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NEW OBJECTIVITY:
GEORGE GROSZ: OTTO DIX

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Anne Crowley

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Introduction

In this thesis, the objective is to gather together images of a new realism and objectivity, as they evolved in Germany in the wake of - and partly in direct reaction to - the first world war. The intention is to concentrate on one wing of the movement to which both George Grosz and Otto Dix were members - the leftist "veristic" wing.

The sober scepticism of the artists who formed that movement sprang from a renewed preoccupation with the elementary facts of life, a scepticism which sought to come to terms with its own time. Grosz and Dix, principal representatives of the movement, are painters who captured the face of their time. They focussed on the social problems of Germany in the 1920s, a time and a place which - God knows - called for a new astringency. Their work is an exact record which tells us a great deal of the period: peoples' hopes and fears, their excesses and above all their anxieties.

The movement may be called "New Realism", "German Critical Realism", "New Objectivity" or indeed "Neue Sachlichkeit" but for reasons of convenience, it will be known by the label "New Objectivity" throughout this paper. Also for convenience it is being called a "movement" in

preference to other terms such as "trend", "school", "period" or "philosophy" which occur in the literature.

So as to illustrate the path by which each of these artists was led to the New Objectivity movement, I have sought to trace their early work, as well as the influences on them which are significant. I have also attempted to place the work of Grosz and Dix - and the movement itself - within the context of the Weimar Republic (1918-1932). Since the earliest manifestations of the movement were observed to have been in 1918 and its final ones in 1933 there is of course, a strong coincidence. More specifically the study is intended to indicate what Grosz and Dix had in common which may be summed up as their rejection of what seemed to them an ingrained German tendency towards Expressionism.

CHAPTER I

George Grosz (1893-1957)

In 1923 G.F. Hartlaub, the director of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, arranged an exhibition the purpose of which was to show the development of postwar painting. He himself gave the exhibition the title "New Sachlichkeit" explaining that the term -

> "... ought really to apply as a label for the new realism bearing a socialist flavour. It is related to the general contemporary feeling in Germany of resignation and cynicism after a period of exuberant hopes ... Cynicism and resignation are the negative side of "New Sachlichkeit"; the positive side expresses itself in the enthusiasm for immediate reality as a result of a desire to take things entirely objectively, on a material basis, without immediately investing them with ideal implications."[1]

The characteristics of this new realism are an exact and straight forward three-dimensional depiction of subject matter and a return to the small easel picture in accordance with the new conception of the minuteness of reality. Out of this came "social verism". It was inaugurated by George Grosz, and in its beginnings it disclosed

marked affinities with futurism and Dadaism. The psychological background is provided by "Dada" with its anarchic destructive tendency and its contempt for tradition, convention, and so-called "ART". But whereas Dada spurned all set principles and steered clear of moral or social purposes, this German offshoot, in the midst of general misery and revolutionary stirrings of the German post-war years, did involve itself in social values - it turned to violent social criticism. Objective registration of topical reality was the postulate dominating the new tendency, but right from the beginning - as may be seen from the quotation from G.F. Hartlaub above - there were different trends within the movement. One, centred around the Munich painters Alexander Kassoldt and Georg Schrimpf, aimed at restoring the lost harmony of the world through enforced simplicity. In their paintings, still-life objects are silent, inscrutable reminders of an archaic order, the human figure is treated like a still life. Schrimpf, for instance, in spite of his hairline precision of detail, does not paint from nature or models but works in his studio isolated from "reality". His clarity of form is the result of a conscious effort to summon out of his mind the various necessary "facts" and assemble them into a clear and concentrated version of reality. The other trend of "New Objectivity" -

with Otto Dix and George Grosz as its most notable exponents - dwelt instead upon the basic ills of contemporary life.

George Grosz was born in 1893 in Berlin and spent his early childhood in Pomerania where his father managed a Freemason Lodge. The family returned to Berlin in 1900 after his father died and lived in a working-class quarter - going back to Pomerania when his mother undertook to run an officers' club for Hussars - stiff, monocled types who reappear in Grosz's later work. Grosz went to the Royal Academy in Dresden in 1911 and spent two years doing academic cast and anatomical work. When he returned to sketching everyday life, Grosz studied Japanese prints as well as Daumier, Lautrec, Rowlandson and Goya and tried unsuccessfully to get some of his own work into the newspapers.

From 1912 to 1914 he held a scholarship to the Royal Arts and Crafts School in Berlin. Living on the outskirts of the city, he absorbed himself in the world of cabaret and cafe life, which began to be an important source of subject matter. Some of the caricatures of this time, done in a new tense, linear technique, were sold to magazines and provided enough money for a six months' trip to Paris in the Spring of 1913. Paris apparetnly left Grosz unaffected or so he says, although we can

detect stylistic changes that seem to show some effect of the French experience. There is a significant difference between the early style with its lyrical line, as in "The Garret", 1916, a characteristic scene of the 1917-1920 period. The later style is exemplified by "Germany A Winter's Tale", 1918 and displays a futurist quality suggesting Delaunay. The memory of the Paris of 1913, light though it may have been, still carried with it echoes of Picasso, Delaunay and the fantasy of Chagall. It is true that these artists were shown in Berlin, as were the Italian futurists, whose lines of energy, dynamic movement, and planes crossing and interrupting each other, reappear in such paintings as Grosz's "To Oskar Panizza", 1917, and "Metropolis", 1917.

In 1914 he went into the army. Invalided out in 1916 he returned to Berlin. He began to express his disgust with the "partioteers", the profiteers, and generally those who enjoyed themselves while others died at war. Some of these drawings which juxtaposed - though not necessarily in the same work - corrupt officers and mutilated soldiers, appeared in the recently founded "Die Neue Jugend" and, in the "Second Grosz Portfolio" between 1916 and 1917. By this time Grosz was becomming known. An article in the pacifest "Die Weissen Blatter" by Theodore Daubler enhanced his

fame. Together, Grosz's early works present an impressive panorama of post-war corruption and misery - a human wasteland, in strong contrast to popular escape routes of the time i.e. Bauhaus-inspired faith in technology, or, retreat into rural nature. George Grosz shared with Dix the theme of crippled war veterans. Evidence of this include examples from his inexhaustible stock of profiteers, bloodthirsty generals, bald-headed lechers, "kinky" mafiosi and prostitutes.

A further term of war service in 1917 ended with a short sojourn in a military hospital; his experiences there were recorded in drawings of the wounded, the nurses, officers and so forth. Shortly after his discharge, the war ended. For Grosz the disenchantment of this period found its outlet in political action in groups such as the International Dada Movement and also through his critical drawings.

To fully understand Grosz's work and its relation to the "New Objectivity" movement it is also necessary to look into his association with the "Berlin Dada in Action" group. In February, 1918, in "Saol der neuen Sezession", at a meeting sponsored by I.B. Neumann, Huelsenbeck delivered his "First Dada speech in Germany".[2] This began with the statement that the meeting was a demonstration of solidarity with international

Dadaism - the international "Artistic Movement" founded in Zurich two years before. He then launched into a ferocious attack on Expressionism, Futurism and Cubism and heaped ridicule on abstract art, proclaiming as he did, that all these theories had been defeated by Dada. Among the claims Huelsenbeck made in his speech were these:

> "There is one literary form into which we can compress much of what we think and feel: the manifesto. Tzara had enunciated as early as 1916 (Sic). From the day the Cabaret Voltaire opened its doors, we read and wrote manifestos. We did not only read them, we spoke them as vociferously and defiantly as we could. The manifesto as a literary medium answered our need for directness. We had no time to loose; we wanted to incite our opponents to resistance, and, if necessary, to create new opponents for ourselves. We hated nothing so much as romantic silence and the search for a soul; we were convinced that the soul would only show itself in our own actions."[3]

Huelsenbeck followed up his challange by writing a manifesto directed at putting art, dislocated by a number of what he considered to be false

artistic movements, back into its proper place, which was Dadaism. In Berlin Dadaism was able to gain a hold in 1918 because the journal "Die Freie Strasse"[4] offered a psychological base to work from. It stood for a new kind of Anti-Freudian Psychoanalysis. A leading contributor to "Die Freie Strasse" was Otto Grosz (no relation of the subject matter of this chapter) who contributed further to the background thinking of the movement. His was the basic formula:- that of the conflict in the development of personality between what is one's "own" and what is "alien". The writers and painters associated with "Die Freie Strasse", including Grosz developed a new approach to society and to art, by accepting that all intellectual creativity represents a kind of self-educational process for man, in which routine and conventions have to be wiped out. The "Club Dada" was launched, for propaganda purposes at the beginning of April, 1918, with the first Dada evening fixed for 12th April.

Huelsenbeck wrote the first "Dadaist Manifesto"[5] which was signed by Tristan Tzara, Franz Jung, George Grosz, Richard Huelsenbeck, Gerhard Preiss and Raoul Hausmann. This was the first move away from the anti-aestheticism of Zurich. In April, 1918 Housmann published the "Manifesto against the Weimer way of life". In it the reaction against

all traditional morals and aesthetics is quite pronounced but on top of that for the first time there is a strong social content thus drawing a line of demarcation between the Berlin movement and that of Zurich. One elementary difference between the two movements lies in the fact that Dada in Switzerland could take the form of "Artistic Game" while Berlin had to face the conflicts created first by the war and then by Bolshevism.

The deliberately new intellectual attitude of the Berlin Dada group was underlined by the fact that the readings pursued certain revolutionary but not, as is constantly and falsely repeated, Bolshevik aims. In various public manifestoes they waged war on burgeois rubbish, wrong-headed expressionism and empty rhetorical idealism. The journal "Der Dada" was founded by Raoul Hausmann in June, 1919 and was edited collectively by Hausmann, Heartfield and Crosz. Only the George Grosz portfolios, "Das Gesicht der herrachenden Klasse" (The face of the ruling classes) and others, in which he mocked and assailed the ruling class with unremitting savagery, constituted the link with Dada. There followed a whole series of ferocious political publications, to which Grosz contributed.

Walter Mehring illustrates the risks to which Berlin Dadaists exposed themselves when he tells

the story of the journal "Jedermann sein eigner Fussball" (everyone his own football).

> "As I remember it, the credit belongs to our pair of Dadaist publishers and brothers, who also financed the enterprise with the aid of a little legacy they had. But the way we sold it in the streets was my idea. We hired a char-a-banc of the sort used for whitsuntide outings, and also a little band, complete with frock coats and top hats, who used to play at exserviceman's funerals. We, the editorial staff, paced behind, six strong, bearing bundles of "Jedermann sein eigner Fussball" instead of wreaths"[6].

In practice, the demand that art should be banished to the scrap-heap turned into a battle, not against art as such, but against social conditions in Germany. Grosz wrote in the periodical "Die Freie Strasse", 1917,

> "The answer to the question whether my work can be called art or not depends on whether one believes that the future belongs to the working class."[7]

The Herzfeldes would certainly have said the same but there was no such certainty for the others. However, in the years that followed, Grosz's views

were to develop significantly. From futurism Grosz took the notion of combining simultaneous views. This enabled him to combine satirical images in such a way as to express the rhythm of life in the big city. It is a world of whores, swindlers and philistines whose most repulsive aspects he brings out with the naive force of his mordant line. This futurist style was felt already in the paintings of the last two years of the war. "Metropolis, 1917", with its various elements, in violent motion, its psychotic and poorly clothed men in shocking contrast to the nude women who parade their wares through the streets. This work is one of the many exciting condemnations of one class of people in a disintegrating world. Another example, "To Oskar Passizza, 1917" retaining the dynamism of Delaunays "Tour Eiffel" and similar works, has an added northern macabre quality. Its death - doomed, "ensoresque" mobs pour through the streets, making carnival in the midst of death; their animal-like mask faces stand out with cruel clarity.

The more renowned "Germany, a Winter's Tale, 1918", sums up the situation in Germany in the "winter of hunger" from 1917 to 1918, as well as Grosz's aesthetic position at the time. This futurist overlay of forms symbolizes the uneasiness of the fat bourgeois faced by the revolution - an

uneasiness radiating from the central figure who is seated before a collage-arranged table. In the work as a whole we find a rapidly shifting panorama of Germany in the last year of the war. In the foreground are a sanctimonious Minister, an arrogant member of the "junker" class and a self-satisfied middle class individual (possibly a professor) with the culture-symbol of respectability under one arm - a volume of Goethe - while over the opposite shoulder he carries a puppet on a stick. Middle ground and background are filled with a kaleidoscopic vision of figures and buildings, summing up the decadence of religion, the state and contemporary morality - themes which constantly reoccur in Grosz's work.

By 1918, Grosz's prophecy of confusion and disintegration was fulfilled. As the situation deteriorated, political assassination became commonplace; as hunger grew, prostitution and drug addiction mounted alarmingly. At the lower end of the social scale, inflation heightened the misery of postwar scarcities; at the upper end, the profiteers grew insatiable.

During this period Grosz grew much more critical of the social scene. He turned now to carricature of the greedy upper middle class. "The Diamond Profiteers" of 1920, a collage and water colour, shows the predatory character of these conscienceless

creatures, just as "The Cafe", pen and ink drawing, 1919, a scene in a low-grade drinking place, accentuates the matter-of-fact brutality of men and women with their distressingly animal faces.

While Rousseau, De Chirico, Carra, Derain, Picasso, Leger, have been referred to as the fixed points which enabled the New Objectivity Movement to orientate itself, the one painter who had more influence on Grosz (as also Dix) than any other was Georgio de Chirico, particularly in the works of his "Pittura Metafisica" period between 1910 and 1917. These paintings are strictly speaking anti-metaphysical, in that they proclaim the collapse of the old "metaphysical" order that held phenomena together and gave them a meaning. Without this order all things appear isolated and become mysterious. The human observer finds himself lost in a world of artifacts which have become strangers to him. In De Chirico's visions of empty squares, flanked by renaissance buildings as if by a stage set, the anguish, isolation and disorientation of modern man have taken on pictorial reality.

In 1920 Grosz worked Dadaist montages with inserted drawings, a number of which appeared in 1922 under the title "Materialisation". Here the spirit of Pittura Metafisica is clearly discernible. There is the hard, naked perspective space, into

which moves an articulated puppet, the "Manichino". But in Grosz this original mythical figure serves a satirical design: it serves as the man without the face, the massman. Under Italian influence Neo-verism was becoming the dominant style.[8] Grosz, abandoned his expressionist, Dadaist and futurists forms and what remained was sharply realistic drawing with which he exposed the shortcomings of his time objectively and without mystery. "Mirror of Philistines", "Love above All" and "The fall of the Ruling Class" - are the titles of his volumes of drawings, which now appeared in quick succession. His painting too is essentially graphic, a penetrating verist caricature against a ground of mawkish diluted colour.

German culture in the 1920s was concerned for the most part with economic distress which in spite of temporary palliatives, remained basic. German literature and art as late as the end of the twenties and the early thirties - was to be dominated by the hard realism of the New Objectivity. But before this, National Socialism was already visible in the cinema and the media.[9] The advent of National Socialism, as the logical climax of this period of despair and social discontent, does not represent a complete break with either the immediate or more distant past. Just as the 1920s, in spite of the reaction against expressionism, still

preserved many of its idealistic and even emotional qualities, so the Hitler epoch in many ways also show a continuation of the Expressionist spirit. Some writers who were inactive during the New Objectivity period come into prominence under the Nazis e.g. Hans Jonst. More generally, however, the activism of socialism is paralleled by that of the expressionists. The expressionists saw the Third Reich in terms of an infinite world, while the Nazis saw it in purely nationalistic, but still expressive, mystical and obscure, terms. The literature of both Expressionism and Nazism is of a consistently emotive and even ecstatic nature. There is a consistent type of emotional expression in German culture, which contains varying ingredients of mysticism, hysteria, religiosity, romantic yearning and identification with nature. These historical components of the German way of thinking and feeling, differently compounded in different epochs and for diverse purposes, have their positive and negative formulations, first in the emotive rebelliousness called Expressionism and then in the hysterical repressiveness known as National Socialism.

The pause between Expressionism and National Socialism was the New Objectivity. It was another form of protest against the times. It possessed a bitter but dry and hard realism that is strongly

emotional in character and social in content, throughout the years immediately preceding and following the 1916-18 war. As the country moved toward its temporary "Rightist" stability, social criticism changes to despair, evinced in an escapist art. There is evident rejection of the world. If that is the negative side, the positive side appears in a matter-of-fact presentation. Instead of the ecstasy and subjectivism of Expressionism's symbolic-type form, we now find a straight-forward objectivity and a seeking out of individual character.

> "see things as they are ... That is the basis for a pure realism. One cannot paint fury. One has to be able to say yes to human utterances which are here and will be here forever. That doesn's mean to say yes to imperialistic wars, but to a destiny, with which man is confronted under given circumstances and in which he must prove himself. The extraordinary circumstances show man in his complete greatness, but also in his complete depravity and bestiality. In these extraordinary moments man shows all his potentialities."[10]

In effect, Fritz Loffler is contending that reality is the essence of man's existence. Grosz and Dix

shared the view that it was important to face the reality of life. For them form is no longer destroyed in the search for the beyond - rational inner meaning; the object or person is described with minute exactness, yielding a document of reality on an intensified level, as in old German masters like Baldung, Cranach and Durer. Not only the spirit and form but the very themes of the new art differ from the older expressionism. In the newer art, the painter brings us down to earth, although he retains definite elements of emotional intensification. Instead of a "visionary hell", the realities of postwar suffering are observed with clinical intensity by Grosz and Dix.

This careful examination of reality was to have two consequences for the Germany of the day. Firstly, it meant an enrichment of realism and secondly an intensification of the meaning of the object. Where, in earlier art, objects were more or less taken for granted as a part of a universal effect, New Objectivity dealt much more precisely with those objects. It produced quiet, contained, but intense art, the psychological examination of the world of objective reality.

As G.F. Hartlaub pointed out (see page 8, Ch.I) New Objectivity as opposed to the rhythmic and decorative expressionist viewpoint, reverts

to a three-dimensional world. It comes back to the small easel picture, to an almost miniature conception expressed in terms of space projection. The New Onjectivist paints with clarity of form which is the result of a conscious effort to summon out of his mind the various necessary "facts", and to assemble them into a clear and concentrated version of reality. Whatever way he worked, the result is an emotionally heightened interpretation of the clearly observed fact. The social-minded artists like Dix and Grosz probe the fearfulness of various social aberrations and try to bring them as close as possible to the spectator. Where the expressionist was dynamic, the New Objectivist is deliberately static in quality.

The early 1920s were also significant in relation to Otto Dix. They saw the rise and maturity of his critical realism which in his work also carried a message of social outrage. Like Grosz, Dix produced, during the years of astronomical inflation, some of his best work. His graphics and watercolours dealt with the recently ended war and subsequent ethical degeneration and his work was very influential in defining the New Objectivity movement. Like Grosz, he was very aware of the social decay all around him. Every night the new jazz bands blared in the smokey clubs and bars. Nude dancers entertained while prostitutes and drug pushers weaved among the tables. Aids

to forgetfulness like cocaine, heroin and hashish were readily available to add to the effects of liquor. This is reflected in his work too, for example "Frontsoldier in Brussels" from "Der Krieg" and also in "The Seven Deadly Sins". This comparison between Grosz and Dix is carried further in Ch.II.

Grosz's middle-class satires continue during the twenties and early thirties, especially in water-colours such as the "Two War Veterans" of 1928, in a more relaxed naturalistic style. He accepted an invitation to teach in the United States and left Germany in 1933 when he turned toward landscapes and nudes which have little to do with New Objectivity. During the height of his creativity however, in the period immediately following the first world war, Grosz produced characteristic New Objectivity art, and also some of the best social criticism of our century.

> "Here, the essence is the timeless appropriateness, the annihilating accuracy, the devastating judiciousness of George Grosz ingraphic commentary on a sector of twentieth century society that twice contrived to destroy millions of human beings, irrevocably distort and wreck the lives of hundreds of millions more - "[11]

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CHAPTER II

Otto Dix (1891-1969)

Otto Dix went through many of the same experiences as Grosz; he came from a similar background and his work reflects in much the same way his rejection of the horrors of war as well as the abuses of post-war society.

In the case of an artist such as Otto Dix, whose strongest work is reflective of his society, the artist's background has an added significance. Dix was born in 1891, in rural Untermhaus and grew up among the children of workers and small farmers. He spent the years from 1909 until the advent of the war in 1914 at the "Kunstgewerbeschule" (School of Applied Arts). In 1915 he was drafted into the German army and was sent to the Champagne province of France. After two years in the trenches he was sent to the eastern front as a sergent. In the last year of the war, he was returned to Belgium, where he trained as an aerial observer. During his years in the trenches he was wounded several times. Dix spent the 1920s in three places: Dresden, Dusseldorf and Berlin, with a final return to Dresden his "native" city. He was brought to Dusseldorf in 1922 by the well known art dealer Johanna Ey. Officially, in order to get a studio, he became a pupil of Heinrich

Nauen; he identified himself actively with the "Novembergruppe" which he joined.

Dix found himself in the maelstrom of German urban society in 1922 - a society characterised by one historian as follows:-

> "It seemed as though everything was bound to collapse, but factory chimneys went on smoking, bank-clerks neatly wrote out astronomical figures, prostitutes painstakingly made up their faces ... at every turn there were ... dance halls where lean couples conscientiously jazzed up and down. Jazz blared. I remember two popular songs: "Yes we have no bananas" and "Tomorrow's the end of the world". However the end of the world was postponed from one day to the next."[1]

As in the case of Grosz, using critical realism he became a master of the macabre, lashing out at all aspects of social decay.

Dix wanted content - not only form. He explained his position by saying

> "The Expressionists made enough art. We wanted to see the thing entirely naked - clearly - almost without art."[2]

Thus, Dix turned away from the fragmented planes

of cubism and futurism to a new realism, and tinged it with a critical message. Like Grosz he did not abandon the emotional content of Expressionism. He merely turned to a more factual approach, emphasizing content over formal abstraction. This new concern was an outgrowth of Dada's socio-political consciousness, but abandoned the playful outlook and formal iconoclasm of that style. Dix, in his new guise of critical realism, would become, as it were, another terrorist against the middle class, joining George Grosz as an irritant on the surface of society.

Yet, despite his involvement in social criticism, his membership of radical organizations and his aid to socialist groups, Dix was a moral rather than a political reformer. Unlike Crosz, he refused to join the communist party. Even so Dix's subject matter gravitated towards the proletarian "milieu". He depicted the lower classes' individual suffering, contrasting it to the greed of the powerful classes.[3]

His passage to New Objectivity involved an emphasis on the more grotesque and decadent aspects of the postwar years, concentrating on the "merchandise character" of the prostitute, the victimisation of the war cripples and unsparingly and cruelly representing the ugliness. Dix's themes now came increasingly from the dregs of his society. Added to the war memories were other major themes:

cripples, pimps and their whores, circus performers, profiteers and beggars, all the riffraff of the new Republic. These critical works were meant to shock the viewer, which they did.

In 1920 Dix painted a small but vivid canvas, "Die Fleischerladen" (The Meat Market). The subject of butchers, dealers in carcasses of dead animals was an apt analogy for certain Weimar types. In the foreground, leaning over a marble counter, is a grotesque imitation of a woman; hairy arms and neck protrude from the soft dress and incongrously ruffled apron. She is painted a bright, uncompromising carmine, as are all the adults in the shop. This monster grins foolishly down at a small boy who is handing her a scrap of paper. This note carries Dix's signature and the date, a convenient Renaissance motif which Dix was to use quite often. The pink cheeked child wears a little blue sailor's cap with the insignia, Wilhelm II, - the deposed Kaiser. In the background stand the butchers, busily cutting up enormous hooked pigs. The two red monster butchers resemble the carcases.they are dismembering. The two are obviously ex-soldiers; they are liberally tatooed with regimental emblems. The smug-looking butcher on the left wears on his right arm the tatooed insignia of the Artillery Regiment No.48, in which Dix himself served, while on his left arm

he has a representation of the sacrificial lamb with the banner of the resurrection. This may be another military symbol, but on the other hand may be significant here on several levels. The other butcher, clenching a knife in his teeth as he rips the carcass with his hands, sports a tatoo of an oxhead over crossed cleavers and the writing, "God Bless our handiwork". This appears to be a trade emblem, but really there is little difference - all these designs stand for occupations dealing with death and violence. These porcine distortions, in their petty peacetime activities are intended to be concise symbols of German crudity.

1920 marked the commencement of his print period. His woodcuts often appeared in the magazine, "1919", but his chief interest was in the intaglio process. Small editions of his etchings were regularly published by the Rudolf Kammerck Verlag in Dresden. Dix instinctively loved the linear possibilities of this new medium. Thus, when he produced a painting, such as the "Meat Market", he would invariably copy it in etchings - sometimes an exact replica but often simplified. He used primitive methods for tonal variation, usually relying upon crosshatching for such effects. The more sophisticated techniques were of no interest to him during that period. His rough subject matter called for brutal handling. He etched, but did not

paint, sailors with prostitutes, rough and mercenary images sneering at each other. His painting of a sexual murder (an event which occurred with alarming regularity in the Germany of the time) is repeated in an etching. The flying pieces of the woman's body are no less horrifying because of the shocking colour. In a related theme, a portrait of a syphilitic, depicts his thoughts and motivations printed upon his head. Behind his rotting nose, a woman and medications appear alongside the enigmatic word, "Wassermann".

Dix's portraits of whores are often as revolting as this image. "Vohse" of 1912, was one such repugnant creature, and is typical of a type of woman Dix scorned. Etched darkly, with heavy outlines around her sagging breasts and belly, the woman's body is scarcely human, a macabre nightmare under tangled hair. Behind her stands her pimp looking for the next customer. Franz Roh may have had such a brutally realistic image in mind when he compared Dix's motives to those of the earlier master, Caravaggio.

> "Just as Caravaggio had brought back to earth the transcendental proclivities of mannerism in 1600, Otto Dix wanted to lead an overpathetic German Expressionism back to a mercilessly realistic conception of life. But reality was a gruesome thing never

> to be glossed over idealistically. He exagerated ... with a pessimistic force and inflexibility never seen before ... a monstrous scorn exuded from these pictures."[4]

The picture "Vohse" is one of the most horrific images of personal degeneration to come from any critic of German society and of theWeimar Republic itself. "Vohse" represents for Dix, the abomination. By the timehe etched this picture, he was a resident of the city of Dusseldorf. He had behind him two years development as a critical realist and was acquiring a national reputation.

In July and August of 1920 Dix made his only public appearance as a Dadaist, at the first international Dada fair in Berlin. One hundred and seventy-four objects were on exhibition, most of them "openly political and anti-military."[5] Dix sent the large painting of the war cripples and several drawings to this show, which featured a central room dominated by the stuffed effigy of a German army officer with a pigs head. It was labelled "Hanged by the Revolution". Apparently Dix broke with this style, right after the show. Collage - the only formal element he had obtained from Dada - disappeared from his work after 1920.

Also in 1920 Dix joined the "Novembergruppe" with George Grosz. The other members included Dungert, Raoul Hausmann, Hannach Hoch, Ernst Krantz, Rudolf Schlichter, and George Scholz. A collective letter was sent to "Der Gegner" (The Opponent) and published in June of that year. It recalled the impassioned idealism of the group's foundation - in the wake of the November, 1918, revolution - and the early goals calling for a community of artists within a revolutionary society. The letter pointed to the failure of the group's enthusiasm for these goals. The "oppositionists" felt that the main group had been diverted towards formal artistic concerns. The letter concluded with a plea for a return to the original idealism.

Dix, at any rate, had not lost his feelings for the workers, as his paintings and etchings show. In 1921, he joined Grosz again in designing posters for the "International Workers Aid" organization. This group held exhibitions for the benefit of the hungry masses, setting up a relief fund for the purpose from sales of artistic products. They once again called for support from their comrades, but failed to interest the majority of German artists- another disillusionment for Dix.

Because of astronomical rates of inflation Dix remained poor, though he had been selling works since 1919. Even though his subject matter was

strongly critical and proletarian, some of the patrons who bought his work might be considered surprising, like the textile manufacturer who bought his painting of the strolling "War Cripples".

Dix painted several critical portraits of anonymous prostitutes in the period 1921-23. One painting, which is significantly entitled "Venus Des Kapitalist Dichen Zeitalters" (Venus of the Capitalist Age), portrays a woman, her grotesque elongated nudity confronts us directly; she is isolated against dark, wall-papered walls grinning obscenely from beneath a velvet wide-brimmed hat. Her only other apparel is a pair of pearl-drop earings (which may have some relation to baroque iconography), shoes and silk stockings. From her neck to her knees she is blatantly exposed, the absolute antithesis of the classical goddess. While her image is not as shockingly deformed as the etched figure of "Vohse", by no means does she conjure up the traditional sensuous beauty of the Renaissance venus. This composition with its overtones of social decay is clearly meant to be offensive.

What brought the police to Dix's door, however, were the two similar paintings, the "Girl before a Mirror" of 1921, and "Pimp and Girls" of 1922. The former was far more overt in its critical stance than the grubby street scene portrayed in the latter.

The "Girl" was another self-satisfied whore, admiring her raddled and dubious charms in front of a mirror. Again this traditional theme is blurred by the coarseness of the image. This revolting siren, wearing an ugly corset, simpers cretinously at her reflected body. The blatant image and insulting implications of the painting were too much and, on March 26th 1923, Dix was tried in Berlin for obscenity. He hung a group of innocuous examples of his work in the courtroom, in defence of his morality and honesty - and won the case.

Despite his scorn for the society in which he lived Dix never represented himself as superior to his fellow-man. He would recognise many of the traits he scorned in his work in himself. He identified with sailors, "found pleasure in his whores", and suffered like war cripples with his nightmares of the trenches. At the same time all of this angered him; he did not accept it as the norm. After his acquittal he returned to Dusseldorf, where he resumed work with the "Venus" picture. He was obviously not intimidated by the experience of the trial.

We now turn to one of Dix's major themes - the war. He began to concentrate on the event itself, not only the victims who littered the streets of Germany, but the source itself. He said

about his dreams:

> "In which I must crawl through ruined houses, through corridors where I don't get through. The ruins were constantly in my dreams."[6]

In late 1923, following the tradition of anti-war cycles like those of Callot, Goya, Kollwitz, and Rouault, Dix began his great series of etchings, "Der Krieg", continuing work on the fifty plates while on a trip to the Black Forest in 1924. This cycle was released that year in five consecutive portfolios of ten plates each. This horrific vision was an immediate sensation, and bore quick comparison to Goya's "Disasters of War". John Cassandry, an American art historian and critic noted that:

> "Even Goya would have been appalled before the war portfolios of Otto Dix. The disasters of war as Goya reported them are a record of inhumanity and brutal folly, but Dix's "Der Krieg" shows the dissolution of matter and spirit into putrescence and senselessness. Goya is a spectator of atrocities and we observe them with him and react as human beings capable of normal emotional and intellectual responses to them. But Dix is not an observer; he is a victim

of insanity and butchery."[7]

The chief difference between the two great anti-war cycles lies here, in the sense of involvement. Dix was a victim of the violence. Though Goya too was pretty close to hand, Dix witnessed the violence daily. He experienced the presence of massive and impersonal death. It was the apotheosis of insanity and inhumanity. "Der Krieg" in fact bears closer relationship to reality rather than fantasy. Goya's oppressed Spaniards are generally seen as honourable, in contrast to the vicious French soldiers. There are no heroes in "Der Krieg". These etchings became, for Dix, much more than anti-war propaganda; they were manifestations of nihilism. Thus, "Der Krieg" was meant as a generalised comment on the limits of endurance and depravity. Dix considered the etchings to be "still lifes".[8]

His subjects range over the entire spectrum of soldiers' experience, from death in the dugouts, shell holes, and trenches to the brothels and civilian victims of the war. All of the plates are set on the western front, in France and Belgium, where he spent much of the war. One of these etchings, the "Wounded Soldier" grimaces in collapsed terror in one of the finer plates of the cycle. Here Dix uses the splotchy

effects of aquatint to suggest the muddy explosion that shattered the man. The soldier clutches at his shoulder, his helmet askew and his eyes wide in fear rather than in pain. He confronts us directly staring out at us and sharing the shock in his compelling image of horror. There are other wounded men in the series displaying the same sense of shock and desperation, but most of the soldiers in these portfolios are either numb, exhausted, savage, or dead and decayed into nightmarish images. One plate displays a row of victims blackened and swollen by mustard gas. Another presents an image of a long-dead guard, still seated and clothed, his drooping jaw and bleached bones showing through the rents in his decayed clothing. A foot protrudes ridiculously, as if he were struck in the act of crossing his legs. He guards a trench.

Several scenes show the troops attacking. A particularly surreal image is produced in "The attack under Gas", in which a group of helmeted and masked soldiers prepare to go "over the top". These resemble monstrous insects in the pale masks - which often did not work - leaving the wearer a blackened corpse. Another such attack occurs at night, a simplified evocation of a sneak assault, as the enemy with bared, snarling teeth lunges over a trench to stab a defender. These

two plates are the only remotely heroic or exciting aggressions in the cycle. The men are usually depicted trudging along patiently, struggling to continue at war. In the "Machine-gunners Advancing" the strongly delineated men are seen dragging their heavy equipment down an endless hill of corpses. They are compelled to step upon these fetid bodies and the disgust can be clearly seen on some of their faces.[9]

Other aspects of rough military life are portrayed as well. Leaves were available after a certain time spent in the trenches, but these forays back to civilization were no more humane that life in the mud had been. Prostitutes were attracted to occupied cities like Brussels, where soldiers were allowed to carouse for a week or two before resuming their fanatical slaughter. A typical scene appears in "Frontsoldier in Brussels" which portrays the prostitutes in the streets selling their bodies. One of these lustful soldiers stands in the corner gazing speculatively toward a busty boa-clad woman who teeters her swollen body on dainty high heels. Other feathered, frilled and furred women stroll or loiter near her, outlined by the bright store window behind them. The setting emphasised the "merchandise character" that overtook many women during the war.

But other women in "Der Krieg" are not so

willing. There is a dark and shocking image of a terrified nun being raped by an anonymous soldier. Her futile struggles will obviously not deter him. Another Belgian woman kneels in wild disarray over her dead baby, proffering her breast to its unresponsive form, obviously driven insane by her loss. Other women are shown as corpses, flung from a destroyed house by an exploding shell, in the only reference to Goya's work that appears in the series.

"Der Krieg" is an emotional evocation of the modern horror, immediate in its impact and productive of nightmares. It is brutal because the subject is brutal, fierce because the reaction is so. Its impact is an example of Dix's critical realism at the height of its emotional power and intensity.

In 1923, as he began work on "Der Krieg" Dix married and settled down. Soon after his marriage, he painted a portrait of himself and his bride in a stark hieratic style. A quiet airless space surrounds their rigidly frontal figures. Their arms hang stiffly at their sides and their eyes stare straight ahead. Clothed elegantly in dark and conservative outfits, they seem somewhat wooden, even puppet-like and very matter-of-fact in their respectability. There is a metallic precision in the smooth surfaces

and razor edges. This portrait, now lost, caused quite a sensation in artistic circles. Max Beckmann proclaimed himself "violently moved" by it and utilized the objective stance and frozen implacability in his own work. This double portrait has been called a turning-point for the New Objectivity. Dix would develop aspects of this style in his portraits. In 1925, on the advice of the dealer Karl Nierendorf, he moved to Berlin. There his contacts were mainly with the "Rote Gruppe" (Red Group) of George Grosz, John Heartfield, Rudolf Schlichter and Georg Scholz; at the same time he frequented the Romanisches Cafe.

The period of his great portraits had begun, and commissions came quickly. In one year "1926" he painted the journalist Sylvia Von Harden, the industrialist Dr. Hesse, the painter Jankel Adler, the are dealer Alfred Flechtheim, the philosopher Max Scheler. Some of the best portraits were not commissioned but sprang from the artist's fascinated response to a human encounter. In 1929 he was invited back to Dresden to become a professor at the Academy, he accepted. Three major themes characterize Dix's work in the period covered - War, sex and portraiture. All three emerge almost as fixations in 1919 and preoccupy him as late as 1933. During the 1920's Dix did

not produce any landscapes or still-lifes. His interest was exclusively in human beings.

His important work, his career and the movement of which he was a pillar all terminated with the excesses of National Socialism in the early thirties.

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CHAPTER III

New Objectivity (1919-1933)

A convenient point around which to describe New Objectivity is the exhibition mounted by Georg Friedrich Hartlaub at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim in 1925. Hartlaub himself, an art historian, is reputed to have coined the term (Neue Sachlichkeit) to describe the movement and his perception of its character has been summarised by one commentator as follows:-

> 'Objective registration of topical reality was the postulate dominating the new tendency, but right from the beginning Hartlaub distinguished two different trends within the movement. One centered around the Munich painters of Alexander Kanoldt and Georg Schrimpf, aimed at restoring the lost harmany of the world through enforced simplicity ... The other trend, with Dix and Grosz as its most notable exponents, dealt instead upon the basic ills of contemporary life".[1]

At the Mannheim exhibition Grosz was represented by "Wisdmug" and Oskar Panizza", amongst other paintings, as well as "Deutschland im Winter Marchen"

and the portrait "Herrmann - Neisse". Paul Westheim, well known art critic, also detected and diagnosed the new realistic tendency very early on . In 1919, for instance he published a review in Mario Broglio's magazine "Valori Plastici" which includes the following passage:-

> "Characteristic of his (Carlo Carra's) work ..., as indeed of a whole group of young artists, is an idiosyncratic, uncompromising realism (verismo), seeking a meticulous, hard line which suppresses every trace of the individual artist's manner. In Germany, as is known Grosz and Davringhausen are following a similar path".[2]

While Westheim was principally concerned with the Italian school - known as the "Valori Plastici" with its cool detached canvases by Giorgio de Chirico and Giorgio Morandi he also referred to Picasso's neo-classicism which he found similar in tone. It is clear therefore that almost from the beginning New Objectivity was observed to be not so much a style as a new way of seeing things, corresponding to a changed attitude to the phenomena of life and reflecting a radical commitment to the contemporary environment and everyday life.

It was evident from the Mannheim exhibition

that the new realism had more than one side to it. The right wing, described by Hartlaub - mainly in reference to Picasso of the years around 1920 - as "Neo classicists", which includes the French artists who pioneered many aspects of it (not only Picasso himself, but also Juan Gris, Jean Metzinger, Andre Derain), the Italians who congergated around the magazine "Valori Plastici" already mentioned, and in Germany first and foremost the Munich group: Kanoldt, Mense, Schrimpf.

That wing was mainly concentrated in Munich looking mainly towards Italy. The left or "veristic" wing lived mainly in Berlin, Dresden and Karlsruhe: George Crosz, Rudolf Schlichter, A.W. Dresslar, Oskar Nerlinger and Christian Schad in Berlin; Otto Dix, Bernhard Kretzachmar, Wilhelm Rudolph, Rudolf Bergander, Hans Grundig, Otto Griebel and Karl Gunther in Dresden; Karl Hubbuch, Wilhelm Schnarrenberger and Georg Scholz in Karlsruhe.

Gustav Hartlaub characterized all these varied stylists as men who were experiencing a "period of calm resignation or bitter cynicism after a period of exuberant hope".[3] For Hartlaub, the period of exuberant hope was doubtless the early days of the "November-gruppe". In his 1923 letter requesting contributions from the artists and their collectors, he said:

> "I am interested in hanging together representative works of those artists who in the last ten years have been neither impressionistically relaxed nor expressionistically abstract, who have devoted themselves inclusively neither to external sense impressions, nor to pure inner construction. I wish to exhibit those artists who have remained unswervingly faithful to positive palpable reality, or who have become faithful to it once more".[4]

The exhibition was planned for the Autumn of 1923 but its opening was delayed. Apart from an assortment of purely logistical difficulties (such as the problem of transporting works out of the occupied zone), there also seem to have been objections of principle, based on doubts as to the true contemporaneity or modernity of the new trend. It was not until almost two years later that the show took place, from 14 June to 13 September, 1925: not, as had originally been intended, on a European scale but restricted to Germany. Its full title was "Neue Sachlichkeit; Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus" (New Objectivity; German Painting since Expressionism).

In the same year, 1925, there appeared the

celebrated book by Franz Roh, "Post-Expressionism", with its subtitle "Magic Realism; Problems of the Most Recent European Painting". Both phrases, New Objectivity and Magic Realism then denoted one and the same thing; the difference was only one of emphasis. Both referred to a mode of representation which had come into being "after the disappearance of the Expressionist manner" and which was "firm in compositional structure but once more representational".[5] Of course, both terms were intended to have an application which went beyond contemporary German art.

The new movement's artists were primarily concerned with the rediscovery of the object; with the detailed characterization of concrete facts. It was in short a revival of realism, sometimes smooth and slick, sometimes exaggerated until it verged on the grotesque. Both wings shared five basic characteristics in varying degrees: a sobriety and sharpness of view which was largely unsentimental. Subject matter which was ordinary, even banal - and often ugly. Static compositions which often seemed airless. Eradication of the traces of the process of painting and finally a new, hopefully objective, explanation of the world and the

things in it.[6]

Franz Roh categorises opposing characteristics of Expressionism and the New Objectivity -

Expressionism	New Objectivity
ecstatic object	sober object
object suppressed	object clarified
dynamic	static
loud	quiet
diagonals/acute angles	rectangles parallel to frame
monumental	miniature
warm	cool
thick pigment	thin pigment
summary execution	careful execution [7]

In more recent times Bernard Myers noted that there was about New Objectivity a clarity that rivalled the old masters:

> "Form is no longer destroyed in this search for the beyond - rational inner meaning; the object or person is described with minute exactness, yielding a document of reality on an intensified level, as in old German masters like Baldung, Cranach or Durer".[8]

Both Dix's and Grosz's work, especially their

later portraits, follow all these characteristics at one time or another. Both Dix and Grosz share the desire for clarity, precision, and realism that defines the "verist" wing of the New Objectivity school. A comparison of Dix's two important portraits of his parents, the first painted in 1921, and the second in 1924, throw light not only on his personal transition within the movement but upon the very qualities of New Objectivity as they developed over time.

The earler portrait is more expressive and more spontaneous. His parents sit obliguely in the semi-darkness; the diagonal of the couch, upon which the mother sits, is balanced against the diagonal placement of the father's chair. Their faces are tired, moody, maps of their hard life; they are obviously workers, worn by their days, sunken together in a difficult existence. There is deep feeling here, in the handling of the mother's strained face and the father's heavy hands. His strength and endurance are clear; he has conquered his tired body and sits almost proudly, gazing calmly past us. There is a sense of strength and resignation in this emotional portrait. In contrast, the portrait of 1924 is brighter in tone, quieter, and less involved. In this second sitting, his parents are placed next to each other hieratically frontal. More care has

been taken with formal composition; a balance has been achieved between the verticals of their figures and the horizontals of the sofa and dado. They are dressed in similar striped clothing, but this merely points to Dix's love of line and detail, which he never lost; their attire has nothing to do with their social class, as it seemed to have in the former portrait. Their wrinkles have surely deepened in the intervening years, yet Dix lavishes attention on each hair and line in this work. The old master's touch is also obvious in the Renaissance motif of the "Trompe L'oeil" note pinned to the wall behind the father. Dix's signature appears on this scrap of paper. There is a new distance, a new care in the thinly painted images, a new tone to this second portrait. Obviously Dix's methods and motivations had changed by the mid-twenties.

In 1924, Dix took an extensive trip to Italy which strongly influenced his stylistic development. While in the south, he visited all the major art centres from Rome to Florence. The mannerist portraits by Bronzino and Pontorino, with their aloof elegance, their psychological penetration and uninvolved stance, influenced him deeply.[9] From 1924 on, the development of the qualities of New Objectivity can be traced through Grosz's

personal development. His work is also growing towards a more passive feeling, towards a more convincing objectivity and calm, characteristic of the movement during the late twenties. There was a distinct pictorial development: no longer those predetermined insights and opinions translated into succinct pictorial language, but man the individual, observed in every detail. The stimulus now came from individuals and characters rather than from political or social events.

The few occasional drawings with the class struggle as their theme cannot hide the fact that by the mid-twenties Grosz had finally changed from a fighter in the class struggle to a "bourgeois moralist". It is in this new role that he depicted himself in his self-portrait of 1926-27 as one who teaches, admonishes and warns. The traditional gesture of the raised forefinger is meant as an address to the viewer. Turned outward it emphasises the role of the artist, as Grosz now understood it: there is no time for contemplating one's navel, for introversion, but the need for reforming and influencing others.

Typical of the final evolution of New Objectivity is the works of Dix arising from the birth of his daughter Nelly in 1924. Dix's humour was apparent in many of the portraits and studies he did of the child in her infancy. In

his etching, "Nelly", 1924, he shows us the intense, almost hypnotic concentration of her discovery of her fingers. The child's cheeks, over-large head, and wild curls are lovingly depicted with a quick and masterful linearity.

New Objectivity was an artistic endeavour, in a historical moment of uncertainty, after a destructive war, and in the midst of political, economic and social crises, to get a grip on things once more, to bring them back under control. It was also an endeavour to penetrate things conceptually through faithful and unselfseeking observation, to grasp them in their essence, their true mystery, in order to achieve a new orientation in a world which had become elusive and chaotic, and to fathom its innermost coherence. The "veristic" painters attempted to bring the dislocations and contradictions of our modern existence to the level of consciousness, to lay a finger on the wound. Both the right and leftist wings had one thing in common: the realization that reality can no longer be depicted without being interpreted.[10]

George Grosz and Otto Dix are pre-eminent among the prophets - represented by the movement - who warned of the second world war by reporting, as sharply as graphics and words permit, the realities behind the illusions, the truth behind

the trivialising facades. Their chief style of critical realism was compounded by their outrage and dismay with the social chaos of the Weimar Republic. Their bitterness was indicative of one aspect of the New Objectivity. But by 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor and the Nazis began their cultural purges the Neue Sachlichkeit was brought to a premature end, the greatest period of the movement had already passed.

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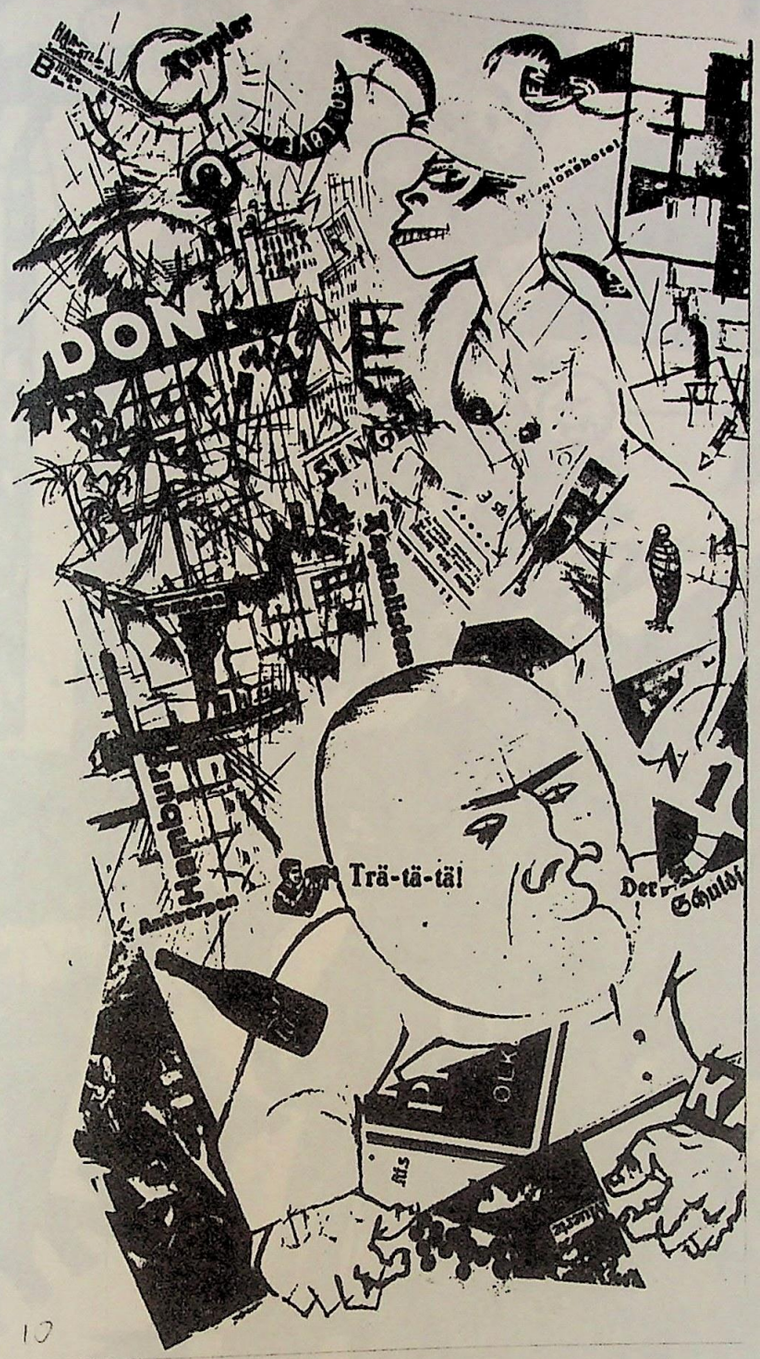

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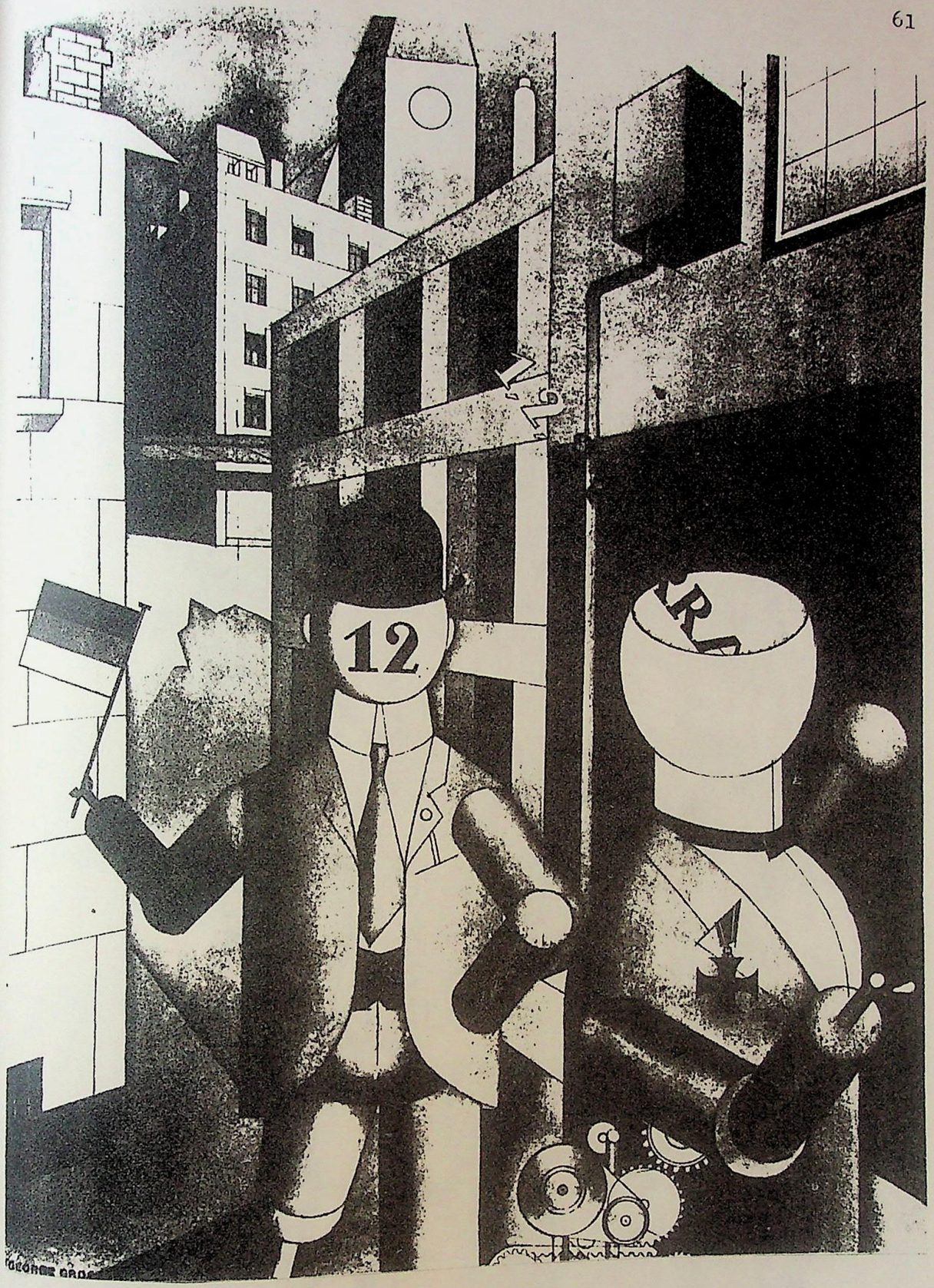

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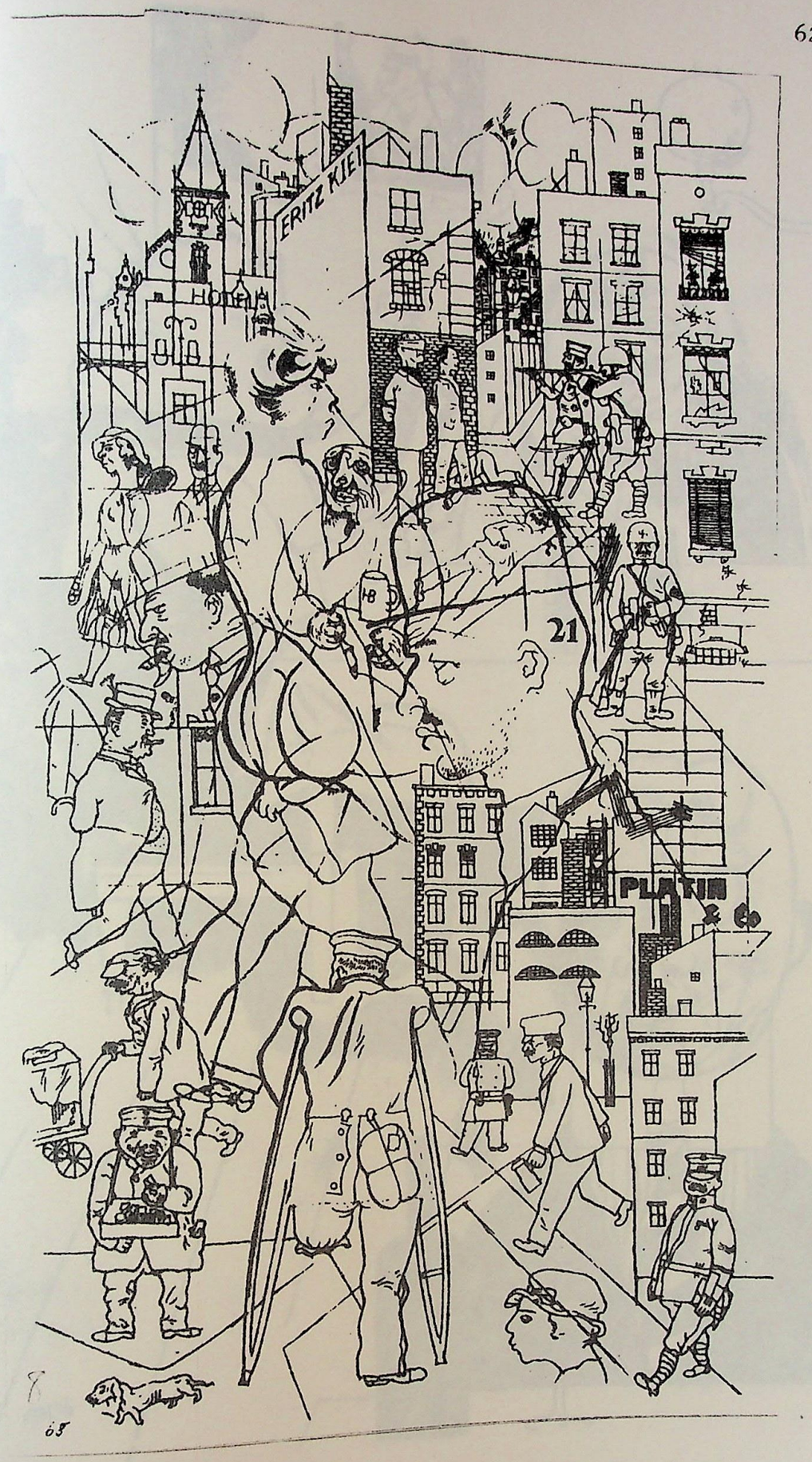

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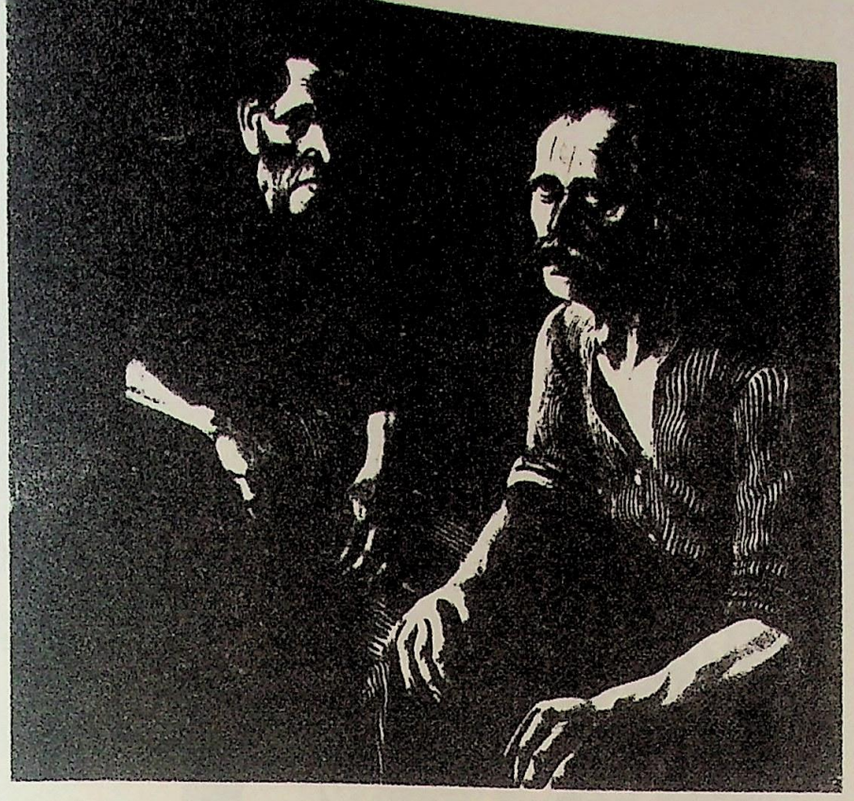
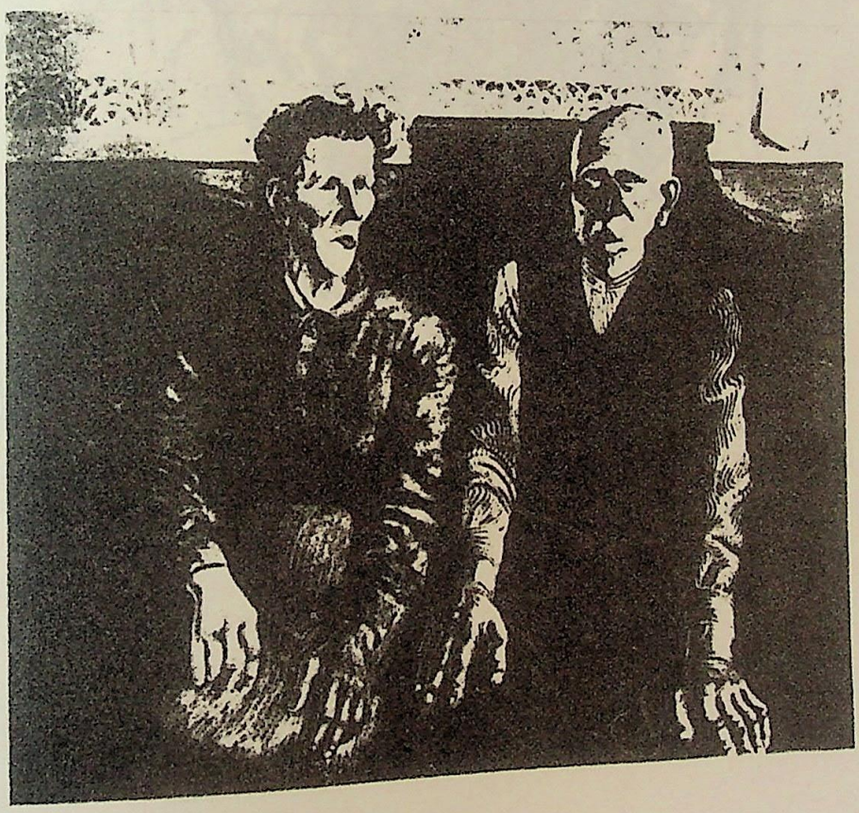


Portrait of Parents, 1921; Otto Dix.



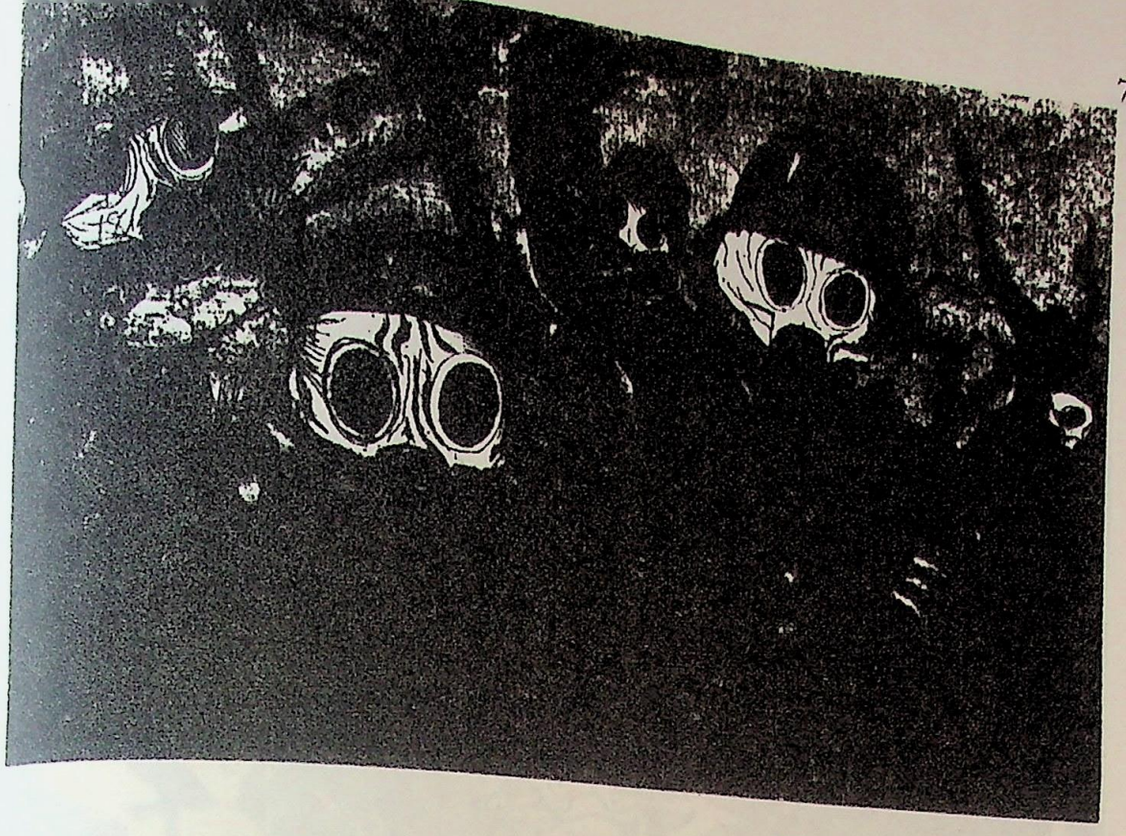
Portrait of Parents, 1924: Otto Dix.

Vohse, 1922, Etching: Otto Dix.

Couple, 1922. Watercolour. Otto Dix.

Nelly, 1924, Etching: Otto Dix.

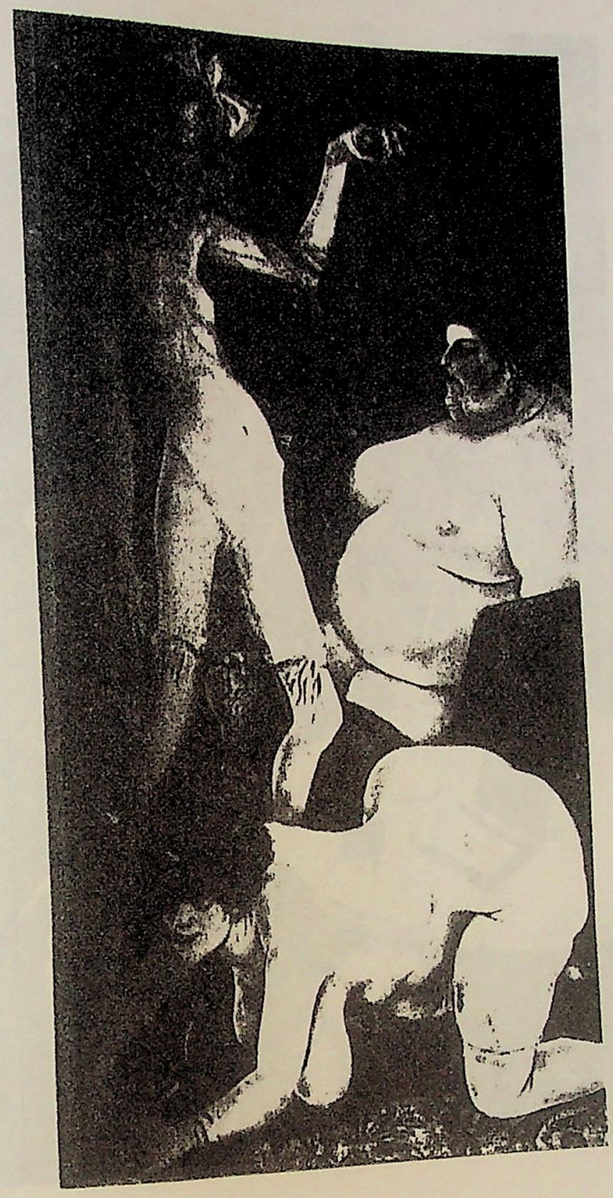
Front soldier in Brussels from "Der Krieg, 1924, Etching: Otto Dix.



Attack under Gas from "Der Krieg", 1924,
Etching, Otto Dix.

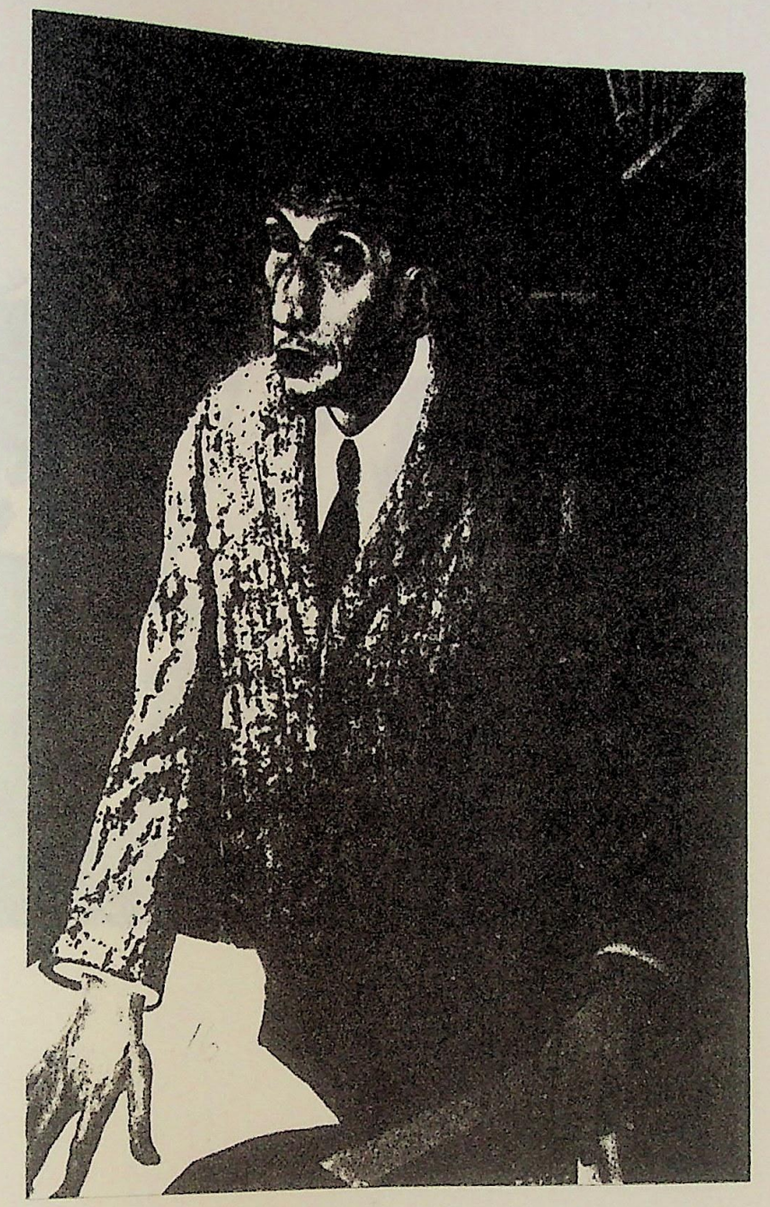
Machine Gunners Advancing from "Der
Krieg", 1924, Etching: Otto Dix.

Three prostitutes on the street, 1925.
Oil on canvas. Otto Dix.



Three women, 1926.
Oil on canvas, Otto Dix.

Sylvia Von Harden, 1926: Otto Dix



Alfred Flechtheim, 1926: Otto Dix.

Playing Children, Nelly with a Doll and Ursus, 1929: Otto Dix.

Red-haired nude, seated,
1930. Otto Dix.

The Seven Deadly Sins, 1933: Otto Dix.