domination, or im-

perialist conquest. The Expressionists violently opposed the bourgeois ideologies of science and progress, championing instead subjective expression and individual vision against objectivistic knowledge.

The Expressionists championed poetic-subjective forms of experience as a reaction against the triumph of scientific-technical reason and the construction of a technological society. Their works thus represent the underside of what Adorno and Horkheimer call the "dialectic of Enlightenment." Against the hegemony of repressive reason, they took up repressed elements of experience, moving from the highs to the lows of experience, from visions of Heaven to Hell. Their "extremism" should thus be seen as disgust with the "moderation" of bourgeois rationality and common sense. The "return of the repressed" in expressionist works, however, often exploded into excessive, even outrageous, celebration of the "irrational." Many Expressionists fell prey to sexual atavism, while others came to glorify war, or to embrace fascism, that strange mixture of cultural irrationalism and a threatened capitalist rationality. Others were attracted to mysticism and religious transcendence as escape from the limits of bourgeois rationality.⁸⁰

One cannot, however, simply dismiss the Expressionists as religious mystics, or gross irrationalists, as Lukacs and others have done,⁸¹ without specifying what forms the alleged "irrationalism" takes and what is wrong with such forms. "Irrationalism" is a broad and generally vague concept that covers a variety of phenomena, some admirable, some blameworthy. When using the term "irrational" one should specify whether one means: (1) concern with passion, eroticism, and subjective experience; (2) rejection of scientific causality or discursive, logical connections; (3) advocacy of violent and destructive forms of social behavior (such as rape, criminality, war, etc.); (4) a political ideology like fascism or imperialism; or (5) an ethical ideal that posits supreme value beyond reason. Since various of these elements are found in different expressionist artists and works, to use the term "irrational" in a useful fashion one must specify what sort of irrational features are present and what is objectionable about them.

Although some Expressionists fell prey to excessively violent and politically reactionary forms of irrationalism, others carried out a useful critique of the sort of bourgeois rationality which affirms a cold, calculating reason as the guiding principle of life.⁸² The plays, for instance, of Wedekind, Sternheim, and Kaiser mock those characters who embody bourgeois reason and who are insensitive to passion, love, artistic concerns, and individual freedom — ideals which they and other Expressionists affirm. Kafka as well exposes the irrationality behind the facade of bourgeois rationality in his novels and stories, providing a disturbing vision of a world in which reason is an instrument of oppression. Fritz Lang's films put in question the codes of bourgeois rationality and many of his films mourn misunderstood lovers crushed by the forces of a repressive rationality and society.⁸³

Although some expressionist art contains an immanent critique both of irrationalism and a restrictive rationality, few, if any, Expressionists achieved an adequate synthesis of reason and emotion, social description and personal vision, or social critique and utopian fantasy. While their attacks on repressive reason were progressive — as were their concerns for individuality, passion, love, and community in an inhuman capitalist market society — they do not really develop convincing alternatives to the society and forms of life criticized. Consequently, while their works often subvert bourgeois codes of art, reason, and ideology, and contain what Bloch calls “traces of liberation,” the expressionist heritage is a contradictory one. Expressionism, along with the avant-garde modernist movements related to it, produced some of the last attempts to preserve individual subjectivity against assaults by increasingly powerful and repressive societies. The famous cries and shrieks of expressionist art thus represent the cries of the individual subject facing repression and threats to its autonomy, inner life, and values. In conclusion, we must therefore ask: Do the Expressionists provide new forms of subjectivity and human life which contain emancipatory alternatives to the detested bourgeois society? This leads us to evaluate the expressionist heritage, to analyze its contradictions, and to suggest reasons for its failures which will also validate its achievements.

Expressionism's Contradictory Tendencies and Heritage

Walter Benjamin's description of Baudelaire provides an apt characterization of the Expressionists: “Baudelaire was a secret agent — an agent of the secret discontent of his class with its own rule.”⁸⁴ Expressionist discontent and passion — intense, personal, and explosive — demanded new forms for its expression, leading to many artistic innovations. The expressionist rebellions often led to undisciplined excess, but, where successful, produced works that revolutionized artistic expression and influenced later aesthetic creation. Expressionist passion and rebellion, however, took many, often contradictory, forms. The Expressionists tended to support rebellion per se, without, in many cases, specifying what forms a liberated humanity would take. They tended to stress a “cult of the self” and an unleashing of passions, but their often undifferentiated stress on “self” and “passions” led to contradictory emphases. On the one hand, there was a call for the “unchaining of Eros,” for the total liberation of sexuality, among many Expressionists.⁸⁵ For Expressionists like Benn and Nolde the goal of instinctual liberation often took the form of a glorification of primitivism and an unleashing of all instincts and desire, no matter what its forms or effects.⁸⁶ Against these atavistic tendencies, other Expressionists tended toward an extreme idealism of spirit, wishing to enhance and cultivate *Geist* in order to make it the guiding force of life.⁸⁷

The expressionist cult of the self consequently took many forms, ranging from a passionate call for the full unfolding of individual talents and powers to a search for common humanity and expression of the “primal self.”⁸⁸ Some Expressionists championed individual freedom and revolt, while others urged ecstatic surrender to collective forms or nature. Further, there were conflicting emphases on brotherhood, peace, and love, contrasted with glorification of unleashed violence and even war.⁸⁹ The Expressionists neither overcame nor reconciled these contradictions; consequently, their ideals of liberation were disparate and often in conflict. Consequently, beyond its undeniable transformative effects on the arts, it is doubtful whether the expressionist revolts had any lasting political or social effects.

Against criticism that art should not be evaluated in socio-political terms, one could answer that the Expressionists demanded to be taken seriously politically and socially, as well as artistically. Few movements were as “politicized” and made such extravagant socio-political claims for their art. Consequently, it is fair to stress that while the Expressionists revolutionized art, they failed in their aspirations to revolutionize society. One problem is that they simply expected too much from art. It is not clear that even the most “political” or “revolutionary” art can effect social change, unless certain socio-economic and political conditions are present. Moreover, Lukacs is correct to claim that Expressionism never really transcended bourgeois society and ideology, and never produced an adequate new ideology, politics or social alternatives.⁹⁰ For, despite their manifold revolts against bourgeois society, the Expressionists never comprehended, or adequately criticized, capitalism as a system of production and never specified any tendencies or contradictions within capitalism which might lead to a new and better society.

In short, most Expressionists did not really understand economics or politics. Their attacks on bourgeois society included violent diatribes against liberalism, trade unionism, the working class movements, and the “masses,” but they failed to see any even relatively progressive forces in bourgeois society and tended to reject the liberal tradition of democracy, human rights, and equality as part of the facade of the hated bourgeois society. Hence, the total revolt of many Expressionists tended toward nihilism. Not all Expressionists were nihilists, or anti-liberal, but the contradictions in the movement made impossible any unitary activity that would provide genuine political alternatives, thus leading to the ultimate failure of expressionist politics and the eventual collapse of the movement as a whole.

The Expressionists were tolerated as the court jesters of the bourgeoisie, for they did not pose a threat to the hegemonic interests of capital. In the era of the re-stabilization of capitalism in Weimar Germany, the bourgeoisie supported and even acclaimed expressionist art, thus making Expressionism part of the official culture in Weimar (see the satire on this situation in the first scene of Brecht's *Baal*).⁹¹ Hence,

although the Expressionists remained anti-bourgeois, they were not clearly or consistently anti-capitalist, except perhaps as a species of "romantic anti-capitalism."⁹² Indeed, in retrospect, it can be argued that the Expressionists even helped in the transition to advanced capitalism, for they attacked some obsolete and reactionary features of bourgeois society which hindered the next stage of capitalist development. In this context, expressionist calls for sexual liberation and revolts against repressive authority and obsolete values, as well as their stress on feeling and the unfolding of individuality, helped create a climate congenial to the development of consumer capitalism, which required instant gratification, craving for the new, eroticized youth-consumer culture, and the "rootless freedom" of movement and choice. Consequently, the Expressionists were really attacking a bourgeois society on the wane and helped prepare for the advent of a more advanced form of capitalism.

In relation to bourgeois individualism and egotism, the Expressionist heritage is also ambiguous. On one hand, the Expressionists found possessive individualism, consumerism, exploitation, and money-worship repugnant, yet they too reproduced forms of bourgeois individualism in their excessive concern for individual selfhood, vision, and expression. Nonetheless, it is also evident that tendencies within Expressionism criticized the excessive subjectivism and Nietzschean paths of the *Übermensch*. Plays like Kaiser's *From Morning to Midnight*, Brecht's *Baal*, Lang's *Mabuse* films, and expressionist tyrant and monster films warned against the dangers of an unrestrained egotism and the concomitant destruction unleashed by an unfettered Ego wreaking its will to power in a destructive and chaotic manner. But German Expressionism on the whole — so obsessed with subjectivity, *Innerlichkeit*, and an often demonic conception of the superior individual beyond good and evil — tended to fuel an excessive bourgeois individualism, putting the individual above other people and society. Hence, Expressionism did not provide viable alternatives to bourgeois individuality, but instead intensified it. Lacking clear concepts of intersubjectivity, an alternative society, and social transformation, Expressionism could not overcome the social forces against which it rebelled and which it often brilliantly depicted and harshly criticized.

Despite its deficiencies and failures, the expressionist heritage contains some emancipatory features beyond its liberating effects on artistic production. The Expressionists' drive toward social change and the creation of new forms of life still provide us with images and ideas to animate radical individual and social change. Their utopian images of transcendence contain social and individual alternatives and project examples of struggles to liberate life and creativity from repressive social and cultural forms.

The expressionist heritage contains traces of liberation still to be achieved, and, as I have argued, expressionist art provides insights into capitalist development and the resulting alienation and dehumanization.

To the heartlessness and spiritlessness of bourgeois society, the Expressionists reacted with passionate emphasis on heart and spirit. Against the disintegration of community brought on by mechanization and industrialization, the Expressionists created new artistic circles and communities. Responding to the suppression of music, poetry, and color by the often drab process of industrialization and urbanization, the Expressionists created colorful paintings, lyrical poetry, and expressive music. To the lack of social concern in an individualistic exchange-society, some Expressionists responded with a sense of social mission and, in the face of the alienation of the individual in industrial capitalism, Expressionists produced various schemes of disalienation. Confronting a crisis of subjectivity, the Expressionists called for a "renewal of humanity."

From this standpoint, expressionist art can be interpreted as a critical source of knowledge, depicting the odysseys of modern subjectivities disintegrating yet trying to reintegrate, dying yet attempting to be reborn. The expressionist rebellions pose in an especially dramatic and acute fashion the central problems of the modern age: What sort of persons do we want to be? What sort of culture should we produce? What sort of society do we want? What sort of politics should we engage in? What kind of world do we want to live in? Although the Expressionists' answers were contradictory and inconclusive, they posed the questions with a passionate urgency, and they disclosed the social conditions and crises of life in the modern era with brilliance, insight, and prescience.

Notes

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¹For a succinct discussion of the various attempts to define Expressionism over the last three decades, see Roy Allen, *Literary Life in German Expressionism* (Göppingen: Alfred Kummerle, 1974). For a useful German anthology, which contains representative attempts to characterize and interpret Expressionism, see Hans Gerd Rötzer, editor, *Begriffsbestimmung des literarischen Expressionismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976). For useful bibliographies on the primary and secondary literature, see Silvio Vietta and Hans-Georg

Kemper, *Expressionismus* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1975) and Roy Allen *German Expressionist Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979). See the annotated bibliography at the end of *Passion and Rebellion* for sources and information on the literature on Expressionism.

²Georg Lukacs, "'Grosse und Verfall' des Expressionismus," in Rötzer, *op. cit.*, and *Realism in Our Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). Examples follow in the text and notes of standard academic interpretations which tend to see Expressionism as a species of irrationalism and subjective mysticism, which is sometimes praised and sometimes damned.

³Bernard S. Myers, *The German Expressionists: A Generation in Revolt* (New York: Praeger, 1957), p. 43.

⁴In his book on Expressionism, R.S. Furness cites the above passage by Malcolm Pasley as "an admirable summing up of the Movement." See *Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 1. The following discussion shall show that such a characterization is completely misleading.

⁵Many critics of Expressionism, such as Lukacs, *op. cit.*, and many academic interpreters, or defenders, of Expressionism take the ideological legitimations of the movement by its propagators, like Edschmid, Bahr, Pinthus, etc. as providing accurate descriptions of Expressionism. Almost every standard interpretation, for example, cites Edschmid's manifestoes as crucial in defining the movement, failing to see that Edschmid himself provides a specific ideology of Expressionism that is excessively subjective and mystical. Consequently, many interpretations mistake the ideology for the art — which are often at odds with each other. Against this practice, I would argue that the ideologies of Expressionism — like all ideology — mystify and distort much expressionist art, while they legitimate a certain tendency as "genuine Expressionism." Renato Pögglioli has an interesting discussion of how avant-garde movements produce ideologies to rationalize and celebrate their own artistic productions. See his *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 4ff., *passim*. On the concept of "ideology" that I am using here, see my article, "Ideology, Marxism, and Advanced Capitalism," *Socialist Review* 42 (Nov. - Dec. 1978), pp. 37-65. The ideology of Expressionism is an example of what I call an "ideological region," in this case, the region of avant-garde artistic ideologies. On the concepts of artistic tendencies, movements, and formation, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1977) and Pögglioli, *op. cit.*. For collections of expressionist ideological pronouncements, see *Voices of German Expressionism*, editor, Victor Miesel (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1970) and, in German, *Literaturrevolution 1910 - 1925*, editor, Paul Portner, (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1960) and *Theorie des Expressionismus*, editor, Otto F. Best (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976). Crucial ideological

manifestoes and interpretations include: On expressionist painting, Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (München: 1907); Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus* (München: Piper, 1914); Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus* (München: Delphin, 1916); and Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947). On literature and Expressionism as a movement, see Kasimir Edschmid, *Frühe Schriften* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1970) and Kurt Pinthus's introduction to *Menschheitsdämmerung* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1920; new, revised edition 1959). Some expressionist ideologies of the theater are translated in *An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama*, editor, Walter Sokel (Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1963).

⁶Geoffrey Perkins, in his book *Contemporary Theory of Expressionism* (Bern and Frankfurt: Herbert Lang & Cie, 1974), argues that a radical disjunction exists between the ideologies of expressionist painting and the actual art works themselves, but nowhere demonstrates this by a discussion of artistic production. Studies in *Passion and Rebellion* will show how the ideologies of Expressionism, which have coalesced into standard academic interpretations, are often subverted, or contradicted by many examples of expressionist art.

⁷Wolfgang Paulsen, *Expressionismus und Aktivismus* (Bern and Leipzig: Gotthelf, 1935).

⁸Walter Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

⁹On the expressionist concept of the New Man, see my chapter "Expressionist Literature and the Dream of the New Man" in the present book. Barbara Wright in her chapter "Sublime Ambition" in this book argues that expressionist art and politics must be taken together and seen as an unitary phenomenon — albeit contradictory. She attempts to show the similar political and aesthetic preoccupations shared by so-called "artistic" and "activist" Expressionists and argues that their positions contain similar flaws. See also her Ph.D. dissertation, *Expressionist Utopia: The Pursuit of Objectless Politics* (University of California at Berkeley, 1977), as well as the book by Eva Kolinsky, *Engagierter Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970).

¹⁰See the analysis by Richard Brinkmann, *Expressionismus: Forschungsprobleme 1952-1960* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1961).

¹¹See Allen's discussion and critique of this trend in German scholarship in *Literary Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4ff..

¹²John Willett, *Expressionism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 21.

¹³Christopher Middleton, "The Rise of Primitivism and its Relevance to the Poetry of Expressionism and Dada," in *Bolshevism in Art* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1978).

¹⁴See the anthology, *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*, edited by Ulrich Weisstein (Paris and Budapest: Didier and Akademai Kiado, 1973) which details the "foreign influences" on German expressionist drama, poetry, and prose, as well as the impact of Expressionism in turn on avant-garde movements and art in England, America, and Western and Eastern Europe. These studies do not, however, really explain why Expressionism took its most characteristic forms and had its greatest impact in Germany; the essays also, for the most part, reproduce the standard academic interpretations of Expressionism, producing few fresh interpretations of the movement or of expressionist art-works.

¹⁵On baroque drama, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: New Left Books, 1977). On the tendencies toward rebellion and emancipation in German literary tradition, see Herbert Marcuse's brilliant doctoral dissertation, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman*, 1922, published for the first time in *Schriften* 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), and discussed in my forthcoming book *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*.

¹⁶On the expressionist infrastructure, see Allen, *Literary Life*, *op. cit.*; Paul Raabe, editor, *The Era of German Expressionism* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1974); and the studies in Part I of *Passion and Rebellion*.

¹⁷On the nature and function of the concept of subjectivity in the modern world, see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); John Lukas, *The Passing of the Modern Age* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Thomas Seung, *Cultural Thematics: The Formation of the Faustian Ethos* (New Haven: Yale, 1976); and the forthcoming study by Stephen Eric Bronner, *The Transformation of Subjectivity*.

¹⁸William Blake, *The Portable Blake* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

¹⁹On Romanticism see Alvin W. Gouldner, "Romanticism and Classicism" in *For Sociology* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); and Edward Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1977). For a criticism of the Williams-Thompson interpretation of Romanticism, see Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

²⁰On German Romanticism, see Walter Benjamin, *Der Begriff der Kunstskritik in deutschen Romantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973) and Marshall Brown, *The Shape of German Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

²¹On the Young Hegelians, see Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1967) and the blistering polemics in Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology, Collected Works*, Volume 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976). On Nietzsche and his impact on

Expressionism, see Gunter Martens, *Vitalismus und Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971); Walter Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis*, *op. cit.*; and Silvio Vietta and Hans-Georg Kemper, *Expressionismus*, *op. cit.*

²²Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 21, and Sokel, *op. cit.*

²³Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 95-6.

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968).

²⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Saint Martin, 1965). On the impact of Kant's "Copernican revolution" on Expressionism, see Sokel, *op. cit.*. I would like to contest here Sokel's claim that Expressionism derives from the philosophy and aesthetics of Kant. Despite the critical thrust of his "Copernican revolution" in philosophy, Kant tried to defend an objectivistic concept of knowledge and truth against Hume's skeptical attacks, carrying out as well a defense of the claims of reason to attain a priori truth. Moreover, Kant's aesthetics were not as "modernist" as Sokel claims. Richard Clark in a "Review Article: Sokel, Kafka, and Kant" shows in detail how Sokel misrepresents Kant's aesthetics (in *German Expressionism, Review of National Literatures*, Vol. 9, 1978, pp. 151ff.). Against Sokel, I would argue that Nietzsche was much more important than Kant for the Expressionist's views on art and reality — although, as I argue below, a variety of intellectual sources influenced their views and artistic practices.

²⁶Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

²⁷Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, *op. cit.*, and Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

²⁸Nietzsche, *Werke in Drei Banden*, Editor Karl Schlechta (München: Piper, 1966) Volume 3, p. 473.

²⁹See the study of Trakl by Hans-Georg Kemper, in Vietta and Kemper, *op. cit.*, pp. 214ff.

³⁰Paulsen, *op. cit.*, and Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*, discuss the intellectual context of the time and the Expressionist's appropriation of Nietzsche and other ideas "in the air."

³¹On Avenarius, Mach, and other positivists of the period, see Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1969) and the fiery polemics by V.I. Lenin in his 1909 book *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (New York: International Publishers, 1932). The following discussion of the similarity between the epistemological positions of Mach and the Expressionists suggests that it was no accident that Lenin chose Mach for a detailed epistemological critique. For suggestions of the importance of Mach in the cultural situation of the time, I am indebted to conversations and correspondence with Henry Pachter.

³²Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³³On the neo-Kantian response to relativism, positivism, and the crisis of subjectivity, see Andrew Arato, "The Neo-Idealist Defense of Subjectivity," *Telos* 21 (Fall 1974), pp. 108-161 and Wright, *op. cit.*

³⁴See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas* (New York: Collier, 1962). Victor Lange points to the similarities between the phenomenological and expressionist quest for essence, both grounded in a theory of absolute subjectivity and intuition, but he does not adequately stress the differences. See "Expressionism: A Topological Essay," in *German Expressionism, op. cit.*, especially pp. 27-30.

³⁵Jacob van Hoddiss, "End of the World," translated in *Modern German Poetry*, edited and translated by Michael Hamburger and Christopher Middleton (London: Macgibbon & Kee), p. 49. Van Hoddiss's poem was the opening selection in Pinthus's anthology *Menschheitsdämmerung, op. cit.*, and is often cited as the first prototypical "expressionist poem." See Ritter's discussion of "Early Expressionist Poetry" in *Passion and Rebellion*.

³⁶Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 38. Marcuse sees Expressionism and Surrealism as anticipating "the destructiveness of monopoly capitalism, and the emergence of new goals of radical change," p. xi.

³⁷On Germany's political economy and industrial development during the period, see Henry Pachter, *Modern Germany* (Boulder: Westview, 1979); Martin Kitchen, *The Political Economy of Germany 1815-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Das zweite Kaiserreich, 1871-1914* (Göttingen: 1973); Kenneth D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); and W.O. Henderson, *The Rise of German Industrial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). On the cultural and social context of the period, see Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

³⁸Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Max Weber, *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford, 1946); Georg Simmel, *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy, and Aesthetics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) and *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois* (Munich: Duncken und Humboldt, 1913) and *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (Munich: Duncken und Humboldt, 1921) and Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

³⁹See the sources in note 47 and Ernst Bloch's analysis of the cultural and ideological contradictions of the era in *Erb-schaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962), part of which is translated with an introduction in *New German Critique*, 11 (Spring 1977).

⁴⁰Pascal, *op. cit.*

⁴¹On generational conflict in expressionist theater, see Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *Das Bild der bürgerlichen Welt im expressionistischen Drama* (Heidelberg: Rothe, 1967) and Horst Denkler, *Drama des Expressionismus* (München: Fink, 1967).

⁴²Jost Hermand, "Expressionismus als Revolution," in *Von Mainz nach Weimar* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969).

⁴³Hermand, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

⁴⁴See Wright, "Sublime Ambition," *op. cit.*, and Kellner, "New Man," *op. cit.*

⁴⁵In his Paris Manuscripts of 1844, Marx wrote that "the development of the five senses is the labor of the entire previous world history," suggesting further that science, industry, and culture are the "open book" of human powers, the objectifications of a historically formed human nature. See Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1975).

⁴⁶Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

⁴⁷Contradictions between the culture and political economy of the bourgeoisie are discussed in Ernst Bloch, *Erb-schaft, op. cit.*; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); and Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). On the rise of industrialism and the early responses by artists, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

⁴⁸Carl Sternheim, *The Strongbox*, in Sokel, *An Anthology, op. cit.*, pp. 90ff.

⁴⁹For more of Sternheim's delightful plays, see Carl Sternheim, *Five Plays* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970).

⁵⁰Carl Sternheim, *Citizen Schippel*, in Willet, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

⁵¹Georg Kaiser, *Gas I and II*, in *Five Plays* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970). Discussed in Kellner, "New Man," *op. cit.*

⁵²Sokel, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁵³Paul Zech, "Factory Cities on the Wupper: The Other City," translated in Allen, *Expressionist Poetry, op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁵⁴Kaiser, *Gas, op. cit.* If one substitutes "nuclear energy" for "gas," Kaiser's *Gas* plays provide a brilliant allegory of the dangers of nuclear energy and warfare.

⁵⁵Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973).

⁵⁶Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*, and Ritter, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷See Zimmerman's study of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in *Passion and Rebellion*.

⁵⁸Heym, "The God of the City," translated in Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵⁹Heym, cited from Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*, pp. 44f.

⁶⁰Ivan Goll, "Cafe," in Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4.

⁶¹On expressionist cafe-culture, see the chapter by Henry Pachter in this book.

⁶²Gottfried Benn, "Nightcafe," translated in *Primal Vision* (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 220. Cited and discussed in Ritter, *op. cit.*

⁶³See the studies by Ritter, Kellner, and Bronner in this book.

⁶⁴On the impact of new modes of transportation on the human sensibility and culture, see Siegfried Giedeon, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Norton, 1969); Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*; and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "Industrialized Travel," *Telos* 21, Fall 1974, and "Railroad Space and Railroad Time," *New German Critique*, 14.

⁶⁵For Pinthus, *Menschheitsdämmerung*, *op. cit.* and the Appendix "The Train-Motif in Impressionism and Expressionism," in Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre* (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1939).

⁶⁶Ernst Stadler, "Journey over the Rhein-bridge at Night," translated in Lange, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-8.

⁶⁷Gottfried Benn, "Express Train," in *Gottfried Benn*, edited by J.M. Richie (London: Oswald Wolff, 1972), p. 107.

⁶⁸F.T. Marinetti *Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.) On Marinetti and Futurism, see Stephen Eric Bronner, "F.T. Marinetti: The Theory and Practice of Futurism," *Boston University Journal*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, 1977.

⁶⁹Georg Heym, "Der Krieg," *Dichtungen und Schriften*, I, editor Karl Ludwig Schneider (Hamburg: Heinrich Ellermann, 1960ff.), translated by Mark Ritter.

⁷⁰August Stramm, "Battlefield," in Hamburger-Middleton, editors, *Modern German Poetry*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷¹See the list in Willet, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷²Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962).

⁷³Jakob van Hoddis, "End of the World," *op. cit.* Armin Arnold in a clever article, "Halley's Comet and Jakob van Hoddis' Poem 'Weltende'" (in *German Expressionism*, *op. cit.*) deflates the myths that surround van Hoddis's poem and suggests that the work is an ironic analysis of the fear propagated in the German press that Halley's comet was going to cause wide-spread destruction. This interpretation supports the reading of Expression-

ism proposed here by underlining the close relationship between expressionist texts and the contemporary social environment.

⁷⁴Reinhard Sorge, *The Beggar, An Anthology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22ff.

⁷⁵On cinema and Expressionism, see Rudolf Kurtz, *Expressionismus und Film* (Berlin: 1926; reprinted, Zürich: Hans Rohr, 1965); Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); and the chapters by Silberman, Rubinstein, Wolitz, and Kaplan in this book.

⁷⁶Kurtz, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*, pp. 110ff.

⁷⁸On the expressionist disgust with their popularity and fadish acceptance by the bourgeois public, see Hans-Jörg Knobloch, *Das Ende des Expressionismus* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1975), pp. 7ff.

⁷⁹On the "critique of instrumental reason," see T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972) and Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

⁸⁰See Benn's works translated in *Primal Vision*, *op. cit.* and *Gottfried Benn*, *op. cit.* and the study of Nolde by Bronner, *op. cit.*

⁸¹Lukacs, "'Grosse und Verfall,'" *op. cit.* and the articles in *Die Expressionismusdebatte*, editor Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), from which articles by Bloch and Lukacs are translated in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977). See also Bronner's article on the Expressionism debate in *Passion and Rebellion*.

⁸²See Vietta-Kemper, *op. cit.*, pp. 153ff. for many examples.

⁸³On expressionist attacks on bourgeois codes of rationality in the films of Lang, see Kaplan, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁸⁵Hermand, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶Middleton, *op. cit.* See the studies of expressionist poetry by Ritter and of Nolde by Bronner in *Passion and Rebellion*.

⁸⁷See Wright, "Sublime Ambition," *op. cit.*

⁸⁸Hermand, *op. cit.* and Kellner, "New Man," *op. cit.*

⁸⁹*Op. cit.*

⁹⁰Lukacs, *op. cit.*

⁹¹See Bertolt Brecht, *Baal*, in Sokel, editor, *An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963); and my study of the play in "New Man," *op. cit.*

⁹²On "romantic anti-capitalism," see Ferenc Feher, "The Last Phase of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 10 (Winter 1976-7).