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Kasper's Theater:  
Avant-Garde and Propaganda Puppetry in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

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**Abstract**

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*Kasper's Theater: Avant-Garde and Propaganda Puppetry in Early Twentieth-Century Germany* is a research-driven study of how and why artists turned to puppetry during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Organized chronologically, the project examines the different ways a puppet could be both an icon of rebellious resistance and a vehicle for manipulation and control—and why it matters. Kasper, the tramp-like everyman trickster cousin of Punch, is a central character, but this study follows other puppets, too, and brings together a range of works by canonical, lesser-studied, and newly rediscovered artists. More than just a history of puppetry, *Kasper's Theater* argues that puppets blur the line between life and art, and offers a new view of German cultural and political history.

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For James Edgar Poague Bell

## **Introduction**

### **Seid ihr alle da?**

*Seid ihr alle da?* Is everybody there? This traditional opening to a German puppet show makes it sound like the puppet has been waiting for the audience. The question is friendly, its grammar informal. It creates anticipation. By answering, the audience is drawn into the performance from the very first sentence, and a relationship with the stage is established. But the puppet's question is not merely rhetorical; it is also a real question. A puppet needs an audience, and it needs that audience to believe in the illusion of its life from the very outset. Viewers participate in the animation of the puppet and are complicit in the action of the play. When a puppet breaks the fourth wall, it disrupts the possibility of suspending disbelief, but it does so in order to take the performance one step further—to engage an audience's belief. For all the artifice of a puppet show, the anti-naturalistic cartoonishness of its familiar stage, puppetry remains a form of theater with the power to blur the division between stage and world, art and life. This project explores the dynamics between the material performance of puppetry and the imaginary realm of belief. It argues that puppets transcended the division between art and life in early twentieth-century Germany, a time and a place when artists were understood to be agents of social and political change.



Fig. i: Carl Reinhardt, *Das wahrhaftige Kasperltheater* (Munich: Braun & Schneider Verlag, ca. 1885), cover image. Spielzeugmuseum der Stadt Nürnberg (Museum Lydia Bayer).

It isn't just anyone who asks "Seid ihr alle da?" The question belongs to Kasper. [Fig. i] The stock character is perhaps the most famous figure in German puppetry, so much so that at times the word *Kasperltheater* was used synonymously with the word for "puppetry."<sup>1</sup> Also known as Kasperle, Kasperl, or Kaspar, the figure has its roots in the *commedia dell'arte*, a sixteenth-century form of professional, improvised theater based on a set of stock characters and scenarios. Inspired by the Pulcinella clown figure from these plays, Kasper shares some traits with his masked Italian predecessor: he is a large-nosed archetypal everyman who fearlessly surmounts life's challenges with wit, shrewdness, and pluck, despite being continuously surrounded by enemies poised to attack. He is naive, inept, and often bawdy, but his fixed smile is so endearingly charming that the audience always cheers when he is victorious—and he is

always victorious. The puppet character evolved during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as wandering troupes of Pulcinella players and puppeteers performed throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup> [Fig. ii] By the nineteenth century in the German-speaking world, Kasper was regularly confronting a cast of stock adversaries, including a devil, a policeman, a crocodile, death, and sometimes even his own wife. Regardless of the hostilities and conflicts that arise in the course of a Kasper show, the play always culminates in a raucous, violent, thrashing scene. Like Pulcinella, Kasper carries a cudgel or slapstick, and although it is his weapon of choice, he is not above using whatever is at his disposal in a fight.



Fig. ii: Francois Joullain, “Habit de Polichinel Napolitan,” Paris, 1731. Luigi Riccoboni, *Histoire du Theatre Italien* (Paris: Cailleau, 1731). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk).

Kasper has cousins who originated from the same Pulcinella character and the wandering puppet tradition that evolved from it: Polichenelle in French, Petrushka in Russian, Kašpárek in Czech, Karagoz in Turkish, and Punch in English (to name only a few). These tramp-like

puppets are variations on a type. Punch may be more familiar to readers of English from Punch and Judy shows, but he is somewhat different from his German cousin. Both Punch and Kasper appear as subversive, violent tricksters in fairground, market, and street performances, to be sure, but only Punch has a particular tradition in British seaside culture. Even more significant than their associations with slightly different venues are their physical variations. Although both puppets have a belly as a reminder of their appetites, and both have a similar facial profile with a beaked nose and prominent chin, Punch is distinguished by an appendage protruding from the back of his jester's motley. [Fig. iii] Often identified as a "hunchback," it is a strange deformity, more phallic than anything else, and it makes the puppet seem slightly magical and wholly imaginary. The visually fantastic hunched back locates Punch in a fairy-tale realm, whereas Kasper remains earthly and human. This distinction between Punch and Kasper further extends to their performance histories: in addition to his appearance in storybook-like scenarios, Kasper's connection to the human realm makes him a character who can easily depict real social dilemmas.



Fig. iii: George Cruikshank, “Punch Fights Old Nick,” etching, 1828. *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy* set down by John Payne Collier and illustrated by George Cruikshank (London: S. Prowett, 1928).

As much as Kasper may appear to belong to the human realm, especially in comparison with his British cousin, the puppet is of course not *really* alive and can therefore withstand what a human actor could not. Just as important as the illusion of a puppet’s life is its ability to survive situations that would kill living, breathing human actors, especially in the service of comic effect. Violence is a hallmark of Kasper puppetry, and part of the thrill is the hero’s ability to endure over-the-top slapstick brutality without experiencing trauma. Prior to the twentieth century, puppet shows were typically performed for mixed audiences of adults and children of different ages and social classes. While it may be surprising today to imagine presenting such violent entertainments to small children, illustrations reveal that even the youngest viewers were

entranced by Kasper's aggressive antics, knowing that hostilities were at a safe distance. [Fig. iv]  
 Puppets and audiences could engage with violence without actual traumatic consequences.



Fig. iv: C. Roth, colored lithograph depicting a Kasper puppet show and audience, Germany, 1843. Puppentheater-Museum Berlin. Nikolaus Hein, *Puppentheater, Motiv in der Malerei und Grafik* (Berlin: Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, 1990), plate 2.

The historical experience of violence changed radically in the early twentieth century, and its effects were particularly pronounced in Germany after World War I (1914–18). Trench warfare, machine guns, chemical weapons, bombers, tanks, submarines, explosive shells, and other military technologies resulted in mass death on an industrial scale in this first modern, global war. Around two million German soldiers were killed (more than any other combatant), just under five million military men were physically wounded in combat, and hundreds of thousands of civilians also died.<sup>3</sup> The country's economy was also left in shambles. The Treaty

of Versailles—with its punishing reparations, territorial losses, and demilitarization—held Germany solely responsible for the war, further adding to the humiliation of defeat. Situated in the period between the end of World War I and the Nazi assumption of power, the Weimar Republic (1919–33) was Germany’s first attempt at democratic rule as the map of Europe was being redrawn.

The art of the Weimar Republic emerged in this context of war trauma, modernity, and political upheaval, and the artists who were creatively active during this fourteen-year period were part of a generation who had served in the military, witnessed the destructiveness of war, or grew up in its aftermath. The devastating legacy of World War I and Germany’s defeat was present, albeit frequently repressed and unspoken, yet this trauma was a significant undercurrent in Weimar culture and art.<sup>4</sup> Many artists sought to create new works for a better, improved reality, or pieces that expressed anger and protest at the damaged state of affairs. As one scholar of the avant-garde writes: “Beginning around 1910, vanguard artists demanded that true art go beyond the intellectual and transform daily life.”<sup>5</sup> “Art into life” became a core tenet of early twentieth-century avant-garde projects, including at the Bauhaus, where artists sought to transform everyday objects into works of art. The Dadaists too tried to intervene in political life through their art, and the fierce responses to their creations reveal the perceived power of such works. George Grosz (1893–1959), for example, created *Gott mit uns* (1920), a portfolio of nine lithographs satirizing the brutality of war and the corruption of the German officers and officials who were responsible for it. The artist and his publisher were tried for defaming the military, found guilty, and forced to pay a fine and surrender unsold copies to the army.<sup>6</sup> As this example illustrates, censors took the work as seriously as the artist did. But a concern for the future

motivated artists to try and change society, even if that involved risk. This was a generation who genuinely believed in the power of art to change the world.

In the early twentieth century, various artists turned to puppets as a vital art form that could be used to rebuild society. Puppet shows continued to be performed for audiences of all ages well into the modern era, even as they became increasingly associated with children and were frequently a child's first introduction to theater or even to art more generally. There is, of course, a strong symbolic association between children and the future. At the same time, the concept of "childhood" itself underwent significant legal and cultural transformations in the early twentieth century. To give only two examples, the Weimar Constitution included legal protections for the welfare of youth, while new models of child development increasingly gained acceptance through progressive educational reform movements.<sup>7</sup> Conceptions of children's psychology as distinct from that of adults filtered down from the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Melanie Klein (1882–1960), Jean Piaget (1896–1980), and others. The notion of children as distinct from adults played out in various ways and inspired some artists to harness puppetry's educational potential to create a better world and improve the citizenry at a pivotal time in their development. Such an understanding was both metaphorical and literal. Children may be seen as symbolic of social renewal, but they could actually be influenced to see things differently. In another register, children's creative play itself emerged as an aesthetic source of inspiration for artists seeking new modes of visual expression. As this study demonstrates, rather than dismiss puppets as mere child's play, modern artists took youthful enthusiasm seriously.

While some artists saw the potential of puppets to envision a better world, satirists used transgressive, biting puppet performances to attack the political establishment. Keyed to adult audiences, and drawing upon a robust fairground tradition of puppet political satire, modern

artists used puppets to critique political and social conditions. The gainsaying, police-evading, death-defying Kasper is both a hero and an icon of resistance. But even more generally, a puppet's miniature stature makes it a safe mouthpiece for a full-throated protest, because its bite is tempered with cuteness. Who could be *too* bothered by a puppet anyway? Puppets could speak truth to power in a way traditional stage actors never could. It is a tradition of satire that, to some extent, runs parallel to that of political caricature. England and France had a well-developed history of satirical cartoons established by artists such as William Hogarth (1697–1764) and Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), respectively. Illustrated satirical magazines did not appear in Germany until some two hundred years later than their English and French counterparts, but the impulse to laugh at symbols of authority was also present in German culture, and it found expression through puppetry.<sup>8</sup> Puppetry is a largely ephemeral art form, typically presented without a fixed script, and subversive messages could be slipped into a performance of a supposedly lowbrow show without the strictures of censorship that applied to many other arts. Puppets became a vehicle for satire in close connection to politics.

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The word *Puppe* in German can denote what we consider in English to be a puppet, a marionette, or even a doll. The works included in this study will follow this expanded, German-inflected understanding of what a puppet is, since it accords with the artists' own linguistic and visual vocabularies. *Puppe* is often combined with other words to form more specific compound nouns such as *Puppenspieler* (puppeteer) or *Handpuppe* (hand puppet), but also *Schneiderpuppe* or *Kleiderpuppe* (tailor's dummy or mannequin). So we will also follow these related notions of

what a puppet is, as such objects were used by German artists of this period, too. Puppet films, puppet-inspired dances, and even radio puppetry fall within the scope of this study. The word *Puppe* itself derives from the Latin root *pupa*, meaning little girl or doll.<sup>9</sup> But the word also has another meaning derived from the same Latin origin: *Puppe* is the entomological term for a chrysalis, the protective layer of an insect at the midpoint of its metamorphosis.<sup>10</sup> It is the phase between the larva and the imago, when an insect undergoes changes during its life-cycle transition. This entomological definition is key to understanding the puppets described in these pages: rather than try and establish a fixed set of features specifying what qualifies as a puppet, or define this art form in narrow terms, the present study treats puppets as figures in flux.<sup>11</sup> One scholar offers a definition of puppetry as the act of bringing imagined life to inert figures and forms, but thoughtfully warns that all definitions “are usually debatable, and any edicts and precepts given here and indeed in most other books on puppetry may be regarded only as points of departure for discussion and experiment.”<sup>12</sup> The primary concern here is not what puppets are, but rather what puppets can do—how they manifest change. Puppets are flexible: in the mind of a viewer who experiences the illusion of their life, in material terms, and in relation to a changing social and political reality. Kasper, for example, is an avant-garde rebel one day, a Nazi hero the next. This study engages artists’ own understandings of the medium and how their approaches to it changed over time.

The puppets in this book will first appear in the works of avant-garde artists who frequently engaged in storytelling and satire with their puppetry. As the narrative advances, however, puppets will be recast as politically evil tools of indoctrination. For all the promises made by this art—life, resilience, rebellion, transformation—puppets are also metaphors for manipulation and control. Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) came to power as chancellor of Germany on

January 30, 1933, and attempted to build his regime in no small way through cultural and artistic initiatives. Faith in the transformative power of art motivated propagandists as much as it did avant-garde artists. Puppets are indeed actors, but they are also acted upon by forces outside of themselves: strings, hands, rods, light, shadow—and politics. This was particularly pronounced during the Third Reich (1933–45), when Hitler’s totalitarian regime established a propaganda campaign that included a Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel. All the puppets in this book take the form of humans, and humans in turn would be transformed into puppets, as we shall see.

How did it happen? How did the Weimar era, a period of unprecedented artistic and social progress, turn into a fascist regime? The question has no single or definite answer, and yet it drives my interest in early twentieth-century Germany. Responses have been tendered by thinkers from many different fields—history, economics, sociology, psychology, and literature, to name only a few—each offering a productive angle. In the early postwar period, German émigré writers associated with the Frankfurt School produced landmark studies on the authoritarian personality and on mass movements.<sup>13</sup> Their approaches frequently considered historical, social, and ideological forces together. Cultural historians too attempted to explain Hitler’s rise. To give only one example, Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), also associated with the Frankfurt School, wrote *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), a book that broke new ground by using film as a locus for sociopolitical analysis.<sup>14</sup> My project also takes an aspect of popular cultural history, puppetry, as terrain for exploring social and political conditions. In a way, by studying an art form associated with rebellion and resistance as well as with manipulation and control, the dialectical relations studied by the Frankfurt School become literally materialized. The story becomes physical, the ideological manifest. Although puppetry cannot explain the rise of the Nazism, a study of the medium in its

various iterations yields a new view of how politics are grounded in everyday life. More specifically, puppetry allows us to watch the shift from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich across broad segments of society: from civilians to soldiers, including girls, boys, women, and men.

Frankfurt School authors were themselves writing in a specific time and place, and their theories reflect their own historical situation. Kracauer, for example, attempted to show how Hitler's ascent was not only possible, but also predictable, through his investigation of Weimar cinema. *From Caligari to Hitler* sought to understand the cinema's past in order to plan better films for the future.<sup>15</sup> Other scholars have correctly noted that, while his view was understandably warranted in the late 1940s, it led to a kind of historical "back-shadowing" that saw Nazism as the inevitable outcome of Weimar culture by downplaying the contradictions of the period.<sup>16</sup> Corrective views, avoiding Kracauer's teleological pessimism, have approached the Weimar Republic from the other direction, as the result of the traumas of World War I. Anton Kaes writes: "The Weimar Republic could have ended differently, and films give us glimpses of this alternative history."<sup>17</sup> But the Weimar era *did* end in the grip of fascism, and it is possible to view the era as both pre-fascist (Kracauer) and post-traumatic (Kaes). Both authors are interested in how the Weimar era ended up in fascism. My approach is likewise interested in the pursuit of historical understanding, and I consider both backward- and forward-looking views, but I also study artifacts from the Third Reich rather than search for an answer in Weimar culture alone. This study puts the two contexts in dialogue, in order to explore both the continuities and the contradictions in German culture between 1918 and 1945.

Puppetry is obviously different from cinema (even in the case of puppet films, as we shall see), and the study of puppetry's creation, presentation, and reception requires a different

approach from that of film analysis. Kracauer and Kaes are both interested in the psychology of cinema—film as a reflection of a nation’s mental state or unconscious—which makes sense insofar as the films of the period were collectively created and addressed to a mass audience.<sup>18</sup>

The puppets in this study, however, frequently represent the vision of either a solo artist or a pair of collaborators. Scripts, too, were written by either a single author or a duo. Most puppeteers have their own individual performance styles, even if they work within a larger troupe. And the audience of a live puppet show is always specific, and not a general multitude. Rather than approach puppetry psychologically, this study considers how individual artists dealt with the changing social and political climate by means of puppet performance. Insofar as this study considers choices made by specific individuals, it presents the stories of artists during the Nazi regime—those who resisted, others who attempted to find accommodation, and some who willingly collaborated. A reciprocal view emerges: artists responded to political changes while their works reshaped society. This study asks how sociopolitical ideologies express themselves in culture, and how artists, in turn, create their world.

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How has puppetry been studied? How have other commentators approached an art form that oscillates between art and life? There is of course scholarship on puppetry as a literary trope in the works of such German notables as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811), Theodor Storm (1817–1888), and Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926).<sup>19</sup> Scholarship on these authors treats puppets as literary characters or examples of philosophical exegesis. In a different but related vein, Shakespeare

scholar Kenneth Gross approaches puppets poetically, as in his reflection on the medium's magic and paradoxes.<sup>20</sup> Excellent modernist puppet research extends literary studies to include intellectual history and modern theater theory.<sup>21</sup> Yet such research, frequently with a textual emphasis, ignores both the materiality of puppets and the historical aspects of performance. Puppetry also occupies a small subfield within theater studies, whose scholars have produced multi-author anthologies that consider "the poetics of puppets" in philosophical, historical, and theatrical terms from different countries and traditions.<sup>22</sup> Theater scholars tend to focus on the relation of the puppeteer to the puppet, rather than the dynamic between the puppet, the performer, and the audience in their larger historical contexts.<sup>23</sup> Wonderful general histories by puppet historians, usually illustrated, emphasize the art's connection to ancient, religious, and folk arts and often include descriptions of modern puppetry practices.<sup>24</sup> While these studies tend to be broad in their chronological scope, they often focus narrowly on marionettes, hand puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, and dolls, and usually do not include adjacent works in different media such as dance, film, or radio.<sup>25</sup> Other studies on puppets, particularly of the avant-garde, treat them as objects of high art and frequently overlook their connection to everyday life and folk art practices.<sup>26</sup> And books that do include a range of puppet typologies—fairground puppets, collectible dolls, avant-garde puppets—do so in separate chapters as distinct topics that maintain certain hierarchies rather than attempt to present a unified, cohesive narrative about puppetry as a cultural practice.<sup>27</sup>

Monographs on specific artists do a better job at providing nuanced historical contexts for puppet works by individuals, but again, these studies typically interpret the puppets within the frame of an artist's oeuvre rather than as part of a much larger puppetry movement or revival.<sup>28</sup> There are also fascinating accounts of the psycho-sexual aspect of puppetry, with an emphasis on

Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), Hans Bellmer (1902–1975), and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), but this is its own subspecialty and not my subject here.<sup>29</sup> There are no studies that specifically address puppetry in *Kulturfilme*, early documentary cinema, newsreels, or radio, let alone attempt to bring these discourses together with other forms of puppetry practice. But what distinguishes this study from others on puppetry is more than just the variety of works discussed in the following pages—although the range of materials is certainly part of how the argument is built. Puppets here are not treated simply as literary metaphors, illustrations of art movements, or examples of a class of historical objects. Rather, because they are all these things and more, often at the same time, puppets will be discussed as constitutive of history, and not merely reflective of it. At stake in this study is how we understand German history and art’s role in shaping culture during the early twentieth century.

Conceiving of puppetry in the broadest, most flexible terms allows for a new view of puppetry to emerge, one that reveals the powerful interconnectedness of art, artists, audience, and the world. This study avoids distinctions that maintain separate realms for different kinds of puppets—high and low art, fine art and toy, object and performance, performer and audience—in order to better capture the shifting dynamics between the materiality of puppets and the imaginative realm of stories. This reference to a “realm of stories” means not only the specific fairy tales and scripts the puppets perform, but also the historical context and political backdrop that animate an audience’s engagement with puppets. Kasper, the iconic German puppet, will of course be one recurring figure (in different situations, performed by different puppeteers, under varying circumstances, at different times), but he is not by any means the only puppet character in this study. The chapters are organized chronologically but with some overlap, and a few

familiar artist groupings emerge, but so do new relationships between canonical, lesser known, and newly rediscovered artists.

A study of puppetry in early twentieth-century Germany requires a cross-disciplinary approach for both intellectual and practical reasons. Although scholars from different fields have written about puppets, puppets do not belong to any one discipline. This is a benefit that grants a writer latitude to draw on a range of interpretive strategies from different specializations as best suits the material and historical documentation at hand. There have been no codified traditions or formal protocols for documenting puppetry's history—especially since part of the medium's strength has always been its improvisational and ephemeral nature—and available research resources are quite varied and uneven. In some cases, physical puppets have come down through time and serve as objects for study, although less may be known about the specifics of the script or performance. In other instances, the precise puppets used in a show may not be known, but a published script reveals in detail a different aspect of a performance's content. Technological developments during the first part of the twentieth century have also affected how puppets were documented. Film and sound recordings offer a different representation of puppetry and an audience's reaction, especially as compared with illustrations and still photographs. Specific historical circumstances have also influenced what could be documented in the first place, as was the case during the Nazi regime. Also important are ancillary materials related to puppets from both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich: diaries, memoirs, biographies, letters, newspapers, magazines, articles, reviews, poems, censors' comments, military field reports, sales catalogs, promotional materials, children's drawings and letters, soldier's sketches, pamphlets, manifestos, even later reconstructions of lost works. This study draws extensively on primary sources from numerous archives, libraries, museums, and collections throughout Germany and

the United States. The result is a rigorous, research-driven, historically grounded study of both puppetry and the aspects of culture that bring it to life.

### **A Puppet Show**

The story begins in 1915, with a Kasper performance at Auer Dult flea market in Munich, where Paul Klee (1879–1940) deposited his son Felix (1907–1990) at the puppet theater while he shopped for picture frames. These early puppet shows made a deep impression on the young boy, and Paul created a set of Kasper puppets for his son as a birthday gift. It was the beginning of an almost decade-long engagement with puppets that spanned the Klees' time at the Bauhaus—the innovative art school where Paul served as a master and Felix studied as an apprentice—when the elder Klee continuously created new puppet characters for his son. The Klees were not the only artists interested in puppetry at the school. Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), another master who directed the Bauhaus stage for a time, designed full-body costumes that transformed human dancers into stylized puppets, thereby creating a new kind of dance. Although Klee and Schlemmer had different approaches to puppetry and vastly different styles, both turned to puppets as a way of connecting art and life: Klee made puppets of living people, while Schlemmer made living people into puppets. Such connections and differences can tell us something about the choices of individual artists in response to the changing historical situation.

**Chapter 1** explores puppetry at the Bauhaus. This revolutionary art school was established with a manifesto: a new generation of artists will create new forms of constructions capable of uniting the disparate fields of art and craft (and later, art and technology) into a cohesive, harmonious whole. Art and design were seen as part and parcel of social and political reform. Klee and Schlemmer, both veterans of World War I, joined this utopian artistic

community and brought their interest in puppets with them. At the Bauhaus, puppetry played an important role: in informal puppet shows staged for family and friends, during festivals and organized parties, and, later, as part of the Bauhaus Theater Workshop program. Klee's puppets illustrate how a familial relationship could be the source of positive creative production as well as a venue for political critique. The Klees' puppet creations also involved portraiture, as Paul made puppet miniatures of different people, both real and imaginary. Schlemmer's engagement with puppetry was more theoretical: seeking a metaphysical representation of the human body in motion, he created geometric abstractions that remained recognizably human through costume and dance. His works too can be understood as a response to the situation of Germany in the aftermath of World War I and as a key form of social critique. Examining Bauhaus puppetry brings the politics of these artists to the fore.

The chapter on Bauhaus puppetry presents these artists as politically engaged—their puppets as political art—and reconsiders received narratives about the school that either treat the institution's history as straightforwardly apolitical or ignore its historical complexities. Paul Klee was involved in a political movement that attempted to establish a Bavarian Socialist Republic (the Räterepublik) in Munich in 1919. Although he appears to have abandoned revolutionary politics after the movement's failure, some of his works from the Bauhaus period, including his puppets, demonstrate continued interest in the subject, albeit with growing cynicism. Klee also created puppets and drawings satirizing nationalist parties and political leaders during the Weimar era. Although Schlemmer was persecuted by the Nazis, he did attempt to find accommodation with the Nazi regime in the early days of the Reich, claiming that his work was both apolitical and aligned with a Nazi worldview. At the Bauhaus, both artists were regarded as less politically minded than some of their more ideologically driven colleagues, yet their

puppetry represents a mostly forgotten chapter in the history of the school and its tremendous impact on the history of art.

While Bauhaus puppetry was seldom explicit in its political commentaries or social critiques, another kind of avant-garde puppetry was more in-your-face: Dada puppetry. **Chapter 2** examines Dada puppet plays—marionette and hand-puppet performances—as well as puppet-inspired poetry, sculpture, assemblage creations, dolls, and shadow shows. Dada was a cultural movement that evolved from antiwar protest cabaret performances at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during World War I. Attracting an international group of iconoclastic artists, writers, performers, and thinkers—individuals united more by their pacifist, antiestablishment position than a particular aesthetic style—the Dadaists revolutionized the history of art by expanding the notion of what art could be. Turning to the stuff of everyday life into a medium for art, the Dadaists drew from emerging media and commodity culture for the content of their works. A lowbrow protest art form par excellence, puppets provided plenty of material for the Dadaists to play with.

Theorists of the avant-garde such as Peter Bürger have characterized Dada as a movement that first and foremost attacked art institutions as a strategy for reintegrating art and life.<sup>30</sup> While there was no shortage of bite, the Dadaists also affirmed the place of art in the world in various ways—and frequently by using puppets. Jean Hans Arp (1886–1966) made Kasper the protagonist in his poetry and sculpture, playfully reshaping him in ways that avoided his easy identification in order to universalize this everyman figure and broaden Kasper’s symbolic associations. This character, for Arp, revealed deeper forms of connection and thereby closed the gaps between art, artist, and everyman. While Arp referenced a puppet, Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943), George Grosz (1893–1959), and John Heartfield (1891–1968) created actual

puppets as caricatures of real individuals and general political types for theatrical performances. Taeuber-Arp made abstract, geometric marionettes for a satire on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (1875–1961). Her work materialized the very notions of human motivation lampooned in the play's script: we are manipulated by invisible forces impressed upon us in childhood, or we are driven by particular archetypes each with its own Jungian complex. Grosz and Heartfield created rude, grotesque parodies of high culture and recognizable political leaders; they performed in uncommon venues and brought unexpected objects together in assemblage forms that, in effect, reactivated everyday spaces and objects as art. Heartfield also collaborated with Rudolf Schlichter (1890–1955) on mannequin-based works that directed viewers to look at the world around them differently, noticing its artifice and pretense, presenting a truer vision of the effects of war. Yet another key figure, Hannah Höch (1889–1978), offered a social critique that invited a reappraisal of accepted values: her *Dada Puppen* rag dolls played with notions of femininity, and this artist too blurred the line between self and artwork by dressing up as one of her own dolls for posed photographs. In a different way, Vilmos Huszár (1884–1960) used disruptive performance tactics with his mechanical dancing shadow puppet, but the work itself was rendered in a De Stijl aesthetic rather than a satirical caricature. Uniting the antiestablishment presentation of a Dada cabaret with the utopian idealism of De Stijl, Huszár's work illuminated an ambivalence about the machine age in postwar Dada. Taken altogether, the range of Dada puppet-based artworks shows a diversity of strategies to reintegrate art and life in constructive ways. And there is no confusion about the politics of each artist.

In a further step, early twentieth-century artists looked to emerging technologies to create new kinds of puppetry, and cinema in particular attracted puppeteers for the new animation possibilities that it offered. Lotte Reiniger (1889–1981), a filmmaker best known for creating the

first surviving feature-length animated film, pioneered a stop-motion technique for silhouette shows that brought shadow puppetry to the silver screen. In addition to her well-known feature-length film *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (1926), she also created fairy-tale, fable, and opera shorts. Reiniger's films are the topic of **chapter 3**. In a career that spanned the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, Reiniger's work evolved, but her stylistic changes take on a hitherto-unexplored political significance when we consider the context of their creation and reception. While there were certainly technological refinements to her animation tools over time, the fundamental technique of cut-paper shadow figures, filmed from a rostrum camera mounted above an illuminated table, remained the same. What changed were the visual sources that she emphasized and their cultural associations.

Although Reiniger was hesitant to express her political views—she was primarily left-leaning and never joined the Nazi party—her work was nonetheless shown during the Third Reich as propaganda, at least for a time. The same medium and visual style used to create avant-garde films during the Weimar Republic was put to propagandistic use with only slight modification. Of particular significance are Reiniger's use of physiognomy in alluding to European folk art, Eastern shadow puppetry, and classical art. Reiniger's style changed in response to the shifting political situation. Considering when these variations occurred and how they were received shows how artist and audience together established the meaning of a puppet work. Reiniger appears to have been aware of her films' reception, at least in hindsight, as she eliminated the racist African and Asian silhouettes that appeared in her earlier fairy-tale films from works created after the war. Later, while living in England, she moved entirely away from physiognomic associations. Silhouette films are less obviously interactive than Kasper-like hand-

puppet shows, but these modern silhouette films nonetheless relied on viewers to participate in the creation of their meaning.

Although Reiniger's work eventually came to be unwelcome in Germany, puppets literally became stock figures in official German artistic and cultural initiatives. Nazi puppetry is the subject of **chapter 4**. Kasper took center stage (once again) during the Third Reich: the subversive mischief maker was recast as a Nazi hero, while his enemies were transformed into Jews, British politicians and soldiers, and other political adversaries. In some cases, the physical puppet itself was reshaped with an Aryan sloped nose rather than his traditional snout. Although Nazi propaganda frequently aimed to overwhelm viewers—enormous rallies, epic films, imposing architecture, monumental design—puppetry mobilized different, sentimental and satirical powers to influence German audiences. Puppetry in the Third Reich aimed to charm and persuade in ways that bolstered Nazi ideology. In a totalitarian regime, every aspect of public and private life is repurposed to suit the aims of the state.

As puppetry became a form of Nazi entertainment and propaganda, Kasper, in turn, was literally reshaped in order to connect with a diversity of audiences. Puppet shows served not only to indoctrinate children, but also to entertain soldiers on the front. Performance kits were sold through catalogs for amateur use both at home and on the front, while professionals filmed their puppets for widely distributed cinematic presentations. Additionally, fashionable puppet film documentaries were created for a specifically female viewership as a model of Nazi feminine ideals. An interactive and responsive medium, puppetry could be tailored for niche audiences. We see this responsiveness at play not only in individual puppet shows, but also on a broader scale in different theatrical settings for children and adults, men and women, civilians and soldiers, throughout the Reich. In each case, and evolving over time in response to specific

historical events, puppeteers tweaked Kasper into a character capable of connecting with a range of viewers while always retaining his same subversive, violent, amusing, everyman traits.

Even as the Nazi Kasper entertained Aryan audiences, yet another version of this puppet performed for a Jewish viewership in restricted performances during the Third Reich. Jewish German puppeteers had once performed alongside their non-Jewish colleagues during the Weimar era, but after the Nazi takeover, censored Jewish shows were only allowed under the auspices of the Jüdischer Kulturbund. Jewish German puppetry is the topic of **chapter 5**. The Jüdischer Kulturbund, a federation of Jewish artists formed in 1933 by Jewish community leaders with the permission, consent, and oversight of the Nazis, was itself part of the Nazi propaganda machine. Yet it also provided some Jewish artists with a small income and gave Jewish audiences access to culture in an otherwise dire economic and political situation. The Frankfurt-based puppeteer Liesel Simon (1887–1958), who had developed her own Kasper character for German children, performed special shows around Germany for regional chapters of the Jüdischer Kulturbund after the Nazi takeover. And an entire marionette theater, Das Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler, became part of the Munich branch of the Jüdischer Kulturbund. Under restrictions imposed by the Nazis, the Jüdischer Kulturbund allowed Jews to create art, but these artists were forced to confront their new situation as a perceived threat to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. These puppet shows in turn invite us to consider how Jews confronted their Germanness and Jewishness when under attack.

Jewish German puppetry in the Jüdischer Kulturbund didn't come out of nowhere. A number of artists had worked with puppets as part of the larger puppetry revival in Weimar Germany. Prior to the twentieth century, puppetry had not been a part of Ashkenazi cultural life or religious practice (with the possible exception of the occasional Purimspiel puppet show

during the carnivalesque holiday of Purim), but during the early 1900s, many Jewish artists experimented with puppets and puppet-based works as part of their acculturated or assimilated artistic lives. In the early days of broadcasting, Liesel Simon translated her children's puppet shows into radio puppet performances capable of reaching a broad audience throughout the country. Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk, the most famously experimental of all the state-run regional radio stations in Germany and a pioneer of children's radio programming, also broadcast a children's show by the philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940). Kasper radio plays from the Weimar era will also be considered in relation to the beginnings of Jewish German puppetry. Listening to its development from the Weimar era through the Nazi era, we can see how these artists drew from traditional German culture in order to make something uniquely their own and constitutive of their experiences.

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This is a true story of made-up worlds, a history where the real and the imaginary exist side by side and blur together, transforming one another through engagement and conflict.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Kasper," in *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1854–1961; Leipzig: online edition, 1971), [http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui\\_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GK02287#XGK02287](http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GK02287#XGK02287).

<sup>2</sup> John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theater in Europe, 1800–1914* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113–17.

<sup>3</sup> The number of German soldiers killed is debated by historians, but most put the number at around two million. Berghahn estimates 2.4 million, Keegan 2 million, and Howard 1.8 million. Volker Rolf Berghahn, *Modern Germany: Society, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 44; John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 423; Michael Howard, *The First World War: A Very*

*Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95. The number of combat wounds treated by German doctors, according to Whalen, is 4,807,568. Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 52–3. The number of civilian deaths is even more difficult to measure: Berghahn places the number at 300,000 while Vincent estimates 763,000 German deaths were caused by the blockade and 150,00 from Spanish influenza. Paul C. Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915–1919* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985), 141.

<sup>4</sup> Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–6.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew S. Witkovsky, *Avant-Garde in Everyday Life: Early Twentieth-Century European Modernism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), cover.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Hess, “God with Us: About the Portfolio,” in *German Expressionist Digital Archive Project* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2011),

[https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection\\_ge/object/object\\_objid-144146.html](https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/object/object_objid-144146.html).

<sup>7</sup> Verfassungen des Deutschen Reichs (August 11, 1919): Artikel 7.7, 119–23, 146; Juliet Kinchin, “The Kindergarten Movement: Building Blocks of Modern Design,” in *Century of the Child: Growing by Design 1900–2000*, ed. Juliet Kinchin and Aidan O’Connor (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 30–33.

<sup>8</sup> On satirical magazines in Germany (compared with England and France), see Pamela Kort, “The Grotesque: Modernism’s Other,” in *Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art, 1870–1940*, ed. Pamela Kort (New York: Prestel and Neue Galerie, 2004), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Puppe,” in *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, [http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui\\_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GP08600#XGP08600](http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GP08600#XGP08600).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> For scholarly definitions of puppetry see John Bell, “Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects at the End of the Century,” in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 5; John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 1–7; Penny Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Puppetry*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (1947; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., li.

<sup>16</sup> Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 5; On back-shadowing see Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusion: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> On puppets in German Romanticism see Henryk Jurkowsky, *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, ed. Penny Francis (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1996), 246–69. For Goethe see Jurkowsky, *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, 250–55; Elenore Rapp, *Die Marionette im romantischen Weltgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (Bochum: Deutsches Institut für

Puppenspiel, 1963), 23–38. On Hoffmann see Lienhard Wawrzyn, ed., *Der Automaten-Mensch: E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählung vom "Sandmann"* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1976), 39. On Kleist see Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automats, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 14–17; Joachim Maass, *Kleist: A Biography*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983). On Storm see Rüdiger Frommholz, "Theodor Storms 'Pole Poppenspähler'-Kinder- oder Künstlergeschichte?," *Schriften der Theodor-Storm Gesellschaft* 36 (1987): 19–36. On Rilke see Jacob Steiner, *Rilkes Duineser Elegien*, 2nd ed. (Bern, Switzerland, and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1969), 73–100.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny*.

<sup>22</sup> Dasia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (London: Routledge, 2014), xxiii; Bell, *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*.

<sup>23</sup> Henryk Jurkowski, "Transcodification of the Sign System of Puppets," *Semiotica* 47, 1, no. 4 (1983): 123–46; Stephen Kaplin, "The Puppet Tree: A Model for the Field of Puppet Theater," *TDR: The Drama Review* 43, no. 3 (1999): 28–35.

<sup>24</sup> See Max von Boehn, *Puppen und Puppenspiel*, vols. 1 and 2 (Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann AG, 1929), especially vol. 2; Günter Böhmer, *Puppentheater* (Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann AG, 1969); Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Verlag Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986); Johannes Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Engwicklungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Puppen und Masken, 1996); Jurkowsky, *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*.

<sup>25</sup> Max von Boehn mentions Lotte Reiniger's films in vol. 2 of *Puppen und Puppenspiel*, 121–27, but this is a rare exception. Discussing puppets and new media together is more common in the context of television. See for example Brian Jay Jones, *Jim Henson: The Biography* (New York: Ballentine, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Pia Müller-Tamm and Katharina Sykora, eds., *Puppen, Körper, Automaten: Phantasmen der Moderne* (Düsseldorf and Cologne: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen/Oktagon, 1999); Ingrid Schaffner and Carin Kuoni, eds., *The Puppet Show* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 2008); Kamil Kopania, ed., *Dolls and Puppets as Artistic and Cultural Phenomena (19th–21st Centuries)* (Warsaw: Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art; Białystok, Poland: Department of Puppetry Art, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Krafft, ed., *Traumwelt der Puppen* (Munich: Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung München, 1992); Astrid Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960* (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> One exception, which includes a brief discussion of the puppetry scene in Munich at the beginning of the twentieth century, is Christine Hopfengart, ed., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Haje Cantz Verlag, 2006), esp. 16–18.

<sup>29</sup> For more on dolls in early twentieth century art see Marquand Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Frank Whitford, *Oskar Kokoschka: A Life* (New York: Atheneum, 1986); Stefan Banz, ed., *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall* (Zurich: JPR Springer, 2010). Francesca Roe at the University of Bristol is currently writing her PhD on puppets and dolls as gendered bodies during the Wiener Moderne.

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

## Chapter One

### Bauhaus Puppets: Politics on Stage

The child's toys and the old man's reasons  
 Are the fruits of the two seasons  
 —William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

While living in Munich, Paul Klee (1879–1940) made twice-yearly trips to the local flea market in search of old picture frames. One day in 1915 he brought along his son Felix (1907–1990), and deposited the boy at the Kasper theatre while shopping, much to the eight-year-old's delight. Felix described his reaction to his first puppet shows: “The highly burlesque performances had a powerful effect upon my child's imagination. My dearest wish was to become the director of such a theater, and this wish was fulfilled on my ninth birthday, when I was presented with eight puppets. My father had made the puppet[s].”<sup>1</sup> Expanding on this original Kasper set, the artist made more than fifty hand puppets for his son between 1916 and 1925, a period spanning his involvement with the Blue Rider group and through his teaching appointment at the Bauhaus. By the time Klee joined the school as a master, Felix was a pupil and regularly staged puppet shows for his fellow Bauhäusler.

Paul's puppets and Felix's shows were part of a larger Bauhaus-wide fascination with puppetry. A father's answer to his son's childhood wish evolved there into sophisticated political commentaries, art-world satires, and formal experiments. The Klees' puppet shows were performed both in their home and at school festivals, and puppetry was central to the curriculum in the Bauhaus stage workshop from the time of its establishment in 1921, under the direction of Lothar Schreyer (1886–1966). Yet the best-known puppet-inspired performances were those of Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), theater director and master at the Bauhaus from 1923 to 1929,

who designed sculptural costumes that concealed a dancer's shape and transformed the living human body into a stylized puppet for quasi-metaphysical dances. Although the Klees and Schlemmer had different approaches to puppetry and vastly different styles, all of them turned to puppets as a way of connecting art and life. [Fig. 1.0]



Fig. 1.0: Felix Klee with a puppet of his father, *Selbstporträt* by Paul Klee, 1988. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 44.

The Bauhaus was an innovative art school established in 1919 by Walter Gropius (1883–1969), its first director, in the city of Weimar with the aim of bringing together fine arts and design. Through a revolutionary curriculum intended to help pupils discover their talents prior to specializing in a specific discipline or medium, the educational program was a conscious and deliberate alternative to traditional academic art schools of previous centuries; its goal was to produce socially useful artists. It represented an attempt to establish a kind of guild that

combined disparate art forms such as architecture, sculpture, and painting into a single, unified whole. Although artists had previously sought to integrate diverse disciplines—especially in a German context, the ideal evokes the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—Gropius used a different word in his foundational manifesto that defined the school’s early philosophy: *Einheitskunstwerk*.<sup>2</sup> The Bauhaus sought to reengineer lived structures and everyday objects, elevating and transforming them into cohesive artworks.

The Bauhaus was a utopian project, and Gropius, as well as many Bauhaus masters and apprentices (there were no “teachers” or “students”), saw art and design as indivisible from social and political reform. They genuinely believed that art had the power to change the world. While the term “Bauhaus” may now be most frequently associated with a particular aesthetic style—cantilevered chairs, boxy buildings, sans-serif typefaces—the school was actually advancing a progressive vision for the modern era, a philosophy more than a visual look. A well-designed chair, a flat-roofed building, or a readable font were not simply good design for design’s sake, but were intended to produce a better, considered way of living in a transformed society. Like the Weimar Republic itself—its fourteen-year timeline parallels the school’s history—the vision was to be democratic. And another parallel to the Republic: its guiding philosophy was born in the wake of World War I. In this study of puppetry at the Bauhaus, the school will be presented as a vibrant, socially responsive, avant-garde establishment in a very specific place and time, rather than a synonym for the International Style aesthetic.

Bauhaus puppetry was political art, and while there were only occasional explicit commentaries on a specific political party, the artists’ views of the world were shaped by their experiences with military conflict in World War I and social upheaval during the Weimar era. A number of important artists had direct experience with the brutality and trauma caused by

mechanized warfare. Such experiences influenced their approach to art and the role it should play in manifesting a new social reality. For example, the founding director of the school, Gropius, had been a sergeant and lieutenant (twice awarded the Iron Cross) and survived being buried under rubble as well as shot out of the sky. But even more importantly for this story, Bauhaus puppet artists also served in World War I: Paul Klee was conscripted into the infantry reserves in March 1916, but spared active combat, serving instead in the air force reserves and later as an aircraft painter. Klee's puppet production was interrupted during the period of his military service—there are no puppets from the years 1917 and 1918—and when he started making puppets for his son again after the end of the war, many of the figures had political resonance. Schlemmer served in combat, was wounded in battle, and was transferred to a military cartography unit until the war's conclusion. As he wrote in his diary in 1923: "Four years of Bauhaus constitute a chapter in art history. But also in the history of the times, for the Bauhaus mirrors the fragmentation of the German people and of the period."<sup>3</sup> At first glance their puppets may not seem to address the horrors of the battlefield head-on, but the works are nonetheless haunted by the traumas of World War I and its aftermath. At the same time, each artist was responding in different ways to the shifting political climate of the Weimar Republic and rising nationalism.

This chapter examines the historical complexities of puppetry at the Bauhaus, and treats the puppet works of Paul Klee and Schlemmer as political artworks. Prior to his post at the school, Klee was involved in a left-wing political revolution in Munich in 1919. Although he appears to have abandoned radical politics after the movement's failure, some of Klee's works from the Bauhaus period, including his puppets, present an ongoing engagement with current events. Although Schlemmer was persecuted by the Nazis, he did attempt to find accommodation

with the Nazi regime in the early days of the Reich, claiming that his art was apolitical and that it aligned with National Socialist values. While at the Bauhaus, both of these artists were viewed as less politically engaged than some of their more overtly ideologically motivated colleagues, yet their puppet works were more than merely formal experiments. What do Bauhaus puppets reveal about their makers' political views and the school's avant-garde project more generally?

Admittedly, puppetry is not the first thing one associates with the Bauhaus. But puppetry goes to the heart of the essential aspects of the school's mission and the historical experiences of some of the artists involved with it. Of particular interest are places where possible political interpretations of puppets diverge, satire is ambiguous, and the worldview expressed is unclear. By exploring the role of puppetry, this chapter contributes to a growing body of literature that takes a fuller view of the Bauhaus's history beyond the legacy first established by Gropius (after his move to the United States) and the ex-Bauhäusler themselves, artists who advanced a specific vision of the school to suit their new situation after the war.<sup>4</sup> As simple and simplified as puppets may at first appear, puppetry reveals an important relationship between the art of the Bauhaus and the politics of the Weimar Republic that turns out to be anything but straightforward.

### **Home Is Where We Start From**

The puppets Klee made for his son over the course of nine years reflected the boy's evolving curiosity, the artist's changing interests, stylistic experiments, and especially the shifting social and political situation in Germany (particularly as Felix grew older).<sup>5</sup> The relationship between fathers and sons is a central theme in discussions of German modernism. According to Peter Gay: "When we think of Weimar, we think of modernity in art, literature and thought; we think of the rebellion of sons against fathers."<sup>6</sup> To illustrate his point, Gay cites examples from

Weimar theater history in which the son's revolt against the father is central to the political message: Walter Hasenclever's *Der Sohn* (1914), Franz Werfel's hatred of his father in real life, and Arnolt Bronnen's *Vatermord* (1922). Gay argues that the theme of father-son conflict "was so general that it became a cliché."<sup>7</sup> While it was of course an established theme prior to World War I in Expressionist works of theater, art, and cinema, it also had a specific resonance among a new generation of Weimar artists with a fresh memory of World War I living in the tumult of the new democracy. John Heartfield's (1891–1968) photomontage *Väter und Söhne* (1924), for example, shows a row of young soldiers backed by oversize skeletons floating in a row above their heads, marching toward an old Prussian general. [Fig. 1.1] It is a dramatic illustration of tensions in Germany, where old men had sent young boys to their deaths for the *Vaterland*. If sons were ready to rebel, it was in part because father figures loomed so large.



Fig. 1.1: John Heartfield, *Väter und Söhne*, 1924. Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Andrés Mario Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of the Avant-Garde Photomontage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 184.

Yet not all fathers and sons were adversaries. The relation between young and old was simultaneously being refigured in positive ways during the Weimar era for those same young

men who were becoming parents themselves. The Klee hand puppets demonstrate that a modernist father-son relationship could be a loving one, and an important source of artistic inspiration as well. While the impulse behind the initial set of Kasper puppets was a very young boy's enthusiasm for the naughty puppet shows at the flea market, a dialogue—not a rebellion—emerged from Paul's puppet gifts. The two men had a close relationship, and Paul was very much involved in Felix's day-to-day care. The son recalls: "Vor dem Esten Weltkrieg führte in München neben der durch Klavierstunden den Leben verdienenden Mutter Lily, der Mann und Vater Paul den Haushalt. Sein Hauptmetier vernachlässigte Klee dabei keineswegs. Am Rockschoß des Vaters hängend, begleite ich – Felix – ihn zu Unternehmungen."<sup>8</sup> In the early 1900s, it was unusual for a father to be so involved in child rearing, typically a task for mothers, nursemaids, and governesses. But Paul was an extremely attentive stay-at-home dad, a fact confirmed by his diaries. From the time of his son's birth in November 1907 through 1909, Paul includes a "Felix Calendar" chronicling the boy's growth and development as part of his daily diary entries. Although this section is abridged in its published form, it nonetheless details a father's sense of pride at his infant son's new ability to sit upright, developing speech, laughter, and mischievousness, as well as Paul's intense fear when Felix was ill with colic.<sup>9</sup> No more than a few days pass without an entry documenting Felix's weight or a new skill. These private entries (some of which remain private in part because as an adult Felix edited Paul's diaries for publication) reveal a father's love and attentiveness to details of daily life. The intimacy between Paul and Felix became a source of creative inspiration for both.

Some German modernists, striving to be a different kind of parent from their Prussian predecessors, found their relationships with their children to be a source of inspiration for their artistic practices. It is largely absent from art historical literature that many modern male artists'

experiences as parents were a wellspring for their art. In an essay on design for children, curator Juliet Kinchin summarizes the state of current scholarship: “In the case of male designers in particular, the experience of engaged parenting and teaching is often treated as a sideline or aberration—not least by the designers themselves—and downplayed as a formative influence on their more publicly appraised work, or omitted altogether.”<sup>10</sup> According to Kinchin, the role of fatherhood in the realm of design history is only now emerging, and is still rare and regarded as an oddity.<sup>11</sup> While Kinchin, a design historian, never mentions the role of fatherhood in *art* history (it is not her area of study), family life and the interests of children formed an important part of the modernist vision, especially for artists who worked at the Bauhaus. In fact, a fair number of Bauhaus masters were involved fathers: Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956), Hannes Meyer (1889–1954), and Oskar Schlemmer (to name just a few) included their children in professional life at the Bauhaus. Unquestionably there was collaboration and cross-pollination between masters at the Bauhaus and other modernist artists, yet these artists never limited their view of potential artistic sources to their colleagues and art historical predecessors alone. The families of many male artists were important in shaping a modern aesthetic vocabulary. Rather than restricting our art historical investigations of potential artistic influences to a genealogy of canonical works, it is helpful to consider how these artists viewed the world more generally. Children’s art was an especially important source and an example of how art and life were integrated at the Bauhaus beyond a simple reverence for children’s naive illustrations. For artists such as Paul Klee, a child was not an abstract ideal, but a person with whom he was actively involved.

Puppets had been a part of Klee’s life in his own family of origin. His sister Mathilde reports: “Between the ages of three and five [Paul] was very fond of playing with dolls.”<sup>12</sup> He

continued this family tradition of giving dolls to his own baby boy; from the “Felix Calendar” we learn that the son played with a doll on May 25, 1908, two days after his two lower front teeth broke through.<sup>13</sup> Kasper puppetry had also been a part of Paul’s own childhood, as Mathilde writes: “[Paul] also liked to put on [Kasper] plays; his audience consisted of the maid, Lina, myself and the children of the household.”<sup>14</sup> In giving his son a set of Kasper puppets on his ninth birthday, Paul was sharing his own experience and memories of his youth with Felix, in addition to responding to his son’s expressed wishes. Father and son both cut their teeth playing with dolls and puppets.



Fig. 1.2: Felix Klee, photograph of Felix Klee’s puppet theater with *Kasperl* and the *Devil* by Paul Klee, puppets and stage frame from 1916, photograph ca. 1924. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 14.

Kasper plays were a part of Klee family life, but Felix’s first set was also importantly related to his father’s professional involvement with the Blue Rider group. The context of the earliest, pre-Bauhaus puppet shows is significant, as it introduces a professional dimension to this familial artistic sharing. Felix put on puppet shows in the Klee home for relatives and guests. A memoir written much later by one of Paul Klee’s students describes *mise-en-scène*: “Er hatte für seinen Sohn Felix ein großes Puppen-Theater angefertigt, das fast die Hälfte von diesem

Zimmer einnahm. Es war blau mit dunkelroten Randleisten und wirkte wie ein riesiger Zauberkasten.”<sup>15</sup> Photographs of these domestic performances offer a glimpse of what it was like and are especially valuable documentation, since all but one of the figures from the original 1916 set of Kasperl puppets were destroyed in a fire at Felix’s home following the bombing of Würzburg in 1945 (Felix called his puppet “Kasperl”). The very existence of such photographs is itself a clue that the puppet performances were a valued creative family undertaking deserving of photographic documentation for posterity. [Fig. 1.2] According to Felix, the puppet stage was a collage created from page of *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*: “Das erste Bühnenbild setzte sich aus Bildchen zusammen, die dem ‘Blauen Reiter’ entnommen waren.”<sup>16</sup> The *Almanach*, published in 1912 and edited by Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) with Franz Marc (1880–1916), presented so-called primitive cultures to the European avant-garde art scene. [Fig. 1.3] Frequently regarded as a groundbreaking publication in twentieth-century art history, it offered an unexpected combination of theoretical essays with works of folk, children’s, African, and South Pacific art, as well as Japanese drawings, medieval German woodcuts, and even Egyptian puppets. According to Klee scholar Christine Hopfengart, “Possibly Klee cut up a copy of *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac or a subscription advertising pamphlet, pasting together his collage from his pictorial material. . . . Thus for one moment the Kasperl and Gretl show became an art historical venue where child play and artistic avant-garde came together and complemented each other.”<sup>17</sup> Hopfengart is right to view these earliest performances as a hybrid of family life and modernist art practice, but it was on more than one isolated moment that the Kasper shows became an art historical venue. For the Klees, the Blue Rider *Almanach* puppet theater was just the beginning of the puppetry-inspired union of Klee’s personal life and with his art. This scene set the stage for the Klees’ puppetry at the Bauhaus in the coming years.

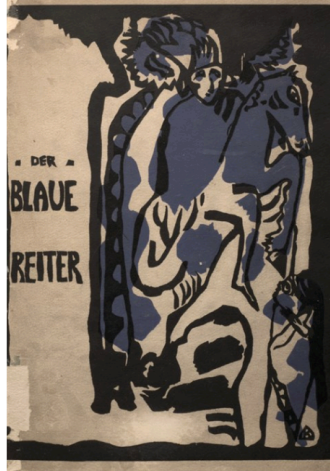


Fig. 1.3: Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds., *Der blaue Reiter* (Munich: R. Piper and Co., Verlag, 1912), cover. Leicester Museum. [www.germanexpressionismleicester.org](http://www.germanexpressionismleicester.org).

### Kasperl's Crew

From this original 1916 Kasperl cast, only the figure of *Herr Tod* survives. [Fig. 1.4] With sunken eye sockets painted black and a jaw of grimacing teeth, the skull-like head corresponds closely with the traditional Kasper puppet depictions of Death. A photograph of a puppet show taken around 1924 shows *Herr Tod* on stage with Kasperl's best friend (now-lost), *Sepperl*. [Fig. 1.5] The scene suggests a traditional puppet story: Kasperl and his friend manage to scare Death off or kill him in the gallows. Paul attempted to make his earliest *Kasperl* and crew recognizable as the classic Kasper cast, while at the same time putting his own unique imprint on each character, especially through the sculpted heads. Although it appears that Paul sewed the clothing for later puppets himself, for the bodies of this first Kasperl set he asked Sasha von Sinner (1893–1975), a family friend from Bern, to sew some of the garments.<sup>18</sup> While it is now impossible to know which outfits were sewn by Paul and which were sewn by von Sinner, Paul likely directed her work on the ones she did make.



Fig. 1.4: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Herr Tod*), 1916. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 51.



Fig. 1.5: Felix Klee, photograph of Felix Klee's puppet theater with *Herr Tod* and *Sepperl* by Paul Klee, puppets and stage frame from 1916, photograph ca. 1924. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 14.

Despite the range of experimentation, especially with materials used for puppet heads, Klee's puppets all share this feature: none have hands. It was the norm for hand puppets of the period to have modeled hands affixed to soft-bodied arms. Three of the puppets wear capes—*Gekrönter Dichter* (1919), *Selbstporträt* (1922), and *Buddhistischer Mönch* (1922)—and have no articulated arms sewn into the garment. The puppeteer would therefore have had the option of improvising a kind of winged arm, also without hands. The handlessness unifies the entire collection, giving the puppets a certain consistency in style from the first 1916 Kasperl set, including *Herr Tod*, all the way through the later pieces from 1925. [Fig. 1.6]



Fig. 1.6: Paul Klee, hand puppets, 1916–25. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 48–49.

Without hands, the puppets' arms have a wing-like quality. Such human-yet-winged forms at times resemble figures from some of Klee's best-known paintings, prints, and drawings—namely, angels. [Fig. 1.7] Given the frequency with which Klee depicted angels, it is

easy to see the puppets as connected with these other works, yet the puppets predate most of these more famous drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and oil paintings. The angel work best known to German scholars from Walter Benjamin's (1892–1940) essay was created in 1920, and angels were in fact rare in Klee's oeuvre up until 1938, when he suddenly drew and painted more sixty angel works in the two years prior to his death in 1940.<sup>19</sup> [Fig. 1.8] While Klee often wrote about his choice of subject in diaries, letters, and teaching notes, the puppets and angels are distinctive in his relative silence about them in written accounts. In fact, the puppets were not even recorded in the comprehensive catalogue of Klee's work (documenting exact titles, date, origins, and serial numbers), and as a result we have less definitive information about them than is usual for his works. Yet even without his written commentary, the puppets share certain stylistic and conceptual features with the rest of his oeuvre and are part of his ongoing, career-long experimentation with the human shape of otherworldly beings.



Fig. 1.7: Paul Klee, *hörender Engel*, 1939. Private collection, United States. Zentrum Paul Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: The Angels* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 85.

Fig. 1.8: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Zentrum Paul Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: The Angels* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 21.

While angels were rare in Klee's art until 1938, devils appear with greater frequency in a number of watercolors, gouaches, oil paintings, and, of course, puppets. Devils were a basic Kasper stock character, and one was included in the first set from 1916. The photograph from circa 1924 shows an image from the play *Kasperl and the Devil in the Magic Box*, yet the low resolution of the picture and the position of the puppet in the photograph makes it difficult to make a detailed interpretation or commentary. [see fig. 1.2] Nonetheless, the title of the performance gives us a clue about the Devil's character: according to Kasper theatrical convention, the Devil tries to take Kasper to Hell, but is dim-witted (more often tricked than trickster) and easily outsmarted by the hero. The same year that Felix performed this Kasperl play, Paul created a second Devil puppet, *Handschuberinger Teufel* (1922). [Fig. 1.9] With a head made from the fingers of leather gloves and mismatched button and brass-nail eyes, this mixed-media puppet has a patchwork, Dada-like, assemblage quality to it.<sup>20</sup> The asymmetry of the eyes suggests that the *Handschuberinger Teufel* is a confused character, always looking in the wrong place (a useful advantage for Kasper). The brass nose ring, along with the horns, is evocative of an angry bull. Felix recalled that *Handschuberinger Teufel* was more evil than the usual Devil puppet, a recollection supported by object-based research at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, where it was discovered that the word *Baissen* (Swiss German dialect for *Beißen*, or "bite") is written in pencil on the ivory disk.<sup>21</sup> Yet this figure looks only partly animal, which makes him at once menacing and cute. As far as fallen angels go, *Handschuberinger Teufel* is a familiar, animalistic creature, not totally foreign, and his devilishness is expressed by visual allusions to base animal qualities rather than supernatural evil endowments. His bite is tempered

by his cuteness. In keeping with the Kasper tradition, Klee raises hell to bring the Devil down to Earth.



Fig. 1.9: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Handschuberinger Teufel*), 1922. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 79.

Klee often made multiple versions of the same character, a hallmark of his iterative approach to art, and the varied outcomes are a testament to his inventiveness. Stock characters were a point of departure for further experimentation, often upending artistic and theatrical clichés and expanding the possibilities for their interpretation on stage. Just as Klee made different versions of the Devil from the classic Kasper cast, so too did he create multiple versions of Death. Recall that Felix called the 1916 Death puppet *Herr Tod*. While there is no way to definitively title these puppets given their omission from Paul's self-created catalogue, the name provided by Felix seems plausible given that *Herr Tod* received a companion a few years later: *Frau Tod* (1921). [Fig. 1.10] *Frau Tod* is not a character from traditional Kasper theater, but a figure of the Klees' own invention. She looks more like an angry ghost than her skeletal husband. Her head is round with painted features (including eyeballs), and the heavily textured plaster gives her a wrinkled, aged appearance. Perhaps to make the two figures easy to

distinguish on the puppet stage, or perhaps to resemble blood smears, *Frau Tod* has roughly hewn red spots sewn to her white gown.<sup>22</sup> While she is certainly deathly, she is visually distinctive from her husband, and also different from other Kasper theater Death stock characters.



Fig. 1.10: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Frau Tod*), 1921. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 68.

While *Herr Tod* may have originally been the nemesis of *Kasperl*, he had characteristics beyond this simple stock role. Marianne Heymann (1905–2003), a student of Paul’s who would occasionally visit the Klee home, recalled a performance of *Herr Tod* and *Frau Tod*: “Während ich diesen kleinen Wunder noch in den Händen hielt, begann Klee plötzlich im Nebenzimmer eine alte Sarabande für Violine zu spielen. Felix huschte hinter die Bühne und improvisierte zu diesen Rhythmen einen Tanz des ‘Todes’ mit der ‘Todin.’ Es war grotesk, unheimlich und unvergeßlich.”<sup>23</sup> As playful as this marriage of *Herr Tod* and *Frau Tod* may have been at first blush, the concept of a *Totentanz* also has a dark resonance in the wake of World War I. The medieval visual motif was a common memento mori, an allegory of death’s power and a

reminder of life's value. [Fig. 1.11] While it never disappeared from German art completely, the image underwent a major revival during the Weimar era and began appearing in contexts outside the realm of religious art. To name just a few examples: Fritz Lang (1890–1976) directed a now-lost film titled *Totentanz* (1919), Thomas Mann (1875–1955) included a chapter called “Totentanz” in his novel *Der Zauberberg* (1924), and powerful visual interpretations of this design appeared with notable frequency on German medals, then a popular and important genre for memorializing World War I. [Figs. 1.12, 1.13] Following Klee's service in World War I, the Death character was recast in a new emblematic role, in a *Totentanz*, a reminder that mortality does not discriminate, but eventually takes us all. Using a visual language that reflected artistic responses to war—especially genres of commemoration such as medallion art—the female Death puppet can be seen as reflecting Klee's reaction to World War I.

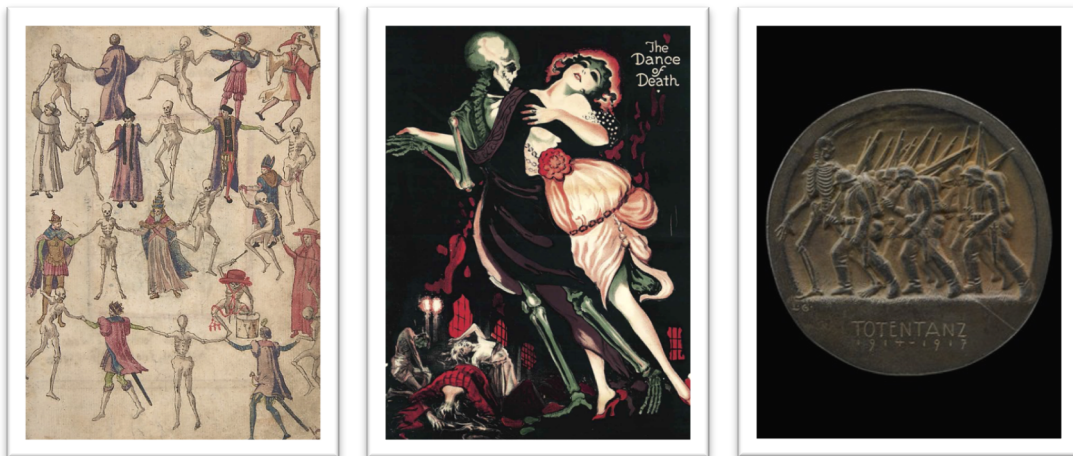


Fig. 1.11: Anonymous, German, *Totentanz*, sixteenth century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

Fig. 1.12: Poster of the American release of Fritz Lang's film *Totentanz*, 1919. Century Guild Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Joanna Ebenstein, ed., *Death: A Graveside Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), 128.

Fig. 1.13: Ludwig Gies, *Totentanz 1914–1917* medal, 1917. British Museum, London. [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org).

The reference to a *Totentanz*, while in keeping with the visual culture of the period, was also personal. In addition to his own experience in the German army, Klee lost important friends and colleagues in combat, including his Blue Rider collaborators August Macke (1887–1914) and Franz Marc. Although *Herr Tod* was created as one of Kasper's adversaries before Klee's service in the war, *Frau Tod* was made after the artist returned home. The scene described by Heymann was staged in the 1920s, likely sometime after 1921, the year *Frau Tod* was created. There are other allusions to loss in the puppet works created after Klee's return home. Throughout the 1920s, his puppet production appears to have been haunted, as he made a significant number and variety of puppet ghosts.

While *Herr Tod* and *Frau Tod* were the most literal of Klee's deathly puppets, ghosts were a favorite puppet subject for him, and took the form of numerous spectral figures: *Vogelscheuchengespenst* (1923), *Elektrischer Spuk* (1924), *Schwarzer Geist* (1924), *Steckdosengeist* (1925), and *Zündholzschachtelgeist* (1925).<sup>24</sup> A number of Klee's puppets were transformative, in the sense that new characters emerged from theatrical use of earlier ones. As we saw with the two Devils and *Herr Tod* and *Frau Tod*, the Klees did not limit the puppets to discrete characters in stock roles, but treated them as evolving and versatile players. Witness the resemblance between *Stiefgrossmutter* (1921) and *Vogelscheuchengespenst* (1923). [Figs. 1.14, 1.15] Both puppets, made within a couple of years of each other, wear dresses from the same floral-pattern chintz. The *Stiefgrossmutter*'s bald head, pointed nose, and long, thin neck gives her an imperious physiognomy. Her name, too, is evocative of the evil step-grandmother stock character from the Grimm's fairy tales rather than a historical force or figure. The *Vogelscheuchengespenst* echoes the elongated neck and pointy nose of the *Stiefgrossmutter* but is more exaggerated still. Perhaps the white cross appliquéd to the front of her dress is meant to

signal that she is dead—a visual key to the audience that this is the ghost of the *Stiefgrossmutter*, or some lifeless scarecrow version of her. While the *Stiefgrossmutter* character draws upon fairy-tale folk traditions and the frequent appearance of such a character in puppet shows, the *Vogelscheuchengespenst* represents a personal and inventive twist.<sup>25</sup> Lifeless figures such as scarecrows do not have ghosts. Such a puppet tale would have required greater storytelling sophistication on the part of the puppeteer—the ability to craft a tale in which the metamorphosis of a character takes place. Felix remarked: “In the choice of figures Klee was always guided by my wishes.”<sup>26</sup> An eccentric character of Felix’s own invention, it was designed by Paul to grow with his son as he developed as an artist and graduated from recounting fairy tales to authoring his own plays. At the same time, the puppets also present Paul Klee’s response to larger cultural events.



Fig. 1.14: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Stiefgrossmutter*), 1921. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 69.

Fig. 1.15: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Vogelscheuchengespenst*), 1923. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 89.

The sheer number of ghosts and specter puppets—while undoubtedly part of a larger artistic exploration of otherworldly creatures, fodder for a child’s imagination—also resonates with military culture. *Schwarzer Geist* and *Steckdosengeist*, two fierce-looking fanged puppets, both wear caps that recall German military helmets: an army helmet and a plumed, parade-style *Pickelhaube* respectively. [Figs. 1.16, 1.17, 1.19] We know that Klee did make a puppet with a real military insignia (his use of a cockade on a different puppet will be discussed shortly), and given the artist’s considered attention to his puppets’ hats and caps, a deliberate allusion to field and parade helmets seems likely. *Schwarzer Geist* is much flatter than many of the other puppets—the brim of the helmet and nose are attached rather than contoured or carved from its papier-mâché head—and its overall shape is much more geometric than voluminously corporeal. While the geometry appears rough compared to a real human figure, the contours of the helmeted head, elongated neck, and body create a negative space that echoes the outline of the Iron Cross military metal. [Fig. 1.18] The snake-like eyes and fangs give the puppet a freakish and unwelcome appearance. The *Steckdosengeist* wears clothing made of coarsely torn gray wool with a tweedy weave, contributing to a chain-mail armor look, a visual reference further underlined by the metal ring attached to the body at center. Although little is known about their theatrical casting (other than that they are ghosts, a fact revealed by Felix’s names), a purely visual interpretation of the physical puppets in the context of military dress and decoration suggests that Klee had World War I in mind, a fact further suggested by their unpleasant and monstrous mood.



Fig. 1.16: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Schwarzer Geist*), 1924. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 98.

Fig. 1.17: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Steckdosengeist*), 1925. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 99.

Fig. 1.18: World War I Iron Cross, second class, 1914. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections.html>.

Fig. 1.19: Prussian general's *Pickelhaube* with swan feather plume, 1900. Imperial War Museum, London. [www.iwm.org.uk/collections](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

Puppetry is a medium well suited to entertaining a wide range of ages, since a single show usually has aspects that work on various registers for children and adults. The Klees' puppets became more sophisticated as time passed, and Paul continued creating puppets more explicitly suited to political themes. Since Felix's interests guided Paul's choice of figures, the puppets served as a way for father and son to explore the wider world around them as the child's horizon broadened. Although Felix may not have fully understood the allegorical meaning of the *Totentanz*, he would certainly have been aware of the Great War at a young age, especially since it took his father away from home. Puppets from the immediate post-war period such as *Alte Jungfer* (1919), *Russischer Bauer* (1919), and *Herr Enterich* (1919) can easily be imagined as starring in child-friendly fairy-tale puppet shows, yet figures such as *Bärtiger Franzose* (1919) suggest that the Klees were also actively drawing on puppetry's history as a vehicle for political commentary. More than light amusements, the puppets provided a way to explore darker, ambiguous questions arising in childhood and adolescence, especially in times of war.

*Bärtiger Franzose* was certainly a response to politics in the aftermath of World War I and makes the political register of the postwar puppets especially clear. [Figs. 1.20, 1.21] At first glance, *Bärtiger Franzose* is an ambiguous character. He has a face that is at once smiling cheerfully and focused with intensity; his upturned beard is shaped like a smile, yet he bares his gritted teeth in concentration. A paint-smearing smock hints that the Frenchman is a painter. The puppet's red hat is reminiscent of Kasper's pointed cap, giving him a playful air, but the French attribution in the name suggests that he is wearing the *bonnet rouge* (Phrygian cap), a hat closely associated with political revolution.<sup>27</sup> The *bonnet rouge*, a symbol of freedom, like the one worn by Liberty in Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, depicting the July Revolution of 1830, tells us that this puppet-artist is a revolutionary character. [Fig. 1.22] Felix reported that

this puppet “played a time-specific, political role in the private performances,”<sup>28</sup> but did not elaborate further. Here is what was happening at the specific time the puppet was created: Paul Klee returned from war to Munich in November 1918, and in 1919 became involved with the revolutionary politics of the Räterepublik. The Räterepublik, or Bavarian Soviet Republic, was a short-lived attempt to establish a socialist state in Bavaria. The movement was brutally halted by the Freikorps, a right-wing paramilitary militia. Klee had joined the artists’ advisory board of the Räterepublik and was involved enough that it was necessary for him to flee to Switzerland briefly upon its dissolution. *Bärtiger Franzose* was made the same year that these events transpired.



Figs. 1.20, 1.21: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Bärtiger Franzose*), 1919. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 59–60.

Paul stopped keeping a diary after 1918, and Felix disclosed no further details of his father’s political involvement in published form, but the depiction of a Frenchman as a

revolutionary artist expressing mixed emotions offers a sense of Klee's experience with this political movement. The utopian socialist state was a failure: more than six hundred supporters of the Bavarian Soviet Republic were killed during fighting in the street and in a series of murders afterward.<sup>29</sup> One of the few existing written records of Paul Klee's mixed political feelings is in a letter to his friend, the artist Alfred Kubin (1877–1959), from May 12, 1919, nine days after the Freikorps entered Munich:

So wenig dauerhaft diese kommunistische Republic [*sic*] von Anfang an schien, so gab sie doch Gelegenheit zur Überprüfung der subjektiven Existenz = Möglichkeiten in einen solchen Gemeinwesen. Ohne positives Ergebnis war sie nicht. Natürlich eine zugespitzte, individualistische Kunst ist zum Genuß durch die Gesamtheit nicht geeignet, sie ist kapitalistischer Luxus. Aber wir sind doch wohl mehr als Kuriositäten für reiche Snobs. Und das was an uns irgendwie darüber hinaus Ewigkeitswerten zustrebt, das würde im kommunistischen Gemeinwesen eher Förderung erfahren können. . . . Also hat die Räte Republik auch für uns manche Erkenntnis gebracht. An eine praktische Durchführung ist nun erst recht nicht mehr zu denken. Wir sind kurz nach der idellen [*sic*] Verdichtung auch noch reif dazu.<sup>30</sup>

When Delacroix painted his *Liberty Leading the People*, the painter showed Liberty with a serene facial expression, spotlighted, standing valiantly atop a pedestal of corpses. But the reality of political fighting in the name of freedom was much less romantic. In response to the failed socialist revolution, Klee eschewed grandiose, heroic salon painting like Delacroix's work,

opting instead to create a puppet. *Bärtiger Franzose* is little male puppet with an anxious expression—the complete opposite of triumphant, bare-breasted Lady Liberty. The very decision to create a humble puppet as a means to express his response to the attempted political revolution is itself a statement of Klee’s feelings about the affair. The only feature shared by Delacroix’s and Klee’s revolutionaries is the *bonnet rouge*.



Fig. 1.22: Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830. Louvre, Paris.

*Bärtiger Franzose* was not the only character with an international attribution in its name, or with political undertones, from this period. Klee created a *Russischer Bauer* (1919), as well as the similarly styled *Junge Bäuerin* (1919) and *Bauer mit schwarzer Kappe* (1920). [Fig. 1.23] These characters in particular lend themselves to a mix of roles in Kasper theater and fairy-tale performances, as well as to political commentary. We know from Felix’s recollections that the *Junge Bäuerin* played in “comic, rustic folk scenes” and that the *Bauer mit schwarzer Kappe* appears to have been her male companion.<sup>31</sup> It was a stock character in Kasper plays from the period as well; for example, in the classic Kasperl Larifari plays developed by Graf von Pocci (1807–1876) for performances specifically aimed at children, one frequently finds rustic peasant

characters.<sup>32</sup> Paul's wife Lily Klee wrote in her memoirs about a volume of *Russische Volksmärchen* that Paul had owned and gave to his son as a gift; it too would have provided excellent scenes for puppet shows.<sup>33</sup> All three peasant puppets have plaster heads, painted almond-shaped eyes, and grimaces, conveying the same ambiguous aspect as *Bärtiger Franzose*. While these pieces would certainly have been fun for Felix's reenactments of his favorite Russian folk stories or Bavarian von Pocci scenes, they too may be seen in connection to the Räterepublik movement and failed socialist uprising. The peasant, like the worker, was an icon of communist visual propaganda. [Fig. 1.24] While the 1917 October Revolution had been a direct inspiration for socialist uprisings in Germany, including the Räterepublik—the Bolshevik Revolution appealed particularly to artists who sought to transform the world after the horrors of World War I—the connection to Russia was not just aesthetic. A number of Russian revolutionaries were actively involved in the Räterepublik, including Eugene Leviné (1883–1919), and Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) advised Bavarian Soviet Republic leaders during its short existence. While it is unlikely that these Russian peasants are portraits of individuals, a political connection seems especially plausible given the historical context.<sup>34</sup> Klee made his political puppets represent a particular type, rather than specific individuals, reserving portraiture for his personal acquaintances and artist colleagues. Such international figures could readily be played as caricatures evocative of political opinions in satirical puppet shows.



Fig. 1.23: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Junge Bäuerin*), 1919. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 63.

Fig. 1.24: Sergey Shimansky, *Moldova Harvest*, 1930s. Nailya Alexander Gallery, New York. <http://www.nailyaalexandergallery.com>.

The most striking political type in Klee's puppet oeuvre is the *Deutschnationaler* (1921), another figure with a national attribution in its name. [Fig. 1.25] The puppet's eyes are black, and its severe, angular features are painted onto its flat, dimensionless face. The fur beard stuck to the chin suggests a caricature of an older, conservative type—it cannot be mistaken for a smile, as might the painted beard of *Bärtiger Franzose*. Just as the hat of *Bärtiger Franzose* offers a clue to his political leanings, this hat likewise indicates the politics of the puppet. Research at the

Zentrum Paul Klee has revealed that the hat is fashioned from a red, black, and white cockade. In the time of the Weimar Republic, the cockade was already a historical artifact; prior to 1919, cockades were worn affixed to Prussian soldiers' helmets to show political allegiances.<sup>35</sup> With this puppet however, the cockade itself is the head covering, stuck directly to the puppet's head rather than attached as an adornment to a hat or helmet. Its color signals a deliberate distance from colors of the German flag in the democratic Weimar Republic (red, black, and gold). The red, black, and white cockade colors highlight a right-wing political stance, and more specifically its role in puppet plays as a political type identified with the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People's Party, or NDVP) in 1921.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Felix Klee once reported that the *Deutschnationaler* would perform together with another puppet, *Philister* (1925), and talk about the colors of the German flag, inspired by the cockade cap of this puppet.<sup>37</sup> The *Deutschnationaler* undoubtedly played part of the "time-specific, political role" described by Felix. At this particular moment, the anti-Bauhaus movement in Weimar, led by Emil Herfurth, a grammar school teacher, had won a seat for the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* in the Thuringian regional parliament (Weimar is located in the province of Thuringia).<sup>38</sup> It was the beginning of the political pressure that would eventually force the Bauhaus's move to Dessau in 1925.



Fig. 1.25: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Deutschnationaler*), 1921. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 67.

Discussions about colors were closer to politics than ever before in the lives of Paul and Felix when this puppet was created. In October 1920, Paul was invited by Gropius to serve as a master at the Bauhaus, and he took up the post in January 1921. Initially leading the bookbinding workshop, Klee also taught part of the Preliminary Course pioneered by Johannes Itten (1888–1967). While the program evolved into the basis of virtually every foundation sequence in art school today, the Preliminary Course was radical in its time for training students to develop perception and intuition and skills centered on the fundamental elements of art (color, line, shape, shade, texture, volume, direction, material qualities), contra the traditional academic art exercise of producing copies of classical works. Given the utopian aims of the Bauhaus, the Preliminary Course was the first step in training artists to change the world. Students were

coached to see colors not as inert decoration or as merely applied to canvas to mimetic ends, but as having necessary correspondences to each other and to particular shapes, a connection akin to universal truths. It was believed that the elements of art had the power to express ideas and emotions transcending differences of culture and language. Paul Klee developed his own theory of color, “Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre” (1921–25), by raising the relationships between colors to transcendent heights.<sup>39</sup> Inviting students to treat color as a force with its own inherent expressive power, by conditioning a student’s awareness of art’s fundamental elements, the Bauhaus faculty believed that a new social and political reality could be manifested.

Imagine how a puppet debate about the colors of a flag would appear in the context of the Bauhaus, especially as expressed in the provincial, limited views of the *Deutschnationaler* puppet, and how well this dialogue would have played as political satire in a performance at a school whose students were already thinking about color as a transcendent force. The relationship of color to politics was about far more than a nation-state’s banner; at the utopian Bauhaus, color was a way of expressing higher truths. A puppet debate about the colors of the German flag would have been a pointed critique as well: the skit Felix remembers is likely a direct play on the nationalistic propaganda campaign of the Deutschnational Volkspartei (DNVP), which ran in elections with the slogan: “Wählt Liste 5 Kampffront Schwarz-Weiß-Rot!”<sup>40</sup> During the 1924 February elections in Thuringia, the moderate Social Democratic government was voted out of power, and an alliance of conservative parties called the Thuringia Order Union (including the DNVP together with the Deutsche Volkspartei [DVP] and the Deutsche Demokratische Partei [DDP]) gained momentum. Hostile to the Bauhaus, these political leaders eventually forced the school to leave Weimar altogether. Art historian Christine Hopfengart writes: “In this historic context we can imagine that Felix used the German

Nationalist puppet to put on a kind of political cabaret, particularly with respect to the Bauhaus, and continuously varied these performances.”<sup>41</sup> Not only does this historical context allow us to understand the role the puppet likely played, it also offers a view of Klee as a politically and socially engaged artist, well after the failure of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, responding to the rising threat of German nationalism.

While there are no scripts for the puppet shows performed by Felix at the Bauhaus—they were largely improvised, without written texts—his reminiscences together with the puppets themselves offer a picture of the Klees’ politics, a subject that confuses scholars today as much as it did commentators at the Bauhaus in the 1920s. Although some recent attention has been paid to Klee’s satirical drawings after the Nazi takeover of 1933, some scholars seem unaware of the political aspect of his work over the entire course of his career.<sup>42</sup> Bauhaus historian Rainer K. Wick, for example, ponders why Klee was invited to the Bauhaus in the first place, given his view of the artist as disengaged from politics: “It does not at all explain, however, why an artist whose work seemed to be entirely untouched by the discussion of the day about an artistic and social synthesis—rather who showed tendencies to escape the world and isolate himself from reality—would have received an invitation to join the Bauhaus, an art school that, for all its utopian perspectives for the future, advocated pragmatic goals.”<sup>43</sup> In a letter to a Swiss artist friend written in 1921, Oskar Schlemmer described the reaction to Klee’s appointment at the Bauhaus: “By the way, Klee’s appointment seems to provoke the greatest head-shaking, for he is considered a *l’art pour l’art* type with no conceivable practical contribution to make; I personally find such a judgment short-sighted.”<sup>44</sup> Schlemmer identified an aspect of Klee’s work that is, perhaps, not readily apparent from his writings alone or even from his paintings when interpreted apart from their historical context: “The analysis of written sources and Klee’s artistic

works . . . confirms the artist's detachment from quotidian events at the Bauhaus, with its perpetual internal squabbles and continuing defensive wars against attacks from outside, as well as from the great social and political events of the time."<sup>45</sup> Yet the puppets indicate otherwise: Klee was politically aware and engaged, and attuned to quotidian Bauhaus squabbles.



Fig. 1.26: Fotoatelier Reichard & Lindner, postcard showing Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1905. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. [www.dhm.de](http://www.dhm.de).

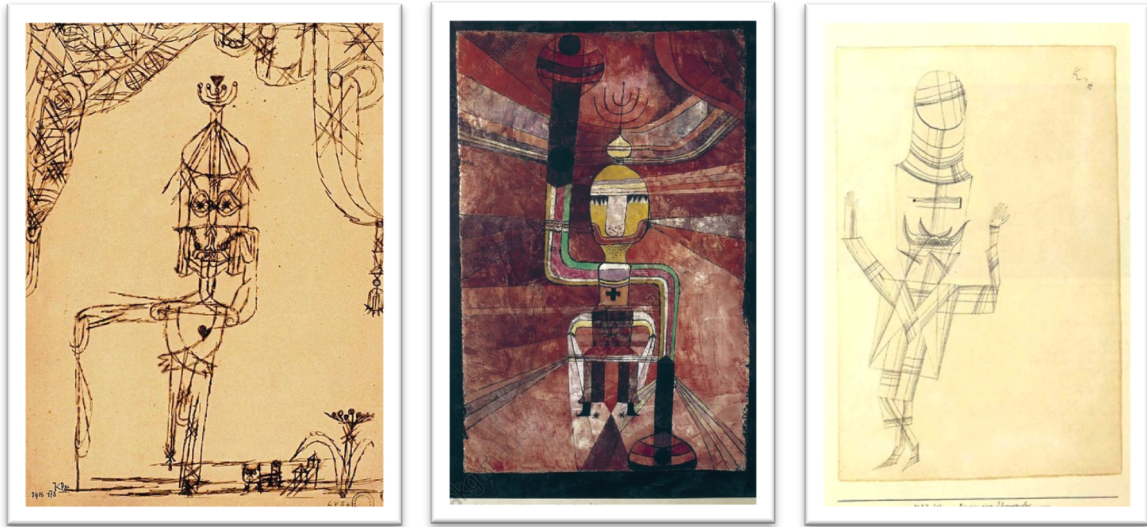


Fig. 1.27: Paul Klee, *Fitzlibutzli*, 1918. Musée d'Art modern et contemporain de Strasbourg. Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 1.28: Paul Klee, *Der grosse Kaiser, zum Kampf gerüstet*, 1921. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart, ed., *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 109.

Fig. 1.29: Paul Klee, *Figurine eines Schwankenden*, 1927. Carl Djerassi Trust II to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Christine Hopfengart, ed., *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 116.

In light of Klee's earlier involvement in the Räterepublik movement, and his relative silence about (or editing of) his role after the fact, it is necessary to look both within and beyond his writings and paintings in order to understand the pragmatic, socially critical dimension of his work. Witness his ink drawings *Fitzlibutzli* (1918), *Der grosse Kaiser, zum Kampf gerüstet* (1921), and *Figurine eines Schwankenden* (1927), and note their resemblance to Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>46</sup> [Figs. 1.26, 1.27, 1.28, 1.29] Klee's use of line in *Fitzlibutzli* is reminiscent of George Grosz's (1893–1959) satirical, unambiguously political drawings from the same period. The same quality of line is also present in his ink drawing *Kosmisch-revolutionär* (1918), a work that may also be seen as a cynical political commentary expressive of the same mood as his *Bärtiger*

*Franzose* puppet from the same year. [Fig. 1.30] Klee did not stop thinking about politics after the failure of the Bavarian Soviet Republic; rather, his thinking on the subject changed as the situation in the Weimar Republic evolved. It was not uncommon in the Weimar Republic for political opinions to change quickly, radically, and rationally. While such drawings are a telling satire of the Kaiser and Germany, Klee's political expression is most readily seen through works executed in a medium closely associated with satirical political commentary—namely, puppets, as we have seen.



Fig. 1.30: Paul Klee, *Kosmisch-revolutionär*, 1918. Art Institute of Chicago. [www.artic.edu/aic/collections](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections).

Not only was Klee aware of social and political events threatening the Bauhaus from outside, he was also keenly attuned to its internal debates. The earlier puppet shows from the Blue Rider period were largely played in a domestic setting, and shows at home for visiting guests continued throughout the 1920s, but the puppets he made during his time at the Bauhaus were staged for larger and more diverse public audiences, for instance at the Lantern Festival, the

Solstice Party, and the Kite Festival.<sup>47</sup> As a student at the school, Felix had an insider's view of Bauhaus action. In an interview from the 1980s he described his role as a puppeteer: "My puppet theater turned me into a magician, equally popular with young and old. In Weimar, I gave a performance every fourteen days for the children and adults."<sup>48</sup> These performances dealt not only with political events of the day (as evidenced by the *Deutschnationaler*), but also with internal Bauhaus politics. In a different interview about his puppet shows from the Bauhaus period, Felix reported: "Then the focus was on my Kasperl plays, in which I ironically dealt with a lot of private conflicts, much to the amusement of those who were not involved in the conflicts."<sup>49</sup> Puppetry offered a way for the Klees to comment on both external and internal debates at the school without necessarily getting involved themselves.

Felix's puppet cast was extended by Paul to include recognizable caricatures of his Bauhaus colleagues: Johannes Itten as the *Mönch* (1922), Lyonel Feininger as the *Greis* (1924), Oskar Schlemmer as the *Breitohrclown* (1925), and even himself, in his *Selbstporträt* (1922). Schlemmer's wife, Tut, recounted a special series of Bauhaus-themed puppet shows called *Bauhaus Satires*.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there was no shortage of fodder for parody at the avant-garde establishment. *Mönch*, for example, shows Itten in monkish robes a year before he left the school. He was well-known as a disciple of the esoteric Mazdaznan religious movement, and the robes were a reference to his costume as well as his role as a kind of cult leader. His belief that meditation, breathing exercises, and spirituality were conducive to artistic practice put him at odds with Gropius's rationalist approach.

Debates about the future direction of the Bauhaus were building to a critical turning point in 1923: Gropius resolved to shift gears and emphasize technological design for the machine age, moving away from Itten's brand of spiritual Expressionism. Testimony from colleagues suggests

that the puppet shows, even when conflicts were aired, were taken in stride. Feininger wrote: “Aber das Schönste von allen diesen waren doch die. . . . Figuren für das Kasperle-Theater, das Klee für Felix verfertigt hat. Unbeschreiblich ausdrucksvoll jede einzelne Gestalt, sogar Porträts naher Freunde treffend in Charakterisierung, voller Humor karikiert, und des Lachens und der Begeisterung war kein Ende, wenn Felix in seiner grotesken Art eine Vorstellung gab.”<sup>51</sup> The cuteness of the puppets would have taken the sharpness out of Felix’s edgier satires.



Fig. 1.31: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Breitohrclown*), 1925. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 107.

Fig. 1.32: Hugo Erfurth, *Oskar Schlemmer*, ca. 1926–27. [www.wikiart.org/en/oskar-schlemmer](http://www.wikiart.org/en/oskar-schlemmer).

Only two of Klee’s puppets were named after real people: the art dealer *Emmy “Galka” Scheyer* (1922) and the *Selbstporträt*—and yet other figures performed as caricatures in the *Bauhaus Satires*. Kasperl made an appearance, as Feininger’s testimony suggests, and Kasperl-like performances featured other characters in these traditional roles (it is possible that Feininger

was using “Kasperle-Theater” as a more general term for hand puppetry). Additional puppets reflect the experimental influence of Bauhaus colleagues in their style and material execution and may have also served as homage-portraits. *Elektrischer Spuk* (1923), for example, is made from an electrical socket, a found object, and recalls the experimentation with materials that took place in Itten’s Preliminary Course, which Felix attended as a first-year student.

*Zündholzschachtelgeist* echoes Schlemmer’s Constructivist style and may have been intended as a gentle spoof on the school’s theater director. An even more pronounced Schlemmer portrait, *Breitohrclown*, is made from papier-mâché, the same material Schlemmer himself employed for some of his costumes, and it does smack of caricature, given Schlemmer’s baldness and protruding ears. [Figs. 1.31, 1.32] It is an especially playful interpretation given that Schlemmer’s artistic program as theater master was to transform living dancers into puppets through costuming and choreography. The puppets’ stylistic indebtedness to the artist’s friends and colleagues visualizes aspects of their artistic practices and again shows how engaged Klee was with current events. Each of these Bauhaus puppets captures the personality of a Bauhaus master not only in terms of physical resemblance, but also through the formal and material realization of the figure and its relation to their work.

The most sophisticated example capturing another person’s personality and spirit is Paul’s *Selbstporträt*. [Fig. 1.33] Made of plaster and painted with wide, unblinking eyes, the head of this puppet is built up over a beef bone, like a skeleton:

Mein Vater schuf ein Selbstportrait als Kasperlfigur, mit riesengrossen Maleraugen, einer Pelzmütze und mit Gips auf einem Rindsknochen gearbeitet.  
Folgende Szene hatte am Bauhaus . . . einen besonderen Erfolg: Emmy-Galka

Scheyer wollte meinem Vater unbedingt ein Bild von Jawlensky aufschwätzen. Jedoch sagte Klee immer wieder ‚Nein!‘ und liess sich in keiner Weise von seiner Meinung abbringen. Voller Zorn nahm nun Galka das Bild und schlug es Klee zersplitternd um die Ohren.<sup>52</sup>

Instead of Kasper's cudgel, Galka uses a painting, and both characters show their impassioned, sometimes stubborn, personalities.<sup>53</sup> The textured overcoat and hat match Paul's style. [Fig. 1.34] The puppet's cloak was likely made from something worn by Paul personally.<sup>54</sup> The artist emphasized a hole in the fabric by stitching a circle around the imperfection in contrasting thread, as if to draw attention to the worn quality of the material. This captures an aspect of the historical conditions in which it was created: hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic began in June 1921, and peaked in 1924. The puppet was not only a representation of Paul, but also a creation made from something that had likely been a part of his daily life, a jacket worn threadbare during the lean years of Weimar hyperinflation. Made from literally everyday fabric, the puppet is a perfect example of the blurring of art and life.



Fig. 1.33: Paul Klee, Untitled (*Selbstporträt*), 1922. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 80.

Fig. 1.34: Felix Klee, photograph of Paul Klee and Emmy "Galka" Scheyer, Weimar, 1922. Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 40.

It is also another example of Paul's role as an engaged parent. Far from a domineering, authoritarian father figure, Paul presents himself to his son as a modest puppet. Paul was also preparing to hand his son the reins of his artistic legacy. Felix would go on to manage his father's estate, serve as editor of Paul's diaries, give frequent interviews about the Bauhaus period, and answer scholars' questions for decades. While rooted in the moment of its creation, the figure was also a way to prepare Felix for the future. Paul passes the mantle on to his son, flaws and all. [Fig. 1.35] Created at a time when Felix, as a student at the Bauhaus, was trying to define his own artistic trajectory, *Selbstporträt* was as much about the boy's interests as it was about the father's artistic legacy. An acknowledgment and support of Felix's interest in the theater, the puppet was also an attempt to gently guide the son's talents in a direction Paul felt most productive. Paul was endorsing Felix's passion for the stage by giving himself over to it, by becoming one of his players. Aljoscha Klee, Felix's son, described the post-World War I puppets as follows: "Everything seems to indicate that Paul Klee quickly became aware of the extent of his son's talent for comedy acting because he passed . . . the direction of the theatre on to his son—consciously, I mean. He anticipated his son's question of what profession to follow, painting or theater, long before the conversation the two had in 1925, when he encouraged his son to go into acting."<sup>55</sup> Felix traced his own passion for the theater back to the days of Bauhaus puppetry: "My love of the theater dates back to those puppet-theater days, which led me to take a job as an assistant theater director at the Friedrich Theater in Dessau, where I worked from 1926 to 1928."<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 1.35: Dean Loomis, Felix Klee with a puppet of his father (*Selbstporträt*) and Emmy “Galka” Scheyer, both by Paul Klee, 1961. *Life* magazine.

As much as Paul’s puppet creations were guided by Felix’s talents and requests, the father also tried to steer his son toward certain *kinds* of theater. Unlike many of his Bauhaus contemporaries, Paul never worked on a theatrical production and preferred reading plays to seeing them performed.<sup>57</sup> Although he directed a number of different workshops and taught a range of classes, from the Preliminary Course to painting, he was never involved in the Bauhaus theatre workshop. In fact, he actively discouraged Felix from joining the workshop. Felix recalled: “Had I been on my own, I would have joined the stage workshop at the Bauhaus. However my father rejected this idea outright, saying categorically, ‘No, you won’t go into the stage workshop, that is a class for the lazy.’ He would never have vented such sharp criticism against anybody else, and today I still wonder why he did so.”<sup>58</sup> In light of Felix’s reminiscences,

it is possible that through puppets, Paul was communicating to his son his misgivings about certain artistic trends. With the exception of operas and circuses, Klee had fundamental reservations about the theatrical entertainments of his day. For instance, he criticized the notable Weimar director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), calling him “scandalous” for “having no idea about Mozart’s precise dramatic attitude[;] [Reinhardt] just set any old story to any old piece of his music.”<sup>59</sup> Klee’s theatrical taste was for opera, which he saw as a modern mode of stylization and abstraction. He attended more than three hundred opera performances in his lifetime.<sup>60</sup> Felix describes his father’s attraction to the opera (a product of his musical interests) and preference over theater: “Aufgrund dieser Musikalität fühlte er sich stärker zur Oper hingezogen als zum Theater. . . . Theatervorstellungen enttäuschten ihn fast immer.”<sup>61</sup> By creating puppet characters from the operas that he loved—*Barbier von Bagdad* (1921) and *Der Sultan* (1921), for example—Paul Klee imparted his artistic preferences to his son while simultaneously discouraging him from joining the Bauhaus theater workshop, which, in his defense, was not created to prepare students for professional stage careers, and could only confer a certificate of participation rather a formal Bauhaus degree. The satirical, fairy-tale, operatic puppets were a way of communicating the artistic values he hoped his son would carry on—as was his *Selbstporträt*, underlining the ongoing dialogue between father and son present in all the puppet gifts.

The puppets that Paul created and Felix performed were an expression of an ongoing conversation about politics, art, and life. The German tradition of giving children puppets as toys, common in bourgeois households in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was elevated in this relationship and became a source of artistic inspiration, especially during the

Bauhaus period. And Paul Klee was not the only Bauhaus artist to take child's play seriously. Photographer T. Lux Feininger (1910–2011), son of Lyonel Feininger, wrote:

The toys an artist has fashioned may serve to gain an insight into the formal ideas of their creator. If I consider, for instance, four artists who have made playthings, . . . I find it impossible to draw a dividing line between “play” and “serious work.” The “real work” of each one of them has a play-like grace and ease, and in the “toys” we find enough seriousness to remind us of the gravity of children at play.<sup>62</sup>

The artists T. Lux Feininger had in mind were the modernists he knew personally, including his own father as well as Paul Klee.<sup>63</sup> Like Klee, Lyonel Feininger was part of the Blue Rider group and appointed by Gropius to a master position at the Bauhaus. He was also an engaged father who created many toys for his three sons (who also went on to become established artists), and his son's observation regarding the line between play and work has a particular resonance in a study of Bauhaus artists.

When scholars spotlight the modernist idealization of the perceived spontaneity, immediacy, and lack of inhibitions in children's art, the “child” is frequently an abstract idealization. Yet many modern artists were themselves fathers and developed their views of children's art based on works made by or together with their kids. Unlike a modernist artist's interpretation of exotic art—seldom based on firsthand contact with a foreign culture—children were not foreign in Germany. More than a fantasy about childhood's naive purity, puppetry operated at the Bauhaus the way it did in the family: as a means to explain the world in answer to

a child's questions. The Klees' puppets explore death, the devil, war, revolutionary and reactionary politics, the Bauhaus community, and the future. The Bauhaus children were to take up the reins of Germany and all its complexities. [Fig. 1.36]



Fig. 1.36: Dean Loomis, Felix Klee performing behind a makeshift puppet theater with puppets made by his father, Paul Klee, 1961. *Life* magazine.

### **Oskar Schlemmer and the Theater Workshop**

Not only was puppetry at the Bauhaus an extension of the personal, festive, and informal creative activities of masters, apprentices, and Bauhaus children, it also played an important role in the school's official theater workshop. Although theater was not one of the original workshops

included in the Bauhaus Manifesto (it was formally added in 1921), theater came to be regarded as suited to the *Einheitskunstwerk* task. From the very beginning, and especially under Schlemmer's leadership, puppets became an important aspect of the theater workshop. The program was initially led by the Expressionist director Lothar Schreyer, and Schlemmer assumed the post of master in 1923. The year 1923 was important in the history of the Bauhaus: it marked a deliberate change from the school's initial Expressionist phase to a more rationalist, technologically inspired approach to design for mass production. Yet even Schreyer's early Expressionist, quasi-Christian theatrical experiments from the early period of the school were staged with *Spielfiguren*.<sup>64</sup> As attitudes shifted away from Expressionism toward an interest in art for the machine age, Schlemmer's puppet-inspired dances found greater favor than Schreyer's poetic dramas, yet an interest in performing objects continued. Regardless of the ongoing debates at the Bauhaus about the future of the school—from craft to mechanical design, from Expressionism to technology— puppet-like performances were a consistent feature of the theater workshop. [Fig. 1.37]



Fig. 1.37: Ernst Schneider, figurines of *Das triadische Ballett* by Oskar Schlemmer, Metropol-Theater, Berlin, 1927. Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. [www.bauhaus100.de](http://www.bauhaus100.de).

The human being, or more precisely the human body in motion, was the focus of Schlemmer's teaching and artistic practice; he aimed to "pursue the idea of metaphysical spaces, metaphysical perspectives, the metaphysical figure."<sup>65</sup> For this artist, the human was to be "the measure of all things." Schlemmer held a range of posts at the Bauhaus, and in each role he explored different ways of representing the human body. He was the leading master of the wall painting workshop, ran the stone sculpture workshop, and together with Itten served as form master in the metal workshop. He was the artistic director of the wood workshop for a time as well. During this same period, at the suggestion of Gropius, Schlemmer started teaching a figure drawing course. The program moved away from static anatomical drawings of nudes that were a mainstay of traditional art schools, yet Schlemmer's teaching and work always maintained a connection to the human form and its figurative expression. Some at the school, at times, considered his figurative art conservative in a period when artists were experimenting with nonobjective abstraction, but his approach to figure drawing nonetheless became a formal part of the Bauhaus curriculum. Schlemmer's interest in the body in space—rather than formal training in choreography, dance, or costume design (of which he had none)—led him to the stage workshop.

But Schlemmer's work in performance didn't come out of nowhere. His interest in the field emerged early in his career—a diary entry from December 1912 outlines a vision for a new kind of dance—and he choreographed a dance during a brief furlough from his military post for a regiment charity event in 1916.<sup>66</sup> Dance appears to have been connected with some of his other artistic investigations as well. Seeking different ways to modernize representations of the human body, Schlemmer developed dance experiments during the time of his service in World War I that represent a first take. His anti-mimetic approach to the stage, using life-size modernist

puppets, ensured that the Bauhaus stage looked quite different from traditional theater. At the same time, the silhouette that appears in the stage costumes—genderless bodies built from geometric shapes—is also evident in his paintings of this same period.

Schlemmer treated theater as an art form uniting all the others, analogous to Gropius's vision of architecture, rather than as training for apprentices to prepare for a professional stage career. Writing in 1961, Gropius reflected: "My own great impression of Schlemmer's stage work was to see and experience his magic of transforming dancers and actors into moving architecture."<sup>67</sup> Schlemmer understood the director's mission at the Bauhaus in his own way, namely, that design should be guided by the human body. But beyond a functional consideration of the body for ergonomic design, Schlemmer conceived of the body in a pure, abstract way. He was not interested in presenting emotional states (like Expressionist artists), nor was he preoccupied with political critique (like Dada artists). At the same time his experiments were not strictly formalistic nor completely devoid of emotional or political content. Bauhaus scholar Rainer K. Wick characterized Schlemmer as "a man in the middle" and it is a particularly apt description.<sup>68</sup> Other scholars have made similar observations. Ina Conzen emphasizes the idea of "synthesis" in his thinking.<sup>69</sup> Schlemmer experimented with abstractions of the human body rendered in geometric terms that nonetheless remain recognizably human; it was a mode of representation that captured many of the social complexities of life in the Weimar era.

It was his preoccupation with the stylized human form in motion that led to Schlemmer's interest in puppetry. Puppets blur the line between figuration and abstraction, human and machine, emotion and objectivity, art and life. For Schlemmer, puppetry offered a way to present the body according to different geometric organizations with a metaphysical overlay. Transforming the human into a puppet was means of overcoming traditional limitations, both

physical and aesthetic, and elevating the body's potential to that of a kind of truth. In a 1924 essay about the theater, Schlemmer describes his influences: "The endeavor to free man from his physical bondage and to heighten his freedom of movements beyond his native potential resulted in the substituting for the organism the mechanical human figure [*Kunstfigur*]: *the automaton and the marionette*. E. T. A. Hoffmann extolled the first of these, Heinrich von Kleist the second."<sup>70</sup> Schlemmer's literary references to two German Romantic authors—who both wrote about puppets—in an essay featuring Constructivist illustrations of the body captures an important aspect of his boundary-bending, synthesizing aesthetic. [Fig. 1.38] He created a style midway between the extremes of Romanticism and Futurism, as embodied in puppets that look half human, half machine.

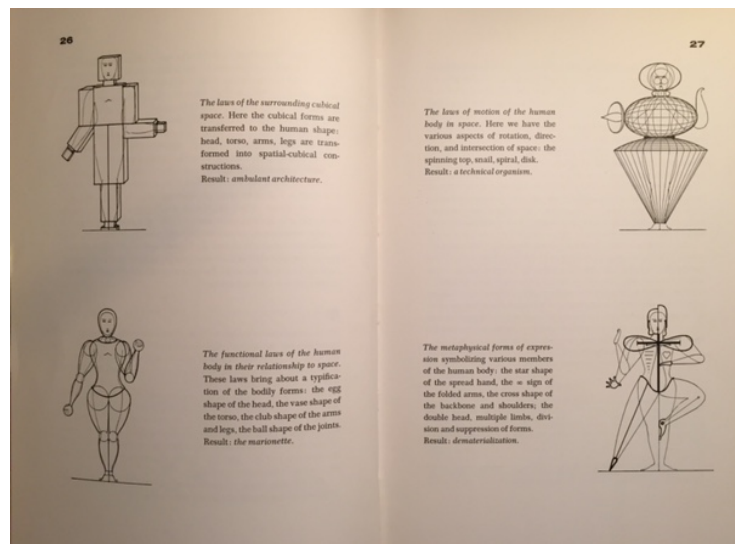


Fig. 1.38: Oskar Schlemmer, "Man and Art Figure," in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 26–27.

Hoffmann (1776–1822) and Kleist (1777–1811) are important reference points for understanding Schlemmer's approach to puppetry, and especially puppetry's relation to dance. A few of Hoffmann's stories, notably "Der Sandmann" (1817), and "Nußknacker und Mausekönig" (1816), inspired nineteenth-century ballets where ballerinas danced the role of an automaton (as

in *Coppélia*) or a cast of dancers performed a world of dolls (as in *Nußknacker*). The appeal of a human pretending to be a puppet had a precedent in dance history. In these nineteenth-century ballets, dancers attempted to model their movements after puppets while adhering to a classical ballet vocabulary, but never before had an artist attempted to transform the living human body into a puppet, as Schlemmer's costumes effectively accomplished. In Kleist's essay "Über das Marionettentheater" (1810), a philosophical treatise written in the form of a dialogue, a comparison between ballet dancers and puppets prompts a metaphysical discussion. In this fictitious exchange, one of the speakers explains how marionettes possess a grace far superior to living dancers. The human dancer is self-conscious and guilty of affectation, while the puppet's weightlessness grants it beauty:

Ich sagte, daß, so geschickt er auch die Sache seiner Paradoxe führe, er mich doch nimmermehr glauben machen würde, daß in einem mechanischen Gliedermann mehr Anmut enthalten sein könne, als in dem Bau des menschlichen Körpers. Er versetzte, daß es dem Menschen schlechthin unmöglich wäre, den Gliedermann darin auch nur zu erreichen. Nur ein Gott könne sich, auf diesem Felde, mit der Materie messen; und hier sei der Punkt, wo die beiden Enden der ringförmigen Welt in einander griffen.<sup>71</sup>

Schlemmer's dances are an answer to the debate: Which is more graceful, the human body or a puppet? The Bauhaus master praised Kleist's treatise in a 1927 essay specifically recognizing the superiority of the soulless puppet in comparison with the human body: "Ich müsste H. v. Kleist's Essah [*sic*] wörtlich abschreiben, um deren Besonderheit und Überlegenheit gegenüber der

menschlichen Gestalt und Bewegung einhellig darzustellen.”<sup>72</sup> To drive the point home, Schlemmer introduced the 1922 premier performance of *Das triadische Ballett* by having the actor Kurt Junker read passages from Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater.”

*Das triadische Ballett*, Schlemmer’s best-known dance, was danced a number of times with variations from one performance to the next, and its reception depended on the audience. The production debuted at the Württembergisches Landestheater in Stuttgart in September 1922, and was last performed for an international dance competition in Paris in 1932.<sup>73</sup> *Das triadische Ballett* was very well received when it was presented in Weimar in 1923 with an audience full of Bauhäusler, but flopped in Dresden a few days later. Bauhaus scholar Arnd Wesemann estimates that only around one thousand people saw the dance during the Weimar era, yet few dance works have had as great an impact, and it was especially influential at the Bauhaus.<sup>74</sup> There was no “official” version of the ballet, given that it changed from performance to performance, and Schlemmer appears to have deliberately wanted it to remain flexible, a space for possibilities, even suggesting that organizers of the 1932 Paris performance change the music, sequence, and costumes.<sup>75</sup> It was staged as a full-length feature and as a single act within larger revues. In fact, Schlemmer regularly changed the musical score for the dance but always selected rigorous and bold compositions by composers including: Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951), Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), or George Frederic Handel (1685–1759), for example.

While no film recordings of any of these Weimar-era performances are presently available,<sup>76</sup> and Schlemmer’s dance notations are difficult to decipher, aspects of the performance have nonetheless been reconstructed by choreographers and scholars based on limited archival documents, the memories of Bauhäusler, and, most significantly, the experience of the costumes themselves.<sup>77</sup> A drawing from 1926 outlining the play’s structure offers an

overview of the version of the dance staged with three dancers (two male and one female) in three acts and eighteen different costumes—each costume completely concealing the dancer's body and greatly restricting his or her movements. [Fig. 1.39] Made of papier-mâché, cardboard, wire, padding, board, and fabric, they were heavy, cumbersome, restrictive, and uncomfortable, but produced the visual transformation of humans into puppets.

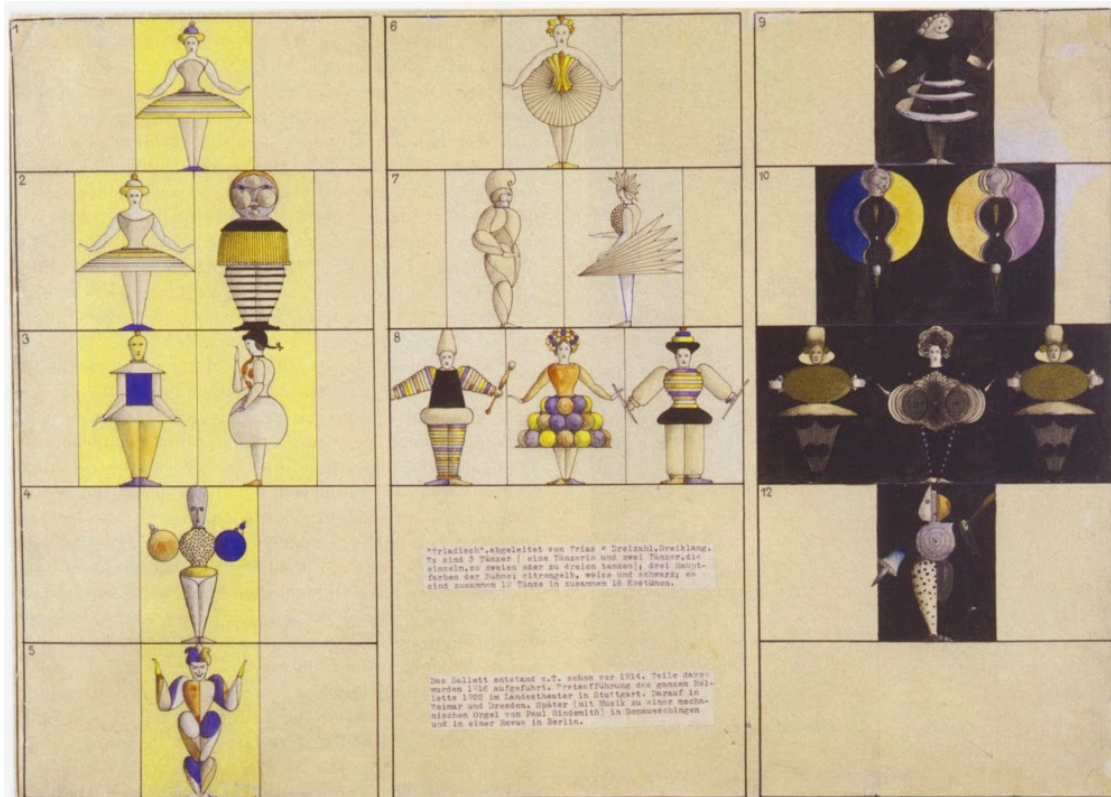


Fig. 1.39: Oskar Schlemmer, costume designs for the *Das triadische Ballett*, 1926. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum. [www.harvardartmuseums.org](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org).



Fig. 1.40: Oskar Schlemmer, *Goldkugel*, 1922. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Ina Conzen, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 216.

While Schlemmer was influenced by Hoffmann and Kleist, the *Das triadische Ballett* was also inspired by the work of his contemporary, the modernist composer Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951), who was himself inspired by much older theatrical traditions. The musical piece *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) became the departure point for *Das triadische Ballett*.<sup>78</sup> Although Schlemmer had already come up with an idea for a new kind of dance, his correspondence from January 1913 describes his impression of a performance of this Schönberg melodrama featuring a woman in a modern Pierrot costume.<sup>79</sup> Just as Paul Klee’s *Kasperl* puppet borrowed a modernized figure from the *commedia dell’arte*, so too did Schlemmer’s *Das triadische Ballett* appropriate its *commedia* stock figures by way of modernist theater. Schlemmer wrote: “Great has been the variety of native costumes developed during the course of human history, the number of genuine stage costumes has stayed very small. They are the few standardized costumes of the *commedia dell’arte*: Harlequin, Pierrot, Columbine, etc.; and they have remained basic and authentic to this day.”<sup>80</sup> Although *Das triadische Ballett* has no plot, the influence of the Pierrot story is evident in its costumes. For dancer Albert Burger’s costume (1922) from *Das*

*triadische Ballett*, the black skull cap and wide white collar recall Pierrot's costume rendered in stiff materials. But even such abstract costumes, the resemblance to *commedia dell'arte* characters is apparent. Witness *Goldkugel* (1922), a modern costume that also borrows the prominent white collar, skull cap, and puffy-looking, oversize body covering typical of a Pierrot mime. [Fig. 1.40] The dancerly possibilities for a performer in this costume are quite limited: the hands are concealed inside the gold sphere bodice, and leg movement is limited to a tiny goose-step as a vertical metal striped cage envelops each limb, freezing and disguising the bending of a dancer's knees. Movement is determined by the costume since the body is so severely restricted. Yet the costume materializes an aspect of the Pierrot character from his conventional role in the stock tale: the three-way love triangle between Pierrot, the Harlequin, and the beautiful Columbine, where Pierrot is helpless when the Harlequin seduces his beloved. The movement of the dancer wearing this costume can be understood as a physicalization of Pierrot's role.



Fig. 1.41: Oskar Schlemmer, detail from costume designs for *Das triadische Ballett*, 1926. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum. [www.harvardartmuseums.org](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org).

Schlemmer also created a few Harlequin-inspired costumes. A sketch in his *Figure Plan for Das triadische Ballett* shows a costume with the brightly colored geometric checkered pattern of the traditional outfit of the *commedia dell'arte* trickster. [Fig. 1.41, see fig. 1.39] In a

more sophisticated way, however, Schlemmer's *Der Abstrakte* (1922) is an updated, modern interpretation of this theatrical hero. [Fig. 1.42] Here, a zigzag pattern is not printed onto the costume's fabric, but an artifact of the asymmetrical, bulky, geometric forms concealing the dancer's body. Like the traditional Harlequin, *Der Abstrakte* is masked and carries a cudgel for slapstick moments. The Harlequin character was known for his agility and frequently performed acrobatic tricks on the *commedia* stage, and here it is Schlemmer's costume itself that creates the physical spectacle while confining the dancer's movements. The left leg of *Der Abstrakte* is enveloped in a large, inflexible, padded covering whose stiffness governs the performer's gait. The right leg, on the other hand, in a black stocking and unrestricted, would have appeared practically invisible to the audience against a dark background. Such trousers result in large, lunging steps creating a diagonal line across the body from toe to waist. The arm coverings are also unequally weighted and divide the body into upper and lower halves in addition to left and right. Changing the position of each hand in relation to the spectator—pointing directly at the viewer or seen from the side—creates different shapes. The lumbering, shape-shifting, unexpected motions of *Der Abstrakte*, a product of the costume rather than deliberate acrobatics on the part of the performer, creates new dance movements and a spectacle of disequilibrium.



Fig. 1.42: Oskar Schlemmer, *Der Abstrakte*, 1922. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Ina Conzen, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 220.

Even when the costume itself did not so strictly govern a dancer's physical movements, Schlemmer sought to materialize and match certain shapes with specific body motions. The figure that most closely resembles a classical ballerina *en pointe* wears a cardboard bowl-shaped tutu with painted concentric circles. The color scheme and motif are picked up on her cap, also with painted circles and a knob on top. The choreography called for the dancer to move in circles, in turn creating the effect of a spinning top.<sup>81</sup> [Fig. 1.43] The same ballerina would also appear later in the dance dressed as *Die Spirale* (1922), her circular motions in this costume creating quite a different effect. [Fig. 1.44] Rather than looking like a toy top, the metallic sheen and coiled wiring of *Die Spirale* resembles something mechanical. The dancer is not transformed into a robot, nor does she appear to be an automaton à la Hoffmann, but she is required to move with the precision of a machine in motion. To dance *Die Spirale*, or a costume such as *Goldkugel*, involved the dancer holding their arms aloft or tight against their body (inside a

costume), thus eliminating one means of balancing. Such demands not only create the visual impression of performing puppets—the defiance of gravity described in Kleist’s dialogue—but also turn the dancer into a puppet in a physical way. Rather than have a puppeteer manipulate the strings, rods, and body of an inanimate performing object, the living body of the dancer is controlled externally by the inanimate puppet costume. The costumes themselves created much of the dance, yet these movements also required conditioned dancers with athletic prowess to give the appearance of endless endurance and gravity defiance. The effect on stage is the answer to Kleist’s philosophical debate.

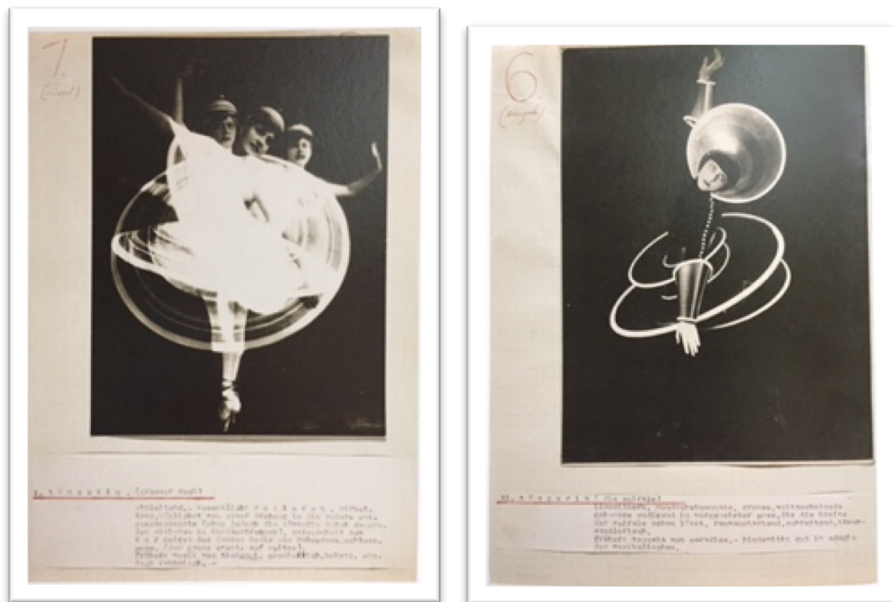


Fig. 1.43: Oskar Schlemmer, design, Atelier Grill (Karl Grill) and Ernst Schneider, photography, director’s notes for Hermann Scheren for *Das triadische Ballett* with Daisy Spies dancing *Tänzerin*, 1927. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Ina Conzen, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 224.

Fig. 1.44: Oskar Schlemmer, design, Atelier Grill (Karl Grill) and Ernst Schneider, photography, director’s notes for Hermann Scheren for *Das triadische Ballett* with Daisy Spies dancing *Die Spirale*, 1927. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. Ina Conzen, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 226.

Schlemmer wrote: "I certainly see great possibilities in the realm of the ballet and the pantomime, both of which are much freer of historical ballast than the theater and the opera. . . . The new artistic medium was a much more direct one: the human body."<sup>82</sup> Ballet and pantomime are indeed apt characterizations of Schlemmer's approach to the stage: no words are spoken, narrative is minimal or nonexistent, and reduced stage sets in bold colors maximize the visual impact of moving costumes. But this statement, in the context of *Das triadische Ballett*, also reveals the paradox at the heart of Schlemmer's art: while the human body is a direct vehicle for expression, the living, breathing human body is subsumed into the costume. While Schlemmer's dances extend and transform ballet and pantomime traditions much like expressionistic *Ausdruckstanz* during this same period, it is also the complete opposite of early twentieth-century dancing that emphasized the unconstrained, un-girdled, barefooted, Duncaneque expressiveness of the body. In a 1925 letter, Schlemmer described his ballet thus: "It is as far from the body dance of modern dancers as from the ever more naked ornamental kitsch found in revues."<sup>83</sup> While the body takes center stage, the individual dancer's body is simultaneously erased by the costume's concealment, and the dancer's movements limited by the heavy papier-mâché outfits. Schlemmer's concern about historical ballast, his conscious negation of contemporary "body dance," and his obsessive drive to create something new grounds his inventions in a specific historical moment. In a different essay he writes: "Natürlich konnte das Zeitalter der Maschine, der Technik, der Mechanik nicht ohne Einfluß bleiben auf die Künste und vollends nicht auf ein Gebiet, das sich insonderheit in der Bewegung offenbart, in der Bewegung des menschlichen Körpers, im Tanz."<sup>84</sup>

Schlemmer sought a new vision of the human at a point in history when notions of the physical body were changing as a result of new technologies, and more specific to the

development of the *Das triadische Ballett*, when the mechanical warfare of World War I was altering visions of male bodies. While Schlemmer originally volunteered in the German army as a medical orderly, he was eventually transferred to infantry, and later served in a topography unit. It is not a coincidence that the preliminary experiments for *Das triadische Ballett*—a few *pas de deux* fragments performed by professional dancers—were staged in the winter of 1916 while Schlemmer was on leave from his military post to recover from several injuries sustained as an infantryman. Although he had originally signed up for military service in 1914 out of a “love of the fatherland,”<sup>85</sup> the experience of battle altered his thinking about the individual. This is what Schlemmer wrote in a letter from the field in December 1916, immediately before returning to Stuttgart and working on the dances that evolved into *Das triadische Ballett*: “The mind has not yet fallen under dictatorship, but the passage for its freedom is considerably narrowed when one’s life and limbs are at the disposal of the state. Small consolation that ‘whatever befalls us is for our own good.’”<sup>86</sup> Mention of dictatorship may be a metaphorical characterization of the plight of the soldier, or a specific reference to the military dictatorship of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff. Either way, it is hardly a heroic battle cry. Schlemmer’s sardonic lament reflects the depersonalization that is the soldier’s fate and articulates the very literal threat of death and dismemberment.

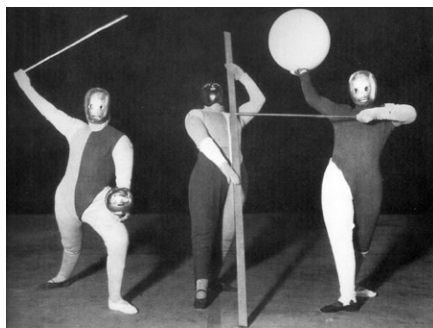


Fig. 1.45: Oskar Schlemmer, design, Ruth Hollos-Consemüller, *Formentanz* with dancers Oskar Schlemmer, Werner Siedhoff, and Walter Kaminsky, ca. 1927. Arnold L. Lehman and Brenda Richardson, eds., *Oskar Schlemmer* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1986), 143.

Some of Schlemmer's costumes are importantly connected to World War I and present the body as both armored and vulnerable. While his later padded costumes, especially those for his *Bauhaus Dances* such as *Formentanz* (1927) and *Raumtanz* (1926), resemble the protective gear used in fencing, a few costumes from *Das triadische Ballett* evoke imagery specific to the period of the dance's genesis during the Great War. [Fig. 1.45] *Scheibentänzer* (1922), a costume involving a black suit to make the dancer's torso, arms, and legs invisible against a dark background, defined the body through an outlined negative space cut into a golden disk. While the body is visually defined as a silhouette—an absence—the visual emphasis of what *is* present appears up top, the dancer's helmet-like mask. [Fig. 1.46] More than a simple face-covering mask, this piece envelops the wearer's entire head like medieval armor. Yet the stylized spike atop the sphere, at the center of the metal head, also recalls the *Pickel* of the Prussian *Pickelhaub* military helmet. In addition to such visual references to symbols of protection and military uniforms, other costumes allude to amputation and injury. *Der Abstrakte*, for example, is armed with instruments of attack and defense (a baton and bayoneted shield), yet its legs simultaneously suggest a military injury. Wounds to the extremities resulting in amputation were common during World War I, and the black-stockinged leg of *Der Abstrakte* creates the impression of a missing limb against a dark background while the stiff encasement of the left leg results in an exaggeratedly limping gait. The *Goldkugel* has no arms, and the title in German translates as “gold sphere” but also “gold bullet.” [See fig. 1.40]

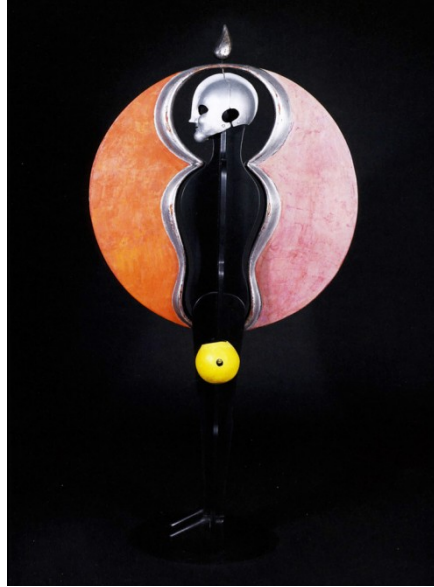


Fig. 1.46: Oskar Schlemmer, *Scheibentänzer*, 1922. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Ina Conzen, ed., *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 221.

A few contemporary commentators have noted the amputation and prosthetic aspects of Schlemmer's costumes too.<sup>87</sup> Art historian Juliet Koss describes *Space Dance* (ca. 1926), a later Bauhaus dance that also features full-body costumes, thus: "The calculated angles of the dancers' arms and legs likewise suggest synthetic limbs."<sup>88</sup> Paul Paret draws an explicit connection between World War I and Schlemmer's dance: "*Das triadische Ballett* was first performed during the war, and its use of restricted motion, prosthetic devices, and protective encasements evokes not only playful whimsy but also the soldier's experience of cumbersome gear, bodily mutilation, and artificial limbs."<sup>89</sup> Eric Michaud associates World War I with abstractions of the human body in Schlemmer's *Das triadische Ballett*, as well as Pablo Picasso's (1881–1973) costumes for *Parade* (1917), Giacomo Balla's (1871–1958) *Fireworks* (1917), and Fortunato Depero's (1892–1960) sets for the Ballets Russes's *Song of the Nightingale* (1916–17).<sup>90</sup> Schlemmer's letter describing a soldier's limbs at the disposal of the state was not simply a

metaphor, but an actual description of the state of affairs during World War I, an event he responded to through his art.



Fig. 1.47: Erich Consemüller, Oskar Schlemmer as the *Musikalischer Clown*, 1927. Consemüller Archiv Berlin, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. [www.bauhaus100.de](http://www.bauhaus100.de).

While certain aspects of Schlemmer's plays may be unsettling, his designs are at the same time very fun and frequently resemble toys or Erzgebirge Christmas figurines, a quality alluded to in Paret's description of Schlemmer's work as "playful whimsy." Play is vital to understanding the Bauhaus theater workshop ethos, and Schlemmer's stage pieces were not completely separate from the spirit of Paul Klee's hand puppets; the theater master's works were also performed at Bauhaus festivals and parties like Felix Klee's satires. At celebrations such as the Fasching Party, Schlemmer's clown costumes added to the jovial spirit. [Fig. 1.47] Inspired by his preoccupation with puppetry, his students created marionettes from wood, wire, and string for more conventional puppet shows, and these shapes echoed the master's costumes. Kurt Schmidt (1901–1991) and Toni Hergt's (1886–?) puppets for *Die Abenteuer des kleinen Buckligen* (1923) were used to perform this tale from the *1,001 Arabian Nights* under

Schlemmer's stage direction. [Fig. 1.48] The bulbous hunchback immediately recalls the padded bodies of the *Bauhaus Dances*, while the linear, flatter figures resemble the body's extended lines from Schlemmer's *Pole Dance* (1927). Even though the puppets were used for a more traditional, narrative-driven fairy-tale puppet show, their execution in wood underlines the Bauhaus's modern ambitions for the technological age: the puppet pieces appear to be machine turned or jigsaw cut rather than hand carved. As a product of the stage workshop, they can be seen as a kind of complement to the stage master and suggest an interpretation of Schlemmer's work by some of his students. They highlight the whimsical and innocent dimension of his metaphysical stage project, as well as the range of moods in Schlemmer's creative undertakings.



Fig. 1.48: Kurt Schmidt and Toni Hergt, a selection of puppets from *Die Abenteuer des kleinen Buckligen*, directed by Oskar Schlemmer, 1923. Puppentheatersammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, eds., *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 167.

But the attitude behind some of Schlemmer's art is harder to parse. His costumes were not an explicit political statement like some of the Klees' satirical puppets. Schlemmer's puppets

were unquestionably an avant-garde response to World War I, but they also had a conservative undercurrent. The opposite of erotic, Expressionistic “body dance,” his works may also have been taken by some viewers as a satire of Weimar cabaret and some of the gender-bending kinky mischief popular during the period. His obsession with scale and form drew on the aesthetic projects of classical antiquity, and may have carried, surprisingly, more conventional undertones. Although Schlemmer designed clown costumes during his Bauhaus period, he hated playing the role: “At our last performance here I played a musical clown (against my will and only because no one else would have done it right).”<sup>91</sup> Schlemmer transcribed a review of the *Bauhaus Dances*—a performance seen by approximately fifteen hundred people—in a diary entry from May 1929 that underlines the confusion surrounding the dances’ reception: “Why is the audience so enthusiastic? Out of primitiveness, out of a spirit of opposition, out of a sense for contemporary culture? Or due to a misunderstanding of the comic aspects, a love for *variété*? . . . ‘What is this?’ Mechanistic cabaret, metaphysical eccentricity, spiritual tightrope walking, ironic *variété*? Is it perhaps all of these together, sometimes more of one, sometimes more of the other?”<sup>92</sup> Schlemmer never answers these questions. The reviewer quoted by Schlemmer described the performance as a success, but also as a riddle.<sup>93</sup>

Politics, or a failure to represent a clear and specific political position, became a cause of friction between Schlemmer and some of his colleagues. Even for the early performances of *Das triadische Ballett*, such as the 1923 staging in Weimar during Bauhaus Week, Schlemmer’s two principal dancers, Albert Burger and Elsa Hötzel, with whom he initially developed the choreography, were at first hesitant to perform given their reservations about appearing in a work associated with the Bauhaus.<sup>94</sup> After Hannes Meyer assumed the role of Bauhaus director in 1928, Schlemmer’s ambiguous politics ran afoul of the new leader: “Toward the Theater, my

special area, [Meyer] wants a social and political slant, which rubs me the wrong way. And besides, I have received such unanimous praise for what I have done thus far that I see no reason to change my course.”<sup>95</sup> His students too began to find fault with the politics of his theatrical principles. Art historian Karin von Maur cites this as the reason for Schlemmer’s departure from the school in 1929: “His abstract concept of theatre and dances caused some political controversy among his students, with the result that Schlemmer took up an appointment at the Staatliche Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe in Breslau.”<sup>96</sup> Schlemmer did not wish show solidarity with Meyer’s left-leaning political positions, nor did he seek to deny a vision of the revolutionary potential for art or the role of the artist. His “man in the middle” approach, to recall Rainer K. Wick’s description, adds ambiguity to the riddle of Schlemmer’s works, and this aspect of his art troubled some of his peers, especially as political orientations shifted more explicitly to the left under Meyer’s directorship.

The alliance of nationalist parties in Thuringia’s parliament that forced the Bauhaus’s move from Weimar to Dessau was just the beginning of political attacks on the school. Bauhaus Dessau was shut down by the Nazis in 1932. At this point the Nazis were rapidly consolidating power throughout Germany. Despite Nazi success in the July 1932 Reichstag elections—they won 37.4 percent of the popular vote<sup>97</sup>—the school relocated a third time to Berlin under the directorship of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, only to close definitively in 1933 after just six months in the capital. Even after the school was closed, the persecution of individual artists continued. Paul Klee fled to Switzerland. Schlemmer too was part of the Nazi victimization. He lost his teaching position at the art academy in Breslau, he was banned from selling his art in Germany, and several of his works were included in the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition. There is no question that Schlemmer suffered financial and emotional losses during World War II up

until his death in 1945. The traditional art historical narrative of the Bauhaus emphasizes the Nazis' hostility toward modern art, and this is absolutely true. Yet this presupposes a straightforward antagonism between avant-garde artists and totalitarian politics. The political opinions of individuals at the Bauhaus were murkier than the Nazi bill that unambiguously shut down the school.

Judging from much of the published record at least, it appears that Schlemmer was also “a man in the middle” when it came to German politics. Hannes Meyer, the Bauhaus director about whom Schlemmer complained, encouraged leftist politics, and allowed communist-inspired views to grow and student groups to become more radical. Schlemmer was by no means the only master at the school averse to Meyer's politics and leadership style, so his displeasure with the director may not solely have been because of Meyer's leftist leanings. (Meyer's communism was ultimately the reason he was dismissed from the directorship by the city of Dessau in August 1930.) Of course, *not* being a leftist revolutionary is no proof of being a Nazi sympathizer. Like most Schlemmer scholars, art historian Faith M. Holland characterizes Schlemmer's project as apolitical—“his conception was of a theater of universal types, neither political nor literary”—and much of the scholarship follows this apolitical interpretation.<sup>98</sup>

Schlemmer's theater project did aim at loftier, nonpartisan goals, so this interpretation is not wrong. But it is also a bit misleading, because it only captures the artist's political allegiances during the Weimar period and misses some of what happened in his career after 1933. In 1919, immediately after the November Revolution and the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm, Schlemmer indeed advocated that German art should provide an ethical model for transforming the world, rather than itself serve as a catalyst for political revolution.<sup>99</sup> In various writings from around the Bauhaus period, he articulated a position that art should transcend any specific political

partisanship. But his statements and artistic production changed during the Third Reich.

Although Schlemmer was targeted by the Nazis and his personal life was negatively affected by this condemnation, his actual political opinions during the 1930s were more complicated. A letter from June 1933 to Gunta Stölzl (1897–1983), a Bauhaus master and head of the weaving workshop, was very approving toward National Socialism. He aligned his artwork with Nazi principles: “Ich fühle mich rein und meine Kunst streng den nat. soz. Grundsätzen entsprechend, nämlich, heroisch, stählern-romantisch, unsentimental, hart, scharf, klar typenschaffend’ usw.”<sup>100</sup>

Schlemmer tried to avoid condemnation during the Nazi period by attempting to find accommodation within the regime, especially in the early days of the Reich. In his book about the situation of artists in Nazi Germany, historian Jonathan Petropoulos describes an episode from April 1933, when Schlemmer corresponded with Reich Minister Bernhard Rust to defend himself against “accusations” that he was a Jew.<sup>101</sup> Schlemmer wrote: “Als deutscher Mensch und Künstler protestiere ich mit aller Entschiedenheit gegen die Verdächtigung, ein Jude zu sein. . . Von dem Rektoren und Präzeptoren Schlemmer in Schlüchtern, Hessen, abstammend, ist meine christlich-protestantische Herkunft bis zum Dreißigjährigen Krieg makellos nachgewiesen.”<sup>102</sup> In another letter to Rust written a month later, quoted by Ina Conzen, he uses the same “heroic, steely-romantic” language as he did in correspondence with Gunta Stölzl—language, Conzen notes, that quotes a speech by Joseph Goebbels, when he writes that he had “from the very outset always met the demands made of art by Minister Goebbels, namely to create an art which was ‘heroic, steely-romantic, unsentimental, communal and creative of new types.’”<sup>103</sup> Schlemmer also wrote to Goebbels in 1933 to express his position that the modernist artists attacked in defamatory exhibitions had been unpolitical artists, who had gone to war in 1914 for their ideals.<sup>104</sup> Scholar Winfried Nerdinger notes that Schlemmer wrestled with his position within

and toward National Socialism.<sup>105</sup> And Jonathan Petropoulos also describes Schlemmer's correspondence with Count Klaus von Baudissin, the Nazi director of the Folkwang Museum in Essen, in which they discussed artistic policies; von Baudissin, one of the most influential museum directors in terms of defining "degenerate art," promised Schlemmer that the artist's murals, which had been moved to a storeroom, would not be destroyed or painted over (Schlemmer's Folkwang Museum murals were eventually destroyed).<sup>106</sup> Today, scholarly access to Schlemmer's archives is curtailed, as Dr. Wolf Eiermann, the conservator of Schlemmer's archive explains: "Ich möchte darauf hinweisen, dass die Familie Schlemmer schon vor vielen Jahren den größten Teil der Dokumente zum Thema 'Bühne' aus dem Archiv abgezogen hat."<sup>107</sup> Conzen writes, "Until 1937 he continued to hope, like many of his fellow artists, to persuade the Nazis of his affinity with their ideas on state art."<sup>108</sup>



Fig. 1.49: Oskar Schlemmer, *Reihe von Figuren mit erhobenen Armen*, design for the Congress Hall at the Deutsches Museum Munich, 1934. Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung* (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 126.

This attempt to find accommodation was expressed not only in his letters and writings, but also in his artistic output. Schlemmer's puppet and stage activities stopped and he instead turned to older art forms, including wall mosaics. In fact, Schlemmer entered a wall mosaic design competition for the Congress Hall in the Deutsches Museum, Munich, in 1934. [Fig. 1.49] Blond female figures, shown in profile, stand in marching rows holding a Nazi salute, as if on parade. Describing this work, Schlemmer praised his own design: "Meine Entwürfe sind nicht schlecht . . . ich habe als einziger, die Volksgemeinschaft darzustellen versucht."<sup>109</sup> These are not the sexually ambiguous characters of his earlier stage work, but altered abstractions. Juliet Koss, who also discusses Schlemmer's connection to Nazi politics in her article on Bauhaus puppetry, describes this drawing as "a return to Jugendstil ideals following the androgynous padding of their 1920s forebears."<sup>110</sup> There is also a notable compositional change from his earlier works: the group shown in this mosaic design presents all figures facing the same direction, whereas it was typical of works from the Weimar period to show groups of people looking in different directions within the same frame. [Fig. 1.50] This work, however, shows figures from only one perspective, who themselves would have only been able to see one side of things. While Schlemmer's costumes may have imposed certain movements on the dancers, a static mural removes the living body completely, and this mural design shows only a view from the right.



Fig. 1.50: Oskar Schlemmer, *Bauhaustreppe*, 1932. Museum of Modern Art, New York. [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

Juliet Koss’s discussion of archival discoveries connecting Schlemmer to Nazism cautions against reading Schlemmer’s work from the 1920s in relation to his political position in the early 1930s: “Creative work never merely illustrates a political orientation that has been fully worked out through years in advance, and the dolls at the Bauhaus were neither Nazi sympathizers nor leftist troublemakers, neither wholly celebratory nor entirely critical of their environment.”<sup>111</sup> Koss is correct: it would be too much of a stretch to call Schlemmer’s puppet dances from the 1920s “proto-fascist.” But his political opinions from the 1930s cannot be completely separated from his overall project, and he did explicitly express his opinion that his earlier works were not at odds with Nazism. Schlemmer joined the Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts and remained a member through the war.<sup>112</sup> Instead of bracketing off Schlemmer’s conservative political expressions in the post-1933 period, it is instructive to reflect on how such a shift could occur and what core concepts remained intact from his Weimar days. Although

different from his Bauhaus works, Schlemmer's later wall mural was not a complete rupture from his earlier artistic output—the human body is still a kind of impersonal abstraction subject to manipulation.



Fig. 1.51: Paul Klee, *Maske rote Jude*, 1933. Michael and Judy Steinhardt Collection, New York. Pamela Kort ed., *Paul Klee 1933* (Cologne: Walter König, 2003), 263.

The example of Paul Klee reminds us that there were Bauhaus artists who did not attempt to find accommodation with the Third Reich. Klee continued to produce art during the Third Reich, but he never tolerated the Nazi regime. After a decade at the Bauhaus, he moved to a teaching post at the Dusseldorf Academy of Fine Arts, a position from which he was removed in April 1933 after only two years. “Accused” by Nazis of being a Jew and a cultural Bolshevik, he was asked to prove his Aryan heritage. In a letter to his family from the year 1933 Klee asserted: “Wenn es auch wahr wäre, daß ich Jude bin und aus Galizien stammte, so würde dadurch an dem Wert meiner Person und meiner Leistung nicht ein Jota geändert. Diesen meinen persönlichen Standpunkt, der meint, daß ein Jude und ein Ausländer an sich nicht minderwertiger ist als ein

Deutscher und Inländer, darf ich von mir aus nicht verlassen, weil ich mir sonst ein komisches Denkmal für immer setze.”<sup>113</sup> His artwork from the year, while subtle, offers a political critique of the Nazi worldview and an affirmation of this stance. [Fig. 1.51] Nor was Klee’s antipathy toward National Socialism merely a reaction to his dismissal from the art academy or inclusion in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition; his antagonism toward Hitler appears in his art as early as 1931 in the drawing *Stamtischler* (1931). [Fig. 1.52] This caricatured sketch—with a title satirizing the dictator’s political beginnings and the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch—underscores the artist’s abiding attention to political matters and anti-Nazi stance.



Fig. 1.52: Paul Klee, *Stamtischler*, 1931. Kunstmuseum Bern. Hans Suter, *Paul Klee and His Illness* (Basel: Karger, 2010), 158.

Although Klee and Schlemmer were viewed as less ideologically engaged than some of their more overtly political Bauhaus colleagues, the politics of each artist comes to the fore when we examine their puppetry. Created in response to the trauma of war and evolving with the

experiences of social change in the Weimar Republic, their works offer a powerful example of how puppetry can take radically different shapes in the same time and place. The visual styles, performance features, and the worldview each artist represents are quite distinct. Klee's puppets, used for satirical shows, harnessed youthful energy and playful subversion in intimate gatherings of family, friends, and the Bauhaus crew. Schlemmer's puppet dances transformed living people into puppets for performances without words on the Bauhaus stage and beyond. Not only do they represent the range of artistic expression at the school, but they also reveal that Bauhaus artists, even those victimized by the Nazis, created works that could be moved left or right.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Klee, *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Gropius, *Programm des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar* (Weimar: Bauhaus, 1919), 1, [https://monoskop.org/images/c/c3/Gropius\\_Walter\\_Programm\\_des\\_Staatlichen\\_Bauhauses\\_in\\_Weimar\\_1919.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/c/c3/Gropius_Walter_Programm_des_Staatlichen_Bauhauses_in_Weimar_1919.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Tut Schlemmer, trans. Krishna Winston (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 139.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, eds., *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009). This exhibition and catalogue helped upend a view of the Bauhaus established by the MoMA itself, together with Gropius, in its 1953 exhibition on the school. Gropius also reissued the Bauhaus Bücher (a series of publication produced by the Bauhaus by different modernist authors from 1925–1930) with his own introductions, thus granting himself the final word. Other scholars have written on the importance of revisiting received Bauhaus narratives. Kathleen James-Chakraborty, for example, writes: “It is difficult not to romanticize the Bauhaus. . . . That it is possible to exaggerate its independence from mass culture and its political purity does not mean that those affiliated with it and the art they produced were not often original, critical, committed, and influential. Such exaggeration does, however, drain their personal and communal struggles of much of the vitality that so animated the school itself, as well as set a standard for uncomplicated moral behavior that is dangerously naïve.” Kathleen James-Chakraborty, “Introduction,” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War*, ed. Kathleen James-Chakraborty (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xix.

- <sup>5</sup> For a catalogue of all Klee's extant puppets and a discussion of each, see Christine Hopfengart and Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek, eds., *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 111–42.
- <sup>6</sup> Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), xiii.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.
- <sup>8</sup> Felix Klee, "Einführung," in Pierre von Allmen and Felix Klee, *Paul Klee: Puppen, Plastiken, Reliefs, Masken, Theater* (Bern: Edition Galerie suisse de Paris, Neuchâtel, 1979), 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 420–24.
- <sup>10</sup> Juliet Kinchin, "Hide and Seek: Remapping Modern Design and Childhood," in *Century of the Child: Growing by Design 1900–2000*, ed. Juliet Kinchin and Aiden O'Connor (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 16.
- <sup>11</sup> Kinchin highlights recent scholarship on De Stijl designs for children by male designers.
- <sup>12</sup> Felix Klee, *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents*, 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898–1918*, 421.
- <sup>14</sup> Felix Klee, *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents*, 22.
- <sup>15</sup> Marianne Ahlfeld-Heymann, *Und trotzdem überlebt. Ein jüdisches Schicksal aus Köln durch Frankreich nach Israel 1905–1955, mit Erinnerungen an Paul Klee* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1994), 84.
- <sup>16</sup> Felix Klee, "Paul Klees Marionetten," in *Theater, Bühne, Bild*, ed. Walter Loosli (Köniz: Kunstwoche Köniz, 1983), 113.
- <sup>17</sup> Christine Hopfengart, "Hybrid Creatures: Klee's Hand Puppets between Art and Kasperl Theater," in *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 15.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Paul Klee painted approximately seven angels during the 1910s and 1920s. See Zentrum Paul Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: The Angels* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 16–23. For examples of his angels from the 1930s, see pp. 25–95. The Benjamin essay referenced is Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. with intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253–64.
- <sup>20</sup> This puppet may have been influenced by Hannah Höch's *Dada Puppen*, exhibited in 1920 at Die Erste Internationale Dada-Messe, Berlin (see chapter 2). Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek also notes this similarity in *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 127.
- <sup>21</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 127.
- <sup>22</sup> The fabric dress of *Mrs. Death* was replaced in 1970, based on the original.
- <sup>23</sup> Ahlfeld-Heymann, *Und trotzdem überlebt*, 84.
- <sup>24</sup> The catalogue entry for the puppet *Vogelscheuchengespenst* also addresses Klee's preoccupation with ghosts but does not connect the work to World War I. Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 132.
- <sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between *Vogelscheuchengespenst* and *Stiefgrossmutter* see Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 132.
- <sup>26</sup> Felix Klee, cited in *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 116.
- <sup>27</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 119. The catalogue entry for this puppet identifies the *bonnet rouge* as a symbol of radical democracy and relates the image to other paintings from Klee's oeuvre.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. The catalogue entry for this puppet also addresses the connection to the Räterepublik.

<sup>29</sup> Allan Mitchel, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 341. Other scholars, including those cited by Mitchel, estimate a number closer to one thousand.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Klee to Alfred Kubin, May 12, 1919, reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Paul Klee: Das Frühwerk, 1883–1922* (Munich: Die Galerie, 1979), 93.

<sup>31</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 120.

<sup>32</sup> For example, there is a peasant character in Franz Graf von Pocci, “Die stolze Hildegard oder Asprian mit dem Zauberspiegel,” in *Sämtliche Kasperlkomödien*, Vol. 2 (Munich: Verlag Eitzold & Co., 1909), 30–63. The stock character appears in other von Pocci plays as well.

<sup>33</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Hopfengart suggests that the *Russian Peasant* puppet may be a portrait of the Russian artist Alexi Jawlensky (1864–1941). This seems possible, especially in the context of Klee’s puppet portraits of his artist friends. Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 116–17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Justus H. Ulbricht, “The Bauhaus and Weimar Republic: Struggles for Political and Cultural Hegemony,” in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend (Königswinter: H. F. Ullmann, 2013), 32.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Klee, “Contributions to a Theory of Pictorial Form,” reprinted in *The Thinking Eye: Notebooks of Paul Klee*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961).

<sup>40</sup> Hopfengart addresses the connection of this political campaign to the puppet as well. Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 122.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>42</sup> Pamela Kort, ed., *Paul Klee 1933* (Cologne: Walter König, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> Rainer K. Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, trans. Stephen Mason and Simone Lèbe (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000), 225.

<sup>44</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 226. Wick draws his textual evidence for Klee’s unswerving interest in esoteric matter from his diary, a journal he discontinued after World War I. It is likely that Klee’s attitudes toward art and politics, and his political opinions, evolved in the face of developments in the Weimar Republic. His continual production of political puppets would seem to indicate this.

<sup>46</sup> Hopfengart notes the connection between these figures and their resemblance to actors and puppets, but the relationship between puppets and politics is not explored beyond calling these works “political cabaret” with reference to Kaiser Wilhelm II. Christine Hopfengart, ed., *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 94.

<sup>47</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Felix Klee, “An Interview with Felix Klee by Sabine Rewald,” in *Paul Klee: The Berggruen Klee Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Felix Klee, cited in Hopfengart, “Hybrid Creatures,” 23.

<sup>50</sup> Tut Schlemmer, “...vom lebendigen Bauhaus und seiner Bühn,” in *Bauhaus und Bauhäusler. Erinnerung und Bekenntnisse*, ed. Eckhard Neumann (Cologne: DuMont, 1985), 226.

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- <sup>51</sup> Lyonel Feininger, “Erinnerungen an Klee,” in *Erinnerungen an Paul Klee*, ed. Ludwig Grote (Munich: Prestel, 1985), 74.
- <sup>52</sup> Felix Klee, “Einführung,” 16.
- <sup>53</sup> In fact, even in the 1950s, Felix performed this piece for an intimate audience of mostly old Bauhaus members, a testament to its enduring impact. Aljoscha Klee, “Felix Klee and the Puppet Theater,” in *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 41.
- <sup>54</sup> Hopfengart and Sladeczek, *Paul Klee: Hand Puppets*, 128.
- <sup>55</sup> Aljoscha Klee, “Felix Klee and the Puppet Theater,” 40.
- <sup>56</sup> Felix Klee, “An Interview with Felix Klee by Sabine Rewald,” 41.
- <sup>57</sup> Felix Klee, “Paul Klees Marionetten,” 112.
- <sup>58</sup> Felix Klee, “An Interview with Felix Klee by Sabine Rewald,” 42–45. While he had his reservations about the theater workshop, his paintings of the Lantern Festival also indicate that he was inspired by at least some of the work produced for the Bauhaus stage.
- <sup>59</sup> Paul Klee, cited in Hopfengart, *Paul Klee: Theater Everywhere*, 10.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>61</sup> Felix Klee, “Paul Klees Marionetten,” 112.
- <sup>62</sup> T. Lux Feininger, *Lyonel Feininger: City at the Edge of the World* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 10.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>64</sup> Schreyer’s theatrical debut at the school, *Mondspiel*, staged in March 1923, was also his last theatrical performance at the Bauhaus. For the text of the play see Lothar Schreyer, “Mondspiel,” *Der Sturm* 14 (April 1923): 56–61. For a description of the play according to Schreyer see Lothar Schreyer, “Mondspiel,” in *Lothar Schreyer Theateraufsätze mit einer Einleitung von Brian Keith-Smith* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2001), 462. There are neither recordings nor published reviews to offer insight into the play or describe Schreyer’s use of the *Spielfiguren*, so little can be known about the Bauhaus performance beyond its script and a few illustrations. Schreyer himself offers no discussion of the play’s reception at the school in his 1956 memoir *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus* (Munich: A. Langen and G. Miller, 1965). The diaries and recollections of those present for the 1923 performance are mostly silent about the factors contributing to the play’s poor reception.
- <sup>65</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 166.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>67</sup> Walter Gropius, “Introduction,” in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 8–9.
- <sup>68</sup> Wick, *Teaching at the Bauhaus*, 256.
- <sup>69</sup> Ina Conzen, “Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World,” in *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World*, ed. Ina Conzen (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart/Hirmer, 2014), 16.
- <sup>70</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” trans. Arthur S. Wensing, in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, 28.
- <sup>71</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, “Über das Marionettentheater“ in *Projekt Gutenberg DE* (1810; Hamburg: Spiegel Online, 2018): <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-593/1>.
- <sup>72</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, “Mechanisches Ballett,” in *Tanz und Reigen*, ed. Ignaz Genteges (Berlin: Bühnenvolksbundverlag, 1927), 81.
- <sup>73</sup> *Das triadische Ballett* was performed at the Württembergisches Landestheater, Stuttgart, September 30, 1922; Nationaltheater, Weimar, August 16, 1923, coinciding with a major Bauhaus exhibition; Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit, Dresden, on August 25 and 26, 1923;

Donaueschingen Chamber Music Festival, July 23, 1926; Grosse Frankfurter Brückenrevue at the Frankfurt Festhalle, August 15–18, 1926; as part of the *Wieder Metropol!* revue at the Metropol Theater, Berlin, September 16, 1926; and as part of the Concours de la Chorégraphie staged by the Archives Internationales de la Danse at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, July 2–4, 1932. For a complete description of the variations in performances at these different venues see Katrin von Mauer, “Oskar Schlemmer as Choreographer and Stage Designer,” in *Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World*, 194–200.

<sup>74</sup> Arnd Wesemann, “The Bauhaus Theater Group,” in *Bauhaus*, ed. Fiedler and Feierabend, 532.

<sup>75</sup> Franz Anton Cramer, “Masterpieces of Avant-garde Theater” in *Bauhaus: Die Zeitschrift fuer der Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau/Schlemmer!*, no. 6 (January 2014): 28.

<sup>76</sup> A twenty-second clip of *Das triadische Ballett* circulated on YouTube at one time. Franz Anton Cramer speculated that this was produced during the 1926 Berlin performance. The post is periodically removed and reposted, but it does suggest that a film version of the dance does indeed exist. Franz Anton Cramer, “In the Here and Now of Geometry,” *Bauhaus: Die Zeitschrift fuer der Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau/Schlemmer!*, no. 6 (January 2014): 22.

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed discussion of re-creating the *Bauhaus Dances* see Debra McCall, “Reconstructing Schlemmer’s Bauhaus Dances: A Personal Narrative,” in *Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Arnold L. Lehman and Brenda Richardson (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1986), 149–59.

<sup>78</sup> For a description of this performance and its influence of Schlemmer see von Mauer, “Oskar Schlemmer as Choreographer and Stage Designer,” 192.

<sup>79</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure,” 25.

<sup>81</sup> Nancy Troy, “The Art of Reconciliation: Oskar Schlemmer’s work for the Theater,” in *Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Lehman and Richardson, 133.

<sup>82</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 50.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>84</sup> Schlemmer, “Mechanisches Ballett,” 80.

<sup>85</sup> Conzen, “Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World,” 17.

<sup>86</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 42.

<sup>87</sup> In her book on the reception of modern dance in Germany, cultural historian Kate Elswit describes how prosthetic limbs influenced the reception of dance in this period. She highlights examples of prostheses designed for specific tasks that emphasized the body as a collection of functional components (rather than a complete individual). While Elswit suggests a relationship between prosthetics and *Das triadische Ballett*, the connection receives only a cursory treatment and is not worked out beyond the superficial association of mechanics and prosthetics. Kate Elswit, *Watching Weimar Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30–32.

<sup>88</sup> Juliet Koss, “Theater of Human Dolls,” *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (December 2003): 724.

<sup>89</sup> Paul Paret, “Oskar Schlemmer: Study for the Triadic Ballet, 1924,” in *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, 170.

<sup>90</sup> Eric Michaud, “Das ‘Triadische Ballett’ zwischen Krieg und Technik,” in *Oskar Schlemmer: Tanz, Theater, Bühne* (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1994), 46.

<sup>91</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 235.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 243–44.

<sup>94</sup> Von Mauer, “Oskar Schlemmer as Choreographer and Stage Designer,” 197. Von Mauer also comments that they were hesitant to perform because there was a reimbursement dispute about their expenses following an earlier performance.

<sup>95</sup> Schlemmer, *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer*, 241.

<sup>96</sup> Karin von Maur, “Oskar Schlemmer,” *Grove Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009):

<http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000076597?rskey=sHLyI7&result=1>.

<sup>97</sup> Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization*, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1966), 604.

<sup>98</sup> Faith M. Holland, “Oskar Schlemmer: A Chronology,” in *Oskar Schlemmer*, ed. Lehman and Richardson, 202.

<sup>99</sup> Opening address to the *Herbstschau Neuer Kunst* exhibition at the Stuttgart Kunstgebäude, October 25, 1919, cited in Conzen, “Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World,” 21.

<sup>100</sup> Schlemmer to Gunta Stötzl, June 16, 1933, quoted in Winfried Nerdinger, “Modernisierung, Bauhaus, Nationalsozialismus,” in *Bauhaus-Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Zwischen Anbiederung und Verfolgung*, ed. Winfried Nerdinger (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 19.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 73.

<sup>102</sup> Oskar Schlemmer to Bernhardt Rust, April 2, 1933, in *Oskar Schlemmer, Idealist der Form: Briefe, Tagebücher, Schriften* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1990), 271.

<sup>103</sup> Oskar Schlemmer to Bernhardt Rust, May 18, 1933, quoted in Conzen, “Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World,” 33.

<sup>104</sup> Oskar Schlemmer to Joseph Goebbels, April 22, 1933, in *Oskar Schlemmer, Idealist der Form*, 273–74.

<sup>105</sup> Nerdinger, “Modernisierung,” 19.

<sup>106</sup> Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler*, 73.

<sup>107</sup> Wolf Eiermann, curator of Schlemmer’s archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, email to the author, May 24, 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Conzen, “Oskar Schlemmer: Visions of a New World,” 34.

<sup>109</sup> Oskar Schlemmer, diary entry from February 7, 1935, in *Oskar Schlemmer, Idealist der Form*, 290. Also quoted in Magdalena Droste, “Bauhaus-Maler im Nationalsozialismus: Anpassung, Selbstentfremdung, Verweigerung,” in *Bauhaus-Modern im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Winfried Nerdinger (Munich: Prestel, 1993), 131.

<sup>110</sup> Koss, “Theater of Human Dolls,” 727.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 728.

<sup>112</sup> Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler*, 51.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Klee, letter to Lily Klee, April 6, 1933, in *Briefe an die Familie 1893–1940*, ed. Felix Klee (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 1234.

## Chapter Two

### Dada Puppets: Life as Art

“Bevor Dada da war, war Dada da.”

—Dada proverb

In December 1919 in Berlin, Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) staged a production of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* on the main stage of his monumental theater, the Große Schauspielhaus. A dramatic trilogy about Clytemnestra’s murder of her husband, King Agamemnon, Orestes’s murder of his mother Clytemnestra, and Orestes’s subsequent trial, the Greek tragedy was simultaneously parodied in puppet form at the revived Schall und Rauch cabaret in the basement of the same theater. *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* followed a typical cabaret program—song, dance, readings, cartoon film, and a puppet finale. [Fig. 2.0] This Dada puppet production, very loosely based on the original but strongly driven by contemporary events, was written by the satirist Walter Mehring (1896–1981) and performed with puppets designed by George Grosz (1893–1959) and John Heartfield (1891–1968). Like the original Greek play, the puppet show took sex and politics as its major themes, but more significantly, it dressed down some of the political players of the time: the Kaiser, the fascist Freikorps, the left-leaning pacifist Kurt Eisner (1867–1919), US president Woodrow Wilson, newspaper journalists, and more. Nobody was spared in this blistering political parody, not even the Schall und Rauch itself; the Dadaists reportedly disrupted their own show and instigated a protest against “die unfertige und entstellte Aufführung des Puppenspiels” and “die Verunglimpfung dadaistischer Prinzipien.”<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 2.0: George Grosz and John Heartfield, artists, Walter Mehring, author, cover of *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolf Fürstner Verlag, 1919). Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

This basement puppet show undermined high culture from directly below, and it did so in traditional rhymed verse with a sophisticated understanding of both classics and contemporary politics.<sup>2</sup> While nonsense poetry and happening-type events were certainly characteristic of Dada performance, so was learned, politically pointed puppet art. This cabaret show was one of several Dada puppet productions realized in Germany and Switzerland as well as elsewhere in Europe. Staged in a range of different venues and realized in different styles, the presentations expressed both a critique and an embrace of the world around them, in a satirical vein. On one hand, *Einfach klassisch!* offers a subversive take on an ancient Greek tragedy. On the other hand, it shows how the Dadaists draw on a traditional performance strategy—puppetry had long been associated with political protest—in order to revive older forms of artistic expression to activist

ends. In fact, puppetry had been a Dada tactic from the very beginning of the movement. [Fig. 2.1] Scholars have noted that Emmy Hennings (1885–1948) was the likely the first to use puppets in Dada, and in March 1917, a political puppet show was improved using her Czar and Czarina puppets at Gallerie Dada and later Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 2.1: Emmy Hennings with a puppet she made and performed with at the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, ca. 1916. Kunsthau Zurich. Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 17.

Dada was a cultural movement rather than a conventional art movement, but it challenged and ultimately expanded modern and contemporary notions of art. Launched in 1916 by anti-nationalistic artists, writers, performers, and thinkers, Dada was a diffuse network of iconoclasts, draft dodgers, pacifists, and refugees who innovated forms of expression in response to World War I. In contrast to a conventional art movement—a cohesive group of artists who exhibit together or work in a common aesthetic style—the Dadaists were involved in a diverse range of creative practices that challenged conventional forms, styles, subjects, and spaces of art. Testing limits led the Dadaists to experiment with innovative topics and materials, and artists often

reached for new forms of media and commodity culture as the stuff of their works. Even as they recontextualized popular culture, found objects, detritus, nonsense sound poetry, and mass media and elevated it all as works of art, high-cultural references were simultaneously deflated. The transgression of boundaries extended to the exhibition frame as well, and Dadaists became the first in history to include pranks, installations, and interactive performance pieces in their creative practices. Instead of confining themselves to representations of gods, kings, and Venuses, limiting their media to paint and stone, or confining their exhibition venues to art museums, Dadaists used elements of everyday culture in response to their new war-afflicted environment. Museum of Modern Art curator Leah Dickerman summarizes the Dada approach: “A defining premise for the movement is deceptively simple and yet has shaped the century: that art might be assembled from the stuff of modern life itself.”<sup>4</sup> Puppets had never previously played a role in high-art culture and their status as a satirical medium, a lowbrow popular entertainment and common children’s toy, was part of their appeal to the Dadaists.

Theories of the avant-garde, especially those most philosophical in their approach, tend to stress Dada’s “newness” and highlight how these practitioners broke with art of the past. Such readings emphasize the movement’s hostility toward meaning, convention, and tradition. Philosopher and avant-garde theorist Peter Bürger emphasized the Dadaists’ anti-art approach as one aimed at the reintegration of art and life, and he views their project as one fundamentally grounded in an attack on art institutions. In his influential book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (first published in German in 1974), Bürger argued that although Dada succeeded in destroying the notion of the organic work of art and fundamentally shifted the location of the political engagement of art (from individual works to art institutions), art continued to be a realm distinct from life.<sup>5</sup> According to Bürger, the Dadaists failed to reintroduce art to the praxis of life, and

while he somewhat softened his view of the totality of this failure in a later essay, he emphatically upheld his position that the reintegration of art and life is predicated upon the necessary collapse of art institutions.<sup>6</sup> But while the collapse of art institutions may provide sufficient conditions for the reunion of art and life, it is not a necessary requirement; Bürger's insistence on the latter view overlooks the more positive and constructive ways Dadaists sought to make art out of the stuff of life and reanimate older art forms. Dada was obviously an anti-art movement, but even so, it promoted the revival of a more unified and harmonious approach to the place and function of art in society.<sup>7</sup> The Dadaists use of puppets was just as much a recollection of an earlier attitude to art and life as it was a rebellious break with the aesthetic and political situation of the day. While some of the puppets to be discussed in this chapter continued the subversive, gainsaying, biting character commonly attributed to Dada, they did so by drawing upon a larger tradition indigenous and specific to puppetry's playful ways.

How did Dada puppets reintegrate art and life? Does the Dadaist take on puppetry lead to an alternative view of the early twentieth-century avant-garde? In order to capture the diversity of Dadaist approaches and the range of puppet styles, this chapter includes a variety of works by different artists and artistic collaborators: abstract marionettes, caricatured hand puppets, mannequin-inspired installations, dolls, and a mechanical shadow puppet. Since Dada was also a literary movement, poetry and theatrical scripts also play a role. The famous puppet character Kasper was not forgotten by the Dadaists, either, and this chapter begins with a poem about him.

### **Kasper Is Dead, Long Live Kasper**

Jean Hans Arp (1886–1966) offers a robust opportunity—as does Paul Klee (1879–1940), discussed previously—to examine an avant-gardist's interest in this tramp-like puppet figure

with origins in the *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>8</sup> Though Arp worked in a range of media, including poetry, sculpture, paint, collage, printing, and embroidery, he is not known to have made puppets for theatrical performance.<sup>9</sup> Yet Kasper was an enduring and recurring figure over the course of his career. Above all, he was the subject of a poem, “kaspar ist tot,” appearing in numerous publications in frequently revised forms between the years 1919 and 1953.<sup>10</sup> Arp also made a Kasper sculpture, *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar*, 1930, a biomorphic abstraction in a bust-like style executed in both plaster and bronze. Upon first reading, the poem may seem obscure, but considered together with the *Kaspar* sculpture and its evocation of Kasper the puppet, with his characteristic pointed hat and beaky nose, the text becomes much more accessible, as does its connection to puppetry. Arp’s dirge-like poem honors a puppet, and an immortal one at that. High and low collide in a playfully disorienting, sardonic tone:

kaspar ist tot

weh unser guter kaspar ist tot.

wer trägt nun die brennende fahne im wolkenzopf verborgen täglich zum schwarzen  
schnippchen schlagen

wer dreht nun die kaffeemühle im urfass

wer lockt nun das idyllische reh aus der versteinerten tüte

wer verwirrt nun auf dem meere die schiffe mit der anrede parapluis und die winde mit  
dem zuruf bienenväter ozonspindeln euer hochwohlgeboren

weh weh weh unser guter kaspar ist tot. heiliger bimbam kaspar ist tot.

die heufische klappern herzzerreißend vor leid in den glockenscheunen wenn  
man seinen vornamen auspricht. darum seufze ich weiter seinen familien-namen  
kaspar kaspar kaspar.

warum hast du uns verlassen. in welche gestalt ist nun deine schöne grosse  
seele gewandert. bist du ein stern geworden oder eine kette aus wasser an

einem heissen wirbelwind oder ein euter aus schwarzem licht oder ein  
durchsichtiger ziegel an der stöhnenden trommel des felsigen wesens.

jetzt vertocknen unsere scheidel und sohlen und die feen liegen halbverkohlt  
auf den scheiterhaufen.

jetzt donnert hinter der sonne die schwarze kegelbahn und keiner zieht mehr  
die kompassee und die räder der schiebkarren auf.

wer isst nun mit der phosphoreszierenden ratte am einsamen barfüssigen tisch.

wer verjagt nun den schirokekoko teufel wenn er die pferde verführen will.

wer erklärt uns nun die monogramme in den sternern.

sein büste wird die kamine aller wahrhaft edlen menschen zieren doch das  
ist kein trost und schnupftabak für einen totenkopf.

*weggis* 1912<sup>11</sup>

Admittedly, the identification of Kaspar with the puppet is not immediately obvious, nor is it simple, and the poem deliberately invites a question about the identity of its protagonist. The opening lamentation, “weh unser guter kaspar ist tot,” is immediately followed by a series of “who . . . now” questions; the poem itself wonders about Kaspar’s identity, and the reader is invited to play along. Just as a puppet asks its viewers questions as a strategy for audience engagement, so too does Arp pose these “who . . . now” queries, together with mystifying imagery, as a way to draw in readers. All scholars who have written on the poem have ventured an answer to the “who” question of the titular Kaspar: he might be Kaspar Hauser, one of the Three Wise Men, the comic character Hans-Kaspar from Alsatian folklore, or our familiar Kasper of the puppet stage.<sup>12</sup> Yet there are more clues to answer this question than simply the overlap of the “Kaspar” name, and more than one simultaneous identity is possible, with the puppet being a key one. Kaspar was one way Arp brought together art and life, and here Kaspar serves as a bridge between the puppet stage and the life of the artist.

The history of the poem's publication recalls a puppeteering approach to the production of a work of art and offers a hint of puppetry's connection to poetry as well as poetry's status as a kind of textual performance. Puppeteers frequently draw upon stock characters and scenarios to present semi-improvised but prepared versions of plays. Arp worked on "kaspar ist tot" for at least thirty-four years, adding to and editing it from its first publication in 1919 through subsequent iterations, until its final edition in 1953.<sup>13</sup> We should not interpret its transformations as we would the evolution of poems by writers of an earlier age, ever developing toward a perfected, perfectible end. The existence of so many different variations is typical of Arp's poetic output, as the scholar R. W. Last comments: "It is clear that Arp did not regard the completed work as sacrosanct, an indestructible entity to be preserved intact for posterity, but rather as a temporary statement to be modified . . . with the passage of time and his constantly changing evolution as a poet."<sup>14</sup> The multiplicity of variations grants his poetry writing process a semi-improvisatory feel—much like the traditional *Kasperltheater* performance—and every version (a kind of textual performance) is slightly different from the next. Typical of the Dadaist approach, a work of art, even a printed poem, is not an inert, perfect and finished product of artistic genius, but rather a transforming creation with a life of its own.

The imagery in the poem can be imagined as a makeshift puppet stage, and the description of Kaspar's accomplishments is very much in keeping with the plucky character of the hand puppet. If one considers the appearance of shrunken, miniature-size puppet props, it is easy to envision the sun as a *brennende fahne* hidden in clouds, blocking the stage's sunlight just long enough for a puppet to pull off a practical joke. One can also easily imagine a coffee grinder as a playful stand-in for some grandiose *urfaß*, or that deer may be hidden in little bag painted to look like a stone cave. Puppet theater shrinks big things down to a small size. Kaspar can pull a

fast one on the devil; he can mock the grandness of a ship or the forces of nature; he offers silly explanations for profound questions about the mysteries of the stars; and he is amusingly brave in the face of danger. A childlike dimension of the poem is emphasized by magic-spell repetition: “die heufische klappern herzzerreißend vor leid in den glockenscheunen wenn man seinen vornamen auspricht. darum seufze ich weiter seinen familien-namen kaspar kaspar kaspar.” The poet’s “warum hast du uns verlassen,” is a sacrilegious reappropriation of the final words from the Gospels Mark and Matthew, language likening the narrator to Christ and the protagonist to God. Big symbols, powerful forces, sources of awe and fear are made small and manageable by brave Kaspar’s humor.

The identification of the poem’s protagonist with the puppet is further supported by his shape-shifting nature both within the text and especially when considered together with the sculpture. Kaspar’s mutability, his constant transformation, is part of what makes him Kaspar. As the lament progresses, Arp suggests that Kaspar, though dead, is not gone but rather transformed: “in welche gestalt ist nun deine schöne grosse seele gewandert. bist du ein stern geworden.” Like his biomorphically abstract sculpture, with a profile resembling a moon-like visage almost as strongly as it does the puppet, Kaspar’s next incarnation may take a celestial shape, or something darker, “ein euter aus schwarzem licht,” perhaps yielding black milk. Like the poem’s constantly evolving form or Arp’s abstract sculpture, Kaspar is a protean figure, adaptable, with an ever-changing identity.

According to R. W. Last, “kaspar ist tot” is an autobiographical poem, and Hans-Kaspar is a pseudo-name for the poet himself (the last three letters of the name Kaspar may be anagrammed to form the name Arp, and the poem defines Kaspar as the figure’s family name).<sup>15</sup> This interpretation may not be far off, especially given Arp’s propensity for collaging words. Nor

must a reading of the poem's protagonist as Kaspar the puppet rule out the autobiographical possibility suggested by Last in his essay. The 1953 edition of the poem mentions Kaspar's ability to "entgrätet die pyramiden,"<sup>16</sup> which may be a reference to Arp's 1924 poetry book *Pyramidenrock*, or to the poet's abiding interest in the pyramid motif. In fact, the poem is a way Arp could recast *himself* as Kaspar the puppet, an antiheroic hero, a creative and irreverent everyman. The poem and sculpture both point to the fact that any attempt at a definitive identification of the protagonist is bound to yield to another, different, but related character.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the identity of the artist is interchangeable with the protagonist of his work—life and art merge in a puppet.

For all the liveliness of the poem's descriptions, "kaspar ist tot" concludes with an image of Kaspar as a lifeless bust, a mantelpiece at the hearth of noble homes: "sein büste wird die kamine aller wahrhaft edlen menschen zieren doch das ist kein trost und schnupftabak für einen totenkopf." For the Dadaists, art was to be reintegrated into the fabric of everyday life, and not through repetitive copies of dead styles glorifying dead men. The irony of the poem—the gap between what is stated and what is actually meant—lies in the fact that Kaspar is anything but dead, though puppets are never technically alive. The artistic spirit of Kaspar and Arp is alive and well, and like a puppet, it can never really be killed, and is always changing shape.



Fig. 2.2: Jean Hans Arp, *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar*, 1930. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Margherita Andreotti, *The Early Sculpture of Jean Arp* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 174.

Fig. 2.3: Jean Hans Arp, *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar*, 1930. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. [www.imj.org.il/en/collections](http://www.imj.org.il/en/collections).

Consider the actual bust in the context of the poem's description.<sup>18</sup> [Fig. 2.2] Although the sculpture was produced after the publication of the first versions of the poem, *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar* is a far cry from those that would have typically adorned the fireplaces of a noble bourgeois home, despite its bronze casting. Seeking an alternative to traditional portraiture and the bust in particular—a mode of sculpture typically created in a realistic style associated with monarchic patronage or vanity—artists like Jean Hans Arp developed a sculptural language that preserved a human reference without relying on mimesis. This approach is operating in several ways in *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar*. As with Arp's other busts from this era,<sup>19</sup> freestanding works in traditional materials (plaster and bronze) are not pop-culture ephemera but instead draw on the gravity of traditional busts reaching back to antiquity. Yet as a way of rebalancing the heroizing pomposity of this kind of portraiture, Arp's figures are ambiguously abstracted, with no definite referent. In *Tête de lutin dite Kaspar*, the referent is a mutable stock-character puppet rather than

a specific individual, like a philosopher or a king. Even as a named imp, “dite Kaspar,” he is a caricature of a character. His visage changes depending on the viewer’s angle of the physical sculpture. His profile resembles puppetry’s Kaspar in no small way because of the narrative suggestion offered by the title, but it also looks like the man in the moon from this angle, again a celestial connection as in the poem. When viewed from the front, the distorted face looks more like a duck, with the nose transforming into a bulbous beak. [Fig. 2.3] Art historian Margherita Andreotti, speaking generally about Arp’s sculpted heads from this period, observes, “The motif of the head may have been the vehicle not only of Arp’s irreverent view of mankind, but also more specifically of his attacks against reason, a faculty conventionally symbolized by the head. . . . By portraying the head in a comical and ridiculous light, Arp was once more attempting to deflate humanity’s exaggerated self-importance.”<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 2.4] And what better figure to deflate humanity’s self-importance than Kaspar! The reference to the puppet in this piece, likewise in the poem, highlights the playful aspect of Arp’s depiction of humanity. It offers an innovative and enduring alternative to the bust tradition rather than simply a hostile attack on the status quo. At the same time, it provides another clue to Arp’s representational approach to Kaspar’s mutable identity.

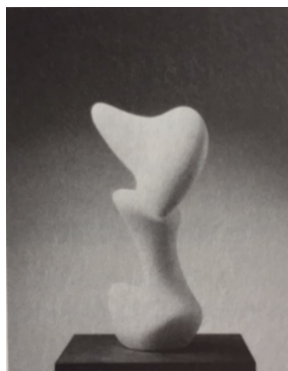


Fig. 2.4: Jean Hans Arp, *Buste de lutin*, 1949. Private collection, Pennsylvania. Arie Hartog, ed., *Hans Arp Skulpturen—Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 102.

Arp's poetic Kaspar, like his freestanding sculptural biomorphic abstraction, evokes a human referent through its simplified forms while avoiding simple description. He is a recognizable stock character, yet he is the protagonist of an almost infinite number of dramas. What at first appears familiar and immediate, then ambiguous, actually turns out to be something much more complex still, deliberately inviting multiple parallel interpretations. The portrait has a referent, but the referent is an unstable one insofar as Kaspar is the ultimate everyman, a universal puppet rather than a specific person. Arp's use of traditional sculpting materials and the bust-like form common to the portrait genre bridge old and new—subject and execution—in his depiction of a playful puppet as a new kind of hero. No single identity can ever be established if it refers to a universal character, even when named explicitly. A simple figure unfolds the complexities of Dada art. Despite the mutable characters, appearances never quite deceive in the Dada puppet world. The move away from simple imitation of nature to more complex systems of meaning is meant to offer deeper resemblances, in which art, artist, and everyman are unified in one perfect and imperfect, unholy trinity.

### **Freudiger, Junger**

Jean Hans Arp's representation of a famous puppet character, both poetic and sculptural, is one example of a Dada approach to abstraction. Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943), Jean Hans Arp's frequent artistic collaborator and wife, used a different but adjacent strategy.<sup>21</sup> The two Dadaists' works are quite different: Arp referenced a puppet everyman in various non-puppet media, while Taeuber-Arp created actual marionettes, including some representing specific historical individuals, and instead of biomorphic, Taeuber-Arp's abstraction was geometric and hard-edged. [Fig. 2.5] As in the works of Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), both Arp's and Taeuber-

Arp's puppet abstractions retain a connection to figuration, but unlike the Bauhaus artist, these Dadaists were not using abstraction to raise their works to a metaphysical realm. Theirs was an attempt to bring art down to earth and to deploy abstraction as a way of opening art and ideas to new interpretive possibilities and parody. Arp and Taeuber-Arp, though both were part of the same Dada movement and both drew on the world of puppetry as a way to bridge abstraction and satire, used different visual vocabularies.



Fig. 2.5: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Jean Hans Arp with the marionettes Taeuber-Arp designed for the marionette play *König Hirsch*, Zurich, 1918. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Google Arts & Culture.

Uncertain identities, masquerade, deception, power, and marriage are a few of the themes in *König Hirsch* by Werner Wolff (1886–1972) and René Morax (1873–1963), a marionette adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's (1720–1806) play *Il Re Cervo* (1762). Taeuber-Arp designed the marionettes and sets used in a 1918 performance. Like its eighteenth-century predecessor, the plot of this play is kicked off by a king's search for a queen: a ruler auditions different women to

be his wife instead of simply marrying the one who actually loves him. Also like the original play, which is dense with multiple storylines, characters, and adventures, the script winds its way from a royal palace to a magical forest where souls can switch bodies and transform from human to animal. But there are key changes that connect this play not only to Gozzi's *commedia dell'arte*-inspired fairy-tale world, but also to early twentieth-century Zurich: King Deramo's magical statue, used to see through the lies of women, was given to him by Freudanalytikus, a magician satirizing Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and another character, Dr. Oedipus Komplex, we learn, is a satire of Freud's Zurich-based former student Carl Jung (1875–1961).<sup>22</sup> [Fig. 2.6]



Fig. 2.6: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, artist, Ernst Linck, photographer, scene from the marionette play *König Hirsch* showing King Deramo with his magical statue and Angela, Zurich, 1918. Karin Schick, Oliver Kornhoff, and Astrid von Asten, eds., *Movement and Balance: Sophie Taeuber-Arp 1889–1943* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009), 32.

Taeuber-Arp is often recognized by art historians as one of the first artists to demonstrate the contribution of the applied arts to the development of abstraction.<sup>23</sup> Her puppets provide a fascinating example of works bridging her involvement in several creative realms. Taeuber-Arp,

a member of the Schweizerischer Werkbund from as early as 1915, taught classes in textile arts at this *Kunstgewerbeschule* from 1916 to 1929. Although she trained primarily to become a textile designer, her interests were not confined to crafts; she also studied with some of the best-known figures in the history of modern dance: Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) and Mary Wigman (1886–1973). Her oeuvre includes paintings, sculptures, works on paper, weavings in wool and beads, embroidery, set designs, interior and furniture designs, costumes, and, of course, puppets. Her involvement with the Zurich Dada movement dates almost from its very beginning (1916), when she performed in circa 1917 at the famous Cabaret Voltaire wearing masks by Marcel Janco (1895–1984). [Fig. 2.7] Additionally, she choreographed dances and performed in accompaniment to Hugo Ball's (1886–1927) recitation of his poem *Klang und Lautgedichte*.<sup>24</sup> *König Hirsch* was commissioned by Alfred Altherr, the director of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Zurich, for the opening of a new kind of marionette theater. Her work for the puppet theater bridged applied art and modern abstraction, her professional world and Dada performance, and it also benefited from her teaching career: the puppet play had a very short performance run, and her students operated the marionettes for its premiere.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 2.7: Sophie Taeuber-Arp dancing, wearing a mask by Marcel Janco, Zurich, ca. 1917. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Google Arts & Culture.

The geometric puppets Taeuber-Arp created for *König Hirsch* were revolutionary within the context of both Altherr's avant-garde, modernist puppet theater and boundary-breaking Dada performance cultures. Instead of presenting a fairground-style aesthetic or an ersatz theater in miniature, Taeuber-Arp's designs radically broke with existing puppet traditions while simultaneously recalling aspects of the conventional puppet cast. Though he never mentions Taeuber-Arp explicitly in his introduction to a book about his puppet theater, Altherr describes his agenda more generally:

Es galt bei der Neuinszenierung von Marionettenstücken in erster Linie, der Kopie des grossen Theaters aus dem Wege zu gehen. Bei der Bühnenausstattung musste Nebensächliches – wie Mobiliar, allzu naturalistisches szenisches Beiwerk – verschwinden, damit nicht der Eindruck einer Puppenstube wachgerufen wurde. Es galt auch, der Marionette einen einfachen Rahmen zu schaffen, ein Bestreben, das von selbst dazu führte, den photographischen Abklatsch nach dem Leben zu vermeiden und das im Laufe der Zeit ein Abstraktion zeitigte.<sup>26</sup>

Dada filmmaker, painter, and chronicler Hans Richter (1888–1976) calls Taeuber-Arp's work “the first abstract puppets,” as indeed they were the first to render puppet characters as geometric essences with exaggerated and unnatural proportions (Kasper's and Pinocchio's noses excluded).<sup>27</sup> She was also one of the first puppet makers who deliberately left joints exposed to show the mechanics of a puppet's construction. Carl Fischer lathe-turned their wooden components—a technique Taeuber-Arp practiced herself, a radical departure from hand carving puppets—while the painting on the bead-like heads and bobbin-like bodies was done by the artist

herself.<sup>28</sup> Some of her puppets had attached adornments like brocade, bells, brass, and feathers. In one account, Richter described the set as made from spools of thread, and although they certainly resemble the tools of textile production, they are not actual repurposed spools and bobbins. Their metal joints were manipulated using wires and thread. The faces are painted in a style recalling African tribal design, reminiscent of the patterns found in Taeuber-Arp's *Dada Köpfe* (1920).<sup>29</sup> [Fig. 2.8]

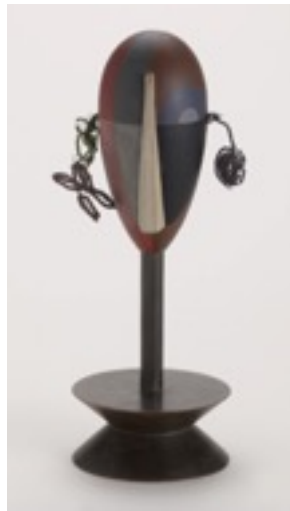


Fig. 2.8: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Dada Kopf*), 1920. Museum of Modern Art, New York. [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

The description of the puppets written into the script for *König Hirsch* by Wolff and Morax suggests a much more realistic portrayal than Taeuber-Arp's stylized abstractions, revealing that the artist responded to the text but initiated the designs herself rather than strictly follow the playwrights' instructions. In the case of Smerldina and her sister Brighella, the authors recommend, "Beide orientalisches gekleidet. Smeraldina mit einem grossen Fächer, grossen Blumen und einem Federbusch." While Taeuber-Arp adorns her *Smeraldina* with flowers and feathers, both are too abstract and geometric to resemble anything "Oriental" (feathers are not a typical feature of Asian sculpture), although they do retain echoes of non-Western art typical of

modernist interest in so-called primitivism. [Fig. 2.9] And *Doctor Komplex*, for example, is described in the text as an earnest fellow with golden glasses and a book under his arm, but Taeuber-Arp's puppet does not wear glasses at all (though his eyes are painted yellow) and the marionette could not carry a book since his arms have no hands. In a way, the marionettes mark a departure from her other works from this period, too: Taeuber-Arp's needlepoints, paintings, drawings, and other designs present nonobjective, austere, rigorous geometric abstractions, while these puppets do look like human and animal forms. Clearly her interest in geometric design influenced her puppets, yet the marionettes, while conceived in independent visual terms, were indeed designed in response to a specific story.



Fig. 2.9: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Smeraldina*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

Der Doktor Komplex performs the play's prologue and begins with a direct address to the audience—an introduction to some of the show's main players and a primer on psychoanalytic theory. Instead of concluding the monologue with a simple invitation to enjoy the puppet show, Dr. Komplex wishes his audience “ein fröhliches Zurückkehren in die Kindheit oder, wie es

heissen muss, eine Regression in die Infantilität.”<sup>30</sup> Underlining an interest in the psychoanalytic movement itself, as opposed to the Surrealists’ fascination with the aesthetic possibilities of the subconscious, the puppet play mixes fairy-tale figures with real psychoanalysts and the learnedness of its theoretical underpinnings. There is evidence for an actual connection between the Dada artists and major figures from the psychoanalytic movement, too. Some sources indicate that by 1918, when this marionette show was staged, Taeuber-Arp and Arp may have attended dance parties held by Jung, and that Sophie’s sister worked in the psychoanalyst’s library.<sup>31</sup> Replacing a magician with a psychoanalyst is pointed, especially if one considers who might have been in the audience; one Dada scholar notes that Jungian and Adlerian psychoanalysts attended Dada events in Zurich.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 2.10: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, artist, Ernst Linck, photographer, hunting scene from the marionette play *König Hirsch*, Zurich, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

Here’s the story: King Deramo attempts to find a bride with the help of his lie-detecting statue (it laughs when a woman is untruthful), a gift from Freudanalytikus. It is the king’s last-ditch effort to find a wife, and he narrows the search down to three candidates: Smeraldina, a commoner pretending to be a noble virgin, who is actually already engaged and probably has

already been “married”; Clarissa, who is in love with someone else but is pressed to apply for the job of queen by her evil father, Tartaglia; and Angela, who is pure and genuinely loves the king. Deramo and Angela do wed, but it is not a simple happily-ever-after, and the marriage is only the beginning of the play’s action. Not only is Tartaglia furious that his daughter was not selected, he is also upset that he will not be able to have Angela for himself. In reaction to his frustrated desires, Tartaglia plots Deramo’s murder on a wedding hunt in the forest. [Fig. 2.10] As Deramo’s advisor, Tartaglia learns of Freudanalytikus’s magical spell for changing bodies with someone else and devises a new scheme: trick the king into transforming into a stag while Tartaglia assumes the king’s body and power (and woman) for himself. Drama ensues under the rule of evil Tartaglia-as-Deramo, but Freudanalytikus, together with Dr. Komplex, expose Tartaglia’s treachery and set everything straight, restoring everyone to their rightful places. The good doctors, can, of course, see through people’s facades to their true natures. And they understand women so very well.<sup>33</sup> [Fig. 2.11]



Fig. 2.11: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, artist, Ernst Linck, photographer, final scene from the marionette play *König Hirsch* showing Freudanalytikus presiding over King Deramo with Angela and

Tartaglia, Pantalón, Leandro, and Clarissa puppets, Zurich, 1918. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Google Arts & Culture.



Fig. 2.12: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Freudanalytiker*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

Fig. 2.13: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Dr. Komplex*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

To emphasize these plot elements, and perhaps also to help viewers keep track of the many characters and narrative threads, Taeuber-Arp made her physical puppets reflect their relationships to other characters in the play. Consider the differences and similarities between Freud and Jung. *Freudanalytiker* has a long and lean torso with overlong arms and an oblong head, while his student, *Dr. Komplex*, is his opposite. [Figs. 2.12, 2.13] Jung's short, stocky, squat body and round head come close to his actual shape in life. Yet despite their differences, the two have similar legs and arms, and both excel in psychoanalytic haberdashery by wearing matching caps. Art historian Sigrid Barten also compares the two marionettes and contends that the painted curls on the side of *Freudanalytiker*'s head are meant as a physiognomic marker:

“Als Hinweis auf die jüdische Abstammung des Psychologen rahmte Sophie Taeuber sein Gesicht mit den typischen Schläfenlocken, den Peies.”<sup>34</sup> This observation is curious, especially in light of the sophisticated manner in which relationships between puppets play out in marionette form. Freud, in actuality, did not wear his hair in the “typical” Jewish style, and the detail, at least to my eye, echoes the beaded design of her *Dada Köpfe*. [See fig. 2.8] The relations among the figures are keyed not to physiognomic differences, but rather to professional and familial resemblances, illustrated through geometric reductions and color palette rather than stereotypical markers. Psychoanalysts, for example, are not required to wear hats. Other examples: Angela, her brother Leandro, and her father Pantalón are marked as kin by their matching feet; Smeraldina and Birghella share the same color scheme and are painted in similar shades. There are other familiar, albeit highly stylized visual references, too, but these are not physiognomic, either. Evil Tartaglia, for instance, looks like a stylized devil with a hat that resembles horns, while virginal Angela wears a white lace dress. [Figs. 2.14, 2.15]



Fig. 2.14: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Tartaglia*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

Fig. 2.15: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Angela*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

*König Hirsch* revived a tradition of satirical puppet parodies by toying with the symbolism of caricature through abstraction. The interaction between the imaginary world and the material world is precisely the dynamic that grants puppetry so much of its theatrical power. Harnessing this relationship between characters as a vehicle for satirical portraiture, simplified stock characters with a referent are thus transformed into a special sort of caricature. Without knowing the names of the marionettes, there would be no way to recognize the little wooden figures as giants in the history of psychoanalysis, yet when animated by a story, abstract forms take on sophisticated meanings. Like cartoon caricatures, real people are reduced to their most exaggerated and elemental features—the difference between Freud’s lean body and Jung’s squat physique helps viewers disambiguate the two doctors—yet with Taeuber-Arp’s Freud and Jung, physical resemblance and physiognomy do not provide the primary points of reference. Both men are best known for their psychological-philosophical-medical writings, and these theories, in turn, provide their best-known traits as puppets. Psychoanalytic ideas become the stuff of the fairy-tale puppet parody. Freud believed that people are often moved by unseeable psychological forces rooted in childhood experience, while Jung contended that people act according to one of a number of different archetypes, each with its own complex. Puppets playfully materialize both versions of human psychology: marionettes are manipulated by concealed puppeteers, while each stock character in a semi-improvisatory puppet play relies on the audience’s recognition of a certain type of person. Although portraiture and cartooning traditions are importantly related to this logic of caricaturing—simplifying the appearance of people to their most basic characteristics—the theatrical mechanics of marionetting and the play’s continuation of

*commedia dell'arte* connect the figures to the intellectual tradition being parodied. The medium is the message. To caricature people best known by their ideas, use the ideas as the basis for their physical representations. The real material for *König Hirsch*'s critique is the invisible world of psychoanalysis.

The overall playfulness of the puppet show would have been clear to viewers: this was no pedantic psychoanalytic lecture, nor was it an academic attack on disciplinary battles. The play, for all its visual ingenuity and intellectual sophistication, was ultimately meant to be laughed at. Deramo announces himself as a follower of Freudanalytikus and even calls out for his leader in a desperate monologue, "O Seelenanalyse, wunderbarer Geheimnis, oh verlass mich heute nicht!"<sup>35</sup> Psychoanalysis is parodied as Freudian and Jungian hocus-pocus and the unchecked credulity of its followers is chastised in a comical way. It is not just the psychoanalysts who can see the characters' true natures: by laughing at the play, the audience has the real one-up. The marionettes themselves help cue the viewers to the truth about the puppet characters, adding to the comedy. Art historian Bibiana Obler, who had occasion to play with Tauber-Arp's puppets, notes that *Angela*, although the love object of two different men, is hardly a graceful or elegant puppet: "Angela, though she crosses her legs demurely, makes for a gangly and awkward princess, her feet stubby and clumsy compared to the king's daintily pointed toes. She is strikingly tall, with sausage legs and excessively long, dangly arms."<sup>36</sup>

In a darker moment of the play, a real-world intrusion from outside the puppet stage throws the comedic elements into relief. There is one unfunny marionette in the story that evokes an image of the war: *Die Wache*, a faceless, multi-armed, multi-legged, multi-headed, mechanical-looking robot who represents military force. [Fig. 2.16] A collective wrapped into a single anonymous figure, this is the only human-ish character without a face. During Tartaglia's

despotic rule, the militaristic puppet appears in Angela's private chamber, by order of the king, to arrest her and the bird catcher Truffaldin, "Der Königs Befehl. Auf, folge mir, du Erzscheml."<sup>37</sup> Small but dark elements punctuate the play's comedy at times, but this too serves as a reminder of the fairy tale's distance from, and connection to, reality.



Fig. 2.16: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Untitled (*Die Wache*) for *König Hirsch*, 1918. Zurich University of the Arts/Museum of Design, Zurich. [www.emuseum.ch](http://www.emuseum.ch).

Taeuber-Arp's puppets employ abstraction in a move away from the simple, naturalistic imitation of people and events in order to show deeper forms of resemblance and meaning. Through the radical reduction of the body to its geometric essences, superficial details of an individual's external appearance are elided in order to express profound truths in a satirical way. The abstraction of the *König Hirsch* puppets is not only an extension of Dada experimentation, but also an important part of the show's overall critique. These puppets are a reminder that unchecked male competition, ambition, and aggression—in love and battle—plays out not only

in fairy-tale worlds, but also in physical reality. And only in an unreal magical forest, not entirely unlike the Burghölzli (the wooded hill that lent its name to the psychiatric hospital located there), can psychoanalytic magicians see the true nature of people and set things straight.

### **Einfach klassisch!**

Other Dada puppet shows trafficked in more conventional forms of satirical representation; George Grosz and John Heartfield's puppet designs offer an example of political caricature more familiar in its exaggeration of the unflattering features of difficult people. [See fig. 2.0] In *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang*, the Schall und Rauch puppet show mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, puppets were used to target specific individuals, and at the same time deployed as weapons against more conventional theatrical institutions. Grosz (born Georg Ehrenfried Groß) is famous for his invective caricature-style drawings, prints, and paintings of 1920s Berlin, and Heartfield (born Helmut Herzfeld) is considered a pioneer of political photomontage. Both artists Anglicized their names to protest anti-English sentiments in Germany: they took politics personally. The playwright, Walter Mehring, was a well-known cabaret lyricist and satirist, and the musical score for the production was composed by Friedrich Hollaender (1896–1976), who also worked for Max Reinhardt's theater upstairs, but is probably best remembered for his work as a composer for film. Reinhardt resurrected the cabaret in the basement of the Große Schauspielhaus (his own independent career in theater began when he established the Schall und Rauch cabaret in 1901), but he had no management or repertoire oversight of this revived version. This puppet show was the vision and work of the downstairs Dadaists.

Grosz, Heartfield, and Mehring were part of the Dada scene almost from its very beginnings, but their aesthetic style was experimental in quite a different way from that of Arp or Taeuber-Arp. Like Wolff and Morax's adaptation of *König Hirsch*, Mehring drew on an older script and used it to parody the actual world around him. But unlike Zurich Dada's abstractions—the war was some distance away from quiet, neutral Switzerland—the political situation in Berlin was immediate, and its damaging effects felt more acutely. Grosz's and Heartfield's visual distortions in puppet caricature were paradoxically meant to offer a more accurate view of the world as they saw it, highlighting its ugliness. If Arp and Taeuber-Arp's works were abstract but elegant, Grosz's and Heartfield's puppets were like a grotesque punch in the gut. Theirs was not an attempt to show different interpretive possibilities; it was a laughing but caustic interpretation of the political climate in Berlin in the wake of World War I.

The early days of the Weimar Republic—this play was presented at the end of 1919—were politically fraught following the Kaiser's 1918 abdication and the collapse of the Wilhelmine Empire. On the political right, nationalistic and anti-republican Germans believed that their country's defeat in World War I was a result not of military losses on the battlefield, but of “backstabbing” striking socialist workers and mutinous sailors. This false *Dolchstoßlegende* was advanced by General Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937) as well as other military leaders to fuel the fears of some citizens regarding a possible Bolshevik-style revolution and unrest. Anger was compounded by the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles and economic strain caused by punishing reparations. There was also discontent on the left side of the political spectrum: the once-united SPD (Social Democratic Party) was divided by the 1914 decision to join the war, and new parties emerged from the party's fracture. Along the leftist spectrum was the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party), which was antiwar, the

Spartacus faction (associated with Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg), which hoped to transform the war into an internal battle between social classes, the KDP (Communist Party), modeled after the Soviet Bolshevik party, as well as independent socialist and anarchist movements. Some political figures took on a revolutionary role, including Kurt Eisner, a writer and pacifist associated with the USPD who briefly served as the prime minister of the Free State of Bavaria following the November 1918 revolution. (His assassination in February 1919 was followed by the establishment of the short-lived Räterepublik, the Bavarian Soviet Republic, in which Paul Klee participated.)



Fig. 2.17: George Grosz and John Heartfield, puppets and caricatures of characters from *Einfach klassisch!*, from the Schall und Rauch program from December 1919. Heinz Herald, ed., *Schall und Rauch* 1, December 1919 (repr.; Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1985), 13.

*Einfach klassisch!* presented characters from all sides of the German political spectrum, as well as international leaders, in the same unflattering light. Although none of the puppets are extant, photographs of some of the hand puppets and marionettes, along with Grosz's design drawings, were published in 1919 together with Mehring's script.<sup>38</sup> A photomontage of puppet photographs together with Grosz's sketches also appeared in the program from the Schall und Rauch, in turn connecting the puppet show with the two artists' best-known media of choice (drawings and montage).<sup>39</sup> [Fig. 2.17] Reading the script with these images, an impression of the Dada satire emerges, especially if one keeps its historical context in view.



Fig. 2.18: George Grosz and John Heartfield, Clytemnestra puppet from *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang*, 1919; reconstruction by Rosemarie Hammer, 1977. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. Pamela Kort, ed., *Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art 1870–1940* (New York: Neue Galerie; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), 127.

The first of three acts begins with Aegisth (Aegithus) deposing Agamemnon. Aegisth is initially described in the script as Clytemnestra's lover, and a writer and professional thinker, an "Ethiker, Antimilitarist. . . . Duellgegner, . . . kann keine Uniform und kein Blut sehen,"<sup>40</sup> and in

the second act, as the democratic president on Clytemnestra's side. Cuckolding Clytemnestra, though married to Agamemnon at the play's beginning, easily switches allegiances. [Fig. 2.18] Although there are no photographs or drawings of these specific puppets, the description of the Aegisth character is reminiscent of Kurt Eisner, who was not only the leader of the Free State of Bavaria, but also an antiwar author and thinker.<sup>41</sup> Agamemnon, characterized in the text as "klg. Hoheit,"<sup>42</sup> a commanding general in his best years, would have been dressed up Kaiser-like in a Prussian general's uniform, given his royal description in the text. In the second act, titled "The Dawn of Democracy," Aegisth is assassinated by Orest (Orestes), just as Eisner was assassinated in reality, and right-wing anti-Republican Orest's political allegiance is cued by his costume; he is "Offizier eines attischen Freikorps, könig. Hoheit, Monokel, attische Freikorpsuniform."<sup>43</sup> In the third and final act, American Woodrow Appollon (Woodrow Apollo) appears interested in guiding the democracy back on track, yet he is an idealist who lives in "higher spheres" and is ultimately ineffective. [Fig. 2.19] Orest reasserts himself at the play's end and leads his Freikorps units to the Baltic (where the Allies had indeed permitted German troops in an effort to block a perceived potential Bolshevik threat).<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 2.19: George Grosz and John Heartfield, Woodrow Appollon puppet from *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolf Fürstner Verlag, 1919), n.p. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz.



Fig. 2.20: George Grosz and John Heartfield, John Heartfield as puppeteer with *Konservativ Herr* puppet from *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolf Fürstner Verlag, 1919), n.p. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Fig. 2.21: George Grosz and John Heartfield, *Der bürgerliche Herr* puppet from *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolf Fürstner Verlag, 1919), n.p. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Other cultural currents, both ancient and modern, were acknowledged in the script. In addition to skewering specific political individuals, the play also went after certain Weimar “types,” the likes of which are familiar from Grosz’s artistic oeuvre. [Figs. 2.20, 2.21] In recognition of its debt to classical theater, the play features an updated Greek chorus: a trio of newspaper editors from the conservative, liberal, and socialist presses. The newspapermen represent clashes between left and right in the press—the mass media was a frequent target of Dada critiques—and their presence signals the importance of the press in the arena of political violence. Additionally, there are secondary characters who articulate different political opinions,

with allusions to ancient theatrical characters, meant to bite. *Electra von der Heilsarmee*, for example, exposes the hypocrisy of a certain religious charity. Electra is not actually there to save anyone—in Greek theater she is part of Orestes’s revenge plot—and instead announces her mission to collect “für hungernde Antisemiten” and “handle nebenbei mit Apparaten / Für Kulturnationen zum Judenbraten.”<sup>45</sup> Even the Wächter, Agamemnon’s guard, is from the really, really old guard: an invalid from the war of 1870 with a beard resembling Kaiser Wilhelm I. In addition to such political types, the play also included references to modern pop-culture film stars and jazz music, and was the first play, or one of the first, to combine live action with film in a single performance.<sup>46</sup>

In case there was any question about who was behind the play, or about the intentions of its artists, the script even includes a self-conscious description of its aims in a monologue delivered by Aegisth while training with a punching bag: “Meine Herren und Damen! Sehr einfach zu lachen. / Aber besser machen! besser machen! / Überhaupt, haben Sie schon mal regiert? / Bald wird man von links, bald von rechts sekkiert, / Im Beiblatt von Zille karakiert, / Wird visitiert, persifliert, ausspioniert. . . . Hält man’s mit den Intellektuelle, / Gleich putschen die Dadaisten-Rebellen. . . . Schließlich merkt man betrubten Angesichts: / Mit der Güte der Menschen war’s wieder mal nichts.”<sup>47</sup> Aegisth’s speech is certainly mocking, but it also explicitly announces the Dadaists’ intentions to depict artistic political overthrow. By inserting the artists into the script, Mehring deliberately merges them with their works, albeit with a dark view.

In addition to attacking the political status quo, with this puppet show the Dadaists were also critiquing the art establishment. Beyond the obvious parody of the Greek tragedy on Reinhardt’s main stage above, the protests that the Dadaists staged to interrupt their own

production included the slogan “Down with Reinhardtism!”<sup>48</sup> Disruption is, ironically, the play’s happy ending. By staging a satire of classical theater as a puppet show in a basement, the performance also represents an attempt to activate spaces not normally suited for theatrical presentations of artists, just as puppets were used to revitalize a medium not normally associated with high art. It was a way to bring art to unexpected places and use those spaces as part of a self-conscious critique. The Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin was also used as a circus, literally, and the basement was the area that once contained animals in cages. In attempting to reunite art and life, the Dadaists did indeed shift their critique to art institutions, but the space in which a work was presented was never discharged of its political potential, and also treated with an awareness of its specificity in time and space.

### **Die Erste Internationale Dada-Messe**

The puppets Grosz and Heartfield created for *Einfach klassisch!* were not their only puppet-based collaboration. From June 30 to August 25, 1920, these two artists participated in the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe, where they exhibited a sculptural puppet (and other works).

Mounted in a private Berlin gallery owned by Dr. Otto Burchard, an expert in Song dynasty ceramics, the Dada fair was neither a theatrical performance nor a normal art exhibition but an “Ausstellung und Verkauf dadaistischer Erzeugnisse.” [Fig. 2.22] Like their earlier puppet performance, the groundbreaking Dada fair was a political attack as much as a critique of art institutions, commodity culture, and bourgeois aesthetics. It eschewed traditional art categories and exhibition practices, instead offering a detached view of humanity’s destruction of itself intended to shock its public. An eclectic mix of media, including paintings and prints, were presented alongside newer media forms such as posters, collages, photomontages, and

assemblages in such a way as to fill the walls and occupy almost all of the floor space; work was even suspended from the ceiling.<sup>49</sup> [See fig. 2.8] In fact, the piece hanging above this unconventional gallery installation was yet another puppet-inspired collaboration, this time the work of Heartfield together with Rudolf Schlichter (1890–1955). Grosz’s and Heartfield’s *Der wildgewordene Spießker Heartfield (Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik)* and Heartfield and Schlichter’s flight-like *Der Preußische Erzengel* are static works rather than puppets designed for theatrical handling. Although these puppet-based sculptures are certainly related to the satirical puppets used at the Schall und Rauch, especially given their biting political intentions, they are also connected to a different but adjacent constellation of *Puppen*. Specifically, these life-size sculptures are based in part on *Schaufensterpuppe*, *Kleiderpuppe*, or *Schneiderpuppe*, and this association with mannequins, tailor’s dummies, and artists’ aids constituted an important part of their critical potential.



Fig. 2.22: Erste Internationale Dada-Messe, Berlin, June 1920; hanging from the ceiling is *Preußische Erzengel* by Rudolf Schlichter and John Heartfield. Bildarchiv Prussischer Kulturbesitz. Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 84.

Mannequins and dummies are used as substitutes for human bodies in both museological and commercial contexts. Although they had a history in museum exhibitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in European folk museums, they were usually a vehicle to display something else, especially costumes and fashions, rather than the showpiece itself. In such traditional displays, the exhibition strategy is to attempt to make the mannequin recede, if not disappear, in the viewer's mind. The Dadaist use of these puppet-like objects, by contrast, deliberately drew attention to their presence. In the case of Grosz and Heartfield, the artists did not dress the tailor's form, thereby making it the focus, while Heartfield and Schlichter emphasized the unreality and presence of their figure by suspending it from above. By leaving the dummy exposed or installing it in an unexpected way, the Dadaists deliberately drew attention to the exhibition setting; it is like breaking the fourth wall in a theatrical production, something puppets do quite often as an audience engagement technique. While part of this was plainly a critique of art establishments, it was simultaneously a reactivation of unexpected objects, giving them new meaning. The use of mannequins exemplifies an aspect of the Dadaists' approach to art making as more than just anti-art: everyday objects and display strategies recontextualize familiar things in unfamiliar ways in order to prompt a viewer to think of the world around them a little differently. Ultimately these works are provocations—mannequins were not used by the Dadaists as uncanny or erotic objects, as the Surrealists would later make them<sup>50</sup>—prompting the audience to take a closer look at Prussian militarism.

Grosz and Heartfield's *Der wildgewordene Spießer Heartfield (Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik)* is a sort of caricature, but a different kind from the *Einfach klassisch!* puppets. [Fig. 2.23] It too presents a Weimar "type" as a punishing exaggeration, but this time in a non-

cartoonish way. The sculpture is no longer extant, but it was thoroughly documented, making it possible to interpret it from the many photographs that were taken in situ at the Dada fair.

Assembled from everyday objects without any intention of disguising their original function (some absurd-seeming at first), the piece is no less vicious than the artists' other caricatures.

Scholar Helen Adkins describes its target: "Kopflös und einbeinig, mit den absurdesten

Attributen und Prothesen bestückt, ist 'Der wildgewordene Spießler' die bissige Karikatur des

allgegenwärtigen, unverbesserlich militaristischen Kriegskrüppel der Weimarer Republik."<sup>51</sup> The

work also alludes to older art historical forms of sculpture. Just as the puppets for *Einfach*

*klassisch!* were made for a modern script play based on a Greek tragedy, this puppet-based

sculpture also carries an allusion to antiquity.<sup>52</sup> In fact, with its missing head, arms, and legs, it

does echo many classical marble sculptures. Its proportions and symmetry are typical of ancient

statuary, where the male body is often the subject. But this work is not meant to be an edifying

masterpiece, and its display in a setting that satirically draws attention to a commercial potential

(these are Dada "products") underlines its transformed status. This is no classical ideal or

military memorial to the glory of war.

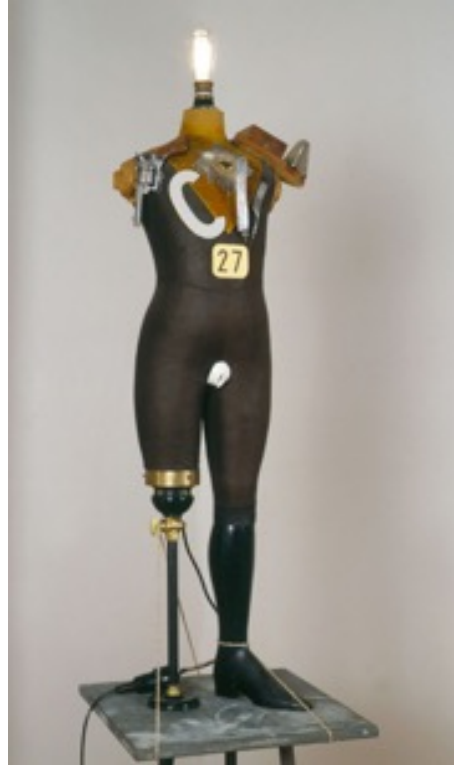


Fig. 2.23: George Grosz and John Heartfield, *Der wildgewordene Spießler Heartfield (Elektromechan, Tatlin-Plastik)*, 1920; reconstruction from 1988. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 123.

The sculpture presents Prussian militarism as a cruel, deforming spectacle. It is not mocking wounded veterans (in the way that the artists' more cartoon-like puppets satirized political targets), but rather is intended as a critique of the violence of war. The assemblage is built upon a dummy for a small man or teenage boy, given its slightly diminutive but life-size height. The petite size of this tailor's dummy is one subtle suggestion of emasculation. The male body indeed resembles a war amputee, as Adkins observes, as it has no arms and its prosthetic legs are mismatched. Despite its lack of arms, the sculpture is nonetheless armed: a pistol is affixed to its right shoulder. Objects that specifically mark the figure as Prussian military adorn it: Prussia's highest chivalric order, Der Hohe Orden vom Schwarzen Adler, is pinned on its torso at heart level, and an Iron Cross, another Prussian military decoration, is affixed to its

rump.<sup>53</sup> While the irony of the Iron Cross's placement is apparent, it gets worse, as the figure is missing yet another anatomical feature below the belt. In place of male genitalia, Grosz and Heartfield attached plaster dentures, a much bolder sign of emasculation representing the martial loss as a kind of *vagina dentata* tale ("Marianne" is a female personification of France, and the "Vaterland" is Germany).

The associations of *Puppen* with Wilhelmine finery would have had another resonance for Berliners at this time. In 1895 Wilhelm II commissioned a hundred white sculptures of Prussian royalty from the artist Reinhold Begas (1831–1911) as decoration for the Siegesallee in Berlin. [Fig. 2.24] Designed to make the world jealous, Wilhelm II's personal gift to the city was widely derided by critics as vulgar. Berliners lampooned the boulevard and its statuary by calling it the *Puppenallee*.<sup>54</sup> Begas was a well-established artist, known for his monuments and Prussian portraits in a grand, neo-baroque sculptural style. Grosz and Heartfield's decorated Prussian veteran, however, more than a little frayed around the edges, is far from a victorious monument to a now-collapsed empire. Installation photographs from the Dada fair show the piece situated by the exhibition's exit; the opposite of a *Schaufensterpuppe* intended to draw shoppers into a commercial establishment, this work would have bid gallery visitors farewell, leaving them with a grotesque vision of what they would encounter in the world outside the art gallery. In other words, an amputee soldier was a more realistic vision of Prussian militarism in the Berlin streets than Begas's neo-baroque *Puppenallee* royal portraits.



Fig. 2.24: Berlin's Siegesallee, ca. 1902–4. Zentralbibliothek Zürich, [www.recherche-portal.ch](http://www.recherche-portal.ch).

At the same time, the work reflects the artists' satirical view of other German cultural spheres, including the home front and the avant-garde itself.<sup>55</sup> *Der wildgewordene Spießer Heartfield (Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik)* includes references to the domestic realm, particularly through its incorporation of daily household items and everyday objects, including cutlery, a lightbulb, a letter, numbers, and a doorbell. Despite the elevated military decorations, the title of the piece also describes it as a “bourgeois Heartfield gone wild,” an attribution of a specific class that transforms the work into a kind of self-critical self-portrait. The work is self-reflective in other ways too, including its shout-out to fellow avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953). This Russian Constructivist had been assigned the task of removing tsarist monuments and designing new Soviet ones by Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin. But like Tatlin's abstract designs, “Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik” has no specific meaning other than its modernity and the oblique reference to a fellow avant-gardist and monument maker, which satirizes Tatlin's idealist undertakings as much as Heartfield satirizes himself. (Although the Dadaists had no way of seeing into the future, Tatlin's famous monument was never realized.)

*Der wildgewordene Spießler Heartfield (Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik)* critiques war and bourgeois aesthetics, and is a self-reflective satire on the avant-garde itself. Just as Arp's poetic Kaspar bridged artist and subject in an oblique way, here is another indirect method of collapsing the boundary between artist and artwork.



Fig. 2.25: John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter, *Der Preußische Erzengel*, 1920; reconstruction by Angelika Mende, 2004. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. Pamela Kort, ed., *Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art 1870–1940* (New York: Neue Galerie; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), 170.

*Der Preußische Erzengel*, another mannequin-like assemblage, also attacks Prussian militarism. But instead of drawing on classical or avant-garde art cultures or the domestic realms, Heartfield and Schlichter relied upon Christian religious art and mass-media propaganda for their visual vocabulary. [Fig. 2.25] The result is a slightly different kind of attack, but one that

nonetheless extends a fairground puppet-style critique with its high/low inversions. While *Der wildgewordene Spießher Heartfield (Elektro-mechan, Tatlin-Plastik)* shows war as mutilating, the male body reduced and naked, *Der Preußische Erzengel* presents the soldier's transformation into a dressed-up beast. Also built on a life-size human dummy, this sculpture too wears Prussian military insignias, but instead of using an Iron Cross to mark an asshole, rank is undermined by the placement of officer's badges on the gray uniform of a field soldier. Of course, the most obvious inversion is the figure itself: recalling a creature from a Hieronymus Bosch painting, Heartfield and Schlichter combine a papier-mâché pig's head with a stuffed man's body and substitute a bayonet for a right hand. Mismatched bodies of human and animal have a long history in Christian art, often representing a disrupted continuum, and the symbol has been used as an expression of something diabolical, especially in northern European religious painting. Here the gesture unites religious art with an image from World War I propaganda; scholar Ralf Burmeister notes that a pig wearing a Prussian helmet was a well-known icon of French anti-German propaganda.<sup>56</sup> Heartfield and Schlichter effectively produced a satire of a propagandistic satire to express their view of the truth about the war.

References to religious art and allusions to pro-war messaging bleed into one another even further, as the work draws upon German propaganda as much as it does French. The banderole around the "angel's" torso reads: "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her," the opening line of a popular Christmas carol penned by Martin Luther.<sup>57</sup> But this messenger brings no glad tidings (and was exhibited over the summer). Burmeister's source study illuminates another fascinating aspect of Heartfield and Schlichter's attack by manifesting Prussian pro-war propaganda, specifically an appeal to the divine as justification for battle and the German promise of God's blessing to those who massacre the enemy. The piece satirizes the absurdity of

slaughter in God's name and parodies the archangel Gabriel's announcement of Christ's forthcoming birth and hope of salvation.<sup>58</sup> Nothing is sacred. Heartfield and Schlichter combine French and Prussian propaganda in one biting but comical, caricatured image. And in case its message was unclear to viewers, the work also provides explicit instructions to make its meaning known. A poster dangles below the improbable flying pig: "Um dieses Kunstwerk vollkommen zu begreifen, exerziere man täglich zwölf Stunden mit vollgepacktem Affen und feldmarchmäßig ausgerüstet auf dem Tempelhofer Feld." In a tone like a puppet's direct address to the audience, as well as parody of propaganda posters from the period, the sculpture includes a built-in call to action and commentary that ironically undermines itself: a work of art, even religious art and especially propaganda imagery, cannot fully reveal the perversity of war.

For all its pointedness, the pig's head is kind of cute, and the suspended puppet is playfully presented, which tempers the invective of its critique without undermining its force—a familiar puppet strategy. Also like its puppet cousins, this work was ephemeral, made from everyday objects rather than valuable materials with permanence in mind. The original is no longer extant, although its installation at the Dada fair is thoroughly documented. In fact, *Der Preußische Erzengel* was damaged sometime in the 1920s, not long after the Dada fair was shut following charges against its organizers for defaming the Prussian army. A young officer who visited the fair was offended by this piece along with Grosz's famous *Gott mit uns* (1920) portfolio. A trial ensued, and through their evasive and ironic testimonies, the Dadaists discredited their accusers; Schlichter was acquitted because he claimed to be incapable of reconstructing the pieces of the ephemeral sculpture, and Grosz was spared jail time and only charged a fine for his prints.<sup>59</sup> The impermanence of the puppet, its ephemeral status rather than gravitas as an artistic masterpiece, was ultimately part of its enduring power.

## Dada Puppen

While distorted masculinities took the shape of mannequin-based sculptures to critique Prussian militarism at the Dada fair, the female form was represented by the doll-like sculptures of Hannah Höch (1889–1978), expressing her view of the conflicting feminine ideals confronting women in the Weimar Republic. These were no cutesy toys for small children, nor were they delicate decorative trophies. As with the works by Grosz, Heartfield, and Schlichter, Höch's charmingly grotesque puppets were assemblages made from the stuff of everyday life, specifically small plushies. At the Dada fair, two were exhibited in a static pose, seated together on a bench, but they were also used in other creative projects. [Fig. 2.26] Although Höch's *Dada Puppen* were not made for formal theatrical presentations like Taeuber-Arp's marionettes, they did appear on the cover the Schall und Rauch program from April 1920, suggesting a theatrical context.<sup>60</sup> [Fig. 2.27] Höch dressed up and posed for photographs with her dolls, and these photographs are not simple documentation (although they do provide documentary evidence), but an important clue to how the puppets should be interpreted. The puppets, together with Höch's photographs, show her response to the contradictory images of progressive and conservative femininity that emerged in Weimar culture.<sup>61</sup>



Fig. 2.26: Photograph of Hannah Höch's *Dada Puppen* at the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe, Berlin, June 1920. Private collection. Ralf Burmeister, ed., *Hannah Höch—Aller Anfang ist DADA!* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007), 101.

Fig. 2.27: Hannah Höch's puppets on the cover of the Schall und Rauch program from April 1920. Heinz Herald, ed., *Schall und Rauch 5*, April 1920. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. <http://sammlung-online.berlinischegalerie.de>.

Höch is best known for her photomontages, and the *Dada Puppen* can be understood as a kind of sculptural extension of both her avant-garde works on paper and her professional practice in the applied arts.<sup>62</sup> Two *Dada Puppen* and her famous collage *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* were included in the Dada fair, an exhibition context pointing to their shared status as Dada “products” and their place as protest art. Both present the viewer with images of reassembled bodies made from unexpected pieces. The two puppets were a pair from a series of four that she produced between 1916 and

1918; all were stuffed dolls with the hourglass shape of a female body, dressed in skirts. Made of fabric, yarn, beads, ribbon, wire, sandpaper-like board, and thread, their mixed-and-matched textures, colors, and materials make these pieces look distinctively one-of-a-kind. Like the other Dadaists, Höch made no attempt to hide or disguise the materials used in their construction, and the effect intentionally creates a kind of un-dainty, ragdoll aesthetic that recalls her own *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*, as well as modernist collages more generally. She was also drawing on her background in the feminized field of the applied arts, not unlike Taeuber-Arp, who also referenced the visual language of needlecraft (especially spools and bobbins) in her marionettes. Höch trained in graphic, book, embroidery, and textile design, and worked for a number of different magazines and pattern departments at the Ullstein Verlag, eventually serving as an editor in the handiwork division of the press from 1916 to 1926. Her main occupation for the magazine was to sketch patterns for embroideries and lace, test the designs, and finally draw the completed craft projects. Additionally, she patterned women's fashions and plush toys. The *Dada Puppen* combine both spheres of artistic activity—avant-garde and applied—as a new kind of everyday object.

But these are no ordinary dolls. The puppets present a grotesque hypersexualization of the female body that is simultaneously softened by a playful resemblance in size and scrappiness to a child's rag toy. The shape of the puppet bodies suggests that Höch is playing with an experience-innocence paradigm in her representation of the female shape. Of the two Dada fair puppets, one has a giant T-shaped torso with dangling nipples and an elongated waist, and the other is flat chested with tiny seed-bead breasts. The other pair, not exhibited at the fair but created during this same period, repeat these physiques yet with a slightly different execution: a voluptuous companion has conical torpedo-bra-like protrusions with pipe-cleaner-fringed

nipples, while a flat-chested puppet has prominent pink disk-and-bead nipples. [Fig. 2.28] There are no color photographs of the now-lost Dada fair puppets, but the two dolls saved by the artist are sewn together in a colorful combination of blues, grays, yellows, pinks, and reds. All the puppets have a messy tangle of unkempt, short hair. Mismatching beads make asymmetrical eyes and the lengths of their arms and legs do away with classical ideals of proportion and balance. One scholar suggests that the *Dada Puppen* represent a subversion of the typical function of baby dolls that are sometimes used to introduce young girls to traditional maternal virtues.<sup>63</sup> While the association to children's playthings is certainly present and deliberate, these are not simple subversive artworks, but rather a complex hybrid creation. In their hybridity—oversexed *and* innocent—they capture contemporary ambivalences toward changing gender roles of the modern woman.



Fig. 2.28: Hannah Höch, *Dada Puppen*, ca. 1916–1920. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 142.

The Weimar Constitution granted all Germans equal rights as citizens, and Article 108 included the rights of women to vote and to hold political office, a major sign that women were being accorded a new and modern status in this young democracy.<sup>64</sup> In fact, women made up the majority of the electorate (partly a result of the high male casualty rate in World War I, and because some men were too wounded or shell shocked after returning from service to be likely to vote), and they held 111 seats out of 423 in the Reichstag in 1919.<sup>65</sup> Women also gained visibility in the public sphere through new occupations and positions that were previously only available to men. Weimar historian Detlev Peukert writes: “The truly shattering change was the emergence of certain clear shifts within the gender based division of labour, which in turn affected the perceived image and social role of women.”<sup>66</sup> As women became increasingly present in politics and culture, their position in society evolved as well, and an image of the “new woman” emerged. Independent, emancipated, and sexually adventurous, with a modern bob haircut and short skirt, these consumption-oriented women gained iconic status in the media. Peukert notes that the new woman icon was more fantasy than reality, since the incomes of most women in the workforce were too low to actually live the life portrayed in the cinema, illustrated magazines, romance novels, and advertising.<sup>67</sup> Commentators from the period frequently noted that “new women” were actually in the minority—that the majority of Germans still held conventional notions of women’s role in society.<sup>68</sup> While the new woman represented one kind of fantasy, the conservative resistance held a parallel idealization of the so-called female virtues of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*. Traditional notions of maternal domestic femininity were a cultural response to women’s changing social roles. These contradictory images existed simultaneously in Weimar culture, and artists such as Höch responded to the paradox in works such as her *Dada Puppen*.



Fig. 2.29: Willy Römer, Hannah Höch with her *Dada Puppen*, ca. 1920.

Höch toyed with the contradictory ideals of femininity not only through the shape of her puppets, but also in how she played with them in posed photographs. Her staged scenes are another indication that these are not one-dimensional critiques of baby dolls, but sophisticated satires complicating a limiting binary vision of femininity. The puppets' form is overtly sexual and confronting, yet Höch sat with the *Dada Puppen* in a restaging of the traditional "Virgin and Child" scene. [Fig. 2.29] The artist wears a conservative light-colored dress with a long, flowing skirt, a serene expression on her face, eyes cast down upon the puppet in her lap, her fingers delicately holding the doll's hand. The second puppet floats mysteriously at her side. Yet the puppets in the place of the Christ Child and Holy Ghost (or angel) are sexualized female rag dolls, and the window does not show an expansive natural vista but a black interior. The artist's hair is bobbed like a new woman film star rather than a head-covered Madonna. Playing with symbols of experience and innocence, the puppets interrupt assumptions about femininity in the

Weimar Republic. Seeing women as either debased whores or innocent Madonnas limits the development of sexual identities, as Höch's simple toys demonstrate. Grotesque female puppets—alternating between a Picasso-esque prostitute and a child's innocent plaything—cast this tension in a satirical light.

In another way and in a different photograph, the puppets also become a kind of self-portrait. Just as Heartfield named one of his puppet collaborations after himself with a reference to the avant-garde movement more generally, so too did Höch allude to self-portraiture through her dolls while simultaneously representing the larger cultural forces that women faced at this time. Dressed up like one of her own puppets, she posed with her Dada fair creation around 1925, representing herself as one of a puppet pair. [Fig. 2.30] Höch wears a circular stiff card skirt, disks around her knees, and a dramatic hairstyle, a costume that echoes the puppet's outfit. Because Höch turns her head and the photograph is slightly blurred, the puppet she plays is somewhat anonymous. Unlike Paul Klee's political puppet portraits discussed in the previous chapter, Höch's photo and dolls have no characteristics to specifically mark them as her or anyone else, which in turn universalizes the message beyond the sphere of her own experience. By casting herself as a puppet, Höch brings the conflicting view of female femininity and sexuality to life—literally. Both actress and acted upon, puppets invite the viewer to consider their assumptions about the place of woman in society. The conflicting views of femininity that the puppets express are not simple subversions on a given expectation, but embodied flirtations midway between ideal and real.



Fig. 2.30: Unknown photographer, Hannah Höch dressed as a *Dada Puppe* and posed with one of her dolls, ca. 1920. Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst. <http://sammlung-online.berlinischegalerie.de>.

### **Mechanisch tanzende Figur**

*Mechanisch tanzende Figur* offers another case of a puppet used in a Dada variety performance.

[Figs. 2.31, 2.32] Vilmos Huszár (1884–1960) created this mechanical neo-marionette for use as a shadow puppet in non-narrative shows.<sup>69</sup> The puppeteer would manipulate it by pressing buttons at its base to engage a complex system of wires and levers, while backlighting projected the shadow of a puppet and stained-glass colors onto a screen in front of the figure. It was made around 1920, and performed as a finale to an evening's entertainment during a Dada tour through Holland in 1923. Huszár, together with the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931), his wife Nelly van Doesburg (1899–1975), and the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), traveled to approximately thirteen different locales and performed variations on a similar program (although Huszár's puppet show appears to have been the only constant at every venue). An evening's performance often included a recitation of Theo van Doesburg's *Dada Is What?*; Schwitters barking like a dog, tweeting like a bird, or making some other noises; a poetry reading

by Schwitters; and a musical number played by Nelly van Doesburg.<sup>70</sup> The conclusion was Huszár's two-part performance, in which he combined a didactic lecture explaining Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964), and their relation to De Stijl with his shadow puppet dance.<sup>71</sup> As in other Dada cabaret lineups, the puppet show was the culmination, but Huszár's was different, not only because of its strange combination of professorial pronouncements and rambunctious anarchy, but also because Huszár's mechanical neo-marionette was not a caricatured, comic, or grotesque figure. Instead, the piece invited viewers to consider the ambivalent relationship between human and machine using Dada's disorienting performance strategies and a De Stijl aesthetic.



Fig. 2.31: Vilmos Huszár, *Mechanisch tanzende Figur*, 1920; reconstruction by Andy Kowalski and Robert Pachowski, ca. 1984–85. Gemeente Museum Den Haag. [www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/collection](http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/collection).



Fig. 2.32: Vilmos Huszár, *Mechanisch tanzende Figur*, 1920; performance simulation with reconstructed puppet; reconstruction by Andy Kowalski and Robert Pachowski, ca. 1984–85. Gemeete Museum Den Haag. vimeo.com.

While there were certainly landmark Dada performances and exhibitions, as we have seen, Dada was not associated with one cohesive style or a single venue, gallery, publication, or institution. The diffuse Dadaist network extended beyond the borders of Germany and Switzerland, and international artists held soirees and salons in cities across Europe and America. In varying contexts, Dadaism came to be associated with different art movements as the decade progressed, most famously Surrealism in France,<sup>72</sup> and in Holland some Dadaists and De Stijl artists crossed paths. The overlap of Dada and De Stijl has been thoroughly discussed: members of both groups wanted to move beyond traditional bourgeois genres to reinvigorate art and bring it to life.<sup>73</sup> Yet compared with Dada, De Stijl was in many ways a more conventional and idealistic movement in which a group of artists organized around a philosophical approach and tried to spread their ideas through exhibitions and publications. The aim of the movement's practitioners (who included artists, architects, and designers) was the establishment of an objective "neo-plastic" art expressive of universal values through basic geometric forms, straight

lines, and primary colors. De Stijl historian Paul Overy notes that its artists applied these principles in different ways, yet they shared many of the same underlying beliefs, including a “utopian faith in the transforming qualities of mechanization and new technology.”<sup>74</sup>

Huszár, a founding member of *De Stijl* magazine and the designer of the journal’s first cover, did not limit himself strictly to the De Stijl scene or rigidly apply its unswerving confidence in technology. *Mechanisch tanzende Figur* is disruptive in its striking originality and strangeness—it remains the only example of a mechanical shadow puppet in the history of Western art—and provides occasion to consider a different angle on puppetry’s role in Dada’s reintegration of art and life. The presence of a De Stijl–influenced work in a Dada context is an example of how some artists bridged Dada’s signature negative provocations with a more positive and constructive vision for art’s communicative power. This hard-edged and geometric figure, built up from separate rectangular elements in right-angle relations, uses the De Stijl visual vocabulary, yet the overall message of the work is more in keeping with Dadaists’ ambivalence and critique. Using surprise and disorientation as its primary theatrical strategies (rather than satire or caricature) the De Stijl aesthetic is put to Dada ends; the puppet itself does not echo De Stijl’s utopian confidence in mechanization despite its formal compositional elements. The resulting image—the human body as mechanical shadow—is balanced, playful, and familiar, yet expressionless, somewhat menacing and estranging. It encourages conscious and intellectual contemplation of the relation between human and machine.

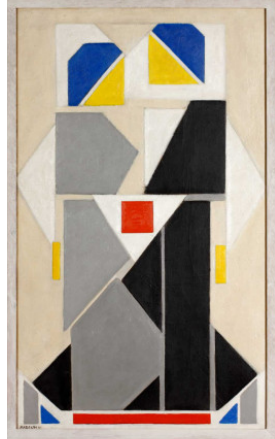


Fig. 2.33: Vilmos Huszár, *Couple Dancing*, 1938–39. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. [www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/collection](http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/en/collection).

Less is known about Huszár than about other artists associated with Dada and De Stijl, but the scholar Sjarel Ex has reconstructed some of his early background based on autobiographical notes written in the 1930s.<sup>75</sup> Huszár was born in Budapest and began his studies in the applied arts while living in his native city. He later went to school in Munich, but abandoned his formal education and traveled to Paris and London. He settled in Holland around 1906, and spent most of his career there working as a painter, graphic designer, typographer, furniture designer, and interior decorator. Huszár was certainly influenced by Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) and other De Stijl artists, yet his work was slightly different from theirs. As in the figures of Oskar Schlemmer, a representational element is retained in much of Huszár's work, and one finds repeated references to a dancing human figure. [Fig. 2.33] The works are balanced (but not necessarily strictly symmetrical), consistent with a De Stijl aesthetic, yet the stiff calm evident in, for instance, Mondrian's De Stijl paintings is replaced with energetic, dynamic movement.<sup>76</sup> Huszár's bodies are elemental shapes, simultaneously built up into mosaic-like assemblages. Additionally, Huszár dabbled in more conventional narrative shadow puppet productions. He presented *The Marriage of Aladdin and Ber'el Badur* at the Haagse Kunstkring

in 1923 (the same year as his Dada performances) and *Baron von Münchhausen's Trip to Russia* with the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring around 1926.<sup>77</sup> [Fig. 2.34] The works were rendered in a traditional European-style folk art aesthetic, but De Stijl stained-glass windows in the miniature building of one of his shadow puppets was evidence of an attempt to merge old and modern puppet forms.<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 2.34: Vilmos Huszár, scene from the shadow puppet show *Baron von Münchhausen's Trip to Russia*, 1926. Carel Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl: 1917–1922*, trans. Carlotte L. Loeb and Arthur L. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 89.

*Mechanisch tanzende Figur* was understood by Huszár's peers as something totally new (which it was), yet the work was created with a much older form of performance in mind: a marionette. Hinged at the knees, hips, elbows, and wrists, the neo-marionette had a plate in the middle of its head that could be shifted left or right to give the impression that its head was turning (it could appear both in profile and face forward). In a letter from 1917, Theo van

Doesburg wrote: “[Huszár] has invented something totally new, a kind of kinetic painting.”<sup>79</sup>

Huszár was explicit about his interest in representing movement—the didactic lecture he presented before the show included slides showing sculptures and paintings representing dance—and he even published deliberately obtuse instructions for a *gestaltende Schauspiel* in the *De Stijl* journal two years before the Dada Dutch tour. Titled “Kurze technische Erklärung von der ‘Gestaltende Schauspiel,’ Komposition 1920–21,”<sup>80</sup> the text outlines four scenes of a performance, describing the positions, shapes, colors, figures, and how they are to be moved—but without actually providing any technical instructions.<sup>81</sup> The goal of the piece: “die absicht ist durch bewegung und stillstand in einem schauspiel fortwährend abwechselnde und gestaltende kompositionen zu zeigen, durch zusammenstellung und verbindungen von farben stand und maß [*sic*].”<sup>82</sup> Even more incomprehensible and deliberately disorienting: “Dieses schauspiel soll elektro-mechanisch oder farben-kinematographisch ausgeführt werden, und ist primitif ausführbar als marionette [*sic*].”<sup>83</sup> His mechanical neo-marionette was one kind of presentation of such a work, both totally new and totally old.

According to such a description, Huszár’s mechanical shadow puppet was conceived without a script or story in mind—the artist created it as a formal experiment. Yet its performance was included in a Dada cabaret, and the preceding acts by the van Doesburgs and Schwitters were an important part of its reception. [Fig. 2.35] The context would have contributed to its disorienting tone and audience confusion about the figure’s identification. The puppet is a nameless *Mechanisch tanzende Figur*, and it is even uncertain if it is supposed to be human or machine. The anonymity of the “figure” would have been further underlined by Schwitters’s preceding recitation of his poem “Ursachen und Beginn der grossen glorreichen Revolution in Revon” (1922), which was often part of the Dada Holland program.<sup>84</sup> In this poem,

a mysterious and anonymous protagonist, Der Mann, stands in a public spot and refuses to respond to questions. First noticed by a child—who innocently draws the mother’s attention to the man—his presence and silence precipitates a wave of concern, sufficient to incite a revolution. In Schwitters’s work, the anonymous man is motionless and the subject of a short narrative. Huszár’s figure, though equally anonymous, not only moves but dances. While puppets have a long history as protesting voices in fairground shows, the silent shadow is an equally potent expression. The wordless movement of the figure’s projected shadow is as much a part of the performance as what the audience projects onto the puppet. Instead of articulating a clear position on humanity in the age of mechanical revolution, the strangeness of the piece is intended to make the audience arrive at their own conclusions regarding what they are seeing.

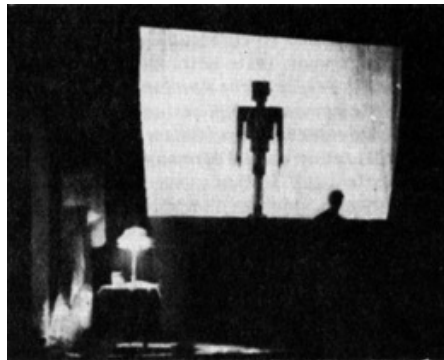


Fig. 2.35: Vilmos Huszár, a Dada performance of *Mechanisch tanzende Figur* in Holland, 1923. *Het Leven*, January 27, 1923, 148, reproduced in Nancy J. Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” *Art Bulletin* 66, no. 4 (December 1984): 650.

*Mechanisch tanzende Figur* does not directly critique war, politics, or the social conditions of the day as explicitly as many of the puppets we have discussed, but it nonetheless provides a potent example of Dada’s disruptive tactics. The work invites viewers to consider the ambivalent relationship between humanity and mechanization using Dada’s disorienting performance strategies, in a traveling Dada cabaret, employing a De Stijl aesthetic. It was also created after the conclusion of the war, and instead of agitation, it invites reflection. The

intersection of Dada and De Stijl points to the former's more positive and constructive features: while often offering a biting, negative critique, a utopian current emerged in the postwar period, especially among artists who imported Dada into other artistic circles. Huszár's puppet draws on older puppetry traditions and reinvents them in a modern way to send an ambiguous message. Yet some elements of its visual presentation—namely the utopian De Stijl visual vocabulary—point to a certain hopefulness regarding art's power to change the world.

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In his theoretical formulation on the function of the avant-garde, philosopher Peter Bürger insisted that an attack on art institutions was a necessary tactic to achieve a reunion of art and life. Yet Dada puppets demonstrate how Dadaists sought to blur the boundaries between artist, artwork, and audience beyond their critiques of art institutions. While some works certainly deflate high art, they simultaneously offer additional points of contact between art and life. The self-referentiality of Hans Arp's *Kaspar*, Heartfield's mannequin sculpture, and Höch's *Dada Puppen* and *Dada Puppen* costume are examples of the constructive (rather than anti-art) way Dadaists sought to eliminate the distinction between art and life by making themselves into art—and an art form that has a role in everyday life. Their own lives became artworks through different kinds of puppet representations. In the case of Taeuber-Arp's puppets, real people were transformed into caricatures of their life's work. Grosz and Heartfield staged an interruption of their own cabaret satire to play the role of the enraged audience, breaking the fourth wall. By combining the utopian visual aesthetic of De Stijl with the disorienting performance strategies of Dada, Huszár's puppets invited viewers to reflect on the work and their own subjective sense of

its strangeness—an old-fashioned interactive puppet engagement strategy that puts some of the creative work back on the audience—rather than attacking the world directly.

Puppets created by the Dadaists were not simply anti-art critiques, but built upon older forms of art and creative expression as well as the stuff of everyday experience in their attempt to reintegrate art and life. As satirical and pointed as some of the puppets may have been, their message was expressed in a medium that was itself part of culture rather than formal art institutions. More than merely an intellectual critique of modernity or an academic attack on the status quo, by taking men and women as central figures, real or imaginary, artists created a sophisticated puppet world that showed humanity to itself as it really appeared: rather than lament the end of art, a poet mockingly pines for the death of immortal Kaspar; the heady theories of Freud and Jung become the stuff of parody; political players are played; a mutilated, castrated mannequin is exhibited at the same show as a female doll with super-size nipples; a shadow marionette machine is programmed to dance. The Dada puppets offer both inspiring models of beauty and promise, and grotesque cautionary tales, all the while drawing upon a larger tradition specific to puppetry's playful ways.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. B., "Ein Protest," *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 9, 1919, cited in Didier Plassard, "Nachwort," in *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang, Vergessene Autoren der Moderne XIV*, ed. Franz-Josef Weber und Karla Riha (Siegen: Universität-Gesamthochschule Siegen, 1986), 25.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition of Walter Mehring's script was published the same year as its production: Walter Mehring, *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolf Fürstner Verlag, 1919), and included photographs of Grosz's and Heartfield's puppets. The edition cited here is the one detailed in the preceding note.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Rugh, “Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1981): 3.

<sup>4</sup> Leah Dickerman, “Introduction,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (1974; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 55–59.

<sup>6</sup> Bürger explicitly reiterated this point from his 1974 book in a 2010 essay responding to the reception of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Peter Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” trans. Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 696.

<sup>7</sup> Dadaist Hans Richter described the anti-art aspect of the movement as follows: “Was uns eigentlich bewegte, war nicht so sehr Krach, der Widerspruch und das Anti per se, sondern die ganze elementare Frage jener Tage (wie der heutigen) nach dem WOHIN?” Hans Richter, *Dada Kunst und Antikunst* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1964), 8.

<sup>8</sup> This Alsatian-born poet and artist used both Jean and Hans as his first name. His full name, Jean Hans Arp, is used throughout for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> In one account by Hans Richter, Arp collaborated with his wife, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, on a set of marionettes predating the *König Hirsch* collection. Hans Richter, “Dada X Y Z . . .,” in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1951), 288. Yet these puppets, if they ever existed, have not survived, and Richter later published a conflicting account attributing sole puppet-making credit to Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Hans Richter, “Sophie Taeuber-Arp,” in *Dada Profile* (Zurich: Die Arche Verlag, 1961), 14. If Arp ever did produce puppets for performance, no evidence is extant.

<sup>10</sup> No variorum of Arp’s poetry exists. The closest approximation of a philological study appears in Reinhard Döhl, *Das literarische Werke Hans Arps 1903–1930* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 115–31. For a brief consideration of the poem in the context of Arp’s sculpture see Margherita Andreotti, *The Early Sculpture of Jean Arp* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 170–72.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Arp, *On My Way: Poetry and Essays* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 11. Any mention or reference to details from earlier or later versions of the poem will be noted. While the poem was first printed in 1919, Arp dated it to 1912 in certain later publications. It is impossible to know if the poem was actually written in 1912 or whether the backdating was a poetic reference to a significant personal event of that year; for instance, some scholars speculate that 1912 held particular significance for Arp because he met Wassily Kandinsky and exhibited in the second Blue Rider exhibition in Munich that year.

<sup>12</sup> Reinhard Döhl, *Das literarische Werke Hans Arps 1903–1930* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 123; R. W. Last, “In Defense of Meaning: Hans Arp’s ‘Kaspar ist tot,’” *German Life and Letters* 22, no. 4 (1969): 337; Leonard Forster, “Un Wackes cosmique: *Weh unser gutter Kaspar ist tot*,” *Saisons d’Alsace*, Spring 1967, 209–12.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Arp, “aus ‘die wolkenpumpe’” *Dada* 4/5 (May 15, 1919): 20; Hans Arp, “Die Schwalbenhode” in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 114–15. While the poem continues for several stanzas, “kaspar ist tot” comprises I and II. Hans Arp, *der vogel selbdritt* (Private Press, 1920); Arp, *On My Way*, 10–11; Hans Arp, *wortträume und schwarze sterne* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1953), 12–13.

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Last, *Hans Arp: The Poet of Dadaism* (London: Oswald, Wolff, 1969), 9–10.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. Last, “In Defense of Meaning: Hans Arp’s ‘Kaspar ist tot,’” *German Life and Letters* 22, no. 4 (1969): 339–40.

<sup>16</sup> “wer scheuzt nun die schiffe parapluies / windeuter bienenväter ozonspindeln und entgrätet / die pyramiden.” Arp, *wortträume und schwarze sterne*, 12–13.

<sup>17</sup> A similar structure is demonstrated in “Puppen” (1952), a different poem by Arp. Written from the shifting perspectives of different puppets—from the first person singular, to the plural, to a series of different first-person puppets or puppet moods—the poem progresses in a way that prevents the identity of the speaker from resting on any single voice, despite the fact that it is unquestionably written from first-person puppet perspectives. Jean Hans Arp, “Puppen,” in *Hans Arp Gesammelte Gedichte: 1939–1957* (Wiesbaden: Limes-Verlag, 1974), 211–14.

<sup>18</sup> Andreotti also connects the sculpture with the poem and writes, “Clearly the sculpture is the ‘bust’ of Kaspar . . . referred to in the last lines of the poem.” Andreotti, *The Early Sculpture of Jean Arp*, 172.

<sup>19</sup> Arp began sculpting free-standing sculptures such as busts and torsos in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Another notable bust from this period is *Tête avec moustache hérissée* (1926), a reference to Kaiser Wilhelm. Taeuber-Arp also produced a well-known series of modernist busts, her *Dada Köpfe*.

<sup>20</sup> Andreotti, *The Early Sculpture of Jean Arp*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> When the puppets were made, the artist’s name was Sophie Taeuber. She hyphenated it to Sophie Taeuber-Arp after her marriage to Jean Hans Arp in 1922. Because the pieces are unsigned, and for clarity’s sake, her married name is used throughout.

<sup>22</sup> Werner Wolff and René Morax, *König Hirsch* (Zurich, 1918), unpublished typescript, collection of the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich–Schaudepot.

<sup>23</sup> Walburga Krupp, “Floral-Linear: Figuration and Abstraction in the Work of Sophie Taeuber-Arp,” in *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Today Is Tomorrow* (Zurich: Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess AG, 2014), 217.

<sup>24</sup> Jill Fell, “Sophie Täuber: Masked Dada Dancer” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35, no. 3 (1999): 277. For Hugo Ball’s own recollections of these dances and her performance see Hugo Ball, “Die Tänzerin Sophie Taeuber,” in *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, ed. Georg Schmidt (Basel: Holbein Verlag, 1948), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Bibiana K. Obler, *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky and Münter, Arp and Taeuber* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 170.

<sup>26</sup> Alfred Altherr, “Zur Einführung,” in *Marionetten*, ed. Alfred Altherr (Erlenbach-Zurich: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, n.d., ca. 1926/27), 5–6. Altherr, strangely, does not mention Taeuber-Arp explicitly in his book about Das schweizerische Marionettentheater, nor does he list her work in his selection of puppets photographed, yet it is clear how her puppets conform to his vision.

<sup>27</sup> Richter, “Dada X Y Z . . .,” 88; Richter, “Sophie Taeuber-Arp,” in *Dada Profile*, 14. In Motherwell’s anthology, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Richter recalls marionettes made shortly after a dance performance at the Kaufleuten Hall, Zurich, on April 9, 1919 (288). Yet in the later German account, Richter attributes the puppets to Taeuber-Arp alone (not a collaboration with Jean Hans Arp) and dates their manufacture a year earlier, to 1918, prior to the Kaufleuten Hall event. There is little evidence of a first set of puppets, and the inconsistency is likely confusion about the same marionettes.

<sup>28</sup> Astrid von Asten, “Entering the Stage,” in *Movement and Balance: Sophie Taeuber-Arp 1889–1943*, ed. Karin Schick, Oliver Kornhoff, and Astrid von Asten (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009), 29.

- <sup>29</sup> On the connection between the marionettes and *Dada Köpfe* see *ibid.*, 29. For the relationship to African art see Obler, *Intimate Collaborations*, 171.
- <sup>30</sup> Wolff and Morax, *König Hirsch*, I:2.
- <sup>31</sup> Obler, *Intimate Collaborations*, 177.
- <sup>32</sup> Raimund Meyer, *Dada in Zürich: die Akteure, die Schauplätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1990), 55.
- <sup>33</sup> Wolff and Morax, *König Hirsch*. For a discussion of this play also see Obler, *Intimate Collaborations*, 166–77.
- <sup>34</sup> Sigrid Barten, “Und alle Puppen Tanzen—Die Dada-Marionetten von Sophie Taeuber,” *Kunst und Architektur in der Schweiz* 47, no. 4 (1996): 428.
- <sup>35</sup> Wolff and Morax, *König Hirsch*, I:12.
- <sup>36</sup> Obler, *Intimate Collaborations*, 171.
- <sup>37</sup> Wolff and Morax, *König Hirsch*, II:17.
- <sup>38</sup> Mehring, *Einfach klassisch!*.
- <sup>39</sup> Heinz Herald, ed., “Grosz-Heartfield-Marionetten aus ‘Einfach Klassisch!’” in *Schall und Rauch* 1 (December 1919), 13.
- <sup>40</sup> Mehring, *Einfach klassisch!*, 9.
- <sup>41</sup> Peter Jelavich also interprets the Aegisth character as Kurt Eisner. Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 141.
- <sup>42</sup> Mehring, *Einfach klassisch!*, 3.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>44</sup> For a discussion of this play see also Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 141–45.
- <sup>45</sup> Mehring, *Einfach klassisch!*, 15.
- <sup>46</sup> Mel Gordon, “Dada Performance,” in *Dada Performance*, ed. Mel Gordon (New York: PAJ, 1987), 18.
- <sup>47</sup> Mehring, *Einfach klassisch!*, 14–15.
- <sup>48</sup> Gordon, “Dada Performance,” 18.
- <sup>49</sup> For more on the Dada fair see Helen Adkins, “Erste Internationale Dada-Messe,” in *Stationen der Moderne: Die bedeutenden Kunstaussstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1988), 156–83; Wieland Herzfelde and Brigid Doherty, trans and introduction, “Introduction to the First International Dada Fair,” *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 93–104.
- <sup>50</sup> For more on the Surrealist use of mannequins see Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001).
- <sup>51</sup> Adkins, “Erste Internationale Dada-Messe,” 159.
- <sup>52</sup> The allusion to classical antiquity was deliberate. Schlichter called these works “corrected masterpieces.” For additional description of their relation to ancient art see Brigid Doherty, “Berlin,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, 101.
- <sup>53</sup> Hannes Bergius, “Dada Grotesque,” in *Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art 1870–1940*, ed. Pamela Kort (New York: Neue Galerie; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004), 166.
- <sup>54</sup> Frank B. Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany since 1815* (London: Continuum, 2003), 211.
- <sup>55</sup> According to Brigid Doherty, the piece stands for the disenchantment of the work of art along with “the dadaists’ self-mocking identification with the anarchist radicalism and petit-bourgeois revolutionism condemned . . . by the Russian Soviet leaders V. I. Lenin and by the German Communist Party, of which Grosz, Heartfield and Herzfelde were founding members, as a form

of ‘going wild’ that Lenin . . . presented in terms of psychic regression and sexual impotence.” Doherty, “Berlin,” 103.

<sup>56</sup> Ralf Burmeister, “From Heav’n on High: The Prussian Archangel,” in *Comic Grotesque*, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 173–74.

<sup>60</sup> Heinz Herald, ed., *Schall und Rauch* 5 (April 1920): front cover and p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of the history of the puppets and their relation to the work of other female puppet artists from the Weimar Republic (including Erna Pinner and Lotte Pritzel) see Janina Nentwig, “Dada-Puppen,” in *Hannah Höch—Aller Anfang ist DADA!*, ed. Ralf Burmeister (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007), 58.

<sup>62</sup> Maria Makela also suggests that these puppet works are not a subversion but an extension of traditional handicrafts. Maria Makela, “By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Höch in Context,” in *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1997), 66.

<sup>63</sup> Julia Dech, “Marionette und Modepuppe, Maske und Maquillage—Beobachtung am Frauenbild von Hannah Höch,” in *Hannah Höch: Fotomontagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle* (Tübingen and Cologne: Kunsthalle Tübingen and DuMont Buchverlag, 1980), 79–94.

<sup>64</sup> Verfassungen des Deutschen Reichs, August 11, 1919, Artikel 109.

<sup>65</sup> “The Rise of the New Woman,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 195.

<sup>66</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 96.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 99–100.

<sup>68</sup> Alice Rühle-Gerstel, “Back to the Good Old Days?,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 218.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of this piece and its relation to other dancing figures in De Stijl see Nancy J. Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” *Art Bulletin* 66, no. 4 (December 1984): 645–56.

<sup>70</sup> At least thirteen performances (both in formal venues and at informal evenings in people’s homes) were scheduled for the Dutch tour, but the exact dates and locations remain unclear. Retraced by various authors using advertisements and reviews, a lineup of eighteen performances can be found in: Meta Knol, *Kurt Schwitters in Nederland / Kurt Schwitters in the Netherlands: Merz, De Stijl and Holland Dada* (Zwolle, the Netherlands: Waanders Uitgevers, 1997), 21–23; Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” 652.

<sup>71</sup> Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” 652–53.

<sup>72</sup> David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>73</sup> Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” 654–55. Troy especially notes the overlapping interest in the primitive in both Dada and De Stijl, and connects this to Huszár’s interest in the primitive figure of the marionette. She characterizes the connection as even closer and interprets both movements as focused on the identity of modern humanity in the machine age.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Overy, *De Stijl* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 12.

<sup>75</sup> Sjarel Ex, “Vilmos Huszár,” in *De Stijl: 1917–1922*, ed. Carel Blotkamp et al., trans. Carlotte L. Loeb and Arthur L. Loeb (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 77–121; Eva Bajkay, “A Hungarian Founder of the Dutch Constructivist: For the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Vilmos Huszár’s Death” *Acta historiae atrium* 30 (1984): 312.

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<sup>76</sup> Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” 645–56. Troy’s article offers a thoughtful analysis of this issue, combining a reading of Mondrian’s interest in dance with van Doesburg’s, Zwart’s, and Huszár’s figures of the dancer. Yet Troy’s argument can be extended even further by noting Huszár’s *many* dancer paintings (she offers only the puppet and *Komposition 1920–21: Gestaltende Schauspiel* as examples of his dance pieces).

<sup>77</sup> Troy, “Figures of the Dance in De Stijl,” 252.

<sup>78</sup> The windows in the shadow puppet are a miniaturized example of the stained-glass windows Huszár designed on commission for the Bruynzeel family home. For more on the windows see Ex, “Vilmos Huszár,” in *De Stijl: 1917–1922*, 88.

<sup>79</sup> Theo van Doesburg, letter to Antony Kok, cited in *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>80</sup> Vilmos Huszár, “Kurze technische Erklärung von der ‘Gestaltende Schauspiel,’ Komposition 1920–21,” *De Stijl* 4, no. 8 (1921): 126–28, reprinted in Ad Petersen, ed., *De Stijl 2 1921–1932: Complete Reprint* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 1968), 101–2.

<sup>81</sup> Huszár concludes his “technical clarification” by noting that for a cinematic performance, more specific instructions are required: “Für eine kinema-aufführung sind noch spezielle mitteilungen nötig.” Huszár, “Kurze technische Erklärung von der ‘Gestaltende Schauspiel,’ Komposition 1920–21,” 128, reprinted in Petersen, *De Stijl 2 1921–1932: Complete Reprint*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 128;102.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 126;101.

<sup>84</sup> Meta Knol, *Kurt Schwitters in Nederland / Kurt Schwitters in the Netherlands*, 22–23.

## Chapter Three

### Lotte Reiniger's Silhouette Films: Between Light and Dark

That shadow is a man's most faithful companion, and nobody can jump over his own.  
—Lotte Reiniger<sup>1</sup>

Lotte Reiniger (1889–1981) is best known for creating the first surviving full-length animated feature film, *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (1926). In this movie, the real action begins when an evil sorcerer tricks Achmed into mounting a flying horse, knowing he doesn't know how to ride the animal, and instead of falling to his death, the prince is delivered to lively adventures in a magical world. [Fig. 3.0] The movie goes on to interweave the stories of Achmed and Aladdin with other tales from *One Thousand and One Nights* in visually enchanting ways. But *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* was only one among many silhouette films that Reiniger made: she pioneered a stop-motion shadow puppetry technique with her husband, Carl Koch (1892–1963), and over the course of sixty years she created numerous cinematic retellings of fairy tales, animal stories, opera shorts, and fables, often set in imaginary realms. Like *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, many of these stories feature a conflict between good and evil. In a career that spanned the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich into the postwar period, Reiniger's style evolved. Affected by societal upheavals—real historical dramas between good and evil—a political dimension emerged in her work. This chapter explores the significance of stylistic change in the historical context of her films' production and reception.



Fig. 3.0: Achmed on a flying horse from *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, 1926 (Harrington Park, NJ: Milestone, 2000), DVD.

Graceful, elegant, sophisticated, witty, and above all magical: Reiniger's films are not the machinating, manifestoing, putsching, or Reichstag-roasting variety of twentieth-century German political statement making. But they are politically engaged. One feature of the scholarship on Reiniger is that critics have frequently overlooked the historical conditions in which she worked—film historians have even written articles about this tendency to praise rather than analyze her animations.<sup>2</sup> In her own time, Reiniger's movies were celebrated in avant-garde circles, praised for their charm and technical qualities, and their seeming distance from reality was readily accepted. As film critic and theorist Béla Balázs (1884–1949) described the imaginary world of her work: "Gesetze der Natur gelten in dieser Sphäre nicht."<sup>3</sup> Even on the rare occasion when her peers were critical of her films—perhaps because of the association of fables with children, perhaps because of the connection of silhouettes to advertising<sup>4</sup>—the works were still not critiqued for their political stance. The cultural commentator and film theorist

Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) dismissed Reiniger as a minor artist, calling her films “sweet” and suitable for “small-town people and salesgirls with warm hearts and nothing else.”<sup>5</sup>

Today Reiniger’s movies are held up as examples of serious feminist work, and she is celebrated as an avant-garde pioneer; it was indeed rare in the early twentieth century for a woman to work in film as anything other than an actress or perhaps an editor. Reiniger directed her own films as well as animated them, and she did travel in avant-garde circles.<sup>6</sup> Yet even the most current scholarship, which considers the historical conditions of Reiniger’s film production, still does not question her politics.<sup>7</sup> In a recent book on Reiniger’s place in animation history, for example, Whitney Grace states that “Reiniger and Koch weren’t apolitical and some of their films can be interpreted as allegories, but it wasn’t their main driving force. Her main desire was to be part of the surreal magic that occupies the screen and her optimism that her skills were sufficient to discern solutions to animation’s technical process made her stand out from her contemporaries.”<sup>8</sup> Yet there are historical moments when an artist’s desire to be a part of the surreal magic of the screen represents a kind of political choice, no matter how distant from the political fray that artist’s work may appear to us today.

Reiniger began her career during the Weimar era and was connected with a number of artists associated with the left, including her husband, Carl Koch, and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956). Some historians have written accounts that attribute a political allegiance to Reiniger by virtue of such associations: “Not only did she surround herself with communists and socialists (including Ruttmann, Bartosch, Carl Koch, The Institute for Cultural Research, Paul Dessau, Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Renoir) but [she also] believed enough in those humanitarian ideals that she could not stay in Nazi German and emigrated.”<sup>9</sup> In conversation with her chronicler and biographer Alfred Happ, Reiniger reported that her husband and Brecht

once stood at the side of the road and shouted insults at a crowd of Adolf Hitler's (1889–1945) followers marching on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin.<sup>10</sup> In a different interview, she recalled her worry regarding her husband's fearlessness in political expression.<sup>11</sup> Whitney Grace correctly observes that "Reiniger was less inclined to vocally express her political views."<sup>12</sup> It is true that Reiniger left Germany in 1936; she traveled back and forth between England, France, and Italy for much of the war. But it is also true that she went to Mussolini's Italy in September 1939 and returned to Nazi Germany, to Berlin, in December 1943.<sup>13</sup>

Being an avant-garde artist, or the wife or friend of left-leaning people, is not a guarantee that one's work will be politically left-leaning. Walter Ruttmann (1887–1941), for example, one of Reiniger's avant-garde collaborators on *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, went on to make propaganda movies during the Third Reich, including documentaries celebrating the steel and armaments industries.<sup>14</sup> Although the silhouette films Reiniger produced after the Nazi takeover were not militaristic, she did continue to make movies, and some were shown with Nazi approval.<sup>15</sup> In fact, several films accepted for screening in the Third Reich were even used as fascist propaganda. Her work eventually became unwelcome by Nazi censors, yet it was initially accommodated by the regime and was never officially banned. And when Reiniger and Koch returned to Berlin toward the war's end, Reiniger began creating a fairy-tale film for the Nazi Reichsinstitut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht.<sup>16</sup> Did her work change after 1933? How can we make sense of an avant-garde artist whose fairy tales and operas were used as Third Reich propaganda?

The cultural and artistic policies of Nazi Germany were complicated. Although the terms "degenerate" and "decadent" were present in the art historical discourse of the nineteenth century, the Nazis reduced them to racist concepts and deployed them as condemnatory labels

for modern art.<sup>17</sup> Yet it was not always immediately straightforward what modern works the Nazis would consider offensive. It took a while before Nazi film authorities warned Reiniger and Koch that their works were “caviar.”<sup>18</sup> As we witnessed in chapter 1, the Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943) joined the Reichskammer der bildenden Künste and initially tried to find accommodation for his art, yet he ultimately failed to win the favor of the regime.<sup>19</sup> Reiniger, on the other hand, never joined a Nazi organization. Yet her films were interpreted as political allegories by audiences during the Third Reich in different ways from how we might see them today. Although Béla Balázs observed that the laws of nature did not apply in Reiniger’s films, her works cannot escape the time and space of their creation.

This chapter explores Reiniger’s adaptations of certain visual sources in different films from various moments of her career and considers the significance of these changes against a shifting political landscape. Her interest in Eastern and Western shadow puppetry, art paper cuttings, and silhouetting not only represented a break with academicism typical of avant-garde experimentation, but also had political resonance in early twentieth-century Germany. By disentangling a network of visual associations, we can better see how strands of European folk arts, the exotic, and a physiognomic discourse on race were synthesized during the Weimar Republic and carefully modulated in the Third Reich’s vigilant policing of racial boundaries. Reiniger wrote about her work over the course of her career, often discussing sources of inspiration, and these writings too will be considered together with other archival documents. More than a simple study of evolving iterations of certain subjects or motifs, this investigation presents Reiniger’s silhouette puppet films in their historical context in order to show how the same medium and technique, with subtle variations, could be put to completely different political purposes.

### **Everything Old Is New Again**

The first and most striking feature of Reiniger's adaptations is her medium: Reiniger transformed the traditional art of shadow puppetry using innovative cinema technologies of the early twentieth century. Her stop-motion technique involved fixing a rostrum camera above a flat glass surface, lit from below, to capture the incremental movement (by hand) of weighted black paper cutouts. With a film rate of twenty-four frames per second, a movie such as *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* involved exposing more than 250,000 frames, one at a time, to obtain the final edited eighty-one-minute version.<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 3.1] The glass pane on which the cutouts were placed would have below it semitransparent layers of cut tissue paper representing the scene's setting. Sometimes multiple glass plates were used to separate the background, mid-ground, and foreground of a scene, a technique that also facilitated a simulation of a panning shot, in that a scrolling roll with a background scene could be gradually pulled, sandwiched between glass layers, to simulate the look of a moving camera. To mimic the appearance of depth or shots taken from different ranges, Reiniger cut figures in an assortment of sizes. As her practice progressed, she and her associates refined the *Tricktisch* (animation stand) in its evolving iterations, each more elaborate than the last, reflecting not only new technical developments but also her increasing skill as an animator. Yet the essential silhouetting principle of lighting paper cutouts from below and filming them from above—as well as her striking dexterity with scissors—remained a constant feature of her work.



Fig. 3.1: Photograph during the production of *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, with Lotte Reiniger (at right) arranging silhouettes, Walter Ruttmann (at left) creating the background, and Carl Koch (center) at the ladder leading to the camera mounted above. Alfred Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst* (Tübingen: Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2004), 22.

Although Reiniger's style and technological innovations were highly original, she was not the only filmmaker interested in puppetry on film during the early years of cinema. The first puppet movie credit belongs to the Lumière brothers. [Fig. 3.2] *The Happy Skeleton* (1897) is a forty-second film featuring a classic vaudeville trick puppet, a skeleton marionette, that joyfully dances a bouncy jig as its limbs come apart and return to and from its core. Other animators tried to take the trick one step further and eliminate the visible manipulation of puppets using stop-motion. Such artists included James Stuart Blackton, Pat Sullivan, and Otto Messmer in the United States; Arthur Melbourne-Cooper in England; Émile Cohl in France; Ladislav Starevich in Russia; and Reiniger's contemporaries the Gebrüder Diehl in Germany, as well as other artists elsewhere. But the invention of the *Tricktisch* by Reiniger and her husband Koch—ahead of

Walt Disney's 1923 invention of the animation stand—was one of many firsts for the artist and cinema history more generally.

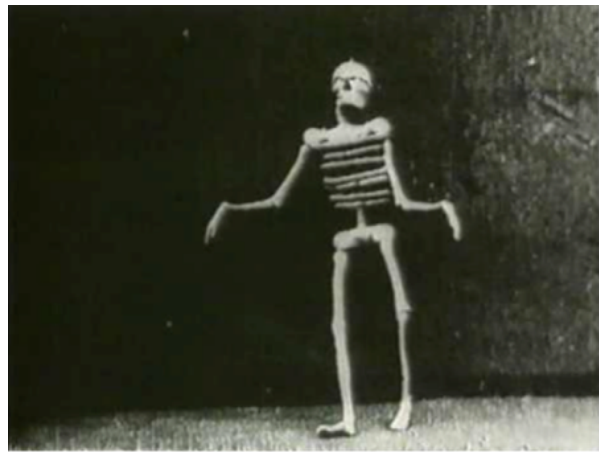


Fig. 3.2: Lumière brothers, *The Happy Skeleton*, 1897. YouTube.com.

Reiniger's work was also part of a widespread fascination with shadow puppetry at the start of the twentieth century among German filmmakers. In fact, the desire to put puppets on film was so pervasive in the early days of cinema that other artists actually tried to create the look of shadow puppets without using puppets. Before Reiniger began cutting her silhouette movies, experiments in shadow films were already under way. *Der getäuschte Pierrot* (1917), a film conceived and directed by Ludwig von Wich, replicates the look of a shadow-puppet show yet uses live human actors.<sup>21</sup> [Fig. 3.3] Von Wich mined the traditional puppetry terrain of the *commedia dell'arte* for his intertitle-free, six-minute narrative about Pierrot's loss of his love, Columbine, to the Harlequin. While the actors' exaggerated, dancierly, and acrobatic movements underline their puppetlike-ness, simulated puppets are not the same as real puppets. Humans are bound by gravity in a way that puppets are not. As close as von Wich may have gotten to achieving the look of a silhouette puppet show on film, Reiniger's cutouts marked a departure not only from other animation experiments, but also from other silhouette films of the period.



Fig. 3.3: Ludwig von Wich, *Der getäuschte Pierrot*, 1917. Filmmuseum München. YouTube.com.

Reiniger wrote about her art over the course of her career, and published on her technique even prior to *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*'s completion. Rarely in these accounts does she discuss her work in relation to other films. Rather than situate her art in film history, she repeatedly places herself in a puppetry context. When describing her sources of inspiration in the book *Shadow Theaters and Shadow Films* (1970), an instructional manual based on her experience as a professional artist and a reflection on her life's work, she does not mention any other puppet films, nor does she discuss the prominence of shadows in German Expressionist cinema or the central role of shadow puppetry as a plot element in films such as Arthur Robinson's *Schatten: Eine nächtliche Halluzination* (1923). Reiniger does not even mention Rochus Gliese's *Der verlorene Schatten* (1921), a Paul Wegener production for which she animated a violin shadow sequence. She offers no words about her work for Fritz Lang, for whom she animated a dream sequence in *Die Nibelungen* (1924). Only in the final chapter of her book does Reiniger briefly discuss her introduction to the film industry with an anecdote about her role on a different Wegener film, *Der Rattenfänger von Hameln* (1918), a live-action fairy-tale movie in which she assisted with a stop-motion rat-running sequence.<sup>22</sup> Instead of discussing

film history, in this book Reiniger foregrounds her puppeteering forerunners: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, cabaret shadow shows such as the Schwabinger Schattenspiele, and Eastern shadow puppetry. Indeed, this may also explain why film historian Lotte Eisner fails to mention Reiniger in her famous work *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (1952), even though the animator had a close connection to Reinhardt's circle, as we shall see.<sup>23</sup> She may have made films, but Reiniger was first and foremost a puppeteer.



Fig. 3.4: Lotte Reiniger, *Aschenputtel*, 1922. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

In addition to older shadow-puppetry traditions, Reiniger related her silhouette filmmaking to paper cutting, a traditional folk storytelling practice. It was precisely this cut-paper feature of her process that she emphasized at the very beginning of her career in an essay “Wie ich meine Silhouettenfilme mache” (1922): “Also hören Sie denn und staunen Sie: der ganze Witz ist der, daß bei den vor mir hergestellten Filmen alles und jedes mit der Schere geschnitten ist.”<sup>24</sup> Her early film *Aschenputtel* (1922) opens with a short introductory demonstration of the scissor work involved in creating a character. [Fig. 3.4] In this prelude, a live-action silhouette sequence (unique in her oeuvre), Reiniger shows her hands cutting a figure

into existence. Indeed, finger shadow games, miniature shadow theater, and doorway puppetry are also important domestic folk-culture inspirations for Reiniger's work, but paper cutting provides a specific visual source and has a direct relationship with the content of her films, as this demonstration in *Aschenputtel* makes clear. Other films, including *Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere: Die Affenbrücke* (1927/28), also explicitly announce at the beginning of the story that the viewer is watching paper cutouts. By incorporating such demonstrations into her films, Reiniger underlined the older paper-cutting tradition from which her technical art emerged. At the same time, this demonstration simultaneously served as a kind of framing narrative—a classic fairy-tale technique akin to Scheherazade's own tale—but with the modern twist of providing a view of the mechanics behind a film's production.

Paper cutting has a long history in children's fairy-tale performances in the European cultural tradition. Reiniger's films share common traits with the works of the Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) and the British writer Arthur Rackham (1867–1939), who were famous not only for writing their popular tales in the colloquial language of daily life, but also for their paper cuttings. One historian writes: “Andersen usually made his cuttings while people watched, often while he was telling a fairy tale aloud.”<sup>25</sup> A favorite Anderson image: a combination of a big-nosed Pierrot with graceful ballet dancers or swans. [Fig. 3.5] Rackham's body of work includes several volumes of the *Arabian Nights*.<sup>26</sup> [Fig. 3.6] Cutouts by Anderson, Rackham, and Reiniger often diverge from the fashionable silhouettes produced by professional portraitists of the nineteenth century in that they might depict exaggerated, fantastical characters culled from the imaginative world of story and folklore. These silhouettes are not meant to provide a realistic imitation of living people, but rather share a closer connection to the European

peasant style of decorative art. They provide both a performative context (Anderson would cut as he narrated in live storytelling events) and a visual source.



Fig. 3.5: Hans Christian Andersen, *Open Square with Pierrots Riding on Swans*, 1844. Odense City Museums—Hans Christian Anderson Museum. <http://andersen.museum.odense.dk/>.

Fig. 3.6: Arthur Rackham, illustration from *Sleeping Beauty*, ca. 1920.

While Reiniger never wrote specifically about these paper-cutting artists, *Der fliegende Koffer* (1921), one of her earliest film shorts, is based on an Andersen fairy tale, as is her later short, *Däumelinchen* (1953/54), and toward the end of her career she illustrated a German translation of a print edition of Andersen's *Little Mermaid* story with cutouts.<sup>27</sup> Reiniger visually quoted directly from Rackham's *Fairy Books* in the short films she produced after moving to England in 1949.<sup>28</sup> But the overlapping styles and subjects of these storytellers and filmmaker (fairy tales, *commedia dell'arte*, ballet dancers, exotic settings, animals) points to the same folk-art sources in the amateur paper cutting tradition. Art historian Emma Rutherford clarifies the distinction between folk-art paper cutting and other silhouette portraiture from the nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries: “Paper cutting is considered to be one of the main folk-art techniques, but it is often distinct from the profile silhouette. To describe a silhouette as a *paper cutting* moves it away from a representational profile portrait and into a decorative sphere. Although some aspects of the techniques involved show similarities, it would be misleading to herald paper cutting and profile silhouettes as the same craft.”<sup>29</sup> Reiniger consciously drew on an art form with fairy-tale, folk-culture history, modernizing it with film.

### **Silhouettes, Portraits, and Physiognomy**

Despite their folk-art pedigree, Reiniger’s decorative, storytelling films also have associations with realistic, profile silhouette portraiture; the latter constituted an integral dimension of her aesthetic, and she used both styles together. While many of her fairy-tale film characters are based on fantastic literary descriptions and represented in folk-art ways, in other instances she did use silhouette portraits of real, recognizable individuals. Reiniger had experience in this arena. As a young woman working at Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater in Berlin, she snipped portraits of famous actors and actresses backstage based on their silhouetted shadows on the stage curtains, and gave them as gifts to get herself noticed.<sup>30</sup> When portraits of real people do appear in her films, they are informed by this older tradition of sentimental image making. The portraits in her films are often of her friends and intimates—Catherine Hessling (1900–1979), Jean Renoir (1894–1979), and husband Carl Koch in *Carmen* (1933), for example—but they are cast in roles, playing characters other than themselves. [Figs. 3.7, 3.8] When portraits are used in her films, the images are treated like actors—real people playing characters. And even when the silhouettes are more or less realistic, they are stylized by the virtue of a narrative, as art.



Fig. 3.7: Catherine Hessling as Carmen in a still from *Carmen*, 1933. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Fig. 3.8: Catherine Hessling in a still from *Nana*, directed by Jean Renoir, 1926. Public domain mark 1.0.

While photography replaced silhouette portraiture in the nineteenth century as the keepsake of choice, silhouettes retained their association with physiognomy—the pseudoscientific study of body shape and character—even into the twentieth century. Writing in 1970, Reiniger showed that she was wise to historic misuses of physiognomic silhouettes: “Lavater remained for the most part of the nineteenth century as the great authority on the supposed science which purports to deduce the character of an individual from the features of the face or form of the body. He preferred to use silhouetted profiles for his character readings.”<sup>31</sup> She was referring to the founding father of this pseudoscience, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), and she distanced herself from the truth claims of such an enterprise, calling physiognomy a “supposed science.” Yet it is nonetheless a prominent visual association—important enough to mention even in this instructional book written toward the end of her career. While by the twentieth century photography had established itself over profile tracings as a scientific

documentation tool, the visual association between silhouettes and physiognomy persisted in the art and the politics of the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and beyond.



Fig. 3.9: Lotte Reiniger, stepmother and stepsisters in *Aschenputtel*, 1922. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Fig. 3.10: Lotte Reiniger, Cinderella and her stepmother in *Aschenputtel*, 1922. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

There are moments in Reiniger’s films that clearly rely on prejudices toward certain physical shapes as cues to personality traits, the hallmark of physiognomic pseudoscience. *Achenputtel* (1922) is a case in point: Cinderella wears rags, and yet her sweetness of character is revealed by the contrast of her lovely countenance and figure with her evil stepsisters’ ugly faces and exaggerated, distorted bodies. [Fig. 3.9] Cinderella resembles a fashionable silhouette portrait, whereas the cartoonish stepsisters recall rustic, folk-art paper cuttings. [Fig. 3.10] Lavater used silhouettes drawn from a specially constructed chair and scaled with a pantograph (a pre-photographic technique thought to ensure the veracity of the image), while Reiniger based her depictions on the textual fairy tale and her fantasy—even the elegantly featured Cinderella is not a portrait of a real person. Yet both the pseudoscientist and the storytelling tradition itself were codifications of much older attitudes toward physical beauty and ugliness. Physiognomy was, in part, a modern and “rational” expression of an older set of visual and storytelling codes

where character and physical form were linked. Reiniger brought together folk-art paper cutting, elegant silhouette-style portraiture, and the visual cues of physiognomy in her films to efficiently suggest certain qualities of character.



Fig. 3.11: Lotte Reiniger, the sorcerer and witch in *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, 1926 (Harrington Park, NJ: Milestone Film and Video, 2000), DVD.

The stakes get higher when we consider the connection between physiognomy and race in early twentieth-century Germany. At times in her films, Reiniger did use a racist visual vocabulary, which is most pronounced in the works she produced during the Weimar Republic, for instance *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*. Caricatured depictions of “Oriental” faces stand out right away to almost any contemporary viewer,<sup>32</sup> and while the witch character is supposed to be African, she is a benevolent force (thereby countering a negative view of Africans) battling the evil sorcerer, whose big nose is meant to look Semitic and grotesque. But this enlightened deconstruction of prejudice is not sustained throughout all her films. For example, in *Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere: Die Affenbrücke*, Africans are dangerous enemies from whom the veterinarian and his pets must escape. [Figs. 3.12] The morality of Reiniger’s racial profiling is inconsistent. Just as Achmed is parallel with his textual counterpart, in Hugh Lofting’s (1886–1947) original Dr. Dolittle stories, the author presented a positive animal-loving, pet-saving

character and a racist worldview.<sup>33</sup> Reiniger's film and illustrations of Lofting's stories quote the English author's original sketches, and the portrayal of Africans within the film present a colonial worldview. [Fig. 3.13, 3.14] What are we to make of the racist imagery in Reiniger's films from the Weimar period?



Fig. 3.12: Lotte Reiniger, still showing Africans attacking Doktor Dolittle from *Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere: Die Affenbrücke*, 1927/28. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Doktor Dolittle & Archivschätze* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2007), DVD.



Fig. 3.13: Lotte Reiniger, still from *Doktor Dolittle und seine Tiere: Die Affenbrücke*, 1927/28. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Doktor Dolittle & Archivschätze* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2007), DVD.

Fig. 3.14: Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Dr. Dolittle*, 1920.

Reiniger's early movies treat Eastern and African visual elements with little awareness of their problematically racialized representations. As Reiniger and the scholars who study her works have emphasized: the purpose of her films was first and foremost to entertain. It was quite in keeping with the work of other avant-garde artists in Weimar to depict the exotic as an alternative to a Western, tired academicism, and shadow puppetry offered a fresh new look. The exotic was a romanticized space for avant-garde artists where purer, so-called primitive cultures could exist in an idealized realm without distinction between art and life. Reiniger's writings from the Weimar period say nothing about the political situation in Germany, and she seems primarily engaged in aesthetic and technical considerations. Mostly she writes about her technique, the formal properties of silhouette films, silhouette's value as entertainment, and the connection of her films to puppetry. She appears not to consider her films' relation to politics, perhaps in part because film was then a new medium and filmmakers had yet to realize just how politicized cinema could and would become.

Some scholars maintain that the fantastical nature of fairy tales neutralizes, in a way, racist imagery by situating such depictions in nonexistent fantasy lands rather than falling into Orientalist projections of the other.<sup>34</sup> This interpretation falsely presupposes an abstract, sophisticated adult audience, but these films were also made for kids. While Reiniger's works certainly belonged to Weimar culture, it is an oversimplification to understand them as simply a reflection of the times, as other historians have.<sup>35</sup> Our understanding of Reiniger's attraction to exotic subjects is further complicated by the change in her style and subjects during Third Reich. It is informative to explore *when* and *how* Reiniger drew on certain shadow puppetry, paper cutting, and silhouette traditions. An interest in exotic styles is consistent with aesthetic trends of

the period, yet it is naive to argue that such images were innocent or entirely inert. Reiniger was undoubtedly a woman of her times, and it appears that her motives in these early films were not patently racist, but she became increasingly aware of her imagery's political potency.

### **Silhouette Films during the Third Reich**

Reiniger changed styles during the Third Reich—specifically, she eliminated overt allusions to Oriental shadow puppetry and Africa. In the early 1930s, she began making a series of short opera and fairy-tale movies. Her works from this period were inconsistently received by German censors, journalists, distributors, and audiences, who alternately approved, ignored, suspected, and embraced them. For example, *Carmen*—a parody of a French opera about a freewheeling Spanish gypsy—was initially approved by Nazi censors, yet the short became Reiniger's first source of friction with the Nazi propaganda machine. *Carmen* was shown at the Berlin Film Festival in 1934, and the work elicited mixed reactions. A report from the *Nationalzeitung* on June 10 of that year reflects a journalist's positive reception that simultaneously highlighted the risk and importance involved in screening such a piece: "Den Veranstaltern der Filmfestspiele muß es als besonderes Verdienst angerechnet werden, daß sie einen Film für die Öffentlichkeit (nicht ohne Mut!) gerettet haben, der sonst vielleicht nie mehr das Licht eines Theaters erblickt hätte. . . . Man denkt der Erfolg ist gemacht; es kam aber—die Zensur."<sup>36</sup> In the fall of 1933, the government censors explained to the artist that this film could only be screened as an exception: "Würde es sich nicht um eine ausländische, sondern um eine deutsche Oper handeln, so mußte sie ihn sogar verbieten."<sup>37</sup> The article's author used the earlier *Nationalzeitung* review as an occasion to explain that parody and humor cannot undermine the state, and that it would be a shame for the country to lose Reiniger's work. The journalist's rebuke, occasioned by a short

silhouette film, illustrates how quickly art became a political flash point in 1934 Germany. Both the journalist and the censor interpreted the film as satire with a political charge. The censors critiqued the subject of the work—a French opera parody—rather than its silhouette artistry or modernist style.

Reiniger alluded to a debate about her silhouette films in a multi-author book about the history of paper, *Das Papier: Ein Berufs-Chronik* (1935), published not long after the *Nationalzeitung* article. The filmmaker was the author of an entry on “Das Papier als Filmdarsteller.” Again, as during the Weimar period, Reiniger avoided any form of political statement and instead focused on her medium as a key factor in determining her film style: “Es wird in letzter Zeit von viel über die künstlerischen Fragen dieser Filmart debattiert. Für mich liegt die Lösung schon darin, daß ich nur mit der Schere arbeite. Ich bin dadurch zu einen streng flächigen Stil gekommen, den ich aber nie als Hemmung empfunden, sondern nur als eine, der Filmleinwand und dem Werkstoff Papier höchst gemäße Ausdrucksform begrüßt habe.”<sup>38</sup> As a reaction to the critique of the censors, she obliquely charged her critics with ignorance about the medium itself: “Der Film steht so sehr Anfang seiner Entwicklung, daß man sich, wenn man sich einmal praktisch damit befaßt hat, gar nicht ernsthaft genug damit auseinandersetzen kann.”<sup>39</sup> Focusing on the technical aspects of her practice, Reiniger avoided any mention of the content of her films or discussion about the types of criticisms she faced. But the debate appeared not to interfere overmuch with her film production during the early days of the Reich.

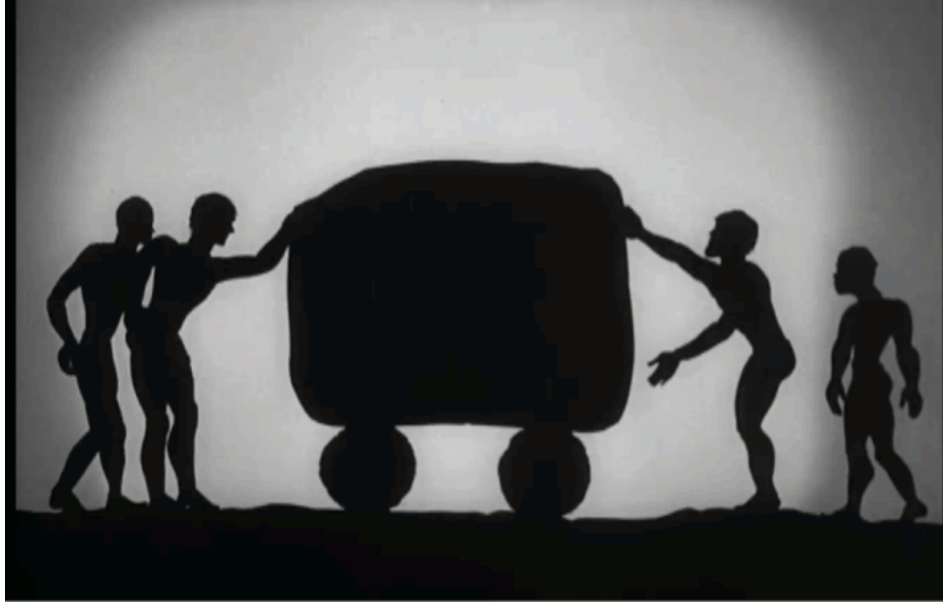


Fig. 3.15: Lotte Reiniger, still from *Das rollende Rad: Ein Film von Wagen und Straßen*, 1934. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

In fact, the charm of Reiniger's silhouettes seems to have captured the imagination of Nazi propagandists as a potentially positive force, particularly when it dealt with a German topic. Reiniger even made a *Kulturfilm*, *Das rollende Rad: Ein Film von Wagen und Straßen* (1934), which screened specifically as propaganda. [Fig. 3.15] The subject of this animated documentary short is technological progress. Humanity's development is illustrated through an evolution from the discovery of the wheel to Germany's Mercedes automobile. Beginning with prehistoric men rolling a log, the story moves chronologically through ancient Egypt, Rome, and the Middle Ages to the Baroque, Rococo, and Biedermeier eras, the Industrial Revolution, and finally Benz's combustion engine for the car. [Figs. 3.16, 3.17] Focusing exclusively on the Western tradition (ancient Egypt was claimed as part of Aryan history by the Nazis), a voice-over narration comments on the uses of different modes of transport over time and describes the roads by which such journeys were made. The choreography of the film is different from that of

Reiniger's other works, in that it is a dance-less horizontal procession of figures across the screen. Its look is distinctive, too, in that the silhouettes are reminiscent of black-figure pottery—especially in the ancient Rome sequence—rather than folk-art paper cuts or Eastern shadow puppetry. Such classicizing forms were more in line with a Nazi aesthetics. There are no exotic images in the film.



Fig. 3.16: Lotte Reiniger, still showing a vehicle in ancient Egypt from *Das rollende Rad: Ein Film von Wagen und Straßen*, 1934. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Fig. 3.17: Lotte Reiniger, still showing automobiles from *Das rollende Rad: Ein Film von Wagen und Straßen*, 1934. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Reiniger is credited with the animation—which was indeed hers—but the screenplay is attributed to Carl Koch and Egbert van Putten (1889–1996) along with material from the General Inspector for Roadways. Fritz Todt (1891–1942) held this position in 1934, and he oversaw the construction of the *Reichsautobahnen* before being promoted to Reich minister for armaments and ammunition. The basic shape of the *Kulturfilm*, a chronological historical progression representing the evolution of a single subject over time, was a common narrative structure for a short like this (in chapter 4, we will see another example of a Nazi timeline *Kulturfilm* on the

history of German puppets). This was plainly a propaganda film, and one approved for children. Despite its stylistic differences from Reiniger's other works, it was designed to appeal to all ages, a frequent strategy for Nazi propagandists.

The version of the film that exists today is a fourteen-minute silhouette animation whose narration corresponds exactly with the description on the censor card *only for the first part*. An additional three minutes or so is described on the censor card, but the footage is now missing. This part of the story picks up after the Great War and reaches its pinnacle with the German Autobahn. To quote the card's account of the film's narration:

Nach dem Kriege begann die große Zeit für die Automobilindustrie. . . . Das Auto bekommt seine Bahn. . . . Der Generalinspektor für das deutsche Straßenbauwesen leitete den Ausbau einheitlich für ganz Deutschland. . . . In einigen Jahren durchzieht das Netz der deutschen Autobahnen, ein Glied im großen Arbeitsbeschaffungsplan des Führers, das ganze Reich und schafft neue Möglichkeiten für die zeitgemäße Entwicklung des Automobils.<sup>40</sup>

It is possible, even likely, that Reiniger's animation sequences concluded just prior to the lost portion of the film, which switched to live-action footage corresponding to the narration quoted on the censor card. According to Alfred Happ, the version screened in 1934 concluded with footage of Hitler brandishing a spade at an Autobahn groundbreaking ceremony.<sup>41</sup> Switching between silhouette animation and live-action footage was not unprecedented in 1934; it remains a common documentary technique even today to use animation to depict past events unrecorded on film and shift to live-action footage to show the present. There was no shortage of

this type of footage, either: updates on the expanding *Reichsautobahnen* were often included in newsreels, and Nazi filmmakers regularly reused newsreel footage in other films. I am inclined to agree with Happ's informed speculation that the film indeed switched to live-action footage given its fit with the censor card (but Happ provides no documentation or citation in support of his theory about Hitler's appearance in the film's conclusion). Happ does not comment on Reiniger's involvement in the Nazi film industry and offers no structural or art historical interpretation of this film.<sup>42</sup> Note the curious opening attribution, "based on the idea of Egbert van Putten with the addition of material from the General Inspector for Roadways," a credit suggesting that Reiniger was not responsible for the film's concept, though she was its principal artist.

Reiniger included a discussion of this film in the form of a philosophical dialogue published in 1936. "Film as Ballet" appeared in English in the British journal *Life and Letters To-Day*, and its similarity to Heinrich von Kleist's (1777–1811) *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810), would have likely been apparent to this periodical's elite literary audience.<sup>43</sup> A fictitious conversation between Reiniger and her "Familiar," it is set in Covent Garden Market on a summer night following a performance of the Ballets Russes.<sup>44</sup> At its core, the dialogue is a comparison of two artistic media—ballet and trick film—via philosophical musings, geometric descriptions, and accounts of technical procedure. But there are other issues couched in this Kleistian homage, including ones that obliquely acknowledge the context of *Das rollende Rad* and its unique status in Reiniger's oeuvre. Transformation over time is one of a range of issues addressed. Reiniger describes multiple reasons for reshaping bodies, both human and animal, in their silhouette forms: not only do musical specificities require that bodies be changed to perform particular dances, but certain historical moments mandate transformations:

You or anyone else might be forgiven for thinking that a horse is a horse anywhere and at any time; but I (alas!) know from bitter experience that this is untrue. When I tried to depict the history of vehicular traffic in *The Rolling Wheel*, I thought for one blissful moment that half a dozen horses would suffice for all the various historical episodes of that film. How sadly and completely was I disillusioned! The frisky steeds that dashed through the desert dragging Egyptian chariots behind them were utterly useless when I tried to trick them out for more pompous service with the Roman quadrigas. . . . And so on, through all our artificial periods, until my studio was a stables [*sic*] and my fingers exhausted from working out the trot, canter and gallop of at least two hundred different legs. . . . To tell the truth, although I had to put so much painstaking work into those tiresome horses, I always looked on them as being of secondary importance. Their main purpose was to introduce a carriage, and that carriage had to appear in a part of the screen where movement was most easily noticed. . . . You must always remember, however, that this film was cultural in its tendency and needed no great artistry on my part in the movement of the figures. It is entirely different from a “danced” film or one conceived in terms of ballet. There my most important effect, the thing I am most anxious to hammer into the heads of my audience, is the expression of my leading figure. . . . I try to establish this key impression at the earliest possible moment by means of a solo scene. Thereby the spectator is not only enabled to understand that figure’s character, but is also

plunged right into the heart of the story; and then, the solo theme having been stated, a world of variation opens.<sup>45</sup>

While this passage presents a frustrating artistic process, Reiniger marks *Das rollende Rad* as a non-artistic work and highlights its non-balletic difference. The phrase “cultural in its tendency” makes little sense as an English phrase, but is meant to correspond with the German *Kulturfilm*, which had evolved by 1936 from a general nonfiction category into a de facto synonym for propaganda. The significant image in the passage excerpted above is a comparison between the masses (a herd of horses) and the individual (a solo dancer). Given the dilemma of running with the pack or dancing to one’s own tune, Reiniger asserts the primacy of the individual in her text, yet the film itself concludes with quite a different image, as the censor card makes clear. Although she is eager to distinguish this work from her others, it is nonetheless her film, and she doesn’t address the addition of live-action footage in this dialogue. Achmed on his flying stallion may be her most famous horse, yet on a metaphorical level, she recognized that horses too change their shape in different historical periods.

Reiniger does raise issues of race and nationality in the course of the dialogue. Her discussion of an audience’s tendency to “screen read” from left to right is interrupted by the interlocutor: “What about the Jews and Japanese?”<sup>46</sup> It is notable that these two groups are singled out from others whose written languages also read right to left; the Jews were already considered enemies of Germany, and not long after this was published, the Japanese would become an enemy of England (Japan invaded China in July 1937, initiating war in the Pacific). Reiniger’s character in the text explicitly ignores this “tactless”<sup>47</sup> comment—although of course the author herself raises the issue. Instead of answering the question, or even engaging it, she

addresses art's ability to transcend borders in order to find an audience. At the end of the dialogue, she writes about the Paris-based Ballets Russes, a troupe of primarily Russian émigré artists and dancers, and likens their exiled situation to her own:

I'm delighted the Russian Ballet has had the courage and good sense in spite of years of exile never to disown the country of its adoption and the country from which it still draws its spiritual impulse. / *Familiar*: Do you mean France? / *Lotte Reiniger*: No. Russia. But you were right to mention France, for the art of these Russian dancers has only truly blossomed and reached its fullest perfection in the West. I really believe they have taken the whole of Europe in their embrace and found their most faithful audience in England. And this makes me happy, for though my poor trick films have little tradition behind them, no assured audience before them and an uncertain future, yet they are based on the same essential principles as the Russian ballets.<sup>48</sup>

Just as the Ballets Russes remains true to its Russian roots while finding an audience in Western Europe, Reiniger too retains an allegiance to German culture with a viewership in England. (Even German film critics in the mid-1930s would remark on Reiniger's undervalued artistic status in her own country.)<sup>49</sup> Reiniger is not abandoning the German heritage from which she draws so much of her inspiration. The form of this dialogue itself—as previously mentioned, a reference to Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*—affirms her artistic roots in a German cultural tradition even when relating her work to other dance arts in foreign lands. In 1936, writing from England, Reiniger expresses confidence in the transcendent power of art and

culture, and sidesteps the complex issue of “Oriental” audiences, even though she can now plainly see that a horse is not always just a horse.

But how does *Das rollende Rad* compare with her other works from around this time? Given that there were other contributors to this one film project, perhaps it is unwise to draw too many conclusions from it about authorial style. Do Reiniger’s other films from the early 1930s suggest a different context for alternative readings? Reiniger did indeed make films without additional content from other contributors that were screened in Germany around the same time as *Das rollende Rad* and even slightly later. *Das gestohlene Herz* (1934), for example, reveals that Reiniger’s works from the period could be seen as affirming the cultural policies of the Third Reich, even if she espoused a position of art’s politically transcendent powers in her English publication from 1936. Of all the movies Reiniger produced during this era, *Das gestohlene Herz* is one of the most complex, especially if one seriously considers the film in its time and place. The work premiered on November 20, 1934, in Berlin on the “Day of German Music,” five months after *Carmen* was screened and critiqued. The film features a big-nosed, ugly, insect-like thieving mountain daemon, who could be seen as either a critique of Nazi policy toward the arts or, alternately, a Jewish caricature undoing German culture. [Figs. 3.18, 3.19]



Fig. 3.18: Lotte Reiniger, still showing the evil villain with stolen musical instruments in his web from *Das gestohlene Herz*, 1934. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Fig. 3.19: Illustration from *Der Stürmer* showing a Jew as a spider, 1930.

The theft and recovery of music is the subject of this silhouette animation. *Das gestohlene Herz* is a ten-minute short set in a German village where seed-sowing, earthy peasants love their music. Invisibly observing the villagers at a distance, a giant, evil, music-hating villain plots the theft of everyone's instruments. At the stroke of midnight, he swoops through the village, removing all the instruments from the peasants' homes. Flying off with his

seized booty, he returns to his mountain cave and hangs the spoils in his spider's web. But the music will not be silenced: the instruments come to life, springing hands and feet to blow, bow, percuss, and squeeze an animating melody propelling an orchestral rebellion. They cast off the entrapping web, capture the villain, and fly back to the town square to reunite with their players. As in her earlier works, Reiniger blends an elegant portraiture-inspired silhouette style (for the villagers) with an imaginatively exaggerated folk-art aesthetic (for the villain). The score is an important part of the narrative, too. Plot points are stressed through sound: for instance, when the villagers awake to find their instruments missing, there is no sound at all. The villain only cackles.

The fact that this film met the censors' approval reveals that the depiction of attractive, silhouette-like peasants in a field fit the Nazi ideal image of *Volk* working their land. The style of the villagers' profiles contrasts with the stock-caricatured, ugly, big-nosed villain, who does not look too different from the evil sorcerer from *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*. Considering Reiniger's warning from the Nazi censors after *Carmen* five months earlier—that she ought to focus on a German theme—it appears that she has complied. *Das gestohlene Herz* was made with production assistance from the Reichsmusikkammer, as the title credit indicates. And yet Alfred Happ reproduces a letter Reiniger allegedly received from a Jewish refugee living in England, who interprets the film as a subversive statement about the Nazi destruction of German culture and praises the artist for her courage.<sup>50</sup> Happ's citation directs his readers to a book about *Das gestohlene Herz*, which I have been unable to locate or even determine if it actually exists.<sup>51</sup> But even if it does, we know that Herbert Just, the person identified as the author of the missing book in the footnote, wrote about the “Tag der deutschen Hausmusik” in a publication for the Reichsmusikkammer in 1939,<sup>52</sup> a clue that Just may have also had a particular agenda when he

suggested in a postwar publication that the film was subversive. It is a plausible reading, in that some viewers at the time may indeed have understood the film as subversive, but it is also naive to imagine that a transgressive statement would have slipped past the Nazis, especially since the film was partially supported by the Reichsmusikkammer.

In fact, the film was actively promoted as Nazi propaganda. Herbert Just's 1939 publication, *Die Förderung der Hausmusik und die Durchführung des "Tages der deutschen Hausmusik": Vorschläge, Erfahrungen und Arbeitsmittel*, is a resource book and guide for communities to present their own regional *Hausmusik* events. There is no mistaking the agenda of this book: its opening epigraph quotes Hitler. It also includes two of Reiniger's works in its listing of *Hausmusikfilme: Das gestohlene Herz* and *Zehn Minuten Mozart* (1930). The author notes that these two *Kulturfilme* are available either with sound or silent (suited to live musical accompaniment) and provides the rental price for both as well as instructions for ordering the sheet music.<sup>53</sup> The publication includes a photograph showing high school students performing the score live at a screening of *Das gestohlene Herz* in a gymnasium in Zehlendorf. [Fig. 3.20] It also includes a list of promotional posters available for purchase, including one in a style evocative of Reiniger's silhouettes (if not created by the artist herself). [Fig. 3.21] While today it is impossible to know Reiniger's original intention in her depiction of the evil villain figure in this film, there is no question that the work was put to propagandistic use.



Fig. 3.20: Screening of *Das gestohlene Herz* at a gymnasium in Zehlendorf, Berlin, ca. 1934–39. Herbert Just, *Die Förderung der Hausmusik und die Durchführung des “Tages der deutschen Hausmusik”*: *Vorschläge, Erfahrungen und Arbeitsmittel* (Berlin: Reichsmusikkammer, 1939), 28.



Fig. 3.21: Promotional poster for the “Tag der deutschen Hausmusik” in a silhouette style reminiscent of Lotte Reiniger’s cutouts, ca. 1935. Herbert Just, *Die Förderung der Hausmusik und die Durchführung des “Tages der deutschen Hausmusik”*: *Vorschläge, Erfahrungen und Arbeitsmittel* (Berlin: Reichsmusikkammer, 1939), 41.

Reiniger made a few other short films screened in Germany during the Third Reich.

These opera shorts and fairy tales have no overt visual propagandistic symbolism (Hitler does not make an appearance, there are no swastikas or racist imagery), and their elegant silhouettes

and storylines would have appealed to both adults and children. *Papageno* (1935) complied with the censor's request for operas with German content, as it is based on a duet from Mozart's *Magic Flute*. In an interview in the 1970s, Reiniger mentioned that Hitler himself approved of this work—"Adolf Hitler fand den *Papageno* sehr interessant, das sei eine schöne Aufforderung, viele Kinder zu bekommen (wegen des Schluß -Duetts, viele, viele Kinderlein)"—but offers no indication of how she came to know this.<sup>54</sup> [Fig. 3.22] Her works from this period feature German music and appear to have kept her safe from the type of critique she received after *Carmen*.



Fig. 3.22: Lotte Reiniger, still from *Papageno*, 1935. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Another film produced that same year, *Galathea* (1935), manifests a Greek influence on the silhouettes, in a classicizing style that would have aligned with Nazi aesthetic policies in a different way. [Fig. 3.23] But beyond *Galathea*'s visual echoes of antiquity (rather than the exotic, which Reiniger emphasized in her Weimar films), this work presents content that could be interpreted as aligning with Nazi ideals of femininity by heroizing a woman's domestic role.

Based on a story from ancient Greek mythology, this short film recounts the tale of the sculptor Pygmalion, who carved a sculpture of a beautiful woman, Galathea, and became so enamored with his creation that when the stone statue came to life, he forgot his devoted, humble maid. Galathea cavorts nude around the village—stopping passersby and tempting men with her striking appearance—while Pygmalion’s attempts at domesticating her come to naught. She is wild and interested in drinking and suggestive dancing, much to the sculptor’s distress, yet the loyal maid remains at the ready to comfort him amid the chaos. Although Pygmalion ignores her generosity, the maid represents moral stability in contrast with the living sculpture’s chaotic, erotic adventurousness. When Galathea is returned to stone and the village spared her mischief, Pygmalion realizes his love for the steadfast maid, and the film concludes with their kiss. In many ways, Galathea is the opposite of Reiniger’s Carmen—although both are strong-willed, sexually expressive, lead female characters—because the gypsy Carmen is not punished in the end of that earlier film. Despite the fact that in Georges Bizet’s (1838–1875) original opera, Carmen is killed by Don José in a jealous rage, in Reiniger’s version (the film that created friction with the Nazi censors), the gypsy tames a bull and rides off with the bullfighter Escamillo—the wild woman gets what she wants.<sup>55</sup> In *Galathea*, feminine free will, troublemaking, and overt sexuality are represented as dangerous while the woman associated with the domestic realm, the maid, is the hero.<sup>56</sup> Just as “viele, viele Kinderlein” is reported to have pleased Hitler, so too could this vision of femininity have accorded with the Nazi ideal of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*.



Fig. 3.23: Lotte Reiniger, still showing the sculptor admiring Galathea from *Galathea*, 1935. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Despite the Nazis' acceptance of *Das rollende Rad*, *Das gestohlene Herz*, *Zehn Minuten Mozart*, *Papageno*, and *Galathea*, Reiniger did encounter political pushback beyond the mixed reception of *Carmen*. The Nazi cinema trade paper, *Deutsche Filmzeitung*, published an article in 1935 noting that silhouette films did not accord to the proper “dramaturgical laws” set forth by the Reich’s *Filmdramaturg*, Willy Krause. Reiniger is never named explicitly in the article, and the “laws” address the formal shortcomings of silhouette film in general rather than the content of Reiniger’s movies specifically:

Sein These von Kombinieren veranschaulicht er am Scherenschnitt-Film. Dieser arbeitet mit den Komponenten Bewegung, Raum, Licht und Schatten, dazu Sprache Geräusch und Musik. Aber er nutzt, wie Krause sagt, diese Komponenten nicht voll- und gleichwertig aus. Der Raum bleibt meist zweidimensional, die Bewegung beschränkt sich auf ihrer primitivsten Urformen, das Licht- und Schattenspiel ist auf die krassesten, sinnfälligsten, Kontraste gestellt. Sprache Geräusche und Musik sind im wahrsten Sinne Untermalung, da die natürliche Beziehung zu den Sichtbaren Dingen und Wesen des Films nicht herzustellen ist, weil die Dinge und Menschen ja nicht original, sondern vermittels einer künstlichen Darstellung gezeigt werden. Einem schwarzen Papiermännchen aber glaubt man nicht, dass es sprechen kann. In diesem Fall ist der Film unrealistisch, ist Illusion und seine Form ist romantisch. Durch Sprache Geräusch und Musik erhält er die künstlerisch einwandfreie Note der romantischen Ironie. Wir haben keinen romantischen Raum mehr, sondern einen realistischen.<sup>57</sup>

The condemnation comes across as a bit cryptic to a reader today, but according to Alfred Happ, Reiniger took the article as a threat: “Das war—wenn auch vornehm ausgedrückt—eine Drohung.”<sup>58</sup> *Papageno* and *Galathea* were the last films she produced in Germany in the 1930s, although she and Koch did apply for funding from the Film Kreditbank on October 16, 1935, three and a half months after Krause’s article. Koch sought backing for a film based on Hans Christian Andersen’s *Däumelinchen*, but was denied.<sup>59</sup> Reiniger dissolved her studio in Berlin in 1935 and left Germany the same year.<sup>60</sup> Her own reflections on the period, in an interview in 1972, were that she didn’t approve of rising anti-Semitism in Germany: “Ich bin in 1933 aus

Deutschland weggegangen, weil mir diese Hitler-Veranstaltung nicht paßte und weil ich sehr viele jüdische Freunde hatte, die ich nun nicht mehr Freunde nenne durfte; und das ging mir gegen den Strich.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, many of Reiniger’s collaborators—the musician Peter Gellhorn (1912–2004), for example, who worked on *Das rollende Rad* and *Papageno*—were categorized by the Nazis as half-Jewish and forbidden from working. And *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* had been financed by the Jewish banker Luis Hagen, with whom Reiniger continued her friendship.<sup>62</sup> Her move away from Germany (to England and Italy, then back to England after the war) allowed her to continue her artistic collaborations with people unwelcome in Germany. In England she found work, mounted a few exhibitions, including one at the Victoria and Albert Museum (the museum’s first by a foreign artist), and made a few films for the General Post Office, including a commercial, *The HPO: Heavenly Post Office* (1938). She continued to maintain personal and professional relationships with people categorized as enemies in Nazi Germany.

While most biographical accounts note that Reiniger left Germany during World War II because of political pressures and later settled in England, this narrative, while true, obscures the complexities of her movements and projects. Reiniger traveled to England in November 1935—while there she published the dialogue “Film as Ballet”—but her residence there lasted less than two years. She went to Paris in January 1937 and collaborated on a few projects with Renoir and her husband (Koch was working on Renoir’s antiwar film *La Grande Illusion* [1937] and later *La Marseillaise* [1938], a film sponsored by French left-wing Popular Front about the French Revolution). Shortly before the outbreak of war in 1939, Reiniger and Koch went together to Italy, where she remained until Christmas of 1943. During the fall of 1943 Reiniger contributed pen drawings as story illustrations to the Luftwaffe’s propaganda magazine *Luftflotte Süd*,

published by the Wehrmacht press in Berlin.<sup>63</sup> She went back to Berlin in December 1943, at the peak of the city's bombings, to care for her ailing mother and because she and Koch were being forcibly evacuated from Italy by the Allies.<sup>64</sup> Reiniger herself stated: "Teils war diese Rückkehr politische Notwendigkeit, teils geschah es in Sorge um die hochbetagte Mutter, die in Berlin lebte."<sup>65</sup> Her return came with risks: "Meine alte Mutter war in Berlin und mit den Nachrichten von den zunehmenden Bombardements entschlossen wir uns, wieder nach Deutschland zurückzugehen, was ein bißchen gefährlich für uns war, weil wir im Hitler-Reich nicht sehr beliebt waren."<sup>66</sup> Yet Reiniger continued to contribute illustrations to *Luftflotte Süd*, for instance providing drawings for its retellings of *Romeo and Juliet* and other historical novellas.<sup>67</sup> [Fig. 3.24]

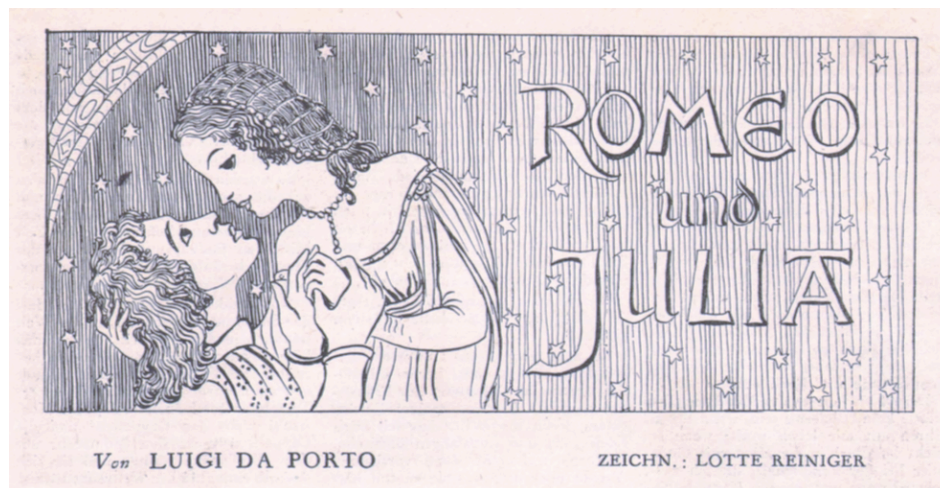


Fig. 3.24: Lotte Reiniger, illustration for *Romeo und Julia* from the Wehrmacht magazine *Luftflotte Süd*, 21 (March 26, 1944): I.

In 1944, toward the end of the war, Reiniger accepted another film contract from the Reichsinstitut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht and began shooting *Die goldene Gans* (1944–47), based on the Grimm fairy tale. She called it her *Fressfilm*, a way to earn some money at the end of the war.<sup>68</sup> It was completed in 1947—or as Reiniger herself described it, the

short was made “teils unter Goebbels, teils unter den Russen.”<sup>69</sup> Although she had reservations about being associated with a Nazi organization, she believed the institute to be different: “Aber das [Institut] war eine harmlose Sache, da waren so . . . ehrliche Lehrer.”<sup>70</sup> This film too takes up a German story, a Grimm fairy tale, and is devoid of any exotic visual influences. It appears quite similar in style to her other Grimm fairy-tale films—from before the war and those produced in England afterward—and against such a backdrop, may be seen as an escapist fantasy of sumptuous meals, an extension of a film series begun in her Weimar days.



Fig. 3.25: Lotte Reiniger, still of the youngest boy and the goose from *Die goldene Gans*, 1944–47. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

The film is quite faithful to the Grimm story: Two favored sons are injured during a tree-felling mission in the woods after they rebuff a scruffy gnome-like hermit. The third and youngest boy, thought to be a simpleton, is saved by his generosity to this same hermit. [Fig. 3.25] The boy’s kindness proves him worthy of a golden goose—an animal that could deliver laughter to a sullen princess—which in turn grants him a kingdom. The curse-casting hermit does not resemble Reiniger’s racialized stock villain with magical powers, but the heroic son

does have a stereotypically European profile. Yet the brothers do not bear any exaggerated physical features marking them as greedy, as one saw with Cinderella's stepsisters in the 1922 film; their ungenerous character is cued primarily by their coldness toward the hermit, an aspect of the plot, rather than by anything visual. Absent are overt reminders of exotic otherness.

A similar transformation in Reiniger's work can be seen in her late animations: racialized profiles vanish, and the physical cues to a figure's character are minimized. In the 1950s, in England, Reiniger created a thirteen-episode series of fairy tales, some using fresh material shot in color, others with recycled footage from her earlier films. In her 2011 book *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights*, historian Marina Warner writes: "After the war, Reiniger's iconography, with its occasionally racialized, cartoonish aspects, betrayed the prejudices of her times: the caricatured Chinese, the African features of her witches and goblins, the apparently exaggerated Semitic profile of the enchanter himself became uncomfortable stereotypes in the postwar period. When Reiniger began reusing footage and figures from *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* for her fairytale shorts, she redrew her characters." The telling example Warner provides—*The Magic Horse* (1954) in which the African magician from Prince Achmed reappears—is redrawn without a hooked nose and transformed to look less villainous. Achmed too looks less African and more European in the later *Aladdin* short (1954). Warner explains this move away from racialized profiles thus: "The prejudices of the Nazis had altered, retrospectively, the terms in which she had expressed herself."<sup>71</sup> This is certainly true, but as we have seen, the movement away from racialized figures was more of a gradual development than an abrupt switch after the war—at times the disappearance of so-called exotic figures was itself a kind of concession to Nazi prejudices. One cannot presume that the work of an avant-garde artist

was politically inert in the moment of its creation by virtue of its modernist style or the political agnosticism of its artist.

In early works such as *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*, Reiniger's figures are at their most exotic and fantastic. And while some folkloric elements remained over the course of her career, certain nuances changed. *Die goldene Gans*, for example, is a story about the power of laughter, but the film does not demonstrate the same playfulness and humor that one finds in Reiniger's Weimar works. It lacks the immediateness of a fairy-tale paper cutting or the affection that went into films with portraits of her friends. Other changes were more decisive: following World War II, Reiniger never cut a racist African or Asian silhouette again, and she increasingly moved away from the obvious suggestion of physiognomic profiles. [Figs. 3.26, 3.27] Compare Cinderella's the evil stepsister in the 1922 silent film with the 1953/54 sound version of the same story created in England.<sup>72</sup> In both iterations, the evil stepsisters are afflicted with facial or figure flaws (an overly large nose and chin, a short and stout body) yet in the later version, the sisters are not as cartoonish looking, and are less obviously contrasted with the modest Cinderella. Though Reiniger remains true to the Grimm tale in both versions, her depiction of heroes and villains became more complicated after the war. For an artist who had been involved in the propaganda machine of the Third Reich, the visual difference between good and evil would never be obvious again.



Fig. 3.26: Lotte Reiniger, *Aschenputtel*, 1922. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

Fig. 3.27: Lotte Reiniger, *Cinderella*, 1953–54. *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Märchen und Fabeln* (Berlin: Arte Edition, Absolut Medien, 2006), DVD.

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Lotte Reiniger was not the only artist associated with the avant-garde who also created works that could, at least for a time, be accommodated by the Nazi regime. As Petropoulos writes: “A key to understanding the history of Nazi Germany is the realization that the regime gradually grew more radical. . . . When [artists] sought out a place in the Reich, they scarcely imagined what would transpire during the war.”<sup>73</sup> Like many Germans, Reiniger thought the situation would soon pass: “Wir dachten, wir könnten nicht alle so ohne weiteres aus Deutschland weggehen, sondern müssten versuchen, unsere Sache zu verteidigen, weil wir es nicht für uns möglich hielten, daß in einem Land wie Deutschland eine grausame Tendenz lange Fuß fassen könnte.”<sup>74</sup> Petropoulos’s case studies of ten individual artists in the Third Reich—five who attempted but failed to find accommodation and five who achieved accommodation—illustrate the nuances of individual situations, egos, and choices. His book moves beyond an exploration of specific biographies to show how individuals negotiated a “Mephisto question” in order to challenge the notion that all modern artists were anti-Nazi, and that all Nazis were anti-modernist. My intention here is not to condemn, excuse, justify, or redeem Reiniger’s art. Her story invites us, much rather, to consider what this history tells us about puppetry’s flexibility as an art form and how important context is to its interpretation. The same basic cinematic shadow puppets—with subtle variations in style and content—could be seen in completely different ways at different moments and places. Even when puppetry is translated to the cinema, audiences are key to the production of meaning. Even as a one-way medium, cinema shadow puppetry extends the viewer’s role as the audience participates in the creation of meaning.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Lotte Reiniger, *Shadow Theatres and Shadow Films* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1970), 11.
- <sup>2</sup> Rachel Palfreyman, “Life and Death in the Shadows: Lotte Reiniger’s *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*,” *German Life and Letters* 64, no. 1 (January 2011): 6–18.
- <sup>3</sup> Béla Balázs, “Die Gewalt der Schere,” in *Der Geist des Films* (Halle: 1930) 122–23, reprinted in Werner Dütsch, ed., *Lotte Reiniger: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek, 1969), 4.
- <sup>4</sup> On the connection of silhouettes to advertising, see Michael Cowan, “The Ambivalence of Ornament: Silhouette Advertisements in Print and Film in Early Twentieth-Century Germany,” *Art History* 36, no. 4 (September 2013): 784–809.
- <sup>5</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (1947; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 128.
- <sup>6</sup> For feminist readings see especially Christian Schönfeld, “Lotte Reiniger and the Art of Animation,” in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld (Würzburg: Königshäuser und Neumann, 2006), 171–90; Whitney Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), 46, 112–13, 166–69, 172–76. For Reiniger’s connection to the avant-garde see especially Evamarie Blattner and Dorothee Kimmich, eds., *Lotte Reiniger im Kontext der europäischen Medienavantgarde* (Tübingen: Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2011); Cowan, “The Ambivalence of Ornament.”
- <sup>7</sup> In “Life and Death in the Shadows” Palfreyman evaluates the reception of Reiniger with an emphasis on *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* and highlights the reflex of praising Reiniger, rather than analyzing her work in depth. Although she argues for a deeper engagement, she does not address the political side of the work.
- <sup>8</sup> Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 19.
- <sup>9</sup> William Moritz, “Some Critical Perspectives on Lotte Reiniger,” in *Animation: Art and Industry*, ed. Maureen Furniss (London: John Libbey, 2012), 17.
- <sup>10</sup> Alfred Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst* (Tübingen: Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2004), 41. The story is also included in Alfred Happ, *Lotte Reiniger, Carl Koch, Jean Renoir: Szenen einer Freundschaft* (Munich: Institut Français de Munich, 1994) 18.
- <sup>11</sup> Werner Biedermann, “Gespräch mit Lotte Reiniger,” in *Lotte Reiniger: Silhouettenfilm und Schattentheater* (Munich: Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1979), cited in Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 41.
- <sup>12</sup> Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 40.
- <sup>13</sup> I will go into details regarding her movements and provide source notes later in this chapter.
- <sup>14</sup> See Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).
- <sup>15</sup> Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 116.

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- <sup>16</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 66–67.
- <sup>17</sup> Olaf Peters, “From Nordau to Hitler: ‘Degeneration’ and Anti-Modernism between the fin-de-siècle and the National Socialist Takeover of Power,” in *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi German 1937*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel; New York: Neue Galerie, 2004), 16–35.
- <sup>18</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 48n111.
- <sup>19</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 51.
- <sup>20</sup> Lotte Reiniger, “Die Geschichte meines Prinzen Achmed,” in *Pressenheft der Comenius-Film GmbH*, ed. Frank Warschauer (Berlin, 1926), reprinted in Dütsch, *Lotte Reiniger: Eine Dokumentation*, 50–51. Reiniger notes that 100,000 of the 250,000 frames were eventually used in the final version of the film.
- <sup>21</sup> *Der getäuschte Pierrot* (1917), directed by Ludwig von Wich, Filmmuseum München.
- <sup>22</sup> Reiniger, *Shadow Theatres and Shadow Films*, 82–84.
- <sup>23</sup> Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism and the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves (1952; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Palfreyman (“Life and Death in the Shadows,” 11) also notes Reiniger’s omission from Eisner’s book, but interprets the oversight as “inexplicable.”
- <sup>24</sup> Reiniger-Koch, “Wie ich meine Silhouettenfilme mache,” in *Das Kulturfilmbuch*, eds. E. Beyfuss and A. Kossowsky (Berlin: Chryselius and Schulz Verlag, 2914), 205.
- <sup>25</sup> Beth Wagner Brust, *The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 12.
- <sup>26</sup> Marina Warner mentions the connection between this storytelling tradition and also observes Reiniger’s Rackham quotations, but she does not explore the significance of the paper cuts as visual sources. Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), 399–400.
- <sup>27</sup> Hans Christian Andersen, *Die kleine Seejungfrau: Scherenschnitt-Illustrationen Lotte Reinigers* (Dettenhausen: Evang. Kirchengemeinde, 1980).
- <sup>28</sup> Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 399–400.
- <sup>29</sup> Emma Rutherford, *Silhouette: The Art of the Shadow* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 221.
- <sup>30</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 11.
- <sup>31</sup> Reiniger, *Shadow Theatres and Shadow Films*, 13.
- <sup>32</sup> For an interpretation of Reiniger’s Orientalism and Edward Said see Schönfeld, “Lotte Reiniger and the Art of Animation,” 181–82.
- <sup>33</sup> Donnaræ MacCann, “Hugh Lofting 1886–1947” in *Writers for Children: Critical Studies of Major Authors Since the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Jane M. Bingham (New York: Charles Schibner’s Sons, 1988), 365–71.
- <sup>34</sup> Schönfeld hints at this, Schönfeld, “Lotte Reiniger and the Art of Animation,” 181–82.
- <sup>35</sup> Warner describes the transformation from a neutral view of such racialized imagery in the Weimar Republic to a charged position after World War II in *Stranger Magic*, 401–2.
- <sup>36</sup> “Film—als Kunstgesehen/Berliner Festspiele/Ein Film wird gerettet/Berlin den 9. Juni,” *Nationalzeitung*, June 10, 1934, quoted in Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 44.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Lotte Reiniger, “Das Papier als Filmdarsteller,” in *Das Papier: Ein Berufs-Chronik* (Berlin: Heinz Schnakenburg Verlag, 1935), 96–97.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>40</sup> Zensurkarte for *Das rollende Rad*, Dokument der Zensurprüfstelle Sig. B 35936-1, reproduced in Anke Mebold, ed., *Die Klassiker von Lotte Reiniger: Musik und Zaubereien DVD Booklet* (Berlin: Absolut Medien GmbH), 20–23.

<sup>41</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Happ, Grace, and other scholars have acknowledged the film as Nazi propaganda, but nobody offers an interpretation, particularly of its stylistic distinctiveness. See Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> The journal *Life and Letters* (later becoming *Life and Letters To-Day*) was a literary review that published short fiction, poetry, essays, and criticism by many of the most significant writers of its day, including members of the Bloomsbury Group, Thomas Hardy, E. M. Forster, Thomas Mann, D. H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, and others.

<sup>44</sup> The original Ballets Russes troupe disbanded in 1929 after Sergei Diaghilev's death that year. The reference is to a 1936 performance of the Ballets Russes troupe run by Wassily de Basil (1888–1951) that reunited some of the dancers from Diaghilev's ensemble. De Basil's Ballets Russes did perform in London in 1936.

<sup>45</sup> Lotte Reiniger, "Film as Ballet," *Life and Letters To-Day* 14 (Spring to Summer 1936), 159–60.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 162–63.

<sup>49</sup> *Der Kinematograph* reported, "Es bewahrheitet sich auch hier der alte Satz, daß der Prophet im eigenen Lande wenig gelte. In England ist über diese starke künstlerische Persönlichkeit bereits ein Buch erschienen und in Frankreich hat der Märchenfilm Prinzen Achmed allerstärkste Beachtung gefunden." "Lotte Reiniger über ihr Schaffen," *Der Kinematograph* 29, no. 58 (March 22, 1935): n.p.

<sup>50</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 52: "Ich bin 1933 aus Deutschland geflohen und habe von da an lange das unsichere Leben des Heimatlosen geführt . . . Sie werden ahnen, auf was für ungesunde Gedanken man da kommen kann. An einem . . . Tage sah ich einen Film von ihnen in London. . . . Es war die Geschichte von einem bösen Berggeist, der den Menschen keine Freude und Freiheit gönnt und ihnen in einer Nacht sämtlich Musikinstrumente wegnimmt, und am Ende wird er doch von der Musik bezwungen.

Für mich wurde der Film ein wunderbar tröstliches Symbol. Mir liefern die Tränen herunter, und nicht nur mir, sondern auch manchen anderen deutschen Flüchtlingen, die um mich saßen -- auf den billigsten Plätzen natürlich. Der böse Dämon war für mich (für Sie auch?) der Nationalsozialismus, der von der Musik, Symbol von Freiheit und Lebensmut, am Ende doch besiegt wird. . . .

Auf dem Heimweg kicherte ich sogar darüber, daß Goebbels den Film seinen besonderen Segen gegeben hatte; aber im Grude sind ja Verbrecher immer doof. Er hat sicher nicht gewußt, daß er damit sein eigens Todesurteil unterschreiben hatte.

Ich freue mich, Ihnen das sagen und Ihnen von Herzen danken zu können. Ich fürchtet, die Nazis hätten schließlich doch entdeckt, wes Geistes Kind Sie sind, und hätten Sie in einem KZ verschwinden lassen.

Mit herzlichem Gruß,  
Dr. Marie Luise H.

<sup>51</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 196n120 notes that the letter was reproduced in the following book as an afterword: Herbert Just, ed., *Lotte Reiniger: Das gestohlene Herz. 33 Bilder aus dem Scherenschnittfilm von Lotte Reiniger mit einer Erzählung der Entstehung und des Inhalts* (Tübingen: Publisher unknown, 1972).

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Just, *Die Förderung der Hausmusik und die Durchführung des "Tages der deutschen Hausmusik": Vorschläge, Erfahrungen und Arbeitsmittel* (Berlin: Reichsmusikkammer, 1939).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>54</sup> Reiniger interview, Dettenhausen, October 1979, cited in Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Harriet Margolis, "Shadow and Substance: Reiniger's Carmen Cuts Her Own Capers," in *Carmen: From Silent Film to MTV*, a special issue of *Critical Studies* 24, ed. Ann Davis (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2005), 61–74. Margolis interprets Reiniger's *Carmen* as a feminist comedy with a female lead holding the power to undermine patriarchal values.

<sup>56</sup> For the feminist interpretations of these two films see Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 171–72. Grace argues for a historicized reading of feminist issues, but does not address the larger political context of the Third Reich. Margolis ("Shadow and Substance," 61–74) argues that the film represents a feminist attempt to subvert the sexism of Bizet.

<sup>57</sup> "Dramaturgische Ratschläge des Reichsfilmdramaturgen," *Deutsche Filmzeitung: Wochen-Zeitschrift für das gesamte Lichtspielwesen* (Munich) 14, no. 26 (June 30, 1935): 1–2.

<sup>58</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 118.

<sup>60</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Schobert, "Gespräch mit Lotte Reiniger," in *Lotte Reiniger, David W. Griffiths, Harry Langdon*, ed. Hilmar Hoffmann and Sigmar Ahlering (Frankfurt am Main: Kommunales Kino, 1972), 99.

<sup>62</sup> Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Happ mentions her contributions in a footnote (*Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 197n151) and notes that her works were illustrations of texts by Friedrich Schiller, Christian Friedrich Hebbel, Rainer Maria Rilke, and others.

<sup>64</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 60, 64; Christel Strobel, "Lotte Reiniger and Her Films," in *Lotte Reiniger. Filme*, ed. Carola Feber and Andreas Ströhl (Munich: Goethe Institut, 1999), 17; Jayne Pilling, ed., *A Reader in Animation Studies* (London: John Libbey, 1997), 231.

<sup>65</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Schobert, "Gespräch mit Lotte Reiniger," 99.

<sup>67</sup> Werner von der Schulenburg, "Das Gelübde: Eine venezianische Novelle," *Luftflotte Süd* 11 (January, 16 1944): 10–13; Luigi da Porto, "Romeo und Julia," *Luftflotte Süd* 21 (March 26 1944): 9–15

<sup>68</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 66; Grace, *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation*, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Happ, *Lotte Reiniger, Carl Koch, Jean Renoir: Szenen einer Freundschaft*, 20.

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<sup>70</sup> Reiniger interview with Werner Bidermann, 1979, quoted in Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 66.

<sup>71</sup> Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 401.

<sup>72</sup> For a comparison of these two films, also see Olga Schwab, “Lotte Reinigers *Aschenputtel* (1922) versus *Cinderalla* (1953/54)” in *Animationen: Lotte Reiniger im Kontext der Mediengeschichte*, eds. Barbara Lange, Catherine Böhm, Andrea Haarer, Antonia Kurz, Olga Özbek, and Olga Schwab (Tübingen: Universitätstadt Tübingen, 2012), 1–11.

<sup>73</sup> Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Walter Schobert, “Gespräch mit Lotte Reiniger in London am 21. 8. 1969,” *Kommunales Kino 1* (1972): 99, quoted in Happ, *Lotte Reiniger: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst*, 42.

## Chapter Four

### Hitler's Puppets: Propaganda on All Fronts

Neben mir stand ein Bekannter meines Vaters, ein Ministerialrat, und der sagte immer nur "Kasperletheater, Kasperletheater."

—Günther Grassmann, eyewitness describing Hitler's 1923 Beer Hall Putsch<sup>1</sup>

Kasper rings a bell signaling the beginning of the puppet show. The smiling children watch with rapt attention. "Meine Großmutter hat heute Geburtstag," announces Kasper. The movie camera focuses on the children in the front row. "Ach so," responds a boy. "Und alles muss schön sauber sein. . . . Jetzt mach ich alles sauber und ich muss das Mittagessen putzen und die Stiefel kochen." Shouting and jumping in delight, eager to help Kasper straighten out his tasks, the children complete Kasper's sentence in chorus: "Ach! Das Mittagessen, das Mittagessen muss ich . . . 'KOCHEN!' Und die Stiefel muss ich . . . 'PUTZEN!'" The children put their arms over their heads and wave their hands in excitement. One kid sticks out his tongue in complete absorption. Their eyes sparkle. What will happen while Kasper is off doing his chores? We see a quick shot of Kasper as he asks the kids if they will still be around when he gets back: "Ich bin bald wieder da. Ihr bleibt doch für lange da, ja?" But the camera is more interested in the stagestruck children than the puppet, as they answer Kasper with a reassuring "Ja." We hear Kasper reply off camera, "Gut!" A boy in the front row jumps up first, raises his right hand, and shouts: "Heil Hitler!" [Fig. 4.0]



Fig. 4.0: Boy salutes “Heil Hitler!” while watching a performance of the Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater, 1939. *UFA Tonwoche 484/1939*. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

This is not the same chore-averse, chaos-creating, antiauthoritarian Kasper hero so adored by avant-garde artists. This Kasper’s attitude is different. He looks the same as the stock character from the fairground—big nose, mischievous, toothy smile—but in this 1939 performance by the Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater, Kasper likes cleanliness and order. And this is no imaginary scene: it is a description of documentary footage from a pre-Christmas puppet show hosted by the Nazi leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude*, part of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*. All the spectators are “Aryan,” and it is not just a single boy, but the other children as well, who jump from their seats to give Kasper the Hitler salute.

While Kasper is offstage doing chores for his grandmother, a robber comes. Fortunately, the robber is dim-witted and easily trapped by the puppet hero and his friend the policeman,

along with the help of the children, who are anxious to disclose the robber's hiding spot. Although a policeman was frequently included in Kasper ensembles in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his role as an authority figure and a representative of the law usually made him Kasper's foe rather than friend. But things are different in this play. Together, they bring violence upon the robber and restore order to conclude the scene. The audience of small children becomes particularly raucous when Kasper brings out a mallet to capture the robber inside a trunk and carry him away. "Hurrah! Hurrah!" exclaims Kasper as he and the policeman carry the box offstage.



Fig. 4.1: Hohnstein Kasper performs, 1939. *UFA Tonwoche* 484/1939. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

How was a subversive rabble-rouser like Kasper transformed into a Nazi hero? What role did Kasper play in the Third Reich? [Fig. 4.1] When one thinks of propaganda images from the period, Hitler delivering one of his ranting speeches immediately comes to mind. Or we imagine

a sharp-jawed man wearing a military uniform with a swastika armband and the *Totenkopf* insignia on his cap. Violence and fear were certainly Nazi strategies for establishing political control from the very beginning of the movement,<sup>2</sup> but leaders of the Third Reich also advanced a sophisticated propaganda campaign with a charming face. The image of innocent puppet-loving children—this footage ran as part of newsreel in 1939 for German cinemagoers<sup>3</sup>—was a vision of the Nazis as they themselves wanted to be seen. [Fig. 4.2] While strong-armed persuasion was part of the Nazi machine, so too was an amusing and entertaining kind of propaganda.



Fig. 4.2: Audience watching Hohnstein Kasper show, 1939. *UFA Tonwoche 484/1939*. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

This brand of propaganda presented audiences with a familiar face and a worldview reflecting existing beliefs, but recast with a Nazi message. In his book *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (1993), the scholar David Welch writes: “Propaganda is as much about confirming as about converting public opinion. Propaganda, if it is to be effective, must in a

sense preach to those who are already partially converted.”<sup>4</sup> Using a familiar character with a tradition in German folk culture gave the puppeteer a way in. At the same time, puppetry’s interactivity and responsiveness meant that its message could be carefully tailored to specific audiences—a performer could know his viewers from their instant feedback—and adjust the message to maximize ideological influence. A history of puppetry in the Third Reich shows this mechanism in action not only on the level of individual puppet shows, but also on a larger scale through puppetry’s appearance in a wide range of settings and even diverse media for different kinds of viewers.

In its most iconic instances, Nazi propaganda aimed to dominate with overwhelming monumentality: Leni Riefenstahl’s films, Arno Breker’s sculptures, Albert Speer’s architecture, masses, party rallies, et cetera. In other cases, especially narrative cinema, the Nazis sought to present pleasing images of wholeness. Eric Rentschler writes of Nazi film: “Studios were dream factories”—designed to enchant and enthrall—“not propaganda machines.”<sup>5</sup> Big feature films presented a “cinema of illusion” offering fantasies of wholeness. Puppetry, however, harnessed different energies for a range of viewers in varying circumstances, but usually with a pleasing, homegrown (rather than factory-produced) visage. Performed by professional puppeteers, puppets indoctrinated children through stage shows. Families were encouraged to put on puppet plays of their own using Nazi-approved figures and scripts that could be mail-ordered from the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel. Older audiences delighted too at the caricatured, satirical figures on offer, such as the Jew or Winston Churchill. Portable and practical, hand puppets made a great carry-along for soldiers, and productions for military men didn’t turn away from war. Professional puppeteers boosted the morale of troops on the front lines and cheered up convalescing soldiers. Kasper performed alongside the monumental pageantry of Nuremberg

Rallies.<sup>6</sup> And while Albert Speer's pavilion for the 1937 Paris World's Fair was dwarfing the Soviet entry, Kasper was winning a gold medal at the same event for his antics.<sup>7</sup> These propaganda initiatives were so effective that puppetry was committed to celluloid: in addition to documenting live shows for charming newsreel footage, special puppet films were produced as children's entertainment as well as fashionable documentaries aimed at women.

Defining propaganda can be a challenge, as its meaning shifts over time and in different contexts, but scholar Aristotle Kallis offers a useful framework when he characterizes propaganda, a form of mass communication and persuasion, as “a systematic process of information management geared to promoting a particular goal and guaranteeing a popular response as desired by the propagandist.”<sup>8</sup> When examining the history of propaganda, it is easy to get caught up in the debates that played out between Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945) and Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) over Expressionism in the arts. We could certainly follow exhibition history in the Third Reich, as others have done, and consider the struggle between the degenerate modernism exhibited at the *Entartete Kunst* show and the kitschy, pseudo-neoclassical heroism of the *Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung*.<sup>9</sup> But questions of aesthetic style reflect only one facet of the Nazi propaganda effort. When viewed from this broader angle—propaganda as information management geared toward a desired response—studying its operation shows how existing attitudes were repurposed with a Nazi message. Propaganda of the Third Reich was sophisticated and tuned to reach different audiences, keyed to their ages and priorities. Puppetry played an important part in the “orchestra” of Nazi propaganda<sup>10</sup>—to borrow Goebbels's analogy—and practitioners of this traditional folk art deliberately drew on its historical range as an instrument of both indoctrination and satire.

Puppetry was the calculated and controlled grassroots arm of Nazi entertainment propaganda. Its unique performance features and specific history set it apart from other forms of propaganda and offer a view on how a *Volkskunst* led to the establishment of a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Continuing its reliance on interactive, fast-paced performance rhythms and traditional characters, puppetry drew on old theatrical conventions but was popularized through the most modern means of organization and technology. Kasper's sense of mischief and violence took on new shape between 1933 and 1945 as he embodied the world that created him.

### **Gleichschaltung**

During a process known as *Gleichschaltung* immediately following Hitler's takeover, non-Nazi organizations were either eliminated or transformed into official Nazi groups. It was a maneuver to seize control of all aspects of German society, and puppetry troupes were not exempt—in fact, they were seen as a powerful political weapon. One Nazi propagandist wrote: “Der Kampf um das Volkstum beginnt schon beim Kind. Weil das Puppenspiel in gleicher Weise das Kind und den Erwachsenen anspricht, ist es eine Waffe, die wir in diesem Kampf nicht entbehren können. Es kommt hinzu, daß das Puppenspiel das politische Geschehen den Erfordernissen des Tages entsprechend ins Spiel einbeziehen und ihn seine Sinndeutung geben kann.”<sup>11</sup> According to Third Reich puppet historian Gerd Bohlmeier, approximately forty professional puppetry stages (of the hundreds from the Weimar period) were sanctioned after 1933. These stages became the focus of the Nazi puppetry program in the early days of the Reich.<sup>12</sup>

Shutting down puppet theaters that had been popular in the Weimar era but did not conform to the Nazi worldview was one part of the *Gleichschaltung*.<sup>13</sup> The avant-garde puppetry of many Bauhäusler, Dadaists, and other modernist artists was declared “degenerate” and the

leftist, proletarian Kasper Theater ended. The majority of active puppeteers in Germany prior to 1933 had been traditional traveling fairground hand-puppet performers, yet only a tiny fraction of these stages were considered *volkskulturell wertvoll* and allowed to continue after the takeover.<sup>14</sup>

The other part of the *Gleichschaltung* approach to puppetry involved the promotion and organization of puppeteers with ideologically correct shows. Some puppeteers from Weimar were encouraged to practice their art, and Max Jacob (1888–1967) of the Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater (the man behind the puppet in the newsreel clip just described) is one example of a puppeteer who began his career during the interwar years but tweaked his performances to accommodate the Nazi regime. There was some continuity among performers from the Weimar era to the Third Reich. A number of puppeteers began performing didactic shows to demonstrate so-called proper social norms in the early twentieth century, and National Socialism extended this trend. The Nazis were not the first to sanitize Kasper, to treat him as a model for behavior, or to pepper their plays with anti-Semitism—some of this was already present during the Weimar period and earlier. In fact, the majority, if not all, of the forty Nazi-approved puppet theaters were established during the interwar period.<sup>15</sup>

Many styles of puppetry that had been popular during Weimar continued to be practiced in the Third Reich. Puppeteers performed open-air shows at fairgrounds, in variety shows and cabarets, and on formal stage spaces at theaters and schools. Amateur puppeteers toyed around at home and in clubs with family and friends, instructed by build-it-yourself puppet manuals and published scripts. There were lots of hand puppets, marionettes, and even a bit of shadow puppetry.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, puppetry became an interest of some Nazi filmmakers, such as the documentarian Ulrich Kayser (1899–1977), as well as other documentary filmmakers who

produced children's shorts. As we saw in the previous chapter, Lotte Reiniger created shadow-puppet films with themes that could also be received as propaganda. This variety of puppetry activity—on both stage and screen—reflected an attempt to preserve and even extend all aspects of puppetry performance while controlling the content to deliver approved Nazi messages.

The diverse range of puppet activities was aimed at various audiences, and in Nazi Germany this meant that puppetry initially fell under the auspices of different administrative groups. No history of puppetry in the Third Reich would be complete without a description of the bureaucracy associated with it.<sup>17</sup> A few groups that sought to control puppetry included: Alfred Rosenberg's *Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur* (later renamed the *NS-Kulturgemeinde* after its merger with the *Deutsche Bühne* association), the *Reichstheaterkammer* (a sub-organization within Goebbels's *Reichskulturkammer*), the leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude*, and the *Hitler Jugend*. Puppet films fell under different but connected production branches of the Nazi bureaucracy, most notably the *Reichsfilmkammer* (also a unit within Goebbels's *Reichskulturkammer*).<sup>18</sup> Puppeteers often operated within a wide Nazi network, and professional performers did shows for different groups. The variety of organizations interested in bringing this form of theater in line with party ideology illustrates how widely the propagandistic potential of the medium was recognized, and how varied were the ambitions for its potential audiences.

This diversity also signals that puppetry had no obvious, single, fixed place in the propaganda structure in the early period of the Third Reich. But even as early as 1934, a discussion emerged about creating a central Nazi puppetry organization to standardize puppet performance, one that “wird jedoch auch die Zentralstelle selbst Textdichter und Puppenbildner heranziehen können und das Material für neue Spiele beschaffen. Auf Grund der genormten

Bühnen können diese Sachen, die von vornherein Gemeinschaftsgut sind, an die angeschlossenen Berufstheater ausgeliehen werden.”<sup>19</sup> In June 1938, the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel was established to fill this role. Not only would the institute standardize puppetry texts and figures, it would also promote the expansion of professional and amateur puppetry throughout Germany.<sup>20</sup>

The Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel was created with the cooperation and involvement of three main Nazi organizations, each with a different agenda for puppetry, yet structured in a way that allowed puppetry to preserve its flexible, grassroots qualities. Kraft durch Freude was primarily interested in regulating free-time activities, and its leaders wanted a centralized organization to oversee the assignment and quality control of professional entertainment puppeteers.<sup>21</sup> Hitler Jugend, on the other hand, had a vested interest in the educational potential of the medium, and envisioned an institute to regulate and distribute pedagogically correct puppets, scripts, and instructions.<sup>22</sup> A third organization, the Deutsche Gemeindetag, a council for the coordination of municipal, local-government initiatives, became involved in the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel as well (but was not a driving interest group like Kraft durch Freude and Hitler Jugend). Specifically, the city council of Stuttgart had a hand in the puppetry project.<sup>23</sup> Their involvement signals the importance of regional interests in coordinating puppetry in the Third Reich. While Kraft durch Freude and Hitler Jugend were nationwide organizations, the Deutsche Gemeindetag linked smaller community-based initiatives to larger state ministries through their local representatives. Its involvement in the establishment of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel is important, as it offered a bureaucratic avenue for regional activities to be communicated to administrators of larger programs. The organizational structure of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel was set up to reflect the medium’s responsiveness to different

viewers, providing a means for incorporating local feedback while simultaneously centralizing puppetry's messages.

Operations of the Reichsinstitut were managed by a four-person committee: Siegfried Raeck, institute director; Harro Siegel, creative and deputy director, and from 1941 its acting general manager; Hermann Schultze, dramaturg; and Gottfried Anacker, business director and puppetry advisor. Their efforts were supported by a team of employees—between eleven and seventeen, at different points in time.<sup>24</sup> All four leaders were active puppeteers prior to Hitler's takeover. These men were not just administrative bureaucrats, but were involved in the creation of puppets, the development of scripts, and the publication of puppetry propaganda. In fact, in August 1938, three months after the establishment of the Reichsinstitut, writings by all four were included in a special edition of the Hitler Jugend magazine *Wille und Macht* devoted to the topic of puppets: "In Kasperles Reich: Das Puppenspiel in der Kulturgeschichte." [Fig. 4.3] The language is unmistakably propagandistic and frequently militaristic. Raeck writes of "ein voller Einsatz des Puppenspiels,"<sup>25</sup> Harro Siegel evangelizes the "Theaterleben unseres Volkes,"<sup>26</sup> and Hermann Schultze lionizes the "Gestalt des Kaspers" as a "starker Waffe."<sup>27</sup> In a more philosophical register, Raeck writes: "Das Puppenspiel gibt uns die beste Möglichkeit an die Hand, durch unaufdringliche Zeitsatire, politisch-weltanschaulich, seelisch-erzieherisch zu wirken. Dinge, die ein Schauspieler oder ein Vortragender niemals so offen und frei sagen dürfte, ohne den anderen zu verletzen und ihn jeder Einwirkung zu verschießen, sagt eine unpersönliche Holzfigur lachend und doppelt wirksam."<sup>28</sup> Puppets can speak the truth with greatest effect in a way no other actor or rhetorician could get away with, writes the propagandist. Nazi puppets speak freely, boys and girls!



Fig. 4.3: “In Kasperles Reich: Das Puppenspiel in der Kulturgeschichte,” *Wille und Macht* 6, no. 15 (August 1938): cover. Published by Baldur von Schirach, leader of Hitler Jugend. Private collection.

The Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel was established with lofty goals: to develop and advance professional puppetry; to create new puppets, scripts, and stages; to test new shows; to experiment with puppet-building tools and other new technical aspects of puppet theater, including cinema; and to promote the scholarly study of puppetry.<sup>29</sup> It was meant to be a force in the propaganda machine of the Third Reich, and the construction of a new building in Stuttgart was planned (but never realized) on the grounds of the Sportschule Stillenbuch. The project was supported at the highest level, and one publication from the period even claimed the initiative was approved by Hitler personally: “[Die Stadt Stuttgart] errichtet darauf das neue Institutsgebäude, dessen Modell vom Führer genehmigt ist.”<sup>30</sup> These plans, along with the model itself, were presented in August 1938 during a weeklong conference for Nazi puppeteers held at

a youth hostel in Hohnstein, the same town where Max Jacob established the Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater ten years earlier. [Fig. 4.4] Approximately eighty puppeteers from the forty Nazi-approved professional puppet stages attended.<sup>31</sup> *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, a 1939 propaganda publication about puppetry in the Third Reich that evolved from the conference, describes the goal of the meeting: “Es war die Aufgabe dieser Woche, den Puppenspielern, die im Rahmen der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung ihre Aufgabe erfüllen sollen, den großen Zusammenhang der Volkstumsarbeit aufzuzeigen, in den sie mit ihrem Spiel hineingestellt sind. Es ging dabei in erster Linie um die grundsätzliche Ausrichtung des Puppenspiels, die natürlich auch die künstlerisch sachliche Gestaltung der Spiele bis ins Letzte beeinflusst.”<sup>32</sup> Not only were puppeteers to be approved by Nazi authorities, they would also be trained on how to correctly advance the party’s message.



Fig. 4.4: Photo of the presentation of the plans for the Reichsinstitut building in Stuttgart, Hohnstein puppetry conference, Berg Hohnstein, August 1938. Michael Harro Siegel, *Vom Puppenspiel in Deutschland 1933–1945: Erinnerung an die N. S. Zeit*, Archiv für Puppentheatergeschichte 2 (Frankfurt: Perliko-Perlacko, Dr. H. R. Purschke, 1981), 7.

Yet the leaders of the new institute initially debated the best approach to shaping the ideological content of puppet shows. Rather than focus on questions of artistic style or suitable

venues, as was the case with other famous Nazi aesthetic discussions, these puppeteers debated content: How overtly anti-Semitic should puppet shows be? Performer and figure designer Harro Siegel (1900–1985), a prominent member of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel who served as the organization’s creative and deputy director, documented his recollection of the debates about how, specifically, puppeteers should infuse their performances with Nazi ideology. In his short memoir, Siegel reports an encounter between members of the institute and the puppeteer Georg Deininger (1882–1946), who performed a conservative and frequently anti-Semitic style of marionetting: “Deininger machte den Vorschlag, man solle bei den auf Jahrmärkten und im Freien spielenden Bühnen den Juden (den es übrigens im traditionellen Handpuppenspiel schon immer gegeben hatte) als negative Hauptfigur und Vertreter des Bösen erscheinen und auf offener Szene aufhängen lassen. Dies jedoch wurde von der Tagungsleitung ziemlich energische abgelehnt—freilich kaum aus Humanität, sondern weil die Darstellung eines so mörderischen Antisemitismus damals noch inopportun war.”<sup>33</sup> In 1925 Deininger had established the Stuttgarter Künstler Marionetten Theater, and in 1933 he assumed leadership of the Deutschen Bund der Puppenspieler in Rosenberg’s Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur. An early member of the Nazi party and a recipient of the Goldenes Parteiabzeichen<sup>34</sup> (a badge awarded to the first one hundred thousand party members, and to others for outstanding service to the Nazi party), Deininger was a vocal advocate for hateful depictions of Jews in puppetry.

While anti-Semitism had been a feature of Nazism from the party’s very beginning, puppet shows in the Third Reich dialed down Jew hatred in certain settings and dialed it way up in others. Siegel’s assessment—that the puppeteers countering Deininger’s view were not humanitarians but rather thinking strategically about how best to win over audiences—accords with what we find in histories of other propaganda media. Curators Steven Luckert and Susan

Bachrach write: “Antisemitism was always a central Nazi tenet, yet Hitler and other leaders realized that not all Germans responded to their strident anti-Jewish messages. To be sure, in some areas of Germany, anti-Jewish propaganda was pronounced. . . . In other places, however, the Nazis played down antisemitism or left it out almost entirely from their propaganda campaigns.”<sup>35</sup> Since puppetry was such a flexible art, and the fairground puppetry at issue in Deininger’s debate was an especially mobile performance style, it does make sense that some puppeteers, even Nazis, might respond negatively to mandatory anti-Semitic content. But it is also worth noting that Siegel’s aside about the role of the Jew in traditional folk puppetry is accurate: Jewish characters were often negatively depicted in nineteenth-century puppet shows.<sup>36</sup> The Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism or anti-Semitic puppetry; Jew hatred had long been a part of German history and folk culture in particular. But how and when the Nazis turned up the anti-Semitic volume illuminates the special nature of puppetry as a propaganda medium, and tracks with significant historical moments in the Third Reich.

In the period immediately following the takeover, Nazi puppetry had not yet taken the shape it eventually would later on when Germany was at war. Kasper was different in 1934 than he was in 1939, and the qualities puppeteers emphasized shifted with changing political events. Although professional shows were carefully regulated during the *Gleichschaltung*, the options for puppeteers were actually quite broad in the early days of the Reich. The choice of plays was largely left to individual puppeteers, thus allowing a performer (professional or amateur) to select a version of Kasper Theater that best suited their audience in a given location or historical moment.

Evidence for the expansive range of available puppet scripts and scenarios can be found in *Das Kasperlbuch*, a reference work published in 1934 cataloguing available puppet scripts.

Authored by Siegfried Raeck (four years before he became director of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel), the book includes a 110-page annotated bibliography listing a wide array of available Kasper plays. For every single one of the well more than six hundred published scripts, organized by publisher, Raeck offered a capsule summary, quality rating, and brief justification for his evaluation. Owing to the comprehensiveness of the listings and informed by Raeck's own extensive experience as a puppeteer in Germany and Austria (he claims to have performed more than 3,500 shows between the years 1928 and 1934), the judgments are revealing.<sup>37</sup> Raeck's evaluations allow us to see the priorities of this future Reichsinstitut leader early in his puppetry career, and they also offer a basis for comparison when we examine the plays published by the institute under his leadership a few years later.

Although he eventually became director of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel and frequently wrote about the medium's unique power, Raeck initially questioned the effectiveness of ideological puppetry and highlighted its limits—at least in 1934, when this book was published. Raeck writes about “tendencies” in Kasper plays in his introduction to *Das Kasperlbuch*: “Es gibt viele Spiele, die einer bestimmten Tendenz dienen, etwa der Erziehung zur Hygiene, bestimmten Moralgrundsätzen oder irgend einer andren kulturellen oder politischen Tendenz. Die Untersuchungen zeigen jedoch, daß solche Tendenzen, . . . je nach dem Milieu der Kinder, in fast allen Fällen die ganze Spielillusion und das spontane Mitleben zerstörten, weil sie in der Regel dem Kasperlspiel im Besonderen ganz unorganisch aufgezwungen sind.”<sup>38</sup> Raeck is interested in Kasper's function as a wish-fulfilling image for children, a hero who overcomes all obstacles and reflects the “Seele der Kinder unseres Volkes.”<sup>39</sup> He contends that puppetry can be a good pedagogical tool for some kinds of instruction (responsible alcohol use or hygiene practices, for example) but is explicit about the limitations of political puppetry, especially

shows drawing on issues outside a child's sphere of experience. Rather than present an ideological problem, the intrusion of "tendencies" merely interrupts the magic of the show. For example, when reviewing a work published by the Verlag Jungbrunnengesellschaft, which published Communist Kasper plays during the Weimar Republic, Raeck gives the play a mixed review: "Ein Spiel mit sozialistisch-kommunistischer Tendenz. Kasperl Figur trotz starker Tendenz richtig bis auf Schluß." Not overly troubled by the politics of this play, Raeck cautions his readers, but advises that "Einzelne Szenen auch für Andersgesinnte verwendbar."<sup>40</sup> Instead of omitting the title altogether or warning readers of the danger of even reading a Communist play—Nazis began burning books that offended their worldview as early as 1933—Raeck suggests a tweak. His reviews suggest that he is more interested in praising plays that capture Kasper's essence as a children's hero than in condemning the politics of a specific script.

Raeck also reviews plays with strongly anti-Semitic content in his 1934 critical bibliography in a way that does not necessarily offer praise. Many puppet shows with anti-Jewish themes were published during the Weimar period, often written in a regional German dialect, and had a limited audience rather than wide appeal. Raeck is just as critical of these as he is of all the others, and he does not underline anti-Semitic content as either good or bad. When reviewing an anti-Semitic play by the Schwäbisches Kasperletheater, for example, Raeck's attention is on Kasper's failure to appeal to children: "Kein Kasperlspiel. Lange Monologe ohne Handlung. Inhalt wertlos. Kasperl völlig falsch."<sup>41</sup> The specific play under review, *Käspelerle als Polizeidiener* (1924), is noteworthy because it anticipates the kinds of shows that become popular during the Third Reich. Kasper is the policeman rather than his antagonist: "Kasperl wird Polizeidiener und sperrt den Juden, seinen Gläubiger, ein."<sup>42</sup> In 1934 Raeck was still preoccupied with finding a perfect Kasper that would first and foremost appeal to children on

children's terms, and less interested in ideological messages. But the published offerings of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, as we shall soon see, became overtly anti-Semitic during his leadership. What accounts for the change, and when did it happen?

The Nuremberg Laws were already in force when the Reichsinstitut was created (enacted in 1935, these laws deprived Jews of German citizenship, severely limited employment, and defined Jewishness according to invented racial terms), but there were other events that motivated an intensification of anti-Semitic hostilities in Germany. On October 28, 1938, seventeen thousand Polish Jews living in Germany were deported and sent to the Polish border. The Polish Jewish Grynszpan family was among those expelled, and when they sent news of these events to their son Herschel Grynszpan, then living in Paris, the teenage son wanted revenge and decided to kill the German ambassador to France. The seventeen-year-old Grynszpan was unable to locate the ambassador, and instead shot Ernst vom Rath, a German diplomat. Vom Rath died from the gunshot a few days later, on November 9, 1938 (incidentally the anniversary of Hitler's 1923 attempted Beer Hall Putsch), and the Nazis used this assassination as pretext for a massive, cross-country pogrom: Kristallnacht. In attacks launched by SA and SS men, 267 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish-owned business were burned or destroyed, and thirty thousand Jews were arrested. Berlin and Vienna, as urban centers with large Jewish populations, were most severely affected.<sup>43</sup> The event triggered an acceleration of Jewish deportations, and even greater restrictions on the remaining Jewish population. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "The passivity with which most German civilians responded to the violence signaled to the Nazi regime that the German public was prepared for more radical measures. . . . Kristallnacht figures as an essential turning point in Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews, which culminated in the attempt to annihilate the European Jews."<sup>44</sup>



Fig. 4.5: Figure of a villain puppet published in Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, ed., *Das deutsche Puppenspiel: Einsatz, Erfolge und Zielsetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeiterfront, 1939), 16.

Some German civilians may have responded with passivity, but the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel reacted by ratcheting up their anti-Semitic program. [Fig. 4.5] One example of its reaction to Kristallnacht is evident in their publication of the script *Der Jude im Dorn* (1939–40) by Hermann Schultze, the Reichsinstitut dramaturg.<sup>45</sup> It is a composite of the Grimm Brothers fairy tale of the same title, a traditional Kasper scenario, and anti-Semitic stereotypes. The logic of the storyline invites the audience to love Kasper and root for him in opposition to the Jew. Here is the story: the Jew Levi Blaspan attempts to marry a blond princess and usurp the throne by tricking the king through theft and lies. Although the virtuous and sentimental Kasper rightly deserved the princess as his bride, the gullible king is about to hand over his daughter to Blaspan in matrimony when Kasper reveals the deception—just in the nick of time! Although Kasper is initially mistaken for a criminal and poised to be hanged, the king grants the hero his final request and Kasper gets to play his magic musical ratchet. The music produced by the instrument brings such pain and suffering to Blaspan that the Jew confesses his crime and is

hanged at the play's conclusion instead of Kasper. Order is restored: Kasper and the blond princess dance their wedding dance, and a Jew is hanged.

Levi Blauspan is presented as an evil stock character, but with stereotypical anti-Semitic characteristics. He is a professional moneylender with political influence over the king. An ingratiating figure who has insinuated himself into the royal court, he is not unlike Joseph Süß Oppenheimer, the protagonist of the film *Jud Süß* (1940). As a guide for the puppeteer's performance, Blauspan's dialogue is written in Mäuscheln, mockingly simulating a Yiddish-accented German: "Hab ich nich alles schon erreicht am Königshof und im Ländchen?! Tanzen nich de Minister und Räte nach meiner Pfiefe, se alle? Müssen se nich mir zu Diensten sein, weil se haben Schulden, den Trottel! Hat nich Blauspan mit etwas Geldche alles schon erreicht, was er wollte!"<sup>46</sup> Apart from Blauspan's stereotypical general, stock character-like features, the play's subtitle, "mit politischer Bedeutung," indicates that there is also a specific connection to political events of the day: the name "Blauspan" is a colorful play on the name "Grynszpan." In English the names may be translated as "Bluespan" and "Greenspan" ("Grynszpan" is a recognizable Jewish surname and "Blauspan" is an invention). The wordplay would have been immediately apparent to German audiences of the period, with the memory of Kristallnacht and its accompanying anti-Semitic media campaign fresh in their minds. But just in case the reference might have passed a child or two by, one of the puppet characters draws attention to this connection explicitly at the beginning of second scene, in the king's palace. The constable character remarks: "Und hier bei den Armleuchturn gilt nur die Stimme von Herrn Grünspan . . . ach so, Blauspan heißt er."<sup>47</sup>

The Jew puppet intended for this performance, with its prominent hooked nose, slanted eyes, and monkey-like ears, was designed by another Reichsinstitut leader, Harro Siegel, and

resembles the grotesque caricatures often appearing in *Der Stürmer*.<sup>48</sup> [Figs. 4.6, 4.7] The puppet does not look like Grynspan specifically, and since there is no such thing as a Jewish physiognomy, it is merely a hateful invention. The physical traits of the puppet, combined with the character presented in the script, present the Jew as a vile figure, reinforcing anti-Semitic stereotypes. But the puppet and play are tempered by Kasper's humor and charm, and overall *Der Jude im Dorn* is a funny presentation of hate suitable even for young children. A political puppet satire, it exemplifies puppetry's responsiveness to changing political circumstances in the Third Reich.



Fig. 4.6: Harro Siegel, Jew puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 28.

Fig. 4.7: *Der Stürmer* promotional flyer showing a caricature of a Jew, 1930s.

The anti-Semitic content of post-Kristallnacht puppet plays was not substantially different from what one found in print or film propaganda, except for the humor. It was also recast in a medium that was fun for kids. The anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* published a young reader's letters to the editor about the joys of puppets: "Liebe Stürmer! . . . Jeden

Sonnabend spielt uns unser Heimleiter in seinem Handpuppenspiel ein Stück vom Juden vor. Wir besitzen eine Puppe, die einen richtigen Juden darstellt. Sie hat eine Nase wie der Satan. Wenn dann der Kasper kommt, dann rufen wir ihm zu, er möge den bösen Juden vertreiben. Wenn aber der Jude im Spiel zu uns sagt, wir sollten ihm helfen, dann rufen wir einfach den Kasper heraus. Nun spielen wir regelmäßig Stücke von Juden, die unser Heimleiter aus dem *Stürmer* herausliest.”<sup>49</sup> Today it is impossible to tell if the letter was really written by a child—everything published in *Der Stürmer* should be viewed with suspicion—but at the very least the document suggested a way to entertain children. This letter is not referring specifically to *Der Jude im Dorn* or even to the Jew puppet produced by the Reichsinstitut (the letter was published in 1936, a few years prior to the production of Reichsinstitut’s puppet), and yet it nonetheless indicates an alignment between puppetry and other anti-Semitic media. Puppet shows were a way to deliver messages found in other propaganda specifically to children.

Even puppet scripts on topics other than the evils of Jews incorporated anti-Semitism to normalize stereotypes. The Kasperized adaptation of the familiar fairy tale about the emperor’s new clothes, *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers: Ein Kasperstück für große Leute frei nach dem Märchen von Andersen*, written by Hohnsteiner puppeteer Max Jacob, cues anti-Semitism without allusion to a specific individual (such as Grynszpan) or even expressly calling the villain a Jew.<sup>50</sup> Jacob does not need to label the villain because the traits written into the character would have been immediately obvious to German audiences in the Third Reich. The Jew is identified simply as Weber, and he is the swindler who sells invisible fabric to embarrass the Kaiser. Circumstantial clues would have marked this figure as Jewish to a Third Reich audience, for instance the historical association between Jews and the garment industry. Although no specific puppet is recommended for this figure (this play was not included in the catalog *Spiele*

*und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater*), the weaver's appearance and affect are described in the stage directions: he is to have "ein Spitzbubengesicht, seine Art zu sprechen ist aufdringlich verbindlich."<sup>51</sup> Although the weaver's speech is not written as Mauscheln, and the text is nowhere near as exaggerated as in *Der Jude im Dorn*, the weaver's first spoken words are written in an incorrect German word order: "Verstehe ich die besten Stoffe zu weben, Herr Minister. Schöne Stoffe, gute Stoffe."<sup>52</sup> According to puppet historian Johannes Minuth, this would have been just enough of a linguistic fault to identify the weaver as an outsider.<sup>53</sup>

The play is littered with additional Nazi stereotypes that mark the weaver as Jewish, including his outspoken greed for gold: "Aber Gold brauch ich, sehr viel Gold."<sup>54</sup> There are repeated references to the weaver's foreign race, for instance, "Der Weber scheint einer fremden Rasse anzugehören,"<sup>55</sup> and Kasper, the good German, is repeatedly shown in contrast with the racially foreign foe. The play is unequivocally a work of propaganda, and it concludes with Kasper's direct address to the audience with a warning to remain vigilant: "Behaltet immer diesen klaren Blick und guckt allen Dingen genau auf den Grund. Wer einen guten Posten hat, soll ihn auch gut ausfüllen. Aber er soll sich hüten, Kleider zu sehen, die gar nicht da sind, den damit ist dem Volk nicht gedient."<sup>56</sup> The piece is not about the evils of the Jews per se. Without making anti-Semitism an overtly expressed central theme (as it was in *Der Jude im Dorn*), but rather just one element of a larger didactic wartime message, Jacob's play normalizes anti-Semitism. The Jew, in his many guises, is just one additional evil to be vigilant against.

The Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel responded to political events of the day by actively producing and promoting ideological puppetry filled with anti-Semitic themes. Different plays presented the Jews from various hateful angles—from over-the-top caricature in *Der Jude im Dorn* to a normalized-but-expected statement in *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers*—and the range

allowed puppeteers to select a script best suited to their audiences. Although there was some initial debate among Reichsinstitut puppeteers about how far anti-Semitism should go in puppet shows when the puppeteers met at the Hohnstein puppetry conference in August 1938, three months later, after Kristallnacht, the political climate changed and Jews in Germany became more overtly targeted. There can be little doubt that the leaders of the Reichsinstitut were keenly aware of the events taking place around them. No longer convening at a countryside retreat, and not yet in place at their prospective headquarters in Stuttgart, the Reichsinstitut was operating out of a villa in the center of Berlin, their “Vorbereitungstelle” at Bissingzeile 11, less than two kilometers away from Gestapo headquarters. It was here, Bissingzeile 11, that the Reichsinstitut ran its publishing program, producing scripts as well as the puppet heads for their staging. Anyone could mail order scripts or puppet heads directly from the Reichsinstitut at this address.



Fig. 4.8: Cover of the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater*, 1940. Private collection.

The 1940 catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* presents a selection of ten scripts available for purchase from the Reichsinstitut, each title accompanied by a capsule

summary, brief commentary, and list of the puppet characters needed for a performance. [Fig. 4.8] It reveals, in part, how Reichsinstitut puppet plays would have looked to audiences in the 1940s by including photographs of each puppet. The write-ups also provide information about target audiences. Furthermore, the commentary on each play reveals additional information about the background history of the script. In the remarks on *Der Jude im Dorn*, for example, we learn that this script was not the solitary effort of its author, Hermann Schultze, but was developed in collaboration with a Jungmädelsbund puppetry group: “Es entstand in Zusammenarbeit mit einer JM-Puppenspielgruppe und hat seine praktische Brauchbarkeit wiederholt beweisen können.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, this anti-Semitic puppet play about the murder of a Jew was performed and perfected with the assistance of young girls (the Jungmädelsbund was the division within the Bund Deutscher Mädel for girls aged ten through fourteen). Whether it is true or not, such a description, at the very least, highlights the suitability of this material for a young audience, including girls.

Although the plays were designed to reach broad audiences of different ages and genders, many individual catalog entries recommend plays specifically for children, especially girls. In the commentary on a different political puppet play, *Die Hamsterhexe*, the catalog notes: “Im Laienpuppenspiel auch als ausgesprochenes Mädelskasperstück zu gebrauchen.”<sup>58</sup> Even satirical puppet plays with overtly political protagonists, such as *Wer den Hut hat, sagt die Wahrheit* or *Tschill, der Räuber von der feuchten Insel*, are recommended for both adults and children. The scripts and puppets are carefully designed to entertain different audiences on different registers, while consistently conveying a politically charged message. The catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* provides insight into how the Reichsinstitut fulfilled the mandates of its establishing agency and reached a diversity of viewers, while delivering ideologically consistent

content. Additionally, it shows how puppetry distribution was arranged in the Third Reich to offer flexibility for different viewers: from little girls on the home front to servicemen abroad.



Fig. 4.9: Harro Siegel, Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel puppets made from wood and Labolit, 1939–40. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986), 118.



Fig. 4.10: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel puppet head production of the characters Mr. Lügenmaul, Mr. Regenschirm, and Mr. König, likely Berlin, ca. 1940. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, eds., *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefant, 1987), 127.

The catalog includes photographs of twenty-four hand puppets, each representing a different character, whose heads were available for purchase along with four different styles of hand pairs (for four main character types). Designed by the puppeteer Harro Siegel, the heads

were available as hand-carved wooden puppet parts, or made from a lightweight, durable, synthetic plastic called Labolit at a lower cost. [Fig. 4.9] The series was so successful that two additional heads were added in 1942: a prince and a ratcatcher.<sup>59</sup> In the years 1942 and 1943 alone, approximately ten thousand puppets were sold through this catalog (nine thousand from Labolit and one thousand from wood).<sup>60</sup> [Fig. 4.10] The costumes were to be hand sewn by the purchaser—in the catalog introduction Siegel recommends “industrious” women and girls for the task—using fabric patches and remnants.<sup>61</sup> Among the characters on offer are an almost complete traditional Kasper set: Kasper, Grete, Grandma, a policeman, a witch, two devils, and a magician, as well as other assorted fairy-tale characters, including a king, a princess, a few robbers, a Spießbürger, and a Jew. [Figs. 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15] Absent from the set are various animals (such as the crocodile) and the traditional *Kasperltheater* puppet, Death, but the selection extends beyond standard Kasper and fairy-tale stock characters to include British caricatures such as John Bull (whose head could also be used interchangeably with that of an innkeeper with a costume swap), British gentlemen, and colonial Englishmen. Likewise, certain caricatures such as the robber were recommended for the role of a Pole in satirical shows. [Figs. 4.16, 4.17] In addition to these national caricatures, specific historical figures are shown, including Mr. Regenschirm (Neville Chamberlain [1869–1940]), and Mr. Lügenmaul (Winston Churchill [1874–1965]). This mixing of Kasper and fairy-tale characters with political caricatures in a single catalog reinforced puppetry’s role as vehicle for political satire.



Fig. 4.11: Harro Siegel, Kasper puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 17.

Fig. 4.12: Harro Siegel, Grete puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 17.



Fig. 4.13: Harro Siegel, Schupo (Schutzpolitzi) puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 27.

Fig. 4.14: Harro Siegel, Hexe puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 21.

Fig. 4.15: Harro Siegel, Erster Teufel puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 22.



Fig. 4.16: Harro Siegel, John Bull puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 23.

Fig. 4.17: Harro Siegel, Erster Räuber puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 20.

### Puppet Politics

Just as anti-Semitic puppet shows were a response to current events in Germany, political plays likewise reflected a keen awareness of external affairs. They were an attempt to manipulate opinions on foreign relations through puppet propaganda. A song introducing a short satirical Kasper play by Erich Scheurmann (1878–1957), from a collection of puppet shorts titled *Politische Zwischenspiele für das Kaspertheater* (1939), reminds us what was going on internationally when the Reichsinstitut was producing its puppets and plays.<sup>62</sup> *Mr. Tommy Regenschirm: Eine Internationale Posse aus dem Jahre 1939* begins with a call-and-response song led by Kasper. Each rhyme builds upon the previous line, and each verse names a political leader who was an enemy of the Reich in 1939, the year Germany invaded Poland and the British

declared war against Germany. It presupposes an audience with fairly high level of awareness about ongoing international politics, and mixes in satire playing on new enemies, especially British politicians, with heroic verses about successful conquests and leaders humiliated by German forces in newly annexed countries.

The first target, and the figure to whom the play will return after its opening musical sequence, is “Herr Chamberlain.” Also lampooned is Anthony Eden (1897–1977), who served as the British foreign secretary and later secretary of state for war. His name, Eden, is rhymed with the word *Lügenreden*. Churchill too is satirized. [Figs. 4.18, 4.19] The song looks well beyond the western front and includes mention of “Abessinien,” an allusion to Benito Mussolini’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia. But the song also looks eastward and evokes moments of the Reich’s successful expansion: “Seht ihr nicht Herrn Schuschnigg dort . . . Ja, er schweigt und sagt kein Wort.”<sup>63</sup> This line is especially disturbing in light of what transpired with Kurt Schuschnigg (1897–1977), the chancellor of Austria who opposed Hitler’s 1938 annexation: he was arrested by the Nazis, placed in solitary confinement at Gestapo headquarters, and sent to the concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Dachau. Other eastern leaders are mocked as well, including Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), the president of Czechoslovakia (until 1938): “Ja, eifrig quasselt Herr Benesch. . . . Ja, wäscht in London schmutz’ge Wäsch,”<sup>64</sup> a reference to his British exile and the dirty business of the September 1938 annexation of Czech Sudetenland (a violation of the Munich Agreement). Polish president Ignacy Mościcki (1867–1946) and the diplomat and foreign minister Józef Beck (1894–1944), both of whom opposed Hitler’s plans for Poland, are mentioned as well: “Ist noch nicht der Osten hie, . . . Wo bleibt den Herr Moschi-ky . . . Nun bleibt uns die Spucke weg, . . . in den Saal tritt jetzt Josef Beck.”<sup>65</sup> The song reminds German

audiences of the events leading up to the September Campaign, Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939—the beginning of World War II.



Fig. 4.18: Harro Siegel, Mr. Regenschirm puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 29.

Fig. 4.19: Harro Siegel, Mr. Lügenmaul puppet from the catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 29.

The same Kasper who leads the audience in song proceeds to star in a very short five-act satire. *Mr. Tommy Regenschirm: Eine Internationale Posse aus dem Jahre 1939* is a play about the series of failed defense pacts sought by the British that year. Following Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia in March, Chamberlain tried to establish a British, French, Soviet, and Polish alliance for the defense of Poland, should its independence be threatened. Mr. Regenschirm, a caricature of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, is presented as clueless and ineffective at protecting Europe (using his umbrella) and reconciling with Germany (by bringing Kasper under his umbrella, too). The prime minister puppet sets the stage by appearing with an open umbrella

and wearing a gas mask. Kasper emphatically represents Hitler's Germany, a point he makes clear with his first remark to the British puppet: "Heil Hitler!" Kasper also lets the audience know he is a fascist in a short exchange with Mr. Regenschirm, who announces himself to be a democrat: "Ich bin Demokrat. . . . Demokratie heißt die absolute Freiheit jeglichen Individuums," to which Kasper replies: "Auha, auha, verstehe: Absolute Vertrottelung jeglichen Individuums [*sic*]." <sup>66</sup> Despite Mr. Regenschirm's repeated attempts to explain his aversion to conflict and the utility of the umbrella, Kasper is clever and shows the problems with Chamberlain's plans: "Doch, doch, ich bin orientiert: Kampf bis zum letzten Franzosen. Du zahlst und der andere stirbt." <sup>67</sup> An attempted negotiation between Mr. Regenschirm and a puppet named Michel (a reference to Mikhail Kalinin [1875–1946], the nominal head of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin [1878–1953]) also fails, as Michel would rather remain under his own umbrella. In fact, Michel and Kasper appear to have a behind-the-scenes understanding, as Michel calls to Kasper offstage: "Kasper, zeige dem Herrn einmal unseren Schirm!" (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a nonaggression treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union established in August 1939). <sup>68</sup> But the most fruitless conversation of all takes place between Mr. Regenschirm and a wounded Pole. The Polish puppet cries: "O, ich großes polnisches Dummkopf! Schutz von kleine Nation hat er gesagt und ist geblieben zuhause. Popolska verloren! Alles verloren!" Kasper does not present himself, or by extension Germany, as the cause of the Pole's suffering: "Nix Schutz- und Regenschirm! Angeschmiert hat man Dich, armes Luder" <sup>69</sup> Poland's injury is the failing of England and France, not German or Soviet invasions. In reality, of course, Germany invaded Poland one week after signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Mr. Regenschirm's final attempt to lure Kasper under his umbrella fails, and Kasper warns that the umbrella is leaking, and everything is about to pour down on the British

puppet. Kasper predicts that German borders are about to change. The play concludes with Mr. Regenschirm running, calling for Marianne (France), and crying that his umbrella is broken. The puppet show is as much a reflection on current events as it is a form of forecasting: it prepares German audiences for war.

Puppetry was not simply light diversion in Nazi Germany, and it did not necessarily provide the same apolitical illusions as the cinema. War was the subject of several puppet shows, and battle was dramatized in Reichsinstitut scripts. Kasper and other fairy-tale figures were enlisted, and when conflict appears, so do gas masks, bomb shelters, air raids, U-boats—and devils. But as Kasper announces in Hans Buresch’s script *Kasper fährt nach Engelland* [sic], “Angst? Ja warum denn? Wir Deutsche fürchten den Teufel nicht!”<sup>70</sup> Kasper’s fearlessness in the face of difficult circumstances extends from the devil to war. In fact, in this play the devil ends up on Kasper’s side; Kasper convinces the air devil Luftikus to fly him on a German broom to England, where the puppet encounters his old foes, Mr. Lügenmaul and Mr. Regenschirm. These caricatures of Churchill and Chamberlain are not called by their real names, yet here they get more stage time than in other satirical performances. By the end of this story, Kasper contrives for the water devil Aquatus to feed Mr. Lügenmaul and Mr. Regenschirm to the sharks. Not only do such plays reinforce negative images of the British enemy and a positive outcome for German Kasper, but they also provide a model for behavior: the best way to face battle is with courage and cheerfulness.

### **Theater of War**

This was not the first time that puppets went to war in German history.<sup>71</sup> One author from the 1920s writes, “Der Schützengraben sah eine Blüte des Puppenspiels. Was konnte in der tödlich

ermüdenden Länge des Stellungskampfes unseren Feldgrauen willkommener sein, was vermochten sie sich mit geringerer Anstrengung zu beschaffen und zu betreiben als ein Kasperltheater.”<sup>72</sup> *Das Kasperlbuch*, Siegfried Raeck’s critical bibliography, includes ten entries for plays featuring Kasper in World War I and another nine entries for plays in which Kasper plays a soldier or a recruit.<sup>73</sup> Soldiers could easily make puppets from available materials as a kind of grassroots field entertainment. [Figs. 4.20, 4.21] A flexible and portable form of art, puppetry proved practical for downtime in the trenches during the Great War.



Fig. 4.20: World War I trench puppets made from limestone and cloth, Germany, ca. 1915–16. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986), 116.

Fig. 4.21: World War I trench puppet carved from wood from the German eastern front, Russia, ca. 1915. Puppentheatersammlung Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. <http://skd-online-collection.skd.museum>.

Rather than leave it up to soldiers to improvise as they did in World War I, puppetry was encouraged through official propaganda channels during World War II. The Reichsinstitut catalog *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kasperltheater* recommended sending its puppets and plays to

soldiers: “Es wird viel überlegt und gefragt: Was können wir unseren Männer hinausschicken? Nun, hier ist auch eine Antwort!”<sup>74</sup> To facilitate these gifts, the Reichsinstitut expedited delivery of its products to military families (in 1942–43, for example, the wait time for a Labolit puppet head was two or three months for a civilian, but two or three weeks for Wehrmacht families).<sup>75</sup> The Nazi propaganda machine intervened in the grassroots tradition of infantry puppetry by producing puppets and scripts to distribute to soldiers. In fact, Hermann Schultze, the author of *Der Jude im Dorn* and Reichsinstitut dramaturg, even provided military men with lessons.<sup>76</sup> [Figs. 4.22, 4.23] Puppetry as entertainment for soldiers was not the invention of the Nazi regime, but the organized control of do-it-yourself plays marked a change from the war puppets of Germany’s past; no aspect of performance was left to chance in the Wehrmacht.



Fig. 4.22: Hermann Schultze (left) teaching soldiers to perform with Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel puppets, ca. 1940. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, eds., *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefant, 1987), 129.

Fig. 4.23: Hermann Schultze (left) teaching soldiers to perform with Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel puppets, ca. 1940. Clipping from the *Münchner Illustrierten Presse*, no. 50 (1940), reproduced in Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986), 119.

But the military propaganda puppet initiative did not end with do-it-yourself productions. Professional puppeteers were sent to perform for soldiers on the front lines, too. This was an

innovation. Reichsinstitut leaders were keenly aware of the precedent set by World War I puppeteers, as Gottfried Anacker wrote in the Nazi periodical *Die Kulturverwaltung*: “Wir wissen aus dem Weltkrieg, daß damals bei der Truppe in Ruhestellung und im Schützengraben, aber auch in den Gefangenenlagern in Feindesland Puppentheater gespielt worden ist.” Anacker also saw the deliberate deployment of professional puppeteers to the front as different from this earlier phenomenon: “Anders die Aufgabenstellung in diesem Krieg. Mochte es im Weltkrieg bisweilen aus einer Verzweiflung über die trostlose Öde des nervenzerstörenden Wartens heraus geschehen, ein Puppentheater zu bauen, so ist in diesem Kriege von den Dienststellen der Wehrmacht selbst der Wunsch ausgesprochen worden, bei der Betreuung der Truppen gute Puppenspielbühnen einzusetzen.” These performances were intended to entertain the troops, but they were also a model for soldiers for how to stage their own shows: “Auf Wunsch des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine die Handpuppenspieler F. K. Hellweg, Oswald Hempel und Otto Schultz-Heising in Norwegen und an der deutschen Nordseeküste eingesetzt, die den Soldaten der Kriegsmarine nicht nur etwas vorspielen, sondern ihnen vor allem zeigen sollen, wie sie sich selbst eine einfache Kasperbühne bauen, Puppen herstellen und zum einigen Spiel kommen können.”<sup>77</sup> This initiative ensured consistency in puppet propaganda on the home front and in occupied regions.

Professional puppeteers performed their own scripts, but some players also incorporated Reichsinstitut texts into their programs, especially Scheurmann’s *Politische Zwischenspiele für das Kaspertheater*.<sup>78</sup> This meant that soldiers could watch a show, order the script and puppets, and then do it themselves. The puppeteer Friedrich Karl Hellwig often performed *Wer den Hut sagt die Wahrheit oder Tschill, der Räuber von der feuchten Insel*, as seen in period promotional posters, which was also available for purchase in the Reichsinstitut catalog. [Fig. 4.24] A

different front puppeteer, Willi Biondino from the Mainzer Handpuppenbühne, would perform political Reichsinstitut puppet shows as well, and also mix his own play, *Kasperle löst die Judenfrage auf* (the script no longer exists), into a program featuring anti-English satire.<sup>79</sup>

Political and anti-Semitic puppetry takes on a different shape when we consider these performances on the front. No longer merely a vehicle for galvanizing an abstract sense of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, such plays reflected an idealized version of everyday reality for soldiers. Such shows were an opportunity for soldiers to see their mission on stage, cast in a heroic and amusing light.



Fig. 4.24: Poster promoting military performances by Friedrich Karl Hellwig featuring his play *Wer den Hut sagt die Wahrheit oder Tschill, der Räuber von der feuchten Insel*. The puppets shown are caricatures of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel puppets. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, eds., *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefanten, 1987), 87.

The exact number of professional puppet troupes called to the front is difficult to determine, but Gerd Bohlmeier puts the number at approximately twenty.<sup>80</sup> Certain theater and troupe names do recur in articles and reviews from the period as well as in archival documents and artifacts: Gerhards Marionetten, the Dortmunder and Salzbuger Marionettentheater,

Dresdner Puppenspiel, Iwowski Puppenspiele, Mainzer Handpuppenspiele, Marionettentheater Puhonny-Ehlert, Mainzer Handpuppenspiel, Oswald Hempel, Zangerles Rheinische Marionetten, and others. But the most important puppeteer to be called to the front was Max Jacob. With his Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater, Jacob was the most prominent puppeteer in the Third Reich. His Kasper was the showpiece of Nazi puppetry, and his deployment to the front lines was a significant attraction for soldiers, sailors, and any other Germans involved in the war. [Fig. 4.25]



Fig. 4.25: Max Jacob with his Kasper puppet, Germany, ca. 1937. Richard Schimmrich, ed., *Das Hohnsteiner Handpuppenspiel* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1937), 25.

Max Jacob had built a reputation as a popular puppeteer with his playful-yet-instructive Kasper shows during the Weimar period. Many puppeteers gave their version of Kasper certain signature features, but Jacob's flourishes were truly distinctive. The name of the theater,

Hohnstein Kasper Theater, came from Hohnstein Castle in Saxony, where Jacob and his troupe members lived for a time and developed their brand of puppetry. The moniker became synonymous with a specific style of hand puppetry and a particular set of characters (the Hohnsteiner Kasper is still performed today in Germany). The most important figure, of course, was Kasper himself. Most of the Hohnstein puppets, including the original Kasper, were carved from wood by troupe member Theo Eggink, and costumed by fellow performer Elisabeth Grünwald. Big-nosed and grinning, he was clearly a continuation of the traditional *commedia dell'arte*-inspired character, but with a twist. Instead of a stiff, pointed cap, Hohnstein Kasper wore an extra-long, floppy fabric hat ending with a jester-like bell. In moments of extreme excitement or in the presence of sausages, he would twirl his hat like a propeller. Some of the traditional Kasper cast members were included in the Hohnstein shows, such as Gretel and an authority figure, the policeman—but both were positive and helpful friends rather than enemies. Other characters were also given front-and-center prominence, including Kasper's "allerbester Freund" Seppel and the dog Struppi. Every show included a memorable jingle, a theme song of sorts: "Tri-tra-trulla-la." The Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater was its own distinctive media brand—with a film presence, too, as we will soon see—and Max Jacob's Kasper was adored.

With roots in the back-to-nature *Wandervogel* youth movement popular during the Weimar period, Jacob's Kasper was different from the rebellious Kasper popular in fairground performances. Although his puppet shows often included a didactic message, Jacob's Kasper was still the lovable everyman with a subversive edge. He was not chaotically transgressive, but childlike, and his antics sometimes pushed the boundaries of acceptable adult behavior. These performance conventions were already in place before Hitler came to power, but they changed subtly during the Third Reich to suit different audiences. What remained the same: Kasper

always used the familiar form of address (*du* instead of the formal *Sie*) regardless of who was watching. Even when speaking with high-ranking Nazis, Kasper could get away with informalities. [Fig. 4.26] The subversive side of puppetry was still at play in Jacob's shows, but in a calculatingly didactic way, affirming the good of the collective. Although less so, he was still violent when pushed, especially when up against a robber. And, as in the 1940 puppet catalog discussed above, the Death puppet was absent from the cast.



Fig. 4.26: Dr. Wilhelm Frick and his family enjoy a puppet show. Frick was a Nazi official who served as the minister of the interior from 1933 to 1943. He was one of the authors of the Nuremberg Laws. Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, ed., *Das deutsche Puppenspiel: Einsatz, Erfolge und Zielsetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeiterfront, 1939), 48.

Fig. 4.27: German soldiers laughing at a Max Jacob puppet show, the Netherlands, 1942. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, eds., *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefant, 1987), 89.

Jacob began traveling with his puppet theater almost as soon as he took up the art at age thirty-three in 1921. During the Nazi period his travels continued, and he journeyed both within Germany and internationally together with his troupe (sometimes he traveled with different members). Jacob played Nuremberg Rallies and on Kraft durch Freude vacation cruises. He

played for factory workers and small village clubs. He cheered up patients in hospitals and sanatoriums. He delighted German children and families. In 1937 he went to Paris to perform at the World's Fair and was awarded the gold medal—a particular high point in his career.

According to his own accounting, in the year 1938 alone, he performed 489 shows in 201 days, in 102 cities and villages, for 83,978 children and 98,677 adults.<sup>81</sup> A satellite Hohnsteiner Kasper stage (with a different puppeteer, but the same Hohnsteiner Kasper and training) played elsewhere, including in Greece and Bulgaria. It was not radical for a puppeteer to travel, and it was not a new experience for Jacob and his troupe, but it was indeed an innovation for a puppeteer to reach audiences on this scale. [Fig. 4.27] Travel to the front was also new: from 1939 until the outbreak of total war in 1944, Jacob performed for active-duty soldiers, sailors, and Nazi officials. Eleven major tours during these years are documented, many of them to the eastern front.<sup>82</sup>

Jacob discussed his potential program for his front performances with Nazi organizers in Berlin prior to his departure on a tour. Everyone agreed that traditional folk plays such as *Faust* and *Freischütz*, as well as Grimm and Andersen fairy-tale dramatizations, would be best. In his 1964 autobiography *Mein Kasper und ich*, Jacob maintained that he objected to instructions to perform political puppet shows and convinced party officials to allow him the freedom to select his own scripts during a test deployment in Poland in 1940: “Als ich fragte, was denn sonst gespielt werden sollte, bekam ich zu hören, daß natürlich nur Spiele mit ausgesprochen politischer Aussage in Frage kämen. Ich entgegnete, daß meiner Ansicht nach der Soldat gerade an unseren unpolitischen Stücken seine Freude haben würde. . . . Die Auswahl der Stücke wurde mir überlassen.”<sup>83</sup> Jacob's program for soldiers did indeed feature *Faust* and *Freischütz*. [Fig. 4.28] Although these plays were already part of the Hohnsteiner Kasper Theater repertoire prior



Zwölfender [military slang for “sergeant”], und daß er handelte, statt zu reden—im entscheidenden Augenblick natürlich, er konnte sonst reden wie ein Buch und scheute sich auch nicht, die höchsten Dienstgrade anzuquatschen!—das war soldatisch.”<sup>85</sup> Positioning himself as an insider, Kasper the cute puppet could get away with satire about military life: “Er war eben da, dieser hölzerne Geselle und sprach unbekümmert darauflos. Ihn störte nicht die Anwesenheit hoher und höchster Offiziere, im Gegenteil: er duzte alle, die vor seiner Bühne saßen.”<sup>86</sup> Kasper held a unique position in the Germany military hierarchy, which gave Jacob a unique vantage point from which to observe the war.

Traveling to annexed territories and combat zones, the puppeteer learned firsthand what the soldiers were dealing with, including the little day-to-day deprivations (like ersatz coffee) and bureaucratic irritations of military life. But he also saw the destruction wrought by his own country and spoke with people affected by the conflict. We know the specifics of his tours because Jacob kept a field journal, a daily diary of his journeys. These archival documents are both mundane in their prosaic accounting of costs and other data as well as astonishing for their deadpan descriptions of what Jacob encountered on the front. They also allow us to reconstruct other details, including the names of his fellow traveling puppeteers. Jacob often describes his meals, the coffee, prices for food and beverages, the weather, how many kilometers traveled, his accommodations, the number of seats at a venue, and how many spectators attended a show. The viewership per performance ranged from a few dozen to a thousand-plus, depending on the location and time.<sup>87</sup> The reports of his audiences, especially his characterizations of soldiers, and his descriptions of the local scene in various locales are most revealing of all.

There was a learning curve for Jacob and his troupe as they perfected their performances for soldiers. During an early tour in Warthegau (a region of western Poland annexed by the

Germans in 1939), Jacob played for different groups of spectators and found the Wehrmacht soldiers particularly difficult. In the town of Moschin (Mosina), he writes: “Um 19 Uhr haben wir ausschließlich Wehrmacht. Der Saal ist überfüllt, die Stühle reichen nicht. Auch eine ganze Anzahl Volksdeutscher sind wiedergekommen. Leider reagieren die Soldaten nur auf verhältnismaßig primitive Dinge, sodaß wir selbst von der Vorstellung nicht befriedigt sind.”<sup>88</sup> If Jacob described military Kasper as having an “ungewaschenes Maul” in his article for *Die Freiwache*, then the puppeteer learned his lingo from the soldiers themselves. He and his troupe quickly picked up on what was popular, what plays resonated. Two days after this unsatisfying performance, Jacob describes another early-morning show for the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe in the city of Posen (Poznań) that was so successful that one soldier even bought a puppet. Another performance was more successful still: “Ueber [*sic*] 500 Menschen waren da . . . (wir spielten: Des Kaisers neue Kleider und Kasper als Maler).”<sup>89</sup> The play *Des Kaisers neue Kleider* was likely the one authored by Jacob and published as *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers: Ein Kasperstück für große Leute frei nach dem Märchen von Andersen* by the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel. The anti-Semitism in that play would have well suited the Wehrmacht on the eastern front. Blaming the foreign-raced Weaver for the embarrassment of the Kaiser appears to have been a theme enjoyed by soldiers tasked with the Generalplan Ost, the German colonization of Central and Eastern Europe.

As Jacob and his troupe grew more comfortable with their performances for soldiers, the puppeteer spent fewer words in his field reports describing his shows. Instead he elaborated on the various places he visited and the people he encountered. About five months after the tour in Warthegau, he and his troupe traveled farther east, this time to the General Government (a region of central and southern Poland and western Ukraine annexed by Germany). The demographics of

this region were different from the towns he had visited previously. In pre-1933 Germany, Jews comprised less than one percent of the total German population, but when Hitler annexed this region, there was a dramatic increase in the Jewish population of the Reich.<sup>90</sup> Historian Timothy Snyder describes the numbers after the invasion of Poland: “Hitler had just added significantly more *Jews* (at least 600,000) to his Reich than he had added Germans, and for that matter nearly tripled the population of Jews in Germany (from about 330,000 to nearly a million.) If the General Government (with its 1,560,000 Jews) was included, he had added well over two million Jews to Berlin’s dominions.”<sup>91</sup> Jacob’s field reports, especially those from his tour in the General Government, record his impressions of the ethnographic differences in this new administrative area of the Reich.

Jacob describes his initial impressions of the General Government on August 15, 1940: “Bis Petrikau sehen wir viel zerstörte und verwüstete Dörfer, mitunter ist kaum noch ein Haus bewohnbar,” then continues in the same paragraph in the same matter-of-fact tone, “Petrikau macht einen lebendigen Eindruck. Die Juden im Gouvernement [General Government] tragen Armbinden mit dem Stern, sodaß sie gleich erkennbar sind. Die männlichen Angehörigen der Judenrasse ziehen vor uns tief den Hut oder die Mütze, das hat man ihnen hier also beigebracht.”<sup>92</sup> The variety of Jews in the region was a revelation for him, and cause for deepening anti-Semitism:

Unsere Gaststätte weist zwei große Schaufenster auf, vor unserem Platz aus sehen wir Juden auf dem Bummel. Juden in endlosen Massen, in allen Schattierungen und in allen Ausgaben. Schmierige und dreckige Kaftan-Juden, dann wieder solche mit höchster Eleganz, sie machen durchaus keinen gedrückten Eindruck, viel eher einen frechen. Was

man hier an Juden gesichtern [*sic*] sieht, ist durchweg gemein und höchst minderwertig. man [*sic*] kann hier ohne Weiteres zum Judenfeind werden.<sup>93</sup>

This sentiment was repeated by Jacob numerous times in this particular field report, often using the same language: “Juden, Juden und nochmals Juden. In allen Ausgaben und in allen Schattierungen. . . . Kanzuga [Kańczuga] hat 2500 Einwohner, darunter sind 900 Juden.”<sup>94</sup>

The exact phrase “Juden, Juden und nochmals Juden” is repeated at least three times in this single sixty-eight-page field report.

Why should Jacob’s shock at the Jewish populations, and his anti-Semitism, be of note? Jacob entertained German soldiers, engineers, party officials, and other Germans with his puppet shows in the east while the Jewish population was being rounded up into ghettos, expelled, and worse. Here is his description of the Warsaw Ghetto less than two months after its establishment: “Die Juden sind im Ghetto zusammengefaßt, das von Deutschen und Polen nicht betreten werden darf. Wo die Straßen vom Ghetto in die übrige Stadt einmünden, sind sie radikal zugemauert und zwar ungefähr drei Meter hoch. Oben auf der Mauer sind Glasscherben. Nur wenige Zugänge führen ins Ghetto, sie sind stark bewacht und jeder wird genau kontrolliert. Die Juden dürfen sich in der übrigen Stadt nicht zeigen, sie leben ganz unter sich.”<sup>95</sup> Towns without Jews were remarked upon by Jacob in his field diary as well. In Leżajsk (Leżajsk), in southeastern Poland, Jacob is cheered upon seeing the market square, which had just been literally paved with Jewish gravestones: “Juden sind nur noch wenig anwesend. Wir hörten, daß vor Errichtung der polnisch - russischen Grenze die Juden noch in ungeheuren Scharen über die Grenze nach Rußland getrieben wurden. Die Russen sollen sich nachher beklagt haben: was sie mit den vielen Juden anfangen sollten.”<sup>96</sup>

Jacob does not specify which plays he performed during this tour, but the show was so well received that he went back to the General Government region in early 1941. In 1942, he and his troupe played a tour across the Molotov-Ribbentrop line. [Fig. 4.29] “Wir sehen die ersten Spuren des Rußland - Feldzeuges. Im Bogen von Bialystock [Białystock] hatten die Bolschewiken ungeheure Kräfte massiert, um von hieraus den Stoß gegen Deutschland zu führen. Noch jetzt liegen auf der ganzen Strecke hunderte von Panzern, Zugmaschinen und Autos. Es ist ein tolles Bild.”<sup>97</sup> A historian presents a different angle; here is Timothy Snyder again: “In an arc that extended southward from the Baltic Sea to the Black sea, the last week of June and the first weeks of July 1941 brought violence against Jews. . . . In some important places . . . such as Białystock, the Germans carried out large-scale killings with their own forces, thereby setting a kind of example.”<sup>98</sup> The Final Solution was under way by the time Jacob arrived to entertain the troops.



Fig. 4.29: *Kaspers Erfolge bei der Flak* (anti-aircraft gun), by an anonymous soldier, from Max Jacob’s guest book on the eastern front, Dnepropetrovsk, October 1942. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin, eds., *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefanten, 1987), 105.

Jacob's travel itinerary during his next eastern tour to the Soviet Union, in which he visited an ever-increasing number of military infirmaries, reflected Germany's escalating losses. Later in 1944, he headed farther east and played right at the front lines: "Nachmittags spielen wir bei einem Regiment, das wieder unmittelbar in vorderster Line am Feind liegt. . . . Die meisten kommen aus dem Graben, sie sitzen da, braun und verdreht, mit Karabiner und Handgranaten."<sup>99</sup> He describes performances interrupted by incoming attacks—he was that close to the action—but maintained an optimistic attitude about the war's outcome for the Germans. Later in life, reflecting on this eastern tour in his autobiography, he provided a different assessment: "Es war für uns eine niederdrückender Einsatz, denn die Stimmung unserer Soldaten war unter den Nullpunkt gesunken, und auch uns fehlte die Lust am Spielen."<sup>100</sup> Troop entertainments were suspended with the outbreak of total war.

While Jacob wrote about some of his wartime experiences in his autobiography—he never denied that he accommodated the Nazis—he maintained that he only performed apolitical puppet shows. But the field reports, and a consideration of when and where he was playing, make it hard to view his performances for the German military as apolitical. We have already seen the anti-Semitism in Jacob's Reichsinstitut script *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers: Ein Kasperstück für große Leute frei nach dem Märchen von Andersen*, and how he described his audiences on the eastern front. A journalist traveling with the Wehrmacht in Poland in 1941 reviewed a performance of Jacob's *Faust* and described Kasper's role: "Aber auch in der Politik war er beschlagen, dieser Teufelskerl."<sup>101</sup> Writing in 1945 about his own Kasper performances for soldiers, Jacob used almost the exact same language as this journalist: "Auch in der Politik war er beschlagen, und vor allem kannte der Kasper die Sorgen und Nöte der Soldanten."<sup>102</sup>

Although there is no record of Jacob ever performing an overtly satirical political puppet show (such as those featuring puppet versions of Churchill or Chamberlain), this does not mean that his shows were devoid of political content. References to race did arise, and there is little doubt that this was a politically savvy artist performing a character that reflected the historical situation.<sup>103</sup> And if the children's shows were different—without overt Nazi signs—this was an instruction that came from the top brass. As one Nazi puppet publication explicitly instructs, for the purposes of political education: “Eine politische Tendenz muß in der Haltung und im Handeln der spielenden Puppen zum lebendigen Ausdruck kommen. . . . Nicht der Kasper verkörpert eine nationalsozialistische Haltung, der etwa von der Spielliste herab ‘Heil Hitler’ grüßt, oder gar mit einer Hakenkreuzfahne über die Bühne zieht; vielmehr muß er in seinem Tun und Handeln ein ganzer Kerl sein.”<sup>104</sup>

But Jacob nonetheless maintained a different view of his work during the Third Reich. The puppeteer claims he only joined the Nazi party *as a favor*. This is from a letter written in the postwar era:

Was meine Tätigkeit innerhalb der Nazizeit angeht, so gibt es innerhalb der russischen Zone bestimmt kleinlich Neider, die mir etwas am Zeug flicken wollen. Wer aber objektiv urteilt, weiß, daß, ich mich in meiner Arbeit nie beeinflussen ließ. Weder vor 33, noch nach 33, noch heute. Ich spiele heute dieselben Stücke, die ich immer gespielt habe und zwar im gleichen Wortlaut. . . . Pg. [party member of the NSDAP] wurde ich 1940. Es wäre wirklich nicht nötig gewesen, aber ich wollte unserem OG-Leiter (Ortsgruppenleiter) einen Gefallen tun.<sup>105</sup>

The shows he performed for soldiers were absolutely different from those he performed for small children—by his own admission! Although he may have performed his old puppet shows for

kids with the same words before and after 1933, recall that children in the Third Reich would give his Kasper the “Heil Hitler” salute. [Fig. 4.30]



Fig. 4.30: Girl salutes “Heil Hitler” seconds after the adjacent boy gave this salute while watching a performance of the Hohnstein Kasper Theater, 1939. *UFA Tonwoche* 484/1939. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

### **Kasper at the Movies**

Between his tours abroad to entertain the troops, Jacob would return to Germany and film puppet movies.<sup>106</sup> He describes the undertaking in his autobiography: “Geplant war die Herstellung einer Anzahl Kurzfilme als Gegengewicht zu den stark aufkommenden Mickey-Maus-Filmen.”<sup>107</sup> According to Jacob, he was initially skeptical that puppetry could translate into cinema, and had to be persuaded to produce even so much as a test film. But the venture began in 1936 with *Der betrogene Räuber*, a fifteen-minute short intended to run before a feature-length fairy-tale movie. The script was new to the repertoire—Jacob wrote the scenario specifically for

film—and performed the piece on his usual stage. It was shot in a straightforward style: a mostly static camera recorded the puppets as they were framed by the proscenium of the stage. Jacob describes the simplicity of these early films: “Verwunderlich war es, wie stark die so primitiv verfilmte Schwarz-Weiß-Angelegenheit auf die Kinder wirkte. . . . Trotzdem ging es bei den Vorführungen laut zu, die Kinder hielten nicht mit ihrer Meinung zurück und sprachen selbst den Leinwand-Kasper an.”<sup>108</sup> With the dynamic aspect of puppetry preserved, and Jacob slightly more convinced of Kasper’s suitability for film, he shot a few more shorts.



Fig. 4.31: Advertisement from a Hamburg newspaper for Hohnsteiner puppet films, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung, File: Hohnsteiner/Max Jacob Puppenfilm.

These early Kasper films—*Kasper kauft ein Haus* (1937), *Blaue Blume im Zauberwald* (1937), *Kasper und der Waldgeist* (1937), and *Kasper und die gestohlenen Hühner* (1937)—

were directed by Hubert Schonger (1897–1978) a documentarian specializing in animal films and (later) fairy-tale features. [Fig. 4.31] He had no background in animation at the time, and the earliest Hohnsteiner works show little experimentation with possible film tricks. They are shot in a direct style, as one might record a live puppet performance, and relied for their success on Jacob's gift as a puppeteer. Based on scripts that Jacob had performed for live audiences during the Weimar period and after the Nazi takeover, Jacob could anticipate children's reactions to various antics, and would often directly address the viewer. Breaking the fourth wall seldom broke the reality of the scene for children; in fact, directly addressing the audience appears to have drawn kids even deeper into the drama. A 1937 film review reports this effect: "Die Kinder unterhielten sich gut und antworteten auch eifrig dem Filmkasper, wie sie es vom Puppentheater gewöhnt sind."<sup>109</sup> Almost all the critical reviews of these early shorts mention that children would talk back to the screen, a clear sign of their capacity to engage, and of the kids' imaginative investment in the film world in front of them.

That children talked back to the screen was important. Propaganda officials realized that they could study the effect of a children's film to improve the editing before its widespread release. In this way, the interactive performance qualities of puppetry were preserved even with Kasper's adaptation to film, normally a one-directional medium. Using test audiences was a new technique learned from the Americans, according to the trade magazine *Film-Kurier*.<sup>110</sup> Hohnsteiner Kasper films were screened in Berlin for test audiences made up of young girls with the notion that the kids could teach filmmakers about the effects of the cinema on the young. Not only could specific films be improved, but the larger propagandistic cinematic enterprise could be better understood. *Film-Kurier* reported on these previews: "Diese Versuchsstunde war für uns sehr eindrucksvoll . . . und wir sind sicher daß diese Kinder später, als Kinobesucherinnen,

nachdem sie so Filme schauen und erkennen gelernt haben, anspruchsvolles, aber für gute Filme dankbares Publikum abgeben werden.”<sup>111</sup> Another trade paper, *Lichtbild-Bühne*, also reported on this same preview and noted that although the audience was comprised of six- to fourteen-year-old girls, the shows would be suitable for adult audiences, too.<sup>112</sup> The interactivity of puppetry was retained, even at the level of film production.

Reviews and advertisements from the period reveal that these early Hohnsteiner Kasper films were included in *Kindernachmittag* programs of assembled shorts. The afternoon time slot was frequently (but not exclusively) reserved for fairy-tale films. Many of the films shown in such screenings were, in fact, also puppet films, but usually of the stop-motion animation variety. Works by the Gebrüder Diehl (Ferdinand and Hermann Diehl [1901–1992, 1906–1983]) were featured, as were musical shorts and occasionally short animal documentaries. Early reviews for these *Kindernachmittag* programs specifically mention the Gebrüder Diehl short *Max und Moritz*, a dark comedy based on the nineteenth-century comic about two mischievous pranksters. Two reviews in local city papers mention that Kasper films ran in a program with a “Mickh-Maus” [*sic*] film in 1937.<sup>113</sup> But it was Kasper who stole the show. Even when a Kasper film was shown as a trailer for a feature-length fairy tale, children liked Jacob’s films better: “Die Kinder dem kasperlichen Beifilm viel mehr Aufmerksamkeit und Liebe schenkten als dem von menschlichen Schauspielern gespielten Märchen film, der als Hauptfilm lief.”<sup>114</sup> Advertisements for children’s screenings spotlighted Kasper. [Figs. 4.32, 4.33]



Fig. 4.32: Advertisement from the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Filmzeitung*, September 18, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung, File: Hohnsteiner/Max Jacob Puppenfilm.

Fig. 4.33: Advertisement from a newspaper in Koblenz for Hohnsteiner Kasper films, a repeat event due to a full house, ca. 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung, File: Hohnsteiner/Max Jacob Puppenfilm.

Although film trade journals described these works as entertaining for adults, their programming time slots and advertisements indicate that they were specifically geared toward children. The scripts Jacob shot were different from the plays targeted at soldiers. In fact, only one of Jacob's Reichsinstitut scripts, *Die Räuber Kribs und Krabs*, was made into a film (in 1941). The film shorts never explicitly address the ongoing war or deal with political affairs. While *Faust*, *Freischütz*, and *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers* were the core repertoire for front

performances, the children's films were less overtly political and instead featured the playful adventures of Kasper and Seppel. They resemble the scripts published for children's performances in the early 1930s, before the takeover. Suspense builds as Kasper searches for his *Großmutter* or princess. Drama unfolds as the puppets set off with rug beaters and butterfly nets in search of treasure. [Fig. 4.34] Excitement mounts as birthdays are announced. Sausages are sought on the high seas. [Figs. 4.35, 4.36] Kasper and his friend encounter a ghost king, robbers, witches, Aladdin, and a sultan, as well as exotic Africans and Indians. The dog Struppi becomes an important puppet. Elsewhere the Hohnsteiner Kasper proudly announces his allegiance to the *Volksgemeinschaft* in Nazi propaganda, but never in these films.<sup>115</sup>

This was not an accident, as film historian Eric Rentschler observes of Nazi film more generally: "The decision to eradicate signs of the times and to take flight from present was not made by subversive forces or oppositional artists. The order came from the top. If Nazi culture often put on a happy face or feigned an innocuous countenance, its cinema provided the definitive embodiment of this agreeable semblance. Images, maintained Nazi film theorists, should enthrall and enchant audiences."<sup>116</sup> And these films are indeed enchanting parts of the Nazi "cinema of illusion." Kasper and Seppel are absolutely charming. The cheerful theme song, "Tri-tra-trulla-la," sticks in your head like the best jingles do. Unlike the puppet scripts that were available for purchase from the Reichsinstitut catalog, each of them full of allusions to war and current political events, in these films there are no overt signs of the times such as anti-English rhetoric or kill-the-Jew plots.



Fig. 4.34: Still from the Hohnsteiner Kasper film *Der Goldschatz der Sioux Indianer*, 1939. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 249615-1.



Fig. 4.35: Still from the Hohnsteiner Kasper film *Der Goldschatz der Sioux Indianer*, 1939. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 249615-1.

Fig. 4.36: Still from the Hohnsteiner Kasper film *Die verschwundene Prinzessin*, 1944. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 62772-1.

Which is not to say that politics are absent from these films (they aren't) or that the films transcend their propagandistic aims (they don't). Newspaper reviews of the early Kasper films often mentioned the films' opening vignette: African puppets dance and speak into a megaphone to announce the show.<sup>117</sup> Even though the films never address Nazi politics explicitly, they

nonetheless demonstrate a strong ideological agenda, especially with regard to racial ideals, and the theme arises again and again. African puppets appear in a number of the Hohnsteiner Kasper films as exotic characters that can be either frightening for the hero or helpful, depending on the situation. [Fig. 4.37] These African puppets were not new, nor were they specific to the cinema, for they had long been a part of the Hohnsteiner repertoire (and were also in keeping with the Weimar interest in the exotic). With brown skin, giant round eyes, red lips, and an oversize, happy-go-lucky smile, these puppets are classic examples of racist “darky” iconography. [Fig. 4.38] African puppets performed more than mere song and dance in Jacob’s films for the Third Reich, as remarks about race would also arise as an aspect of the story, especially in episodes set in exotic locales featuring Kasper’s interactions with foreign characters. In the film *Kasper bei den Wilden* (1940), for example, an African king offers Kasper his daughter’s hand in matrimony after Kasper helps him. Kasper laughs at the thought of marrying a black woman, even if she is a princess. In *Der Geisterkönig* (1940), Kasper explicitly states that he wants a bride “Mit zwei blonden Zöppen [*sic*].”<sup>118</sup> Kasper’s princess, the ideal bride, is always blond and blue eyed. Racist images—objectifying Africans and elevating Aryan women—would not have been out of place in a *Kindernachmittag* film series that also included the American cartoon *Sambo* (1935), as one discovers in an advertisement from 1937.<sup>119</sup>



Fig. 4.37: Still from the Hohnsteiner Kasper film *Der Goldschatz der Sioux Indianer* showing an African with a megaphone and teepees in the background, 1939. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv.

Fig. 4.38: Hohnsteiner Kasper ensemble, showing Kasper in the middle row, right, above the dog, and African characters at top, ca. 1920s. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986), 117.

Kasper doesn't just talk about color, he lives in it through cinema. Cultural theorist Paul Virilio writes: "it seemed to Goebbels and to Hitler himself that the rescuing of the German cinema from black-and-white would provide it with a competitive edge against the tonic power of American productions."<sup>120</sup> Color had important political uses in the Third Reich, and the use of color film was charged. Kasper went looking for his lost, blond-haired, blue-eyed princess in color in *Die verschwundene Prinzessin* (1944). [Fig. 4.39] Although there is no overt political content in this short film, Kasper is nonetheless employed to advance a racist Nazi agenda. Hans Albers (1891–1960) the star of the color Nazi film *Münchhausen* (1943), remarked at the time that color film "permits new possibilities and unimagined effects; now eyes really will appear blue and hair really blond."<sup>121</sup> In fact, Jacob shot two color Kasper films—the film stock was expensive<sup>122</sup>—illustrating the value of Hohnsteiner puppet films to the propaganda campaign and underlining the importance of his place in the racial discourse.



Fig. 4.39: Still from the Hohnsteiner Kasper film *Die verschwundene Prinzessin*, 1944. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 62772-1.

These early Kasper films were popular with children and successful with audiences despite the haste with which they were shot. Because filmmaking was expensive, the troupe had to work quickly, and often without the possibility of retakes. After the first fifteen films, Jacob began to worry about quality and his reputation as a puppeteer. He switched directors and production companies, and shot the next set of Kasper shorts with Curt A. Engel from the Boehner-Film company. Although Engel was also a documentarian, he was interested not only in capturing the puppet shows in a static fashion, but in experimenting with some of the technical possibilities created by their translation to a new medium. Engel shot the Hohnsteiner puppet shorts in a film studio, rather than on Jacob's stage, and the movies increasingly referred back to their status as films. For instance, instead of opening with dancing Africans, later Kasper films begin with film credits presented by a puppet film crew. Clearly, these films are hand-puppet performances and there is no attempt to make them look like anything else. But Engel would also include simple special effects, such as a puff of smoke or an editing break (to make something magically change), and he encouraged Jacob to try new things, assuring him it would work on camera.<sup>123</sup> Jacob was much happier with the new partnership and film products. Some scripts even credit Engel with the film's concept.<sup>124</sup>

In total, Jacob shot twenty-four Kasper shorts during the Third Reich and reached huge numbers of children. He reflected in his autobiography: "Obwohl ich auch heute noch der Ansicht bin, daß der Kasper nicht auf die Filmleinwand gehört, mußte ich mich aber überzeugen lassen, daß Millionen deutscher Kinder durch den Film zum erstenmal mit dem Kasper in Fühlung kamen."<sup>125</sup> Although it is difficult to determine an exact number of viewers—there is no scholarship specifically on children's film in the Third Reich—Jacob's estimate of millions seems plausible when one considers what we do know about young audiences.<sup>126</sup>

*Jugendfilmstunden*, specially organized monthly Sunday screenings for Bund Deutscher Mädel and Hitler Jugend members, sharply increased attendance from 300,000 spectators in 1933 to 11,210,000 in the years 1942 and 1943.<sup>127</sup> Although cartoons and puppet films were not typically shown at *Jugendfilmstunden* (aggressively militaristic films such as *Pour la Mérite* [1938] and *Feuertaufe* [1940] were typically programmed for these mandatory film viewings),<sup>128</sup> the sheer scale of the audiences offers a sense of the Nazi agenda for film viewers.

Despite his importance in the Third Reich multimedia junket, and despite the Nazi racial ideology presented in his puppet shows and films, Hohnsteiner Kasper had his detractors. Here is Jacob's autobiography again: "Trotzdem erlebten wir manch ärgerlichen Zwischenfall. Einige Zeitgenossen, darunter auch sehr offizielle, nahmen Anstoß an Kaspers Nase. In Zeitschriften wurde ganz offen gefordert, daß der Kasper aus ‚rassischen Gründen‘ eine andere Nase bekommen müßte."<sup>129</sup> Nazi physiognomic beliefs, based on pseudoscientific principles linking body shapes with character traits, praised the sloped nose and condemned the hooked (or "Jewish") nose. Kasper does indeed have a large, beaked nose, true to his *commedia dell'arte* origins. The puppet addressed the issue head-on in the play *Kasper kauft ein Haus*, published in 1941. Speaking to his audience, Kasper says: "Brav seid ihr auch, das sieht man an eurer Nasenspitze. Was habt ihr für kleine Nasen! Schaut auch einmal meine an, die ist groß. Dafür bin ich auch der Kasper, der hat immer eine große Nase. Ich stecke sie auch in alles rein."<sup>130</sup> Jacob's Hohnsteiner Kasper kept his big nose throughout the Third Reich; it was yet another way he was the ultimate subversive hero who still managed to affirm party ideology.

But other iterations of the Kasper character were given a nose job. In order to conform to the Nazi philosophy of race, puppets from the period have smaller, sloped noses, including the Kasper head available for purchase from the Reichsinstitut. [See fig. 4.11] The importance of

puppet noses becomes especially pronounced when we compare the nose of the Reichsinstitut Kasper with the nose of the Jew puppet. The Nazis even presented their own genealogy of puppetry in the form of a *Kulturfilm*: *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* (1940). [Fig. 4.40]



Fig. 4.40: Still showing dolls in the opening sequence from *Die Historie der deutschen Puppe* in an article published in *Die Wiener Bühne* magazine, June 14, 1940: 6.

### **Puppet Kulturfilme**

We can see the importance of puppet genealogy, as the Nazis conceived of it, in *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, a short documentary *Kulturfilm* directed by Ulrich Kayser that traces the history of German puppets from the prehistoric era to the Third Reich. Nazi *Kulturfilme* and newsreels were screened before feature-length movies, as they had been during the Weimar era. Film historian Hartmut Bitomsky writes: “What the entertainment films might have lacked in primary Nazi ideology was more than made up for by *Kulturfilme*. . . . The features may well have shown revues and romances, but culture films assumed the political burden.”<sup>131</sup> *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* was a puppet fifteen-minute lesson movie created for an adult

audience, and like many *Kulturfilme*, its topic was explicitly political. A promotional article in the magazine *Die Wiener Bühne* described the film: “Keine Geschichte von Kinderspielzeug. . . . Wo immer wir Puppen erhalten finden, sind sie Abbild der Welt der Erwachsenen, nachgeahmte Damen und Herren, die die Kleidung und Kultur ihrer Zeit spiegeln.”<sup>132</sup>

Organized chronologically, the film mixes puppet animation and live-action footage. A magical, stop-motion sequence bookends a historical narrative: ladylike dolls in a toy shop vitrine awaken at the stroke of midnight, rubbing their eyes as they come alive, and at the film’s conclusion they return to their motionless position in the showcase. Male voice-over narration in an expository tone does much of the work in this didactic story, and its timeline structure is similar to Lotte Reiniger’s propagandistic *Kulturfilm*, *Das rollende Rad* (1934), discussed in the previous chapter. The film traces the roots of German puppetry back to the Paleolithic Venus of Willendorf, and progresses through the Middle Ages, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Empire, Biedermeier, and “Inflationszeit” (or Weimar) eras, eventually to the Third Reich. Kasper is an important part of the story too, and a special sequence is devoted to Kasper’s plays. The fairground puppet is introduced in historical context as well: the narrator announces that “our Kasper” has been running his puppet show for more than four hundred years. [Fig. 4.41]



Fig. 4.41: Still showing Kasper from *Die Historie der deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

Fig. 4.42: Still showing Kasper in action from *Die Historie der deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.



Fig. 4.43: Still showing children at a Kasper puppet show from *Die Historie der deutschen Puppe*, 1940, using the same audience footage as the *UFA Tonwoche*. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1. (see Fig. 4.0)

The Kasper segment in *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* offers another example of Kasper's transformation to conform with Nazi racial policy. This part of the movie mixes documentary footage with a puppet show staged for film. Specifically, the sequence splices recycled newsreel footage of the audience from Max Jacob's 1939 puppet show (the same

newsreel footage described at the beginning of this chapter), but instead of the Hohnstein Kasper, a slope-nosed version of this puppet character takes its place. [Figs. 4.42, 4.43] Jacob's big-nosed Kasper has been edited out, as has the children's "Heil Hitler" salute. The sound of real children's voices as heard on the newsreel has also been replaced with a generic, canned-sounding laugh track. Following a similar shot-reverse-shot pattern as the original newsreel scene, the camera alternates between the audience of small kids and the slapstick show onstage. The replacement Kasper does battle with a robber, and a rug beater becomes a weapon in the exchange. But most importantly, Kasper's face is Aryan shaped. Even when the film shows a historical Kasper marionette—the mid-eighteenth-century Linzer Kasperl puppet—he has a sloped nose rather than a beaked one. [Figs. 4.44, 4.45] Kasper's nose job is one visible way in which the film illustrates Nazi racial policy.



Fig. 4.44: Still showing Linzer Kasperl from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

Fig. 4.45: Linzer Kasperl, eighteenth century. Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum. [www.landmuseum.at](http://www.landmuseum.at).

But the film is about more than Kasper's nose—his profile was only one aspect of how Nazis aimed to project a “purified” image of the German nation. In many respects, *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* is a fashionable film designed to appeal to women, in that it presents a Nazi feminine ideal of beatific, blond motherhood. An Aryan German nation required the active participation of women on the home front, and in order to indoctrinate children, mothers needed to cooperate. Historian Michelle Mouton writes: “Almost from their first day in office, the Nazis inundated Germans with propaganda exalting motherhood. Government-sponsored advertisements and posters, carefully designed . . . , loudly and publicly proclaimed, ‘The care of mothers and children is the holiest duty of the entire German *Volk*.’”<sup>133</sup> In this film, little girls wearing period dresses are shown lovingly caring for their dolls, mimicking mothers tending infants. [Fig. 4.46] Scenes of girls playing with dollhouses illustrate the centrality of home in the lives of women; the house is her domain to organize and control, while in a different scene, little boys play war with toy knights. [Fig. 4.47] Light-haired girls with angelic faces, in period rooms, calmly playing with baby dolls, are presented as if historical fact, when the scene is really intended as a model for “proper” womanly behavior. The narrator remarks: “Beim Puppenspiel versinkt unseren Kindern die Welt der Wirklichkeit.” No adults appear in this film at all in live-action roles, and the children have no speaking parts. Women and children are interchangeable and silent.



Fig. 4.46: Girl tending to her doll from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

Fig. 4.47: Girls playing with their dollhouse from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

*Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* was not the director's first *Kulturfilm* aimed at female audiences. Ulrich Kayser had made a very different documentary featuring avant-garde puppets during the Weimar era that expressed a completely different vision of femininity through puppet art: *Die Pritzelpuppe* (1923).<sup>134</sup> The Weimar *Kulturfilm* was primarily set in an artist's atelier, and it too heralds puppets as a reflection of the times in its opening sequence: "Jede Zeit hat ihren besonderen Stil. So zeigte sich die Zierlichkeit des Rokokos in dürftigen Marionettenpuppen." Two traditional marionettes in period costume, one crying in the lap of the other with the hands of a puppeteer visible at the top of the screen, are representatives of the old style. The second intertitle positively announces modernity's arrival with mock-biblical grandiosity: "Der Geist unserer Tage schuf die Groteskpuppe." Moreover, Hannah Höch's (1889–1978) *Dada Puppen* (ca. 1916–1920) represent the grotesque puppets of modernity—the same two exhibited at the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe in Berlin discussed in chapter 2—and are shown suspended above a pillow, swinging and spinning as an annoying-looking, barking

dog knocks them about in agitation. [Fig. 4.48] Kayser's Weimar film, like his Nazi propaganda piece, has a narrative arc with puppets coming to life and returning to a static state, and each treats puppets as an expression of their time, but old and new are completely inverted between the two movies.



Fig. 4.48: Still showing Hannah Höch's *Dada Puppen* and a dog in a scene from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.

Kayser's *Die Pritzelpuppe* restages the creative process of the then-famous German puppet maker and costume designer Lotte Pritzel (1887–1952). This version of *Die Pritzelpuppe*, produced by UFA, is less than twenty minutes in duration and was also originally meant to accompany a feature film. Offering a peek into Pritzel's studio, the movie is much more than straightforward documentation of the artist at work. [Figs. 4.49, 4.50] It is a stylized film that follows Pritzel's creation of a puppet, its transformation into a living person, and its eventual return to a frozen state. An intertitle midway through states this narrative trajectory explicitly: "Ein eigenartiger Kreislauf: Nach dem Leben wurden die Puppen geformt, und zu dem Leben kehrt die Kunst dieser Werke zurück." Like *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, *Die Pritzelpuppe*

follows a similar animation pattern, but the Weimar film emphasizes a cyclical structure rather than a linear timeline, and it is far more avant-garde in both its content and its technological cinematic experimentation. Despite the smoother stop-motion animation tricks and sound used in the Nazi work, especially in the opening and closing sequences, this Weimar silent film uses an Expressionist cinematic visual style (including backgrounds painted in an Expressionistic fashion and iris effects) in contrast with the more literal style of the Nazi film.



Fig. 4.49: Still showing Lotte Pritzel in her study creating a puppet, from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.



Fig. 4.50: Still showing Lotte Pritzel in her study creating a puppet, from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.

But in order to pinpoint the philosophical and aesthetic transformation between Kayser's Weimar and Nazi puppet films, an introduction to the protagonist of *Die Pritzelpuppe* is instructive. Lotte Pritzel was well known during the Weimar era for her sculptural puppets, her costumes for theater and dance, as well as her artistic persona. Though today mostly forgotten, when Pritzel is remembered, it is mostly through the writings she inspired rather than for her own art. Rainer Maria Rilke, Theodor Däubler, Jakob van Hoddis, and Johannes R. Becher all honored her with essays and poetry.<sup>135</sup> In a diary entry, Paul Klee (1879–1940) describes her as the “allerliebste Schwabinger Intrigue.”<sup>136</sup> Pritzel's puppets were popular enough to inspire songs, including Max Kuttner's suggestively titled tune, “Wenn meine Frau die ganze Nacht mit ihrer Pritzelpuppe spielt.”<sup>137</sup> The erotic-yet-innocent aesthetic of her puppets was mirrored in her costumes commissioned by some of the best-known directors of the Weimar era. Her theatrical costume credits include Frank Wedekind's *Die Kaiserin von Neufundland* (1923), Max Reinhardt's *Kreidekreis* (1925), and Friedrich Hollaender's *Laterna Magica* (1926). [Fig. 4.51] (A pantomime scene from *Die Kaiserin von Neufundland* shows a prince played as a by a woman in men's clothing.) Additionally, she costumed and inspired the eponymously titled *Pritzelpuppetanz*, a dance performed by Expressionist dancers Niddy Impekoven (1904–2002) and Anita Berber (1899–1928).<sup>138</sup> In fact, Impekoven danced a version of the *Pritzelpuppetanz* recorded in the closing scene of the film *Die Pritzelpuppe*. [Fig. 4.52] Not only does this film offer contemporary viewers a portrait of this artist's work, but it also presents an image of her feminine persona: a flirtatious, sexually aware “new woman.”



Fig. 4.51: Still showing Lotte Pritzel preparing the costume for Blandine Ebinger's character from Frank Wedekind's *Die Kaiserin von Neufundland*, from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.

Fig. 4.52: Still showing Niddy Impekoven's *Pritzelpuppetanz*, from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.

As lean, androgynous, flapper-like silhouettes sculpted in wire and wax with angular and stylized faces, Pritzel's works have an exotic quality. The dolls' stylized features frequently have an Eastern inflection, including almond-shaped eyes, oftentimes together with more typically Western cultural markers like curly blond hair. [Fig. 4.53] This mix grants them a pseudo-universal quality, as if they may be any woman of any ethnicity from any culture. A few figures are posed mid-dance, with one leg raised, crossing the body, an energetic movement echoing the Nataraja pose, a Hindu art motif depicting a dancing Shiva. [Figs. 4.54, 4.55] Others are modeled with their hands pressed together in a gesture of prayer or gratitude while standing on a pedestal from a Catholic relic or within a repurposed gold-leaf Rococo shrine. This mix of cultural signifiers, combined with their stylish dress, is exemplary of Weimar's new woman. In her study of advertisements and the *neue Frauen* of Weimar and Nazi Germany, historian Uta Poiger discusses the emergence and disappearance of such a "cosmopolitan aesthetic," a kind of pan-racial fantasy of ideal and identical-looking women.<sup>139</sup> The clash of ethnic features

(physiognomic, costume, pose) are a perfect example of such a cosmopolitan aesthetic. These are modern works displaying a progressive vision of feminine sexuality.



Fig. 4.53: Lotte Pritzel, *Puppen für die Vitrine*, Munich, ca. 1910. Wilhelm Michel, “Puppen von Lotte Pritzel,” *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 27 (October 1910–March 1911): 329.



Fig. 4.54: Lotte Pritzel, *Dancing Harlequin*, ca. 1920s. Private collection. Alamy Stock Photo.

Fig. 4.55: Shiva Nataraja, India, ca. eleventh century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [www.metmuseum.com](http://www.metmuseum.com).

This image of female self-expression—creative, sexual, cultural—completely vanishes in Kayser’s Nazi film. Instead, we watch children in a Biedermeier setting, with a giant crucifix on the wall, presented as an aesthetic ideal. [See fig. 4.47] In a different scene, avant-garde puppets from the Weimar period are actively critiqued. For example, the 1920s is represented as a depraved time: an old man puppet and young female puppet, seated in tubular steel chairs, have drinks over candlelight. [Fig. 4.56] Theirs is not a wholesome relationship. An abstract flapper figure mounted on a champagne cork twirls on a spinning jazz record with cigarette smoke in the air. The narrator then announces the puppets as “Bauhausstil Dessau 1925,” as if captioning two abstract, modernist puppets dangling on the screen.<sup>140</sup> [Fig. 4.57] Puppets of the Weimar era are an aesthetic transgression, of course, but they are also a break in the timeline of German maternal values. The promotional article in *Die Wiener Bühne* uses the charged word *Mißgeburten* to describe them.<sup>141</sup> The narrator expresses his relief at the passage of time: “Diese Auswüchse sind Gott sei Dank heute überwunden. Deutsche Art und Mütterlichkeit haben wieder zu Seelen unseres Kinders zurückgefunden.” Darling Aryan girls, silent and peaceful as they rock their dolls to sleep, mark a return of the motherly soul in this subsequent scene. [Fig 4.58] Even though Kayser’s 1923 film was silent, those female actors had much more of a voice than their counterparts in the 1940 production.



Fig. 4.56: Puppets representing the “Inflationszeit” from *Die Historie der deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

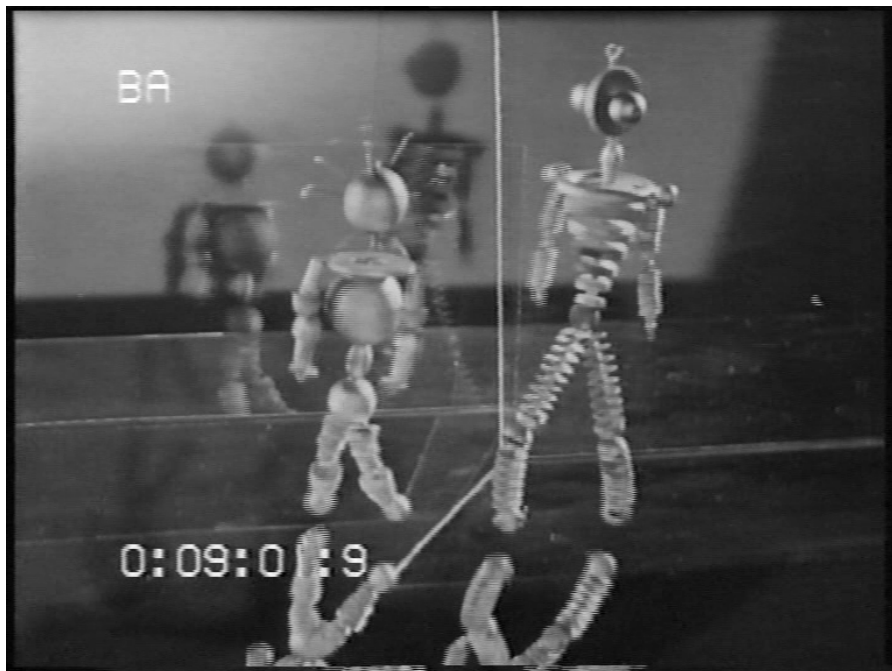


Fig. 4.57: “Bauhausstil Dessau 1925” from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.



Fig. 4.58: “Diese Auswüchse sind Gott sei Dank heute überwunden. Deutsche Art und Mütterlichkeit haben wieder zu Seelen unseres Kinders zurückgefunden,” from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

The sequence showing the excesses and depravity of 1920s puppetry visually quotes from the Weimar-era *Die Pritzelpuppe* (1923)—Kayser’s own film! Although most of the puppets in the “Inflationszeit” are not actual modernist puppets, they are shot like the puppets from his earlier, avant-garde work. Just as Lotte Pritzel’s puppets were shown as dark silhouettes, so too is the flapper puppet spotlit to emphasize an encircled shadow. [Figs. 4.59, 4.60] The Bauhaus puppets dangle from a string, invisibly suspended and slightly twirling, just like Hannah Höch’s *Dada Puppen* in the introduction to *Die Pritzelpuppe* [See figs. 4.48, 4.57]. The assemblage-like layering of visual elements in the foreground, mid-ground, and background of the frame—as one finds in the saxophone, champagne, and smoking jazz puppet scene—stands out in a film where all other segments are shot with a naturalistic *mise-en-scène*. Kayser uses the modernism of his own Weimar aesthetic as the basis for a critique in his later Nazi film. [Fig. 4.61]

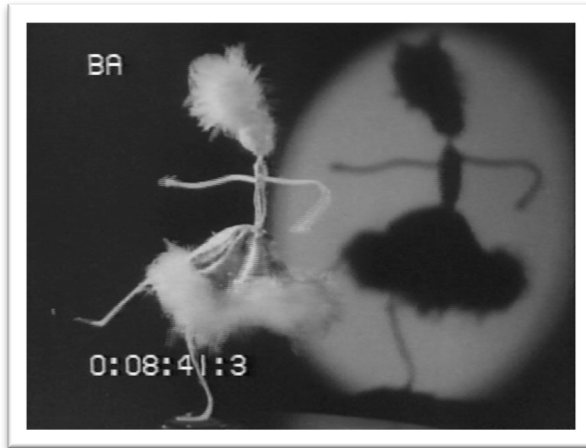


Fig. 4.59: Mock-modernist puppet with spotlight and silhouette from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

Fig. 4.60: Silhouette of Lotte Pritzel's puppet from *Die Pritzelpuppe*, 1923. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: K 241166-1.



Fig. 4.61: Jazz, alcohol, and a smoking puppet of the “Inflationszeit” from *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe*, 1940. Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

*Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* presents a view of German motherhood as a tradition that has survived the test of time. In the era of the Third Reich, such maternal values also held the power to overcome class boundaries. The film's narrator remarks that it does not matter if a puppet is an expensive luxury doll or a roughly hewn Tyrolean wooden carving—the camera shows children lavishing the same gentle, silent attention on figures both fancy and plain—“Ein Kind kann sich eben in alles hineinversetzen.” Nazism promised a classless society: the *Volksgemeinschaft* was to be an ethnic community of pure German people in a society where social and class divisions were to be solved by racial “harmony.” Motherhood was part of the way to establish a racially organized nation. Claudia Koonz, a historian of women in the Third Reich, writes: “Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns they defined as motherly. The fact that women bore no responsibility for issuing orders from Berlin does not obviate their complicity in carrying them out. Electoral statistics charted their enthusiasm.”<sup>142</sup> *Die Historie der Deutschen Puppe* is a misogynistic film to today's eyes, but it was intended to champion a woman's role in the domestic sphere as a heroic act that was part of a larger national project. The film shows children dressed up in costumes, engaging in pretend play, but the imaginary world of dress-up and make-believe that it reflects is a much larger illusion than the cinema screen.

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Pinocchio's nose grew larger for every lie he told, but in the Third Reich, Kasper's nose shrank as his untruths became more extreme. An adaptable and responsive art form, puppetry evolved with the changing political situation and was tailored to reach varied audiences on a huge scale.

Whether a puppeteer performed for small children, combat soldiers, Nazi brass, or the movie camera, puppetry in the Third Reich tended to be lively and playful. But it was neither simple nor lighthearted—it was not a sanitized presentation of National Socialist dreams, created to appear open and unbiased. Rather, it took existing beliefs and adjusted them subtly, gradually, in a calculated way, tailored to reach different viewers and produce specific outcomes in particular times and places.

The history of puppetry in the Third Reich is more than just another chapter in Kasper's transformation over time—although it is that. It also an example of how a totalitarian state operates. When I started researching Nazi puppetry, I had a definition of totalitarianism in mind: a political system where the state controls all aspects of public and private life. Watching adorable children give Kasper the Hitler salute confirmed my understanding of totalitarianism, and at the same time interrupted my usual ways of thinking about Nazi Germany. While violence, discipline, and regimentation were indeed a part of organizing social relations in the Third Reich, so too was charm. Puppetry is the ultimate non-monumental art form, both literally, in terms of the physical size of puppets, and figuratively, given its historical role as a minor art. But nothing and nobody was overlooked by the Nazi regime.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Günther Grassmann, interviewed in *100 Jahre—Der Countdown* (1923), a series written by Guido Knopp, produced by ZDF, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 40.

<sup>3</sup> UFA-Tonwoche (484/51/1939), Universum Film AG (UFA), Bundesfilmarchiv Deutschland, Eingangsnummer B111232.

<sup>4</sup> David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993), 9.

- <sup>5</sup> Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 9.
- <sup>6</sup> “Die Hohnsteiner Puppenspieler kommen nach Baden-Baden,” *Baden-Baden Morgenzeitung*, October 18, 1935. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Kritiken 1923–1945. The article describes the upcoming puppet show by Max Jacob as “Ein Ereignis für unsere Stadt. Waren sie doch die einzigen, die beim Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg auf dem großen Volksfest spielen durften. Das erste Gastspiel nach dem Reichsparteitag.”
- <sup>7</sup> Max Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich: Lebenserinnerungen eines Handpuppenspielers* (Stuttgart: Ogham Verlag, 1981), 260.
- <sup>8</sup> Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> See Olaf Peters, ed., *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937* (Munich: Prestel; New York: Neue Galerie, 2014).
- <sup>10</sup> For a description of Goebbels’s “Orchestra Principle” see Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, ed., *Das deutsche Puppenspiel: Einsatz, Erfolge und Zielsetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeiterfront, 1939), 24.
- <sup>12</sup> Gerd Bohlmeier, “Die Vereinnahmung des Puppenspiels im NS-Statt,” in *Front Puppen Theater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen*, ed. Dorothea Kolland and the Puppentheater-Museum Berlin (Berlin: Elefanten, 1987), 66.
- <sup>13</sup> Gerd Bohlmeier, *Puppenspiel 1933–1945 Deutschland: Das Puppenspiel im Dienste der Nationalsozialistischen Ideologie in Deutschland* (Bochum: Deutsches Institut für Puppenspiel, 1985), 51–56.
- <sup>14</sup> Bohlmeier, “Die Vereinnahmung des Puppenspiels im NS-Statt,” 66; Michael Harro Siegel, *Vom Puppenspiel in Deutschland 1933–1945: Erinnerung an die N. S. Zeit*, Archiv für Puppentheatergeschichte 2 (Frankfurt: Perliko-Perlacko, Dr. H. R. Purschke, 1981), 3, 5.
- <sup>15</sup> See Gerd Bohlmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown: Zur Organisation eines Unterhaltungsmediums im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Die Spiele der Puppe*, ed. Wanfred Wegner (Cologne: Prometh Verlag, 1989), 169–84.
- <sup>16</sup> Heinz Ohlendorf, *Das Schattenspiel: Ein Werkbuch für Schattenspieler* (Munich: Kaiser, 1935). Shadow puppetry is mentioned in the publication Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, 22.
- <sup>17</sup> See Bohlmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown: Zur Organisation eines Unterhaltungsmediums im Nationalsozialismus,” 169–84.
- <sup>18</sup> For an extended description of puppetry’s role in these various groups see Bohlmeier, “Die Vereinnahmung des Puppenspiels im NS-Statt,” 65–73; Bohlmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown,” 170–84; Astrid Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960* (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2002), 83–90.
- <sup>19</sup> Alfred Sieber, “Ausblick,” *Die Puppenbühne*, no. 6 (1934): 45, cited in Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 91.
- <sup>20</sup> On the history of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel see Gerd Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Figurentheater” (PhD diss., Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, 1993); Gerd Bohlmeier, “Figurentheater im Ideologiekonsens: Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” in *Front Puppen Theater*, 121–31; Bohlmeier, *Puppenspiel 1933–1945 Deutschland*; Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 90–102.

- <sup>21</sup> Bohlmeier, “Die Vereinnahmung des Puppenspiels im NS-Statt,” 68.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–72.
- <sup>23</sup> Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 92.
- <sup>24</sup> Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 131–54; Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 93; Silke Technau, “Puppenspiel in der Propaganda der NS-Diktatur,” *Das andere Theater* 85, no. 24 (2014): 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Siegfried Raeck, “Die Kulturpolitische Aufgabe,” in *Wille und Macht: Führerorgan der nationalsozialistischen Jugend* 15 (August 1938): 19.
- <sup>26</sup> Harro Siegel, “Marionette und Theater,” in *Wille und Macht*, 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Hermann Schultze, “Puppenspiel in der Kulturgeschichte,” in *Wille und Macht*, 13.
- <sup>28</sup> Raeck, “Die Kulturpolitische Aufgabe,” 20.
- <sup>29</sup> Gerd Bohlmeier, “Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” in *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts*, <https://wepa.unima.org/en/reichsinstitut-fur-puppenspiel/>.
- <sup>30</sup> Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, 59.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 59; Walter Kipsch, “Die Fraktion der Vierzig,” in *Bemerkungen zum Puppenspiel: 1936–1990 (eine Auswahl)*, ed. Walter Kipsch and Ilse Marie Kipsch (Frankfurt am Main: Puppen und Masken, 1992), 69–70.
- <sup>32</sup> Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, 59.
- <sup>33</sup> Siegel, *Vom Puppenspiel in Deutschland 1933–1945*, 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Bohlmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown,” 171.
- <sup>35</sup> Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach, *The State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009), 39–40.
- <sup>36</sup> Manfred Wegner, “Materialien zu Figur und Gestalt des Juden im Puppentheater des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Theatralia Judaica: Emanzipation und Antisemitismus als Momente der Theatergeschichte. Von der Lessing-Zeit bis zur Shoah*, ed. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 164–83.
- <sup>37</sup> Siegfried Raeck, *Das Kasperlbuch* (Vienna: Kulturausschuß des Deutschen Schulvereines Sudmärk, 1934), vii.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, x.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005201>.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> For a discussion of this play see Bohlmeier, “Figurentheater im Ideologiekonsens,” 123–24; Bohlmeier, *Puppenspiel 1933–1945 Deutschland*, 103–5; Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 227–39; Johannes Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Puppen und Masken, 1996), 127–30.
- <sup>46</sup> Hermann Schultze, *Der Jude im Dorn* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1939/40), 8.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>48</sup> Siegel, *Vom Puppenspiel in Deutschland 1933–1945*, 18. Siegel claims it was not his desire to create the puppet: “Vegebens suchte ich nach einem Ausweg—fand aber keinen.”
- <sup>49</sup> *Der Stürmer*, no. 16 (April 1936), cited in Joseph Wulf, *Theater und Film im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1966), 279–80.

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- <sup>50</sup> For a discussion of this play see Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 109–14.
- <sup>51</sup> Max Jacob, *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers* (Leipzig: Arwed Strauch Verlag, 1941), 11.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 113.
- <sup>54</sup> Jacob, *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers*, 12.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.
- <sup>57</sup> Hermann Schultze, “Die beiden neuen Spielreihen des Reichsinstituts für Puppenspiel,” in *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 9.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>59</sup> Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 174.
- <sup>60</sup> Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 94; Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 174.
- <sup>61</sup> Harro Siegel, “Neue Köpfe und Hände für das Kaspertheater,” in *Spiele und Köpfe für das Kaspertheater*, 13.
- <sup>62</sup> For a discussion of these plays see Bohlmeier, “Figurentheater im Ideologiekonsens,” 123; Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 219–26, 248–65; Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 130–37.
- <sup>63</sup> Erich Scheurmann, *Politische Zwischenspiele für das Kaspertheater* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1939), 14.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 16a.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>70</sup> Hans Buresch, *Kasper fährt nach Engelland* (Berlin: Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel, 1940), 3.
- <sup>71</sup> See Olaf Bernstengel, “Militaria im Puppenspiel zwischen 1805 und 1933,” in *Front Puppen Theater*, 57–64. For information on puppetry in World War I see Evelyn Zechner, “‘Kasper saust von Sieg zu Sieg’. Sozialhistorische und soziologische Studien zu ausgewählten Puppenspielen aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs,” *Zeitschrift für Literatur- und Theatersoziologie*, Sonderband 2 (November 2011): [http://lithes.uni-graz.at/lithes/11\\_sonderband\\_2.html](http://lithes.uni-graz.at/lithes/11_sonderband_2.html).
- <sup>72</sup> Max von Boehn, *Puppenspiel* (Munich: Bruckmann AG, 1929), 212.
- <sup>73</sup> Raeck, *Das Kasperlbuch*, 173.
- <sup>74</sup> Siegel, “Neue Köpfe und Hände für das Kaspertheater,” 13.
- <sup>75</sup> Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 174, 323; Wolfgang Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf und Sohn, 1986), 317.
- <sup>76</sup> Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 323. Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente*, 119.
- <sup>77</sup> Gottfried Anacker, “Puppenspielerarbeit im Kriege,” *Die Kulturverwaltung* 4, nos. 10/12 (October/December 1940): 111–12.
- <sup>78</sup> Bohlmeier, “Das Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel,” 329–30.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 329–30.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>81</sup> “Vom Hohnsteiner Kasper höchstpersönlich,” in *Mensch, Puppen, Narr, Spieler, Weiser: Für den Freundeskreis der Hohnsteiner Puppenspiele*, ed. Herbert Just (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1958), 20.

<sup>82</sup> For a description of Max Jacob’s tour see Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 287–306; Susann Günther, “Der Hohnsteiner Kasper an der Hauptkampflinie: Max Jacob im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Front Puppen Theater*, 96–107, esp. 98–107; Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 222–23.

<sup>83</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 288.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 288–89.

<sup>85</sup> Max Jacob, “Mit dem Hohnsteiner Kasper bei den Soldaten,” *Freiwache*, February 1945, 58, reprinted in *Mensch, Puppen, Narr, Spieler, Weiser*, 60.

<sup>86</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 290.

<sup>87</sup> The biggest audience noted by Jacob was in Florence, 1943: 1,100 viewers. Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 301.

<sup>88</sup> “Auf Spielfahrt im Warthegau. Beginn 5. Februar 1940,” February 12, 1942, page 5. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/41.

<sup>89</sup> “Auf Spielfahrt im Warthegau. Beginn 5. Februar 1940,” February 14, 1942, page 7. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/41.

<sup>90</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, “Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country” <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161>.

<sup>91</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 131.

<sup>92</sup> “Spielfahrt ins Generalgouvernement Polen. Beginn 14. August 1940,” August 15, 1940, page 2. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/42.

<sup>93</sup> “Spielfahrt ins Generalgouvernement Polen. Beginn 14. August 1940,” August 18, 1940, page 4. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/42.

<sup>94</sup> “Spielfahrt ins Generalgouvernement Polen. Beginn 14. August 1940,” September 2, 1940, page 18. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/42.

<sup>95</sup> “Spielfahrt ins Generalgouvernement Polen. Beginn 14. August 1940,” November 25, 1940, pages 67–68. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/42.

<sup>96</sup> “Spielfahrt ins Generalgouvernement Polen. Beginn 14. August 1940,” August 26, 1940, pages 67–68. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1940/42.

<sup>97</sup> “Einsatz im Osten.” Beginn: March 30, 1942, page 5. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1942.

<sup>98</sup> Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 195.

<sup>99</sup> “Einsatz im Osten.” Beginn 1. April 1944,” May 16, 1944, page 26. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Spielberichte 1944.

<sup>100</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 304.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Simon, “Doktor Faust in Polen,” *Garaer Zeitung* 15/16, no. 11 (March 1941): Sunday supplement.

<sup>102</sup> Jacob, “Mit dem Hohnsteiner Kasper bei den Soldaten,” 58, reprinted in *Mensch, Puppen, Narr, Spieler, Weiser*, 61.

<sup>103</sup> Although she cites different examples from this period, puppet historian Astrid Fülbier makes a similar observation about the politics of Jacob’s wartime shows: “doch erfolgte eine subtile Anpassung durch die Charakterisierung/Belegung der vorhandenen Puppentypen. Die von Jacob umgearbeiteten traditionellen oder die neu geschriebenen und publizierten Theaterstücke integrierten die erwünschten weltanschaulichen/zeitgenössischen Aspekte und trugen auf diese Weise zur Verbreitung von NS. -Gedankengut bei.” Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 223.

<sup>104</sup> Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> Max Jacob, letter cited in Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 116.

<sup>106</sup> A full list of Jacob’s films appears in *Mensch, Puppen, Narr, Spieler, Weiser*, 89. A list of his Third Reich films appears in Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 225. But the dates for a number the films are inaccurate in both publications. A short description of the development of his film program appears in Fülbier, *Handpuppen- und Marionettentheater in Schleswig-Holstein 1920–1960*, 222–23. For a description of Jacob’s film production efforts see Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 228–34, 274–76. For a description written by his collaborator see Willy Wohlrabe, “Holzköpfe als Filmstars,” in *Mensch, Puppen, Narr, Spieler, Weiser*, 85–88.

<sup>107</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 229.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>109</sup> Wolfgang Hultsch, “Der neue Film UFA Palast: Filme für Kinder,” *Pommersche Zeitung*, November 23, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>110</sup> “Tagesschau Berlin, den 15. September, Puppenfilme vor Kindern” *Film-Kurier*, November 15, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> G. O. Stindt, “Schulmädchen sehen Märchenfilme,” *Lichtbild Bühne*, September 15, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>113</sup> “Bernward-Lichtspiele: Fröhliches Kunterbunt in Tonfilm,” *Allgemeine Zeitung Hildesheim*, October 14, 1937; “Ufa-Palast Dortmund: ein buntes Kinderpogramm,” *Dortmunder Zeitung*, October 18, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>114</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 231.

<sup>115</sup> Amt Feierabend der NSG Kraft durch Freude, *Das deutsche Puppenspiel*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> For example G. O. Stindt, “Schulmädchen sehen Märchenfilme,” *Lichtbild-Bühne*, September 15, 1937; “Tagesschau Berlin, den 15. September, Puppenfilme vor Kindern,” *Film-Kurier*, November 15, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>118</sup> Max Jacob, *Der Geisterkönig: Ein Kasperstück für den Film von Max Jacob, Hohnstein* (Manuscript, 1940), 1. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Filmmanuscripte.

<sup>119</sup> “Bernward-Lichtspiele: Fröhliches Kunterbunt in Tonfilm,” *Allgemeine Zeitung Hildesheim*, October 14, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Max Jacob Puppenfilme.

<sup>120</sup> Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema* (New York: Verso Books, 1989), 8.

<sup>121</sup> Hans Albers, “Der Schauspieler und die Farbe,” *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, December 25, 1942, cited in Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 203. Rentschler notes that the quote may have been written by a ghostwriter.

<sup>122</sup> Wohlrabe, “Holzköpfe als Filmstars,” 87.

<sup>123</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 231–32.

<sup>124</sup> The script for *Das Zauberbuch* (1948) provides the following credit: “Nach einer Idee von Curt A. Engel bearbeitet von Max Jacob.” Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Filmmanuscripte.

<sup>125</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 230.

<sup>126</sup> A discussion of youth viewership together with audience attendance numbers appear in David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 21. These figures are drawn from Nazi publications from 1943 and 1944.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 184, 197.

<sup>129</sup> Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich*, 271.

<sup>130</sup> Max Jacob, *Kasper kauft ein Haus: Heft 3* (Reichenau: Rudolf Scheider Verlag, 1941), 4.

<sup>131</sup> Hartmut Bitomsky cited in Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*, 20–21.

<sup>132</sup> Ludwig Gesek, “Historie der Deutschen Puppe: Der jüngste Kulturfilm der Wien-Film,” *Die Wiener Bühne*, June 14, 1940, 6.

<sup>133</sup> Michelle Mouton, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1981–1945* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2007), 116.

<sup>134</sup> *Die Pritzelpuppe*, dir. Ulrich Kayser, perf. Lotte Pritzel, Blandine Ebinger, Niddy Impekoven, UFA, 1923. BA/FA Berlin. Eingangsnummer: B 36833-1.

<sup>135</sup> Editha Mork and Wolfgang Till, eds., *Lotte Pritzel: Puppen des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase* (Munich: Puppentheatermuseum Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1986). This catalogue contains all the referenced works, along with other writings. For additional information on Lotte Pritzel see Barbara Boreck, “‘Ach sie haben eine Seele aus weißer Watte, die Holden’: Lotte Pritzel und ihre Wachsfiguren,” in *Schwabing: Kunst und Leben um 1900*, ed. Helmut Bauer and Elisabeth Tworek (Munich: Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1998), 103–11; Sara Ayres, “The Uttermost Limits of Vision: The Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel (1887–1952),” in *Dolls and Puppets as Artistic and Cultural Phenomena (19th–21st Centuries)*, ed. Kamil Kopania (Warsaw: Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Arts; Białystok, Poland: Department of Puppetry Art, 2016), 10–17.

<sup>136</sup> Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee 1898–1919*, ed. and intro by Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 249–50.

<sup>137</sup> There are at least two songs named after Lotte Pritzel’s puppets: Solo Piano, “Pritzelpuppen,” 78 record, Berlin: Merkur M521 1923; Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri with Mac Rauls, “Pritzel-Puppen,” 78 record, Bekka-Record; also recorded by Paul Godwin Kuenstler Orchester, “Pritzel-Puppen” 78 record, Berlin: Grammophon.

Max Kuttner, “Wenn meine Frau die ganze Nacht mit ihrer Pritzelpuppe spielt.”

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<sup>138</sup> Berber performed the *Pritzelpuppe* dance as early as April 1920, with the musical accompaniment of Jaap Kook at the Schall und Rauch cabaret in Berlin. For a program listing see Heinz Herald, ed., “Programm April 1920,” *Schall und Rauch* 5 (April 1920): 4.

<sup>139</sup> Uta Poiger, “Fantasies of Universality? Neue Frauen, Race, and Nation in Weimar and Nazi Germany,” in *The Modern Girl around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization*, ed. Alys Eve Weinbaum et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 317–44.

<sup>140</sup> It is unclear who the artist behind these two puppets is. A photograph of these same two puppets appeared in an English-language publication from the early twentieth century describing them as “Marionettes of the Experimental Stage at the Bauhaus, Dessau” and crediting them to the Theater-Museum, Munich. Susanne de Ponte from the Deutsches Theatermuseum in Munich confirms that they are no longer in their collection and if they ever were, is unable to find a record of their accession (due to damage to the museum’s collection during World War II). Email to the author February 27, 2017.

<sup>141</sup> Gesek, “Historie der Deutschen Puppe,” 6.

<sup>142</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1981), 5.

## Chapter Five

### The Puppet Vanishes: Jewish German Puppetry

Das Wort “Jude” ist bei uns nie gefallen, als ich ein kleines Kind war. Es wurde mir zum erstenmal entgegengebracht durch antisemitische Bemerkungen (es lohnt sich nicht zu erzählen) von Kindern auf der Straße. Daraufhin wurde ich also sozusagen “aufgeklärt.” . . . Wenn man als Jude angegriffen wird, muss man sich als Jude verteidigen.

—Hannah Arendt, 1964<sup>1</sup>

While Max Jacob’s (1888–1967) clean and orderly Kasper was enjoying his sausages and performing Christmas puppet shows for Aryan spectators throughout Germany, another Kasper played a different role for Jewish audiences. The *Kasperltante* Liesel Simon (1887–1958) presented *Kasperl und die Wunderlampe* in a special guest Hanukkah performance for the Jüdischer Kulturbund Berlin.<sup>2</sup> [Fig. 5.0] Although she had been a famous puppeteer for both German and Jewish German audiences during the late 1920s and early 1930s, by 1937 she was performing puppet shows only for Jews. Like other Jewish actors, she was excluded from participating in Germany’s cultural life after Adolf Hitler’s (1889–1945) takeover. But some artists—puppeteers included—had the opportunity to perform under the auspices of the Jüdischer Kulturbund. This federation of Jewish artists was established in 1933 at the initiative of Jewish community leaders, with the consent, censorship, and oversight of the Nazis, and until 1941 provided “Jews only” artists with some employment and “Jews only” audiences with some culture. Founded in Berlin, the Kulturbund (or “Kubu” as it was also known) eventually spread to forty-nine different localities throughout Germany. Simon performed for children in her hometown of Frankfurt at the Jüdischer Kulturbund Rhein-Main a week after her Berlin appearance.<sup>3</sup>

*Zu Chanukkah:*



**Kinder-  
Vorstellungen**  
im Kulturbundtheater  
Kommandantenstraße 57

1. Dezember 1937  
2. nachmittags 4 Uhr

**GASTSPIEL**

**Liesel Simon** mit ihrem  
**Kasperl-Theater**  
»Kasperl und die Wunderlampe«  
(für Kinder von 4–14 Jahren)

Gutscheine zur Platz-Verlosung RM 1.— für Kinder und Erwachsene  
(Erwachsene müssen Kulturbundmitglied sein) in den Zahlstellen Mitglieder-  
büro, Kommandantenstr. 57, Zahlstelle Aschaffener Str. 18, Hirschfeld,  
Jagowstr. 44, Pappelauer, Neue Friedrichstr. 59, Kedem, Dahlemerstr. 8, Philo  
Verlag, Pariser Str. 44 und an der Abendkasse

**Karten rechtzeitig besorgen!**

**Jüdischer Kulturbund Berlin E. V.**

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*Möbel, die Sie suchen*  
in reicher Auswahl preiswert  
MORITZ HIRSCHOWITZ • SO, Skalitzer Str. 25

Fig. 5.0: Advertisement for a guest Hanukkah performance, Liesel Simon's *Kasperl und die Wunderlampe* puppet show, from *Jüdischer Kulturbund Berlin Monatsblätter* 5, no. 11 (November 1937): 6.

It is hard to imagine two audiences more divided or two Kaspers more different than a Nazi Kasper and a Jewish Kasper. [Figs. 5.1, 5.2] How could both Nazi and Jewish audiences identify with the same plucky tramp forever foiling his dangerous enemies? How is it even possible that the same stock character could be a hero for both Aryans and Jews in the Third Reich? There were certainly differences: for instance instead of sausages, Simon's Kasperl chats about his appetite for mustard pickles in a promotional interview with the Jewish newspaper *Centralverein Zeitung* (pork is unkosher).<sup>4</sup> ("Kasperl" and "Kasperle" are Kasper's proper names in Simon's theater.) Puppet shows at Christmastime are an institution throughout the German-speaking world—even Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) mentions them in several of

his writings—but was there such a thing as a Hanukkah puppet show before Liesel Simon? Where did Jewish puppetry come from?

Despite having different agendas, both Jacob's and Simon's performances were Nazi showpieces in their own way. The Nazis permitted the Jüdischer Kulturbund out of self-interest—to disguise the regime's oppression and to prevent "German" works from being performed by non-Aryans—but the Kulturbund is also regarded by historians as one of the most famous cases of Jewish creative expression in reaction to cultural exclusion.<sup>5</sup> In her book on musical politics and the Berlin Jüdischer Kulturbund, historian Lily E. Hirsch writes: "This organization would become a testing ground for Jews confronting their new status as pariah. In the pressure cooker of Nazi politics, it would also see compressed Jewish responses to anti-Semitism from the past: assimilation through German culture and the expression of Jewish nationalism."<sup>6</sup> In the puppetry of the Kulturbund, both impulses were at work simultaneously. Simon was not the only puppeteer to embody this paradoxical reaction. Most notably, an offshoot of the Munich branch supported an entire marionette theater with programming lasting two years: Das Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler. This Munich troupe of puppeteers performed Kasper shows as part of their core repertoire, but they also presented modernist and explicitly Jewish plays. The Theater der Jüdischen Schulen, too, staged artistic Kasper shows in Berlin. Puppetry performed within the Jüdischer Kulturbund, by various performers, using different styles of puppetry and an array of subjects for plays, offers a way to explore how Jews regarded their Germanness and Jewishness when under attack.



Fig. 5.1: Herbert Sonnenfeld, Liesel Simon with her Kasperl puppet in Berlin, 1937. Sonnenfeld Archive, Jewish Museum, Berlin.

Fig. 5.2: Max Jacob with his Kasper puppet, n.d. [www.max-jacob-theater.de](http://www.max-jacob-theater.de).

### **Jewish Kasper in Weimar**

A few years before Hitler's takeover, in puppet shows performed in the 1920s, Simon's Kasperl lusted after sausages just like Jacob's Kasper. In fact, one of Simon's Kasperl's characteristic phrases during the Weimar period was "Bratwürstel ess'ich für mein Leben gern!"<sup>7</sup> Simon and Jacob had much in common, and they were colleagues as well as friends prior to 1933. Simon had been involved in professional puppetry organizations such as the Kulturverband zur Förderung des Puppentheaters from as early as 1928 and was even a member of the directorate of the Deutscher Bund für Puppenspiele in 1931.<sup>8</sup> An assimilated Jew, Simon was a puppeteering peer of her non-Jewish puppeteering colleagues, a group that included Georg Deininger (1882–1946) (an early member of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei [NSDAP] who argued in favor of anti-Semitic puppetry after the takeover). Together with Jacob, a fellow Kasper performer, she served in the professional hand puppetry group within this Kulturverband zur Förderung des Puppentheaters. Whenever Jacob traveled to Frankfurt on a tour, he would

visit with Simon, as he recounted in his autobiography: “Die damals durch ihrer Spiele im Frankfurter Rundfunk sehr beliebte und bekannte Puppenspielerin Liesel Simon fand sich oft bei uns. Wir sprachen viel miteinander.”<sup>9</sup> Ever the unreliable narrator—Jacob mistakenly writes that Simon emigrated to England with her family in 1933 because of her Jewish heritage when, in fact, she fled to Ecuador in 1941—he is right that Simon was loved and well-known through her radio program during the Weimar era. Both Jacob and Simon were puppetry and media pioneers (recall Jacob’s cinematic innovations described in chapter 4), and both artists came up through the puppetry ranks together, even professionalizing the field in tandem, but it was Simon who really broke new ground in Weimar Germany.

Like most puppeteers, she got her start with traditional puppet shows. Simon’s first Kasperl plays took place sometime around 1917 or 1918. She too made her own puppets, costumes, sets, and decorations at first, and soon opened her own theater for public performances, the *Erstes Münchner Kasperltheater*. Although the theater was located in Frankfurt am Main, it was named in homage to Graf von Pocci (1807–1876), who established the first permanent puppet theater in Munich to present his distinctive puppetry creation, *Kasper Larifari*. Simon’s early Kasperl was strongly influenced by her Munich predecessor—von Pocci scripts were the core of her program at the start—but she expanded her repertoire to include her own stories as well. Like von Pocci’s, her plays were geared toward children, and the Kasperl she presented was also sanitized of the edgy bawdiness of fairground hand puppetry. A July 1921 clipping from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* offers a sense of the early enthusiasm for these performances, a view of her public, as well as the size of her audiences: “500 Kinderaugen hingen gespannt an dem kleinen Vorhang da vorne, hinter dem es schon geheimnisvoll hell zu werden begann. Bald erschein der Kasperl. . . . Kasperltheater! . . . wird unter künstlerischer

Leitung versucht, das alte gesunde Kasperletheater neu zu erwecken.”<sup>10</sup> Like other puppeteers, she traveled periodically with a portable version of her stage (she also performed in concert venues and department stores), and her movement further expanded her fan base. Her ensemble grew, and she soon employed professional performers in her troupe as fellow puppeteers, including actors from the Neues Theater Frankfurt and the Frankfurter Kammerspiel.<sup>11</sup>

Following her enormous success in the first part of the 1920s, by 1928 Simon had changed the name of her company from Erstes Münchner Kasperltheater to “Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater,” a sure sign that she was taking puppetry in her own direction. [Fig. 5.3]



Fig. 5.3: Liesel Simon with her puppets, likely in Frankfurt, ca. 1920s. Historisches Museum, Frankfurt.

She cultivated a new, completely original approach to the art form for the radio, inventing a kind of puppet show without physical puppets. She frequently led the children’s programming on the radio station Frankfurt Rundfunk (officially the station was called Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkdienst AG) broadcasting on the show *Die Stunde der Jugend* starting in 1926. In an interview from that year written in the voice of Kasperle with the trade journal *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung*, the puppet addresses the complications of radio puppetry directly, and how easily it is resolved, with Kasperl sophistication: “Mich kennen doch schon so viele Kinder, da

hab' ich mir gedacht, wie soll ich es anfangen, daß ich mich den Rundfunkkindern spielen und reden kann. Denn, wie komm' ich den dazu, daß ich Euch nie sehen kann? . . . da tåtet Ihr mich ja nur hören und nicht sehen und ich tåt Euch nicht sehen und nicht einmal hören, und ich red' doch immer mit den Kindern, wenn ich spiele, und da hab ich mir gedacht, ich mach das einfach so."<sup>12</sup> [Fig. 5.4] Her *Rundfunk Kasperle* was so successful, it was given its own fixed broadcasting time slot in 1927 on the first Sunday of every month (usually, although sometimes it was a different Sunday), and the show was even called the *Kasperlestunde* in program listings. Simon was proud of her involvement with radio at the medium's very beginnings. In a brochure advertising Liesel Simon's Kasperl-Theater (both stage and radio) from around 1928, she wrote: "Dem Rundfunk Frankfurt gehöre ich seit Anbeginn mit meinen Kasperl-Sendespiel an."<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 5.4: An interview with Simon's Kasperle and photographs of the stage and puppeteer from *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 2, no. 10 (March 7, 1926): 3.

Voice has always been an important dimension of puppetry. Traditional hand puppets, with heads made of wood, have frozen faces. The constancy of Kasper's grin is part of his charm, to be sure, but it can also be a challenge for a puppeteer to convey a broad register of emotions with one fixed expression. In order for a puppet to show surprise, fear, or sadness, for example, a performer needs to modulate his or her voice in ways both exaggerated and subtle.

This is especially true with hand puppets, whose physical movements are quite limited in their expressive capacity, especially in comparison with other styles of puppetry. A great hand puppeteer must also be a great voice actor. Just as early filmmakers saw potential in translating the engaging movements of puppets to the screen during the silent film era—like stop-motion shadow animators—puppetry also attracted the attention of sound media innovators in the Weimar era. Simon credits radio pioneer Hans Flesch (1896–1945), the artistic director of Radio Frankfurt, for encouraging her puppet broadcasts. As a part of Radio Frankfurt, the most famously avant-garde and innovative of Germany’s nine regional stations, Simon played an important role in the history of German broadcasting by translating her Kasperle plays for the airwaves and pioneering new models of audience engagement. [Fig. 5.5]



Fig. 5.5: Tabiphoto, photograph of Liesel Simon with her Kasperl puppet and the Südwestfunk microphone, from *Künstler am Rundfunk: Ein Taschenalbum der Zeitschrift "Der Deutsche Rundfunk"* (Berlin: Rothgiesser & Diesig AG, 1932), 69.

One of Simon's innovations in radio puppetry was to make the show interactive like the live performance, albeit in different ways. She wrote: "Beim richtigen, uralten klassischen Kasperltheater spielen nicht nur die Puppen, sondern jeder einzelne Zuschauer spielt mit."<sup>14</sup> Through her radio programs, she discovered that children could become just as invested in the imaginative world of the Kasperl *stories* as they were in the physical puppets. In an article about her experience with Kasperl on the radio published in a broadcasting trade journal, she wrote: "Diese Einfühlung in die Kindesseele hatte ich durch jahrelanges Kasperlespiel gewonnen. Rein erzählerisch hatte ich zu Anfang den Kindern den Kasperle durchs Mikrophon nahegebracht."<sup>15</sup> But instead of focusing exclusively on the rapid-fire performer-audience repartee, the interactivity with radio was different. Children were so enamored with her Kasperle that they illustrated the radio programs themselves, and sent the pictures with letters to the station: "Nach einer Radiostunde, in der ich vom Kasperle und seiner Frau erzählt hatte, erhielt ich eine Reihe von bunten Zeichnungen, in denen alle Vorgänge, die ich am Mikrophon in Worten geschildert hatte, plastisch-bildhaft widergegeben waren."<sup>16</sup> Simon was sophisticated regarding the features of different media and developed her own vocabulary to describe what she was doing: *optisches Theater* for conventional hand puppetry, and *Rundfunk Kasperle* for the radio broadcasts. She did not call one "puppetry" and the other *Hörspiel* (radio play), since each had aspects of both.

In some cases, each was both simultaneously: some performances with puppets in front of a live audience were broadcast over the airwaves, and thus the interactivity between puppet and children was broadcast, too. The *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* reported on the first children's visit to the radio station in 1926 for a new puppet broadcast of *Das tapfere Schneiderlein* starring Kasperle.<sup>17</sup> [Fig. 5.6] It was so successful, the radio station hosted children again. Newspaper reviews from the *Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung* and the *Volkstimme*

*Frankfurt am Main*, both from March 9, 1927, describe a presentation of the Kasperle-ized fairy tale *Rotkäppchen*. One reviewer writes: “Die Teilnahme und Mitwirkung der Kinder war ebenso lebhaft wie auch bei dem letzten Auftreten im Dezember. Davon werden sich auch alle überzeugt haben, die die Hörer [*sic*] ihres Radioapparates auf die Ohren gesetzt hatten.”<sup>18</sup> The interaction would have also served as a kind of model for radio listening, inviting young hearers to imagine themselves as active participants in the storytelling, thus reinforcing the interactive dimension of puppetry so important to Simon. Kasperle was already known to most kids living in areas with radio reception, so children brought an image of the puppet to the stories they heard. Even if the specific Kasperle from Simon’s stage was new, the stock character was well enough established that they understood who the mischief-maker was. One journalist writing for the *Frankfurter General-Anzeiger* in 1927, borrowing the patterns of puppet speech in his review, wrote: “Einmal ist der Kasperl ja eine im Kindergehirn an bevorzugter Stelle schon plazierte [*sic*] Figur. Die kleinen wissen ja, wie er aussieht.”<sup>19</sup> Such broadcasts with live audiences were entertaining, but they were also a kind of coaching for new radio audiences, using a familiar face to introduce the norms of a new medium.

## Kinderbesuch im Rundfunkhaus

Tripp, trapp, tripp, trapp . . . halte es am Sonntag- nachmittag im Treppenhaus des Postfachamts wider. Tausend und mehr Kinderbeinchen waren dort in Bewegung, um die vier hohen Treppen zu erklimmen, die zum großen Vortragsaal der Rundfunkgesellschaft führen. „Zum Kasperle“ hand auf dem Wegeläuter unten am Tore, der die kleine Gesellschaft in den Saal wies, alle Liesel Simons' Münchener Kasperle-Theater in zwei Vorstellungen ein neues Stück zur Erstaufführung brachte. „Das tapfere Schneiderlein“ hieß es, und war so recht ein Stück nach dem Wunsche und aus dem Herzen der Kinder. Was war Kasperle doch für ein gewitzter Burche! Der gab's der bösen Weilerin gehörig drauf. Und wie machte er sich über sie lustig. Dadurch hatte er die ganze kleine Zuhörerschaft gleich von vornherein auf seiner Seite. Wenn er sich dann brüstete, er habe sieben erschlagen, so tat es seinem Helbentum keinen Abbruch, daß es nur sieben Fliegen waren, die er erschlug. Kasperle wußte die Kinder immer auf seine

Seite zu bringen. Und als er bei den Riefen war und es fertig brachte, daß diese sich gegenseitig totschlugen, fanden seine Zuhörer es ganz in der Ordnung, daß Kasperle sich selbst das Verdienst zuschrieb, die Riefen erschlagen zu haben, denn als darauf angeklagt des Königs ein Ritter dem Kasperle dieses Helbentum freitig maden und für sich in Anspruch nehmen wollte, schrieb eine helle Kinderstimme im schönsten frankfurterisch entrüstet in den Saal: „Liesebeudel, Liesebeudel, Liesebeudel!“ Die Aufführung unter Frau Liesel Simons' Leitung war müttergütig, das verwendete Puppenmaterial prächtig. Nach Schluß jeder Vorstellung fand eine Verteilung kleiner Grammschokolade-Geschenken statt, die den Kindern sehr willkommen war. Ein Extravergnügen bereitete zuguterletzt noch die Schriftleitung der SR Zeit denjenigen Kindern, die in der Sondernummer „Der Rundfunk im Kindermund“ abgedruckt worden waren, indem sie ihnen allerhand schönes und nützliches Spielzeug überreichen ließ. Die Freude darüber bei diesen Kindern war groß. Wir haben einen Teil der Kinderbesucher im Bilde festgehalten und bringen das Bild auf dieser Seite zum Abdruck.



Kasperle erzählt.



Die Casseler Kinder besuchen Dr. Bloch im Sender.

Freude darüber bei diesen Kindern war groß. Wir haben einen Teil der Kinderbesucher im Bilde festgehalten und bringen das Bild auf dieser Seite zum Abdruck.

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Bilder von den Frankfurter Aufnahmen (es sind noch einige andere wie abgedruckt vorhanden) können vom Atelier N. u. C. Heß, Börsenstraße 2, Bilder von der Casseler Aufnahme vom Atelier F. Gebhardt bezogen werden.



Nach der Gabenverteilung an die Frankfurter Rundfunkkinder durch die SR Zeit.

Fig. 5.6: Article about a children's visit to the radio station, with images of Kasperle's audience. *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 2, no. 12 (March 21, 1926): 5.

While there is no surviving film footage of her live hand puppet shows, and she did not publish scripts like her colleague Max Jacob, a few of Simon's radio broadcasts were recorded and turned into gramophone records. Early radio was mostly live, as recording technologies were still relatively young, so the majority of programs went unrecorded. But it is a sign of Simon's popularity and success that multiple plays were documented as 78s. Released between 1928 and 1929 on the Polydor and Grammophon labels, the recordings were available on the commercial market for families to purchase, and were also used by radio stations for (re)broadcasts.<sup>20</sup> The release of her 78s coincided with the year she changed the title of her puppet theater company to include her own name, and were part of her innovative cross-media development of puppetry. But their importance is more than symbolic: as an archival resource, they provide vivid examples of the signature Kasperle she performed.

One can presume that the most successful shows were selected for recording, especially since a number of the recorded plays (*Frau Holle*, *Die drei Wünsche*, and *Rumpelstilzchen*) were part of her standard repertoire for stage as well.<sup>21</sup> The recordings likely represent original material created by Simon, as they were published as 78s with the name of her theater printed on the label. [Fig. 5.7] Although there are other archival documents indicating that she frequently experimented with the scripts and plays of other puppeteers for radio—just as she interpreted the scripts of von Pocci earlier in her career—the audio of such performances appears to never have been captured. In the 1930s she adapted the plays of her puppeteer colleague Jacob for radio; in a letter from July 1931 typed on “Liesel Simon Kasperl-Theater” letterhead, Simon informs Jacob that she has reworked two of his Kasper plays for radio and invites him to listen.<sup>22</sup> The correspondence indicates that she briefly put her own spin on the Hohnsteiner Kasper character for broadcast. But despite her broad range of influences, programs featuring material created by other puppeteers were never recorded—only her own plays.



Fig. 5.7: Liesel Simon with Kasperle puppet and record, ca. 1928. Simon Family Collection, Quito, Ecuador. Frankfurter-personenlexikon.de.

Listening to the recorded programs, it is easy to hear how children became so engrossed in the stories. Simon's voice is lively and gentle, and Kasperle, voiced by a male actor, sounds slightly nasal and mischievous. Both actors often sound like they are smiling. The interactivity essential to Simon's vision of puppetry is modeled within the radio programs themselves, even in these studio-recorded performances without a live audience. In the radio drama *Kasperl und die Kasperltante* (1929), for example, the exchange between Kasperl and his listener is presented as Kasperl asking Tante Liesel for a story, and him offering to tell her one in return. The tale she tells Kasperl is a simple rhyme—introducing a poetic texture and creating auditory interest with its quick rhythm—punctuated by the sound of the puppet's laughter. “Es war einmal ein Mann, der hat nen'nassen Schwamm. [laughter] Der Schwamm war ihm zu nass, da ging er auf die Gass. [laughter] Die Gass war ihm zu kalt, da ging er in den Wald. [laughter] Der Wald war ihm zu grün, da ging er nach Berlin.”<sup>23</sup> The story could have continued, if not for Kasperl's interruption, a silly question in the course of a rhyme: “Ja, warum den gerade nach Berlin, da sind doch schon genügend Leute?” In the story Kasperl tells in return, he is the protagonist (Tante Liesel asks for a true story!) and instead of going into a city, village, or the woods, Kasperl floats above it all on a flying rainbow soap bubble. A hunter, a bird's nest, and a giant strawberry are part of the tale, but we also get a glimpse of Kasperl's pointy hat and big nose, and his interaction with little birds: “Und die haben mir gleich an meiner Zipfelmütze herumgepiekt, und an meiner Nase geknabbert.” The story is ultimately about Kasperl's bravery, but it is also revealed to be an invention. Despite being caught fibbing by Liesel, the program concludes with the sound of both aunt and puppet laughing.

It was a regular stock setup for the radio puppet shows: Tante Liesel, the *Märchentante* (fairy godmother), and Kasperl tell each other stories. Kasperl interrupts, a misunderstanding is introduced, and eventually Kasperl's story is revealed to be untrue or an exaggeration—but nobody is sore about it. The radio play *Schlaraffenland* begins with this type of exchange between Tante Liesel and Kasperl: “Wenn du brav und ganz still bist, erzähl dich dir eine schöne Geschichte vom Schlaraffenland. Setz dich auf meinen Schoß und pass auf!”<sup>24</sup> There are no sound effects, music, or songs in this short narrative about a marzipan mountain in a candy land with gingerbread houses, chocolate cars, and vanilla ice cream snow. Kasperl is so excited by the vision, he confesses he likes marzipan even more than sausages! The success of the radio play rests on its fanciful and childlike vision of a sweet world. It is a comforting and peaceful image of plenty. In another play, *Die drei Wünsche*, the dialogue between Kasperl and Liesel reminds listeners what it was like to eat nothing but potatoes and wish for other delicacies and abundances.<sup>25</sup> *Schlaraffenland* and *Die drei Wünsche* were broadcast in 1928 and 1929 (at least in their recorded form), and one can imagine how such stories might have resonated with audiences who had experienced some of the hardships of hyperinflation a few years earlier. For other younger children, the tale would certainly have been a treat just the same.

Kasperl's bravery is a theme in a number of the tales, including puppet adaptations of the stories *Kasperl rettet Hänsel und Gretel* (1929), *Rotkäppchen* (1928), and *Rumpelstilzchen* (1928).<sup>26</sup> Although her puppet shows were sanitized of innuendo and obscenity, they retain the violence and gore of a Grimm tale. It was common for Simon to put her own Kasperl spin on traditional fairy tales where the puppet's fearless intervention saves the day, but she never does away with slapstick. Kasperl confronts a witch, hacks a wolf's stomach open, and whacks Rumpelstilzchen. The sound of a beating is often the climax of the dramatic action. Simon and

other actors do different voices to represent multiple characters within the same play, at times sounding quite sinister, an effect heightened by the contrast with Liesel's kind voice or Kasperl's easygoing attitude. Other artificial sound effects are introduced to establish a specific setting in these fairy-tale adaptations. When in the woods, for example, birds tweet in the background, and a gong represents a change in location. Some fairy tales conclude with a Kasperl song: "Wenn das Kasperl' Bratwurst sieht, kriegt es immer Appetit, jeden Tag ein Fass voll Bier, hei, das wird ein Leben hier!"<sup>27</sup> The song tempers some of the more frightening moments of the broadcast or marks a return to a calm and cheerful state after an agitating but comic moment of violence.

Kasperl is particularly brave—and especially clever—when it comes to outwitting the police. True to the traditional fairground stock characters, Simon's Kasperl is confronted by an incompetent police officer in *Kasperl und der Polizist* (1929). Like a radio equivalent of a run-in with a Keystone Cop, Kasperl's literal answers, puns, and violence reveal the ineptitude of a figure ostensibly representing rule and law. Kasperl is played by the usual, nasal male actor, but the policeman sounds like Liesel doing a mocking, authoritative man's voice. In fact, part of the humor is that the listener can vaguely discern that the macho figure is actually voiced by a woman doing an impression. Kasperl addresses the police officer, who has been looking for the puppet for some time, as "Herr Polizei, super, Oberpolizist." Extracting basic personal information becomes the driver of the play's humorous but simple plot: evade the policeman. When the cop tries to take control, Kasperl obeys while thwarting any effort of being reined in: "Lass deine dummen Witze! Also . . . Geboren?" "Ja, natürlich bin ich geboren. Sonst wäre ich doch nicht auf der Welt."<sup>28</sup> *Wache* (guard) rhymes with *Lache* (laugh) as Kasperl prepares to attack the cop, complete with slapstick sound effects, followed by a song: "Der Polizist hat mich

nicht gekriegt, das Kasperl' hat gesiegt." The play is a compact audio version of *the* quintessential Kasperl puppet scenario.

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From the perspective of our media landscape today, the radio can seem antiquated, and it can be a challenge to imagine what a technological revolution it was in the 1920s, especially given how fresh Simon's work still sounds (despite a few old-fashioned turns of phrase). But radio audiences were brand new and rapidly growing in number. Early broadcasting, including children's programming, was always trying to cultivate new listeners. In 1926, the year Simon began her *Rundfunk Kasperle*, radio was still emerging in Weimar Germany. Entertainment radio only began in October of 1923, and the number of radio subscribers grew from one hundred thousand in 1924, to two million in 1928, and eventually to more than four million in 1932.<sup>29</sup> Other radio programs set out not only to introduce children to the new medium, but also to explain it without requiring a field trip to the radio station. One of the most fascinating radio plays in this vein was written by the philosopher and media theorist Walter Benjamin. And the character he used for this introduction was, of course, Kasperl.

Benjamin contributed to *Die Stunde der Jugend*, the very same radio program that featured Liesel Simon's Kasperl. From 1927 until 1933, he wrote and presented approximately eighty broadcasts for children's radio. Although he was later somewhat dismissive of these works, claiming he undertook the assignment only for needed income, there was one piece of which he was particularly proud: *Radau um Kasperl*.<sup>30</sup> The radio puppet show was first broadcast in Frankfurt in 1932 and later rebroadcast on Western German Radio Cologne the

same year. We don't yet know whether Simon and Benjamin had direct, personal contact, but they were both airing children's programming on the same radio station during the same years. It seems likely that he was familiar with her work, not only because he wrote his own *Rundfunkkasperle*, but also because he drew directly on her concept of radio puppetry as an interactive medium. The broadcasting announcement in the *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* includes the following address to listeners: "Uebrigens [*sic*] sind Kasperles Erlebnisse in diesem Hörspiel, wie schon der Titel sagt, mit Radau verbunden. Die Kinder werden gebeten, zu erraten, was die hierbei auftretenden Geräusche bedeuten und ihre Meinung darüber dem Südwestfunk mitzuteilen."<sup>31</sup> The editors of *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* seem skeptical about the instructions given—"während der überlieferte Text ein solches 'Feedback' nicht zu kennen scheint"<sup>32</sup>—but children may have indeed written to the radio station in response to the show. After all, children wrote to Tante Liesel and her Kasperle at the radio station quite regularly.

There are a number of similarities between Simon's and Benjamin's puppet radio broadcasts beyond the dates and circumstances of their production. In both cases, the puppet is a rambunctious troublemaker attempting to avoid capture; he answers questions from authority figures overly literally and interacts playfully with children over the course of the drama. There is a strong slapstick element with both puppets, but neither author brings in obscenity or sexual innuendo. But beyond these plot points—some of which are common with stage puppetry from the period—the pitch, intensity, and pacing of Kasperl's speech in Benjamin's 1932 drama resembles the voice of Kasperle from Simon's radio plays. Both are nasal and highly expressive. At the same time there is an audible difference: Benjamin's Kasperl has a notable Munich accent, while Simon's Kasperle's accent is much less pronounced. But this too suggests a shared reference between the two radio performers, as both Kasperles allude to Munich (recall that

Simon's puppet theater was originally called *Erstes Münchner Kasperltheater*). Although Benjamin did not perform von Pocci scripts, as Simon did—*Radau um Kasperl* was his only radio puppet performance—the philosopher was a fan of Papa Schmidt (the founder of Germany's first permanent puppet theater and venue of Kasper Larifari), and familiar with the von Pocci Kasper.<sup>33</sup>

Much of Benjamin's work for radio, performed live in Berlin and Frankfurt, was not recorded, and only manuscript versions have been passed down. The sole exception is *Radau um Kasperl*, of which two substantial audio fragments survive.<sup>34</sup> Although they do not feature his voice (there are no recordings of his voice), they still offer insight into the philosopher's Kasperl character as well as his specific understanding of the new medium of radio. The aforementioned Munich accent is one important clue about Benjamin's puppetry sources, but it is also only one of several accents heard in the recording. A lion keeper has a strong Berlin accent. A group of children have neutral accents, such that the listener mostly notices their young voices and their truth-seeing ability. The mix of accents suggests no specific geographical setting—not from the sound of it—adding a universalizing dimension to the puppet show. Radio, a disembodied medium, can also traverse the limits of a specific place not only by repeat performances in different cities, but also by virtue of its audio mixing.

Of course, being able to detect and interpret the subtleties of different German accents might have been beyond the capacity of small children. But Benjamin had a double listenership in mind—both children and adults—and his puppet does more than bring chaos. Kasperl introduces the radio to kids at the same time that he presents philosophical reflections on the medium for adults. When the show played in Cologne as a repeat broadcast, it ran in the after-school time slot from 4:20 to 5 pm as part of the station's usual youth hour. But when it

originally aired in Frankfurt, *Radau um Kasperl* was a bit longer, and heard from 7:45 to 8:45 pm, past most children's bedtimes. Reviewers from the period noted that dual audience: Karl Zimmermann, reporting for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, wrote: "Es ist zu vermuten, daß, da die Sendung am Abend gebracht wurde, auch die Erwachsenen gehört haben – zu ihrem Pläsier und zu ihrem Nutzen."<sup>35</sup> Benjamin is best known today as a philosopher and media critic, one especially interested in the potentials of new technologies for mass communication. His reflections on radio were relayed not only as philosophical tracts (such as his 1930 text "Reflexionen zum Rundfunk," for example) but also took the form of a Kasperl puppet show for radio.<sup>36</sup> For contemporary readers familiar with his work, many of the themes in the radio play will be familiar from his writings for adults: technology, mass media, language, and translation, and their political potential.

*Radau um Kasperl* introduces the potent feature of radio at the outset of the show: disembodied sound. Opening with a cacophony of honking and whistling ships, the puppet's first line, "Das is aber mal ein nebliger Morgen," tells listeners that the characters within the play's narrative cannot see their surroundings any more than the radio hearer can see the players.<sup>37</sup> Kasperl has been sent by his wife Puschi to buy a fish, and is on his way to the market when he bumps into Herr Mauschmidt, the radioman. The "berühmten Freund der Kinder" is not immediately identified by Mauschmidt because the puppet, lost in the fog, is just a voice without body or clothing, but he is nonetheless able to make himself recognizable to listeners with obtuse and comical answers to the radioman's questions. Mauschmidt is eager to put the puppet on the air, and Kasperl initially resists because he does not understand the radio: "Kasperl, du weißt ja nichts, was der Rundfunk ist. Folge mir auf dem Fuße und ich zweifle nicht, bald wirst du anderen Sinnes werden!"<sup>38</sup> This establishes the main goal of the broadcast—

to introduce the radio and get Kasperl on the air—and kicks off the action of the play. Extending beyond merely a child's introduction (which it does masterfully) the radio drama also presents the positive and negative implications of a mass medium that broadcasts disembodied sound into private homes.

With both simplicity and sophistication, Kasperl demonstrates the radio's potential as a subversive medium and how quickly it can be coopted. The rebel puppet follows Herr Mauschmidt to the radio station and uses the airwaves to broadcast his anger at Seppel. [Fig. 5.8] It becomes an occasion for the puppet to speak his uncensored frustration. The radio station visit introduces child listeners to radio production with a behind-the-scenes peek (and may have been especially engaging to a Frankfurt audience familiar with visits to Simon's live-on-air Kasperle radio shows). Kasperl's trip to the station upsets the authorities, and his on-air exposure reveals the puppet's location to the police (they phone the radio station). Kasperl goes on the run and visits a number of different child-pleasing locales in the course of the chase: a train station, a fair, a zoo. The episode with Herr Mauschmidt launches a familiar stock scenario, but it also reminds adult listeners that despite the promises of a disembodied voice, the airwaves were neither totally anonymous nor free.

The surviving audio fragments from Kasperl's adventures at the fairground and zoo feature vivid examples of early radio's experimentation with different kinds of sound effects. The *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung*'s invitation to listeners to send best guesses about the sources of the noises explicitly drew attention to this key *Radau* aspect of the performance. The noises in the play are more than just technological flourishes or gimmicks—they also constitute an important part of the story. In comparison with the recordings of Simon's radio plays, *Radau um Kasperl* is far more innovative from a technical standpoint in part because it uses sound

effects as more than background or audio cues for a narrated action. At the fairground, for example, Kasperl visits a tent for an exchange with a supernatural spirit called Lipsuslapsus. The voice of the spirit is essentially a distorted echo, and Kasperl's questions about life are answered with humorously truncated repetitions of the final parts of his queries. Imagine the scene as a kind of auditory fun-house hall of mirrors. On one register, it is a classic case of the puppet's clever stupidity, but on a different register, it demonstrates how quickly words can be twisted and rebroadcast as misleading advice. The very premise of a tent with a disembodied spirit voice is itself a kind of meta-reference to the radio within a radio broadcast. Through a phonic contortion, the radio's special effects create new meaning out of previously heard words. Concern with language and deception through dishonest transmissions are a more explicit theme in Kasperl's encounter at the zoo, where he tells children that he is studying an animal language, when he is actually there to steal a fish (since he missed his chance at the market). [Fig. 5.9] His animal-to-children translations are, of course, an invention, but only the children can see through his fib: "Ist ja Schwindel. . . . Alles Schwindel! Schäm dich, Kasperl! Pfi, Kasperl!" In this Kasperl play, twisting words, mistranslation, and the vulnerability of language are all explored through sound effects as a way to present the ambivalent political potential of the technology. Using Simon's idea of interactive radio and calling on listeners to write letters to the radio station to describe the different sounds was an invitation for audiences to think critically about what they were hearing.



Fig. 5.8: Kasperl's voice actor at the Südwestfunk microphone, from an announcement for *Radau um Kasperl* in *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 8, no. 11 (March 13, 1932): A20, reproduced in Thomas Küpper and Anja Nowak, eds., *Rundfunkarbeiten Walter Benjamin Werke und Nachlaß* 9.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2017), 922.

Fig. 5.9: Kasperl's voice actor at the zoo with lions, from an announcement for *Radau um Kasperl* in *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 8, no. 11 (March 13, 1932): A20, reproduced in Thomas Küpper and Anja Nowak, eds., *Rundfunkarbeiten Walter Benjamin Werke und Nachlaß* 9.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2017), 922.

The most ominous warning about radio comes at the play's conclusion, when Herr Maulschmidt arrives at Kasperl's home and delivers payment for his radio performance. In this final encounter with the radioman, the puppet learns that a secret microphone has been placed under his bed and his adventures through the city have been recorded without his knowledge. In her introduction to a book of English-language translations of Benjamin's radio broadcasts, Lecia Rosenthal writes: "Perhaps the most unnerving, ambivalent presentation of radio's range and uncertain political import comes in *Much Ado about Kasper* [*Radau um Kasperl*], where Benjamin turns the radio into an apparatus not only of resistance to official channels of power and knowledge, but also of surveillance and unauthorized listening-in." The agile microphone is capable of entering spaces typically considered private, out of hearing range. "The mobile

location of radio—including its origin and means of recording transmission—not only expands the radio’s range of hearing . . . but also introduces the possibility of stolen speech and unauthorized radio impression. The voice is subject to new and unforeseen forms of expropriation.”<sup>39</sup> By the end of the play, Kasperl has learned what radio is and made a thousand Marks in the bargain. But the takeaway about radio’s political possibilities is ambiguous. It is a happy ending with bleak implications about radio’s potential for misuse.

And misused it was: less than five months after the Cologne broadcast of *Radau um Kasperl*, when Hitler came to power in January 1933, half of all German households had a radio. The Weimar government had insisted that the media be state controlled—lest a single political party or private entity own its own channel—and as an unanticipated outcome of this, the radio became a powerful, one-way propaganda tool under the Nazi dictatorship.<sup>40</sup> The avant-garde artists who had once produced innovative and experimental content for the airwaves now faced persecution. Walter Benjamin was only heard on the radio twice in January 1933, and fled Germany in March of that year.<sup>41</sup> If his attitude toward the radio was ambiguous in 1932, his feelings toward film and photography were more hopeful in 1935 when he wrote his now-famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” But his problems were much greater than the end of his career as a reluctant radio broadcaster. The situation for Jews in Europe was not improving, and the philosopher did not survive World War II: he committed suicide in 1940 after his passage out of occupied France was blocked at the Spanish border.

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Benjamin also wrote a short piece about puppetry and its history. He was sensitive to the cultural differences between puppet shows in different countries and in changing contexts—even within Germany. In a different radio segment, *Berliner Puppentheater*, he noted the connection between puppetry and Christianity in the German tradition. Broadcast on Radio Berlin, it aired on December 7, 1929, not long before Christmas, and Benjamin commented on the timing: “Da kam der Kasperl im Winter. Um zwar genau um diese Zeit, kurz vor Weihnachten.”<sup>42</sup> He also discusses *Theatrum Mundi* puppetry in this piece as being different in form and style from Kasperl shows, and mentions its Christian roots as well. But the Berlin version of *Theatrum Mundi* is secular, and Benjamin makes a point of noting this distinction from the south German custom: “Sie [*Theatrum mundi*] ist eigentlich ein berlinisches und weltliches Gegenstück zu den süddeutschen frommen Krippen.”<sup>43</sup> Even though Munich was the better city for puppetry, as Benjamin admits in his opening sentence of the broadcast, in Berlin it was possible to see miniaturized puppet life, and see it as a secular tradition. Although in older times, or in exotic places like the South Sea Islands, people may have regarded puppets as gods, as Benjamin observes, in early twentieth-century Berlin puppetry is grounded and earthly—even as he describes an adapted biblical scene.

The biblical scene that Benjamin narrates to illustrate his concept of *Theatrum Mundi* is tweaked from its original version to capture the impertinent power of puppetry, but at the same time, it deals with a resolutely Jewish issue obliquely, as a secular story. It is one of the philosopher’s two concluding vignettes from *Berliner Puppentheater*. Benjamin describes a scene from the Book of Daniel about an encounter between King Nebuchadnezzar and three men who refuse to bow to a golden idol built by this Babylonian ruler. For their rejection of the false god, Nebuchadnezzar has them thrown into a fiery oven. In Benjamin’s retelling of the tale, there

is no mention of the golden idol that precipitated the order of immolation, and the scene begins with three men standing in the furnace but unscathed by the heat, not even sweating. Despite the evil king's escalations and taunts, the men sing a Mozart tune in response (in transliterated Berlin dialect) "Üb immer Treu und Redlichkeit bis an dein *kühles* Jrab [*sic*] [Grab],"<sup>44</sup> and one even tells the king to shut up. The Nebuchadnezzar reference makes the scene recognizable as a specific episode from the Old Testament, but the religious aspect has been erased, along with the men's salvation by an angel and God's vindication after this miraculous feat. This scene shows puppets speaking truth to power, and getting away with it, in an earthly realm. It is, indeed, a secular story in Benjamin's retelling, and a salty one at that.

Benjamin's representation of puppetry in Germany as a secular practice is telling. Puppetry was not at odds with Jewish culture, despite its popularity at Christmas. For German Jewish artists, creating puppets was not an act of idolatry—a sin alluded to but not explicitly mentioned in Benjamin's telling of the Nebuchadnezzar story—but an artistic act like any other in Germany during the period. Benjamin was one of many Jews in Germany engaged with puppets and made a point of mentioning their secular status. Many such artists have already been discussed in the course of this study, and indeed, Jewish puppeteers and doll makers played important roles in the history of German puppetry. In chapter 1, the Swiss Jewish artist Sasha von Sinner (later Sasha Morgenthaler, 1893–1975) created the costumes for Paul Klee's (1879–1940) first set of puppets and went on to become a professional doll maker herself. [Fig. 5.10] One of Klee's Jewish students at the Bauhaus, Marianne Ahlfeld-Heymann (1905–2003), who described Felix Klee's (1907–1990) puppet performances in her autobiography, also created puppets as part of her artistic practice, including one representing Paul Klee. [Fig. 5.11] The *Mechanisch tanzende Figur* (ca. 1920) described in chapter 2 was made by the Hungarian-born

Dada and De Stijl artist Vilmos Huszár, who was Jewish. An article published in London in 1950 by the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain promoting an exhibition of Lotte Pritzel's dolls noted that her avant-garde aesthetic and "half-Jewish origin" put her at odds with the Nazis.<sup>45</sup> And of course, there was Kasperl media pioneer Liesel Simon. These Jewish German artists encountered puppetry in the course of their creative careers and took possession of it as an art form with tremendous originality.



Fig. 5.10: Sasha Morgenthauer with one of her dolls, New York, late 1960s. Stefan Biffiger, ed., *Sasha-Puppen: Sasha Morgenthauer* (Bern, Switzerland: Benteli Verlag, 1999), 76.

Fig. 5.11: Marianne Ahlfeld-Heymann, puppet portrait of Paul Klee, 1925. Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

Puppets were not part of traditional Ashkenazi Jewish practice prior to the twentieth century. For more strictly observant Jews, the interdiction against graven images might have actively deterred artists from this form of creative expression.<sup>46</sup> But other, nonreligious factors surrounding the circumstances of puppetry performance in Europe may have played a more

decisive role in shaping a negative view of this art form in Jewish life. In the only scholarly account of Jewish puppetry as a modern practice—an article about a Yiddish puppetry duo on New York’s Lower East Side in the 1920s called Modicut—historian Edward Portnoy theorizes that puppets were not part of *shtetl* life not only because of the proscription against idols, but also because of the frequency with which anti-Semitic representations of Jews appeared in traveling *Petryuska* (a Russian Kasper cousin) puppet theaters.<sup>47</sup> [Fig. 5.12] Given that Jews were also often cast as villains in nineteenth-century fairground puppet shows in Germany, a parallel situation would have likely held throughout the German-speaking world as well, making puppets unappealing to Jewish performers.



Fig. 5.12: Modicut puppeteers Yosl Cutler, Bessie Maud, and Zuni Maud, with puppets on tour in the USSR, 1932. Collection of Philip Cutler. Edward Portnoy, “Modicut Puppet Theater: Modernism, Satire, and Yiddish Culture,” in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 107.

Although there are no Jewish religious rituals involving puppets, it is nonetheless possible that in certain communities, from time to time, puppets may have been performed during Purim, a Jewish holiday commemorating the defeat of Haman's attempt to annihilate the Jews with a reading of the Book of Esther. A festival of joy, feasting, and partying hard, it is customary to celebrate with a masquerade and a bender. The tone of the holiday is carnivalesque reverie, and comic *Purimspiel* plays (with or without puppets) are usually performed. In keeping with the spirit of inversion and irreverence, puppetry may have been an offshoot or the outgrowth of a ritual burning of a Haman effigy, a practice that came in and out of fashion for assorted historical reasons. Puppetry performance during Purim is the kind of exception that proves the rule about its rarity in Jewish religious life; both despite and because of the interdiction against graven images and the prevalence of anti-Semitic puppet characters, that puppetry might have been performed squares with the playful and satirical values of the holiday's inversions. "Might" is an important qualifier, since there is no definitive documentation of Purim puppet shows in the Pale of Settlement (the area of western Imperial Russia where Jews were allowed to settle) or in Germany, but there are strong tradition and performance-based clues, such as the fact that the New York Yiddish puppeteers of Modicut parodied a *Purimspiel* in puppet form during the course of their eight-year existence.<sup>48</sup> In Germany specifically, there is a further hint that puppetry may have been associated with Purim celebrations: Goethe's marionette play from 1769, *Das Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern*, which includes a parody of the Esther story. Since puppetry is often an improvisatory art form, no scripts for such early Jewish plays exist. But outside of the topsy-turvy, drunken Purim celebrations, puppetry in Jewish cultural life does not make much of an appearance before the twentieth century.

German Jewish puppetry—puppet shows with explicitly Jewish content—began in the Weimar Republic. No longer relegated to Purim’s state of licentiousness, puppetry became a vehicle for artists to express aspects of their cultural heritage and a fun way to celebrate Jewish holidays. Part of this development was a function of the larger puppetry revival in Germany at the time. Puppetry was evolving in more sophisticated directions in the early twentieth century—the construction of permanent puppet theaters, scripts targeted for young audiences, expanded understandings of puppetry by avant-gardists, the professionalization of the field, experimentation with new media—and different avenues opened up for the medium’s potential. It was no longer simply fairground folk entertainment with anti-Semitic currents, but a form of modern art as well. Artists, like Benjamin, also regarded puppets apart from Christmas. Such changes may have inspired some Jewish performers to see the medium in a new light.

Jewish acculturation and assimilation presented communities with the challenge of preserving Jewish traditions in an increasingly integrated Germany, and modern art forms, including puppetry, were sometimes seen as a partial solution. An article in the *Israelitisches Familienblatt* in 1932 explicitly invited educators to use puppetry to foster Jewish self-understanding. The author makes an example of a Hanukkah puppet show retelling the story of the Maccabees performed by the Berlin Jugendbund Kadima: “Allgemein gesprochen zeigt dies Beispiel von der erfolgreichen Kasperle-Aufführung, daß bei weitem noch nicht alle erzieherischen Mittel, die dazu dienen könnten, dem Kind so früh wie möglich jüdische Gehalt so einprägsam als möglich zu machen, erschöpft sind.”<sup>49</sup> The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah tends to fall around the same time as Christmas (the Hebrew holiday calendar is lunar, while Christian festivals follow solar cycles). The idea of a special Hanukkah puppet show may have been partially in imitation of the Christmas tradition, but instead of presenting puppet shows with

Christian stories or themes, here a traditional Jewish holiday story was adapted for the puppet stage featuring Kasper (who is not a character in the traditional Hanukkah story). The Maccabees were a Jewish rebel army that took control of Judah, allowing for the rededication of the Second Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and their martial victory is part of what Hanukkah celebrates.

Although the puppet performance was proclaimed an enormous success, the unnamed reviewer does not describe the content in any detail. Nonetheless, this Hanukkah puppet show led the writer to draw the following conclusion: “Es darf eben kein Mittle ungenutzt belieben und darf kein Anlaß ungenutzt verstreichen, wenn es sich darum handelt, jüdischen Kinder jüdische Wissensgehalte zu Selbstverständlichkeiten zu machen.”<sup>50</sup> Other youth groups published puppet plays of biblical stories, for instance puppet retellings of Noah, Joseph, and his brother, or David and Goliath.<sup>51</sup> A 1923 review of the puppet play publication *Biblische Puppenspiel* by Albert Baer and Käthe Baer-Freyer in *Menorah: Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur* stated: “Sicherlich aber können sie sehr viel dazu beitragen, bei den Kindern die Kenntnis der biblischen Gestalten zu vertiefen.”<sup>52</sup> The filmmaker Julius Pinschewer (who worked with Lotte Reiniger during the Weimar era) also created a silhouette short based on the Passover song “Had Gadya” (“Das Lämmchen” [1930]).<sup>53</sup> Some progressive educators saw puppetry as one way to transmit traditional Jewish cultural knowledge in an increasingly secular Germany.

During the Weimar era, Liesel Simon staged Christmas fairy-tale puppet shows; *Weihnachtsmärchen* were a part of her standard repertoire;<sup>54</sup> and she also performed a special Easter edition of her popular *Rotkäppchen* show as part of a program called *Kasperle und der Osterhase*.<sup>55</sup> But as early as 1930, Simon also performed special puppet shows on Hanukkah for children in Jüdische Wohlfahrtspflege, a welfare organization, much to the delight of the young

audience.<sup>56</sup> By Hanukkah of 1931, it was an extremely popular event: “Fast 400 Kinder waren anwesend. Nach einer Ansprach von Rabbiner Dr. Horovitz wurden die Chanukkah-Lichter entzündet und im Chor ‘Moaus Zur’ [Ma’oz Tzur, a liturgical poem for Hanukkah] gesungen. Sodann ergötzte Frau Liesel Simon die junge Schar mit ihrem Kasperle-Theater und fand damit stürmischen Beifall.”<sup>57</sup> Reports in local Jewish community newspapers about these holiday performances describe the event and the children’s contagious delight at Kasperle’s antics, but do not provide the title of the show or a description of its plot. It is thus difficult to ascertain whether Simon’s Hanukkah puppet shows from the Weimar era presented Jewish themes or subjects—which would have been in keeping with the program described in the paper—or if she performed her usual repertoire for a Jewish public at Hanukkah.

After Hitler’s takeover, Simon continued to perform for Jewish audiences, but her puppetry evolved and new titles began to appear. The documentation of German Jewish puppet performance that exists today is much patchier than the picture we can put together of Nazi propaganda puppetry from the same period: there are no 78s, no film footage, and none of the scripts produced during this period were published. But Simon’s shows were included in performance listings, promoted and reviewed in the Jewish press, and photographed by Jewish photojournalists, and the physical puppets have survived. [Fig. 5.13] Putting together this documentation with what we know of her work from the Weimar era, it is possible to trace the trajectory of Simon’s puppetry practice and see how it evolved during the Nazi dictatorship. There were the obvious adjustments after 1933: Simon no longer made radio appearances, was banned from performing for non-Jewish audiences, and no longer presented Christmas or Easter shows. With a new, exclusively Jewish audience in an anti-Semitic political environment, her

repertoire evolved. In addition to Kasperle's changing tastes—pickles instead of sausages—new stories were added.



Fig. 5.13: Liesel Simon's puppets, photo from 2015. Historisches Museum Frankfurt.

Some of the newly added plays indirectly addressed the political situation of the Jews in Germany or included content that might have been interpreted as relatable in a new way. A report appearing in January 1934 in the *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* describes a Simon puppet show consisting of the two plays *David und Goliath* and *Auf einer einsamen Insel*.<sup>58</sup> The program mixed the serious with the comic, but both are stories of a

puppet's encounter with hostile enemies. The reviewer characterized Simon's interpretation of the biblical story of *David und Goliath* as dramatic; the young Israelite's defeat of the Giant Philistine warrior in battle had been a frequent subject in German puppetry since at least Goethe, a story of success in battle when the odds seem insurmountable.<sup>59</sup> The second play, although not described in too much detail, was an adventure tale in which Kasperle and his friend Seppel play sailors who successfully escape an island of "people eaters." This comic puppet show may have drawn on von Pocci's *Kasperl unter den Wilden* together with a similar Max Jacob play, but the context alone would have given this performance a different tone. The reviewer was familiar with Simon's earlier plays and notes that these performances "gehören zu den amüsantesten und dekorativ wirksamsten ihrer bisherigen Laufbahn."<sup>60</sup> The first play tells the story of a fight, and the second play of flight.

There are enough reports to indicate that not every single show explored political or Jewish subjects, and the documentation suggests that Simon continued her creative experiments with puppetry's varied forms even as restrictions against artists increased.<sup>61</sup> Her puppets provided distraction and escape for her audiences. Interestingly, she staged plays with nonreligious content for Jewish holiday performances, perhaps because of Nazi restrictions against presenting heroic depictions of Jewish unity. On Purim in 1935, for example, Simon directed a shadow puppet production of *Dr. Johann Dolittle und seine Tiere*, an adaptation of the Hugh Lofting story, featuring puppets cut by the doll maker Erna Pinner (1890–1987) and the text reworked by a different author (the puppets were praised, but the overall performance was critiqued in a newspaper review as too long).<sup>62</sup> For Purim the following year, she collaborated with another performer to present a "Kasperltheater ohne Puppen" in the form of a kind of charade.<sup>63</sup> Simon was practiced at puppet shows without puppets from her radio days, but it is

difficult to know what was involved in this specific performance since the article does not offer descriptive detail. But both the shadow puppet show and the pantomime reveal a continuing experimentation with puppetry—the exploration of new repertoire and techniques—despite ever-increasing limitations.



Fig. 5.14: Abraham Pisarek, a children's puppet show during a *Kindernachmittag* event organized by the Jüdische Künstlerhilfe and the Kulturbund in Berlin-Grünwald, 1935. It is unclear if this is a Simon puppet show, or a performance by a different puppeteer. Bildarchiv Pisarek / akg-images.

Some traditions established during the Weimar period continued: during the Third Reich, Simon kept performing shows for children's charities such as the Wohlfahrtspflege.<sup>64</sup> [Fig. 5.14] She also continued to perform special Hanukkah shows, but now for broader Jewish audiences. Specifically, she traveled around Germany and performed for various regional branches of the Jüdischer Kulturbund. The *Jüdischer Kulturbund Berlin Monatsblätter* advertised *Kasperl und die Wunderlampe* as a special guest appearance by Simon in Berlin. [See fig. 5.0] Although the traditional story of Hanukkah features a miracle lamp that burns oil for eight nights (even though

there was only enough sacred oil for a single night), it is unclear if Simon's *Wunderlampe* was a Hanukkah lamp, an Aladdin-inspired genie-producing lamp, or some other magical item. What we do know about this December 1, 1937, production we can glean from photographs shot by the photojournalist Abraham Pisarek: Liesel with her characters and two male puppeteers perform for an audience of stagestruck children, Kasperl confronts his adversary with a feather duster, and Liesel and Kasperle both take a bow. [Figs. 5.15, 5.16, 5.17, 5.18] The ensemble of puppets in the photographs resembles the cast appearing on the front of her Weimar-era Liesel Simon's Kasperl-Theater brochure. The photos present an image of the world that is not too different from a few years earlier, despite the fact that everything was going wrong.



Figs. 5.15–5.16: Abraham Pisarek, Liesel Simon performs for the Kulturbund Berlin, 1937. Bildarchiv Pisarek / akg-images.



Figs. 5.17–5.18: Abraham Pisarek, Liesel Simon performs for the Kulturbund Berlin, 1937. Bildarchiv Pisarek / akg-images.

The photographs also confirm for us that the event took place under the auspices of the Jüdischer Kulturbund in Berlin and correspond with the advertised event, as Abraham Pisarek was one of the organization's principal photographers. Simon performed for the Kulturbund because it was the only show in town: Germany's racial laws mandated that all Jewish performing artists join the Kulturbund, and that Jews who wished to attend the events needed also to be members. Events could only be reviewed in Jewish newspapers. When it was first established in 1933, the organization was called the Kulturbund Deutscher Juden, a title that reflected the fact that its members identified as *Germans* of Jewish origin. The collective was primarily comprised of German Jewish artists who had been part of the cultural scene prior to Hitler's takeover, and these people continued to see themselves as connected to German

audiences by their language and cultural background. After the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935, Nazi authorities ruled that the word “German” must be removed from the group’s title, thus easing their histrionic fears that Jews might constitute their own national minority within Germany, and to galvanize the separation between Jews and Germans. The new name, Jüdischer Kulturbund, added further emphasis to the shifting position of Jews in Germany as well as a sense of the complicated situation for an organization set up to promote Jewish arts in an anti-Semitic political climate.

The Kulturbund originated in Berlin, and eventually its model of organizational and bureaucratic structure spread throughout Germany to different cities and towns with Jewish populations. The former director of Berlin’s municipal opera, Dr. Kurt Singer (1885–1944), negotiated the terms of the Kulturbund with Ministry of Propaganda, SS-Kommandant Hans Hinkel (1901–1960). Hinkel, who served as the head of the Prussian Theater Commission in his role within the SS, had initially been appointed by Goebbels to expel Jewish artists from leading German cultural institutions. Although initially his assignment was carried out informally, the Reich Civil Service law passed in April 1933 made it official: Jews were removed from their positions and were not allowed to collaborate with Aryans onstage. Kurt Singer, together with an opera colleague and a drama critic, submitted a proposal for an all-Jewish theater to the Reich Cultural Chamber that same summer. On July 6, 1933, permission for an all-Jewish theater was granted by Hinkel (also making him Goebbels’s de facto official for Jewish cultural affairs). Singer established the relationships in Berlin, and eventually served as a connector between Jewish artists in other cities with Hinkel’s office. The establishment of the Kulturbund was in every way—chronologically, organizationally, creatively—a direct response to anti-Semitism. It also involved the negotiation, and an attempt to find accommodation, between Jews and Nazis.

It was not a simple blanket allowance for a Jewish theater, as Singer had to procure permissions and protections for every piece of repertoire; nor was it automatic that every German city was permitted its own Kulturbund. The Kulturbund staged not only theatrical plays, but also symphonies and operas, it hosted lectures, it mounted art exhibitions, and in some cases it put on puppet shows. As decisive as Nazi policy was about eliminating Jews from Aryan theater, its approach to determining what could be presented within the Kulturbund was less static, and scripts and scores had to be reviewed by Hinkel and his associates on a case-by-case basis. As Nazi cultural policy took sharper shape, so did directives about what types of content could be performed, but the process was still fraught and unpredictable. In addition, certain satellite Kulturbund groups in different German regions were regarded by local ruling governments slightly differently than they were by Hinkel in Berlin, and different kinds of performances were permitted or excluded. Although theater was a big part of Kulturbund life in Berlin, in the Kulturbund Bayern, for example, lectures and musical concerts were preferentially considered, while theatrical performances were much rarer events.<sup>65</sup> Some of the differences between the various Kulturbunds around Germany were the result of slight variances in policy; in other cases, it was a function of the Jewish community itself—how large or small of a Jewish community was present in a given locale, and what kind of spaces were available for staging performances.

The Jüdischer Kulturbund Bayern offers a particularly interesting example of the kind of specific regional differences that occurred between the different groups. The Bayern group, which included the Munich section in addition to Aschaffenburg, Augsburg, Bad Kissingen, Bamberg, Fürth, Kitzingen, Nürnberg, and Würzburg, was approved by State Minister for Education and Culture Hans Schemm (1891–1935) in February 1934. It was closely modeled on the Kulturbund in Berlin, but pitched by its principal organizer, choir director and conductor

Erich Erck (né Erich Eisner) (1897–1956), as a self-aid organization, a way for unemployed Jews to create work for themselves and generate a bit of income, more than as a cultural association.<sup>66</sup> But more interesting than slight variations in its organization structure is the fact that it maintained its own active marionette theater between 1935 and 1937. Das Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler was a unique collective of artists and actors who performed in Munich for Jewish audiences. Unlike the Kulturbund performances by Liesel Simon, a professional puppeteer, many of the people involved in the puppet troupe were amateurs, although almost everyone involved had been connected to the arts professionally during the Weimar era.

The name of the troupe, Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler, hints at its influences and ambitions. This was a collective that regarded its undertaking not as child's play, but as art. Munich had been a thriving center for puppetry: in addition to being the home of Papa Schmidt and Graf von Pocci, the city was home base for Paul Braun's (1873–1955) Marionettentheater Münchner Künstler. Braun was an artist in close contact with Munich's avant-garde scene, who established his puppet theater to stage marionette performances for sophisticated audiences. His repertoire included von Pocci Kasper plays, but also operas and operettas, along with decisively modern plays written by his literary contemporaries, including Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949). Braun's puppetry shows frequently incorporated parody, political satire, and grotesque figures, representing an attempt to present a modern and artistically rigorous form. Despite the similarity in the theaters' names, Braun himself was not a part of the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler. Although he converted from Judaism to Christianity in 1912 and was considered Jewish according to Nazi racial definitions, he left Germany in 1934 (before the establishment of this puppet troupe).<sup>67</sup> That the name of the

Kulturbund puppet troupe evoked Braun's theater was deliberate: it represented an attempt to place the new theater in a known context, one with a high-art agenda.

The repertoire of the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler also paralleled Braun's roster of puppet shows in telling ways, but diverged slightly in its emphasis on Jewish content. One of the cofounders and organizers, Berthold Wolff (1876–?), described the establishment of the theater in a newspaper article published in the *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*: “In München haben sich eine Handvoll ideal gesinnter Künstler und Private zusammengetan und ein Marionettentheater errichtet, das am 30. Januar an die jüdische Öffentlichkeit treten wird. Nach den Absichten der Theaterleitung soll Schauspiel wie kleine Oper, soweit für das Puppentheater geeignet, gepflegt werden; vor allem Werke entweder jüdischen Milieus oder jüdischer Autoren.”<sup>68</sup> Like Braun's theater, the Kulturbund troupe presented von Pocci works and performances. Operettas and musicals were an integral part of the repertoire, too. A review of the musical *Das Ochsenmenuett* from February 26, 1936, drew an explicit link between the two puppet enterprises: “‘Das Ochsenmenuett’ gehört zu den glücklichsten Darbietung der Künstlerischen Marionettenbühne, die durch Paul Brauns tapfere Arbeit schon eine gute Tradition hat.”<sup>69</sup> Since the founders of the Jewish puppet theater made the realization of Jewish art one of its explicit goals, many of its operettas and dramatic plays were written by Jewish composers and authors, or presented Old Testament stories. Braun had, for instance, presented puppet shows based on a play by the Jewish playwright Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), but the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler developed its own version of Jewish repertoire under the restrictions imposed by the Nazi censors.

Selecting the repertoire for performance in the Kulturbund brought some of the inconsistencies of Nazi censorship policies to the surface. In Berlin, where the Kulturbund stage

was set, Hinkel wanted to restrict Jews from performing “German” plays, while his Nazi colleague, *Reichsdramaturg* Rainer Schlösser (1899–1945), wanted to forbid anything “too Jewish” from the stage. The Nazis had managed to devise a strict codification of rules to determine *who* was Jewish according to the party’s racial theories, but establishing what artworks were Jewish was a separate, convoluted matter. The guidelines were imperfect and confusing. For example, while Hinkel wanted the Kulturbund to present exclusively Jewish plays, he did not want heroic ones with triumphant depictions of the Jewish community. Schlösser’s censorship principles were guided by an unwritten rule that the plays must be distinctively Jewish, but not too Jewish.<sup>70</sup> This foggy notion of Jewish art, however, led to inconsistencies in what was or was not permitted. The music of the Jewish composer Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880), for example, was officially banned in Hitler’s Third Reich, and Schlösser had rejected the application for a performance of his music in Koblenz, but Hinkel later sanctioned the performances of three of his operettas.<sup>71</sup> For the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler, Offenbach’s music satisfied their understanding of Jewish art and a performance of the puppet operetta *Das Mädchen von Elizondo* (1859) was permitted in January 1935. [Fig. 5.19] Set in a Basque village, this light comic opera is about romantic misadventure and resolution and was well reviewed in the papers that were allowed to review Kulturbund events, even though its subject and content has no explicit connection with Jewish life (beyond its composer’s Jewish heritage). Other operettas such as *Das Ochsenmenuett* were also extremely well received. [Figs. 5.20, 5.21] In this way, the repertoire presented by the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler was similar to the types of plays performed by other branches of the Kulturbund, although the program featured more musical puppet shows than dramatic plays.



Fig. 5.19: Maria Luiko, the Inkeeper Vertigo from *Das Mädchen von Elizondo*, 1935. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 33.



Fig. 5.20: Marie Luise Kohn, the choirmaster Josef Hayden, his niece Theresa, and his maid Barbara from *Das Ochsenmenuett*, 1936. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 35.

Fig. 5.21: Marie Luise Kohn, the Hungarian oxen seller Istok and his daughter Katicza from *Das Ochsenmenuett*, 1936. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 34.

While Nazi censors were figuring out what art was to be considered Jewish and suitable for Jewish audiences, Kulturbund members faced the challenge of determining a communal Jewish identity for the association collectively, and expressing that identity through art. The Kulturbund brought together a community of members with diverse views on Jewish religious and cultural identities—assimilated Jews, Zionists, native-born German Jews, eastern European immigrant *Ostjuden*—and presentations of contrasting viewpoints played out in newspaper editorials and reviews of different performances.<sup>72</sup> In Munich, the very idea of a puppet theater, especially one associated with secular performance through its allusion to Braun's stage, already points to the kinds of artists that members of the puppet troupe thought themselves to be. Although they now would present Jewish works, their medium was one rooted in German artistic traditions as well as secular modern art. By choosing to present works for the puppet stage, the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler were affirming their identities as assimilated German artists, even as their puppet shows presented Jewish art.

Plays such as von Pocci's *Die geheimnisvolle Pastete* offer insight into how the troupe attempted to present a repertoire that met the conditions enforced by the Nazi censors, while at the same time reflecting their own understanding of German art. The Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler presented a version of this classic von Pocci Kasper show. There are no reviews of this play, which was performed in March 1937, but von Pocci's 1871 script was published and copies are extant. Although it impossible to know exactly how closely the performance adhered to the written text—if it was a word-for-word presentation or tweaked for this new audience—the play illustrates an engagement both with German cultural icons (Kasper, von Pocci) and with the retelling of an Old Testament story. A friendly dispute between

Jakob and his wife, Margaret, hardworking peasant people, about who was responsible for humanity's expulsion from Eden (Adam or Eve?) is overheard by Katzenberger, a mysterious magician and professor. Interested in this battle of the sexes, Katzenberger offers the couple a challenge: When Jakob and Margaret return to their home, they will find their normally modest dinner table decked out in an elaborate feast with every imaginable delicacy. They are invited to partake of all that they desire, but must refrain from lifting the lid on the eponymous mystery pie. Kasper appears in the couple's home, assuming the role of snake-like provocateur and curiosity instigator, and eventually the cover is lifted to expose the pastry. [Fig. 5.22] A small devil pops out of the pie—Kasper's stock opponent—and the couple, now humbled, come to recognize their mutual connection to humanity's weaknesses.<sup>73</sup> But it is not just the plot and its reliance on an Old Testament story that contributes to its potential interpretation as Jewish art, despite the non-Jewish heritage of its author. The language of the play too offers a clue that Jakob could be Jewish when he uses the term *bißl*, a word meaning "a little" in Bavarian dialect, but also in Yiddish.<sup>74</sup>



Fig. 5.22: Maria Luiko, Kasperl Larifari from *Die geheimnisvolle Pastete*, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Diana Oesterle, “*So süßlichen Kitsch, das kann ich nicht*”: *Die Münchner Künstlerin Maria Luiko 1904–1941* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 131.

The puppet group had approximately sixteen core members, each of whom was responsible for different aspects of a performance, but the number of people involved in a given show varied depending on that play’s specifics.<sup>75</sup> Some were mounted with a smaller crew, while others featured a larger cast, and the configuration of actors and singers could also vary depending on the type of performance. The mix of skills possessed by the people involved in the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler was in keeping with its varied repertoire: opera soloists (Walter Capell, Dr. Paul Kuhn, Walter Ries), chamber and choir singers (Ernest Frank, Renate Loeb, Sonja Ziegler), musicians (led by musical director and pianist Josef Waldner), actors and actresses (Bernhard Renka, Lilly Marschütz, Elisabeth Sprinter), visual artists with

backgrounds in fine and applied arts (Maria Luiko, Rudolf Ernst, and Charlotte Schönberg-Ernst), as well as a theater director with writerly skill (Berthold Wolff). Almost all had been art professionals or at least involved in artistic endeavors prior to 1933, and their participation in the group offered them an opportunity to work and use their skills, albeit in a new context. The collective also represented a cross section of Munich's Jewish community—many of those involved were acculturated Jewish German artists from middle-class merchant families, while a few came from older, established, elite or bourgeois backgrounds. In addition, some members were *Ostjuden*, or Eastern European Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants to Germany.

The repertoire reflected not only a diverse skill set, but also the varied backgrounds and experiences of Judaism of those involved. In addition to German von Pocci Kasper plays, musicals, and operettas, in January 1936 the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler also presented *Das Gelöbnis*, a German-language version of a Yiddish play, *Tkias Kaf*, by Peretz Hirschbein (1880–1948). [Fig. 5.23] Hirschbein was a well-established playwright, and although he wrote in a diversity of styles and primarily in Yiddish but also in Hebrew, he was sometimes known as the “Yiddish Maeterlinck” for his Symbolist plays, one of which was *Das Gelöbnis*. According to puppet scholar Waldemar Bonard, the play was likely known to the group through a German-language translation published in Munich in an anthology of Jewish Eastern European dramas, but there were other editions of this same anthology and translation published by different presses around the same period as well.<sup>76</sup> During the play's prologue, the audience watches Dowidl call for his fiancée as he dies before his mother's eyes. The subsequent five acts tell the backstory as a flashback, leading up to the event witnessed at the start. We learn that Dowidl is engaged to Chanele but is extremely ill, and has been for a year, by the time the action starts. Chanele's parents want her to break the engagement so she can marry an acquaintance's

son. Chanele wrestles with the choice, but before she can make a pronouncement, Dowidl dies. A storm breaks out as punishment from God and kills the acquaintance, the woman who had been keen to marry off her son to Chanele. Not long afterward, Chanele dies too.<sup>77</sup> This dramatic plot stages a conflict between autonomy and obligation by characters largely unaware of their true desires.

The play originates in an *ostjüdische* context and makes unmistakable references to specifically Jewish aspects of culture: Shabbat candles, the wedding *Chuppah* (a ceremonial canopy), a *Zaddik* (a mystical Rabbi in Hassidic practice), *mezuzot* (door markers containing a written prayer), as well as the ritualistic breaking of plates to mark an engagement. While many of these practices would have likely been recognizable to Eastern European Jews from smaller shtetl communities, the editor of the play's translation glossed a number of Jewish terms with short descriptions for an assimilated German Jewish or German readership.<sup>78</sup> While unquestionably a play with strong Eastern European and Yiddish allusions, it also has overtones of early twentieth-century Western European drama. It was not only Yiddish critics that picked up on the Symbolist dimension in Hirschbein's plays; a German reviewer of this Kulturbund puppet production of *Das Gelöbniß* was also reminded of Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) and mentioned this French-language playwright in his review.<sup>79</sup> Through this German translation and performance as a puppet show, the puppeteers transformed Hirschbein's colloquial Jewish-language text into a Symbolist play, a work that could comfortably be compared with European modernist dramas.



Fig. 5.23: Maria Luiko, Hennoch, Chache, and the beggar character from *Das Gelöbniß*, 1936. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 39.

The play is dark, and its characters' moods shift only between extremes of sadness, concern, and confusion. Given this relatively small range of emotions, frozen puppet faces would not have detracted from the power of the story. All of the marionettes from this production have an expression of melancholy and worry. [See fig. 5.23] They are shaped and painted differently than the puppets used in lighter operettas like *Das Ochsenmenuett*; the puppet versions of the operetta characters all have quite round—almost uniformly round—heads. [See figs. 5.20, 5.21] For the operetta and musical puppets, cheeks were represented with pink circles on the side of the face rather than as contoured, sculpted facial features. In fact, most of the puppets' heads from *Das Ochsenmenuett* have the same basic shape, and are primarily distinguishable by their differently painted features, hairstyles, and costumes. In contrast, the puppets that performed *Das Gelöbniß* have heads with much more extensive sculptural contouring: Dowidl's eyes are not simply outlined round circles, but angular, downcast, about to shut, and seemingly sunken under thickly rendered brows. This puppet wears a robe that looks slightly too loose, as if covering a

wasting body. [Fig. 5.24] Chache, Dowidl's mother, has wrinkles on her brow and around her lips, and instead of round painted cheeks, she has prominently painted nasolabial folds. Her face is aged. [Fig. 5.25] All the puppets in this dramatic play are created with differently shaped heads: the miller character, Hennoch, has a narrow chin, while the beggar's is more pronounced. Such features give each character deliberate individuality despite their fixed countenances. Although the tone of the text has each figure play a role in a single key, the sculptor Maria Luiko (1904–1941), who created the majority of the puppets for this troupe's productions, gives each suffering figure an Expressionist style all its own. Luiko's biographer, Diana Oesterle, compares the puppets from *Das Gelöbnis* with the makeup from a 1929 Habima theater company performance of *Der Golem*.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that a touring performance of this Hebrew-language play from Poland influenced Luiko's style, but the yellow-green and gray-brown skin tones recall German Expressionist painting as much as they do any particular Habima production.

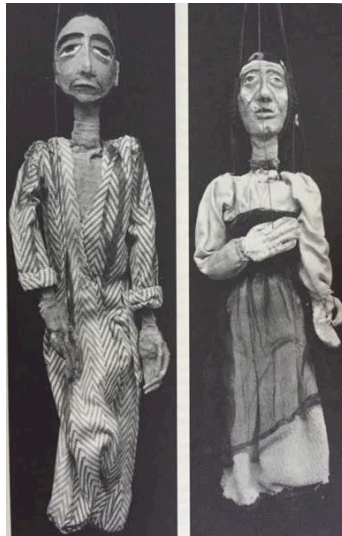


Fig. 5.24: Maria Luiko, Dowidl from *Das Gelöbnis*, 1936. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Diana Oesterle, “So süßlichen Kitsch, das kann ich nicht”: *Die Münchner Künstlerin Maria Luiko 1904–1941* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 129.

Fig. 5.25: Maria Luiko, Chache from *Das Gelöbnis*, 1936. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Diana Oesterle, “So süßlichen Kitsch, das kann ich nicht”: *Die Münchner Künstlerin Maria Luiko 1904–1941* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 129.

Reviews of this play from its Kulturbund production celebrate its Jewishness: “Das Ethos der jüdischen Seele wird sichtbar, ein jüdischer Poet greift in die Tiefe, wenn er die unbezwingliche Forderung eines Menschen vertritt, der das Glück der Liebe gefunden und durch das Unglück frühen Versagen nach Menschensatzung verloren hat.”<sup>81</sup> Although this writer recognized the puppet show’s accomplishment and its importance as a work of art, he also preferred the music to the puppet show itself. But the harshest critique was reserved for a different Jewish-themed play, a performance of a new script called *Moses* staged in January 1935. Based loosely on a 1908 translation of a novella, *Die ägyptische Knechtschaft* by the Swedish playwright August Strindberg (1849–1912) from a collection called *Historische Miniaturen*, the text was heavily reworked by Berthold Wolff, director and organizer of the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler. Although the script no longer exists, reviews of this work, together with the puppets, offer a glimpse not only of the show itself, but also of the audience’s response to an unheroic depiction of a Jewish leader in 1935.

The play begins in Egypt, where the Israelites were slaves to the Pharaoh. According to a review published in the *Bayerische Israelitische Gemeindezeitung*, the action begins with a high priest’s interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream as an instruction to kill all Jewish children. But the Pharaoh’s daughter intercedes and helps save the children. Later in the narrative, in an encounter between the prophet and Pharaoh, Moses convinces the Egyptian ruler, besieged by the ten plagues, to release the Israelites from slavery. The second part of the play then follows Moses and the Israelites in the desert, and the audience witnesses both their grumblings as well as God’s miracles. But true to the Old Testament version of the story, Moses does not enter the Promised Land. The reviewer praised the first part of the play but was extremely critical of the didacticism

of the desert scenes. The Egyptian puppets, with metallic adornments and a style resembling luxurious ancient Egyptian funerary masks, are certainly more lavish and visually much more interesting than the Israelite puppets with cliché beards, but the reviewer never once mentions these aesthetic qualities. [Figs. 5.26, 5.27] It is the Moses character specifically that appears to have been a source of particular distaste: “Moses als Marionette muß alle diese psychologischen Entwicklungen dem Zuschauer schuldig bleiben. An die starre Maske gebunden können wir nicht das Aufleuchten seiner triumphierenden Seele erleben. Die Unwandelbarkeit der Puppe verurteilt ihn zur Eintönigkeit.”<sup>82</sup> The critique reads as if the reviewer wished for a triumphant, sophisticated portrayal of Moses, even though he is depicted in the Bible as a character with faults (hesitant speech) for which he is punished (unable to enter Israel).



Fig. 5.26: Maria Luiko, Moses and the Israelites from *Moses*, 1935. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 37.

Fig. 5.27: Maria Luiko, Pharaoh, his daughter, and the high priest from *Moses*, 1935. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 37.

It is impossible today to know if, how, or why Moses was presented this way. Was it just the impression of this one reviewer, or did this article accurately describe a mediocre performance of a one-dimensional Moses? If Moses was flat, perhaps this lackluster version was an extension of other well-established Jewish storytelling practices. In the course of the Passover

Seder, a symbolic and narrative holiday meal recounting the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, Moses is scarcely mentioned. This was a deliberate editorial choice of the compilers of the *Haggadah* to minimize Moses's prominence, as the celebrated hero is always God rather than his prophet Moses. The Seder too is extremely didactic. According to the Old Testament story, Moses was a poor public speaker, and perhaps the puppet show was too literal in its presentation for an audience hungry for entertainment. Another comment in this same review suggests a general aversion to a presentation of religious content with puppets: "Ein Spiel um Moses auf dem Puppentheater? Können dagegen grundsätzliche Einwände erhoben werden, daß sich ein Puppentheater mit religiösen Motiven befaßt?"<sup>83</sup> But we also know that this was, in fact, the second explicitly religious puppet play presented by the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler. Although it was likely not publicly performed, and no reviews or listings exist, photographs confirm that a puppet play of *Das Buch Ruth* was adapted by troupe member Schalom Ben-Chorin (1913–1999) and staged in 1934. [Figs. 5.28, 5.29] The overall tone of the review is specific to *Moses*, despite this one remark questioning the appropriateness of religious puppet shows.



Fig. 5.28: Maria Luiko, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naemi from *Das Buch Ruth*, 1934. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 93.

Fig. 5.29: Abraham Pisarek (photographer), Maria Luiko, narrator puppet from *Das Buch Ruth*, 1934. Münchner Stadtmuseum. Photo: Bildarchiv Pisarek / akg-images.

It is also possible that the portrayal of Moses had less to do with Jewish cultural traditions and was instead more heavily informed by the particular circumstances of the artists. Moses-as-antihero may well have been an acquiescence to Nazi censors who forbade heroic portrayals of Jewish victories. The reviewer could also have been tacitly expressing his or her displeasure at such artistic curtailments. It may also be a different kind of implied critique: in 1935 Munich, a collective of Jewish artists wished for clear direction in a story about the Israelites' escape from oppression. In an introduction written in 1993 for an exhibition catalogue about these puppets, Schalom Ben-Chorin, who wrote the puppet play *Das Buch Ruth* and was involved with many of the troupe's artists, reflected on the importance of the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer

Künstler as an apolitical resistance group: “Es ist wohl kein Zufall, daß wir damals das Marionettentheater entdeckten. Einerseits hatte das technische Gründe, denn es fehlten die Schauspieler—andererseits aber auch tiefere, die uns kaum bewußt wurden. Wenn der Mensch im totalitären Staat der eigenen Verantwortung enthoben wird, wenn ihn das Regime an Fäden zieht, wird er selbst zur Marionette und die Marionette wird sein Doppelgänger.”<sup>84</sup> From such a perspective—marionettes as doppelgängers—Moses’s didactic, single-toned message and failed attempt to reach the Promised Land must have indeed been hard to watch.

There were other puppet performances under the auspices of the Kulturbund that deliberately did away with marionette strings, where the actors chose to perform with hand puppets, not because they were professional hand puppeteers like Liesel Simon, but because they understood hand puppetry as a more direct art form. The Theater der Jüdischen Schulen, led by Werner Hinzelmann from 1938 to 1941, performed a series of artistic hand-puppet shows in this period. The Theater der Jüdischen Schulen originally attempted to coordinate theatrical content and classroom curricula with stagings of William Shakespeare’s (1564–1616) *As You Like It* (ca. 1603) and Osip Dymov’s (1878–1950) East European fairy tale *Jusik*, both in 1936.<sup>85</sup> After Hinzelmann assumed the role of director, he established his own Künstlerische Handpuppenspiel program in addition to regular live-action plays, for which he cowrote scripts and in which he performed. Writing about the practice of hand puppetry in the *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt* newspaper in 1938, Hinzelmann observed: “Die Marionette ist mehr eine mechanische Puppe, bei der häufig sogar Fäden und Drähte von einem anderen bewegt werden, als von dem, der den Text spricht. Beim Handpuppenspiel ergibt sich daher auch viel stärker die Möglichkeit der aktiven Beteiligung des jugendlichen Auditoriums.”<sup>86</sup> The specific choice of medium—hand puppets—enabled an expression of creative agency and interactivity. In this same article,

Hinzelmann mentioned religious puppet shows such as *David and Goliath* and *Judith and Holofernes*, both plays with heroic central characters who fight back and behead their enemies. While we know Liesel Simon performed a *David and Goliath* play in 1934, it remains unknown if Hinzelmann actually got away with performances of these plays in 1938.

There is unfortunately little documentation of puppetry by the Theater Jüdischer Schulen. Hinzelmann, together with drama critic and dramaturg Leo Hirsch, wrote a play called *Reb Babusch heiratet* that was performed in December 1940.<sup>87</sup> A play about the marriage of a rabbi must have had some religious content, if only because its title character is a rabbi. Better documented are his Kasperle shows from two years earlier: *Die verschwundene Prinzessin* and *Kasperle als Zauberlehrling*, performed together in a single program. Again, the exact scripts used for these performances are no longer extant, and no photographs or puppets survive. Yet it is easy to see how clever, subversive Kasperle managed to sneak at least a bit of Goethe's poetry (his famous ballad *Der Zauberlehrling* [1797]) into a Jewish performance in Nazi Germany as a child's program. A reviewer of this program remarked on the puppet show's appeal for an audience of both adults and children and observed how these plays revived the essence of theater: "Der Hauptideeindruck für den Erwachsenen war, daß hier die Uranfänge des Theaters an sich wieder lebendig wurden."<sup>88</sup> They were performed by Hinzelmann together with his wife, Steffi, for a sold-out house. The reviewer does not describe the plots per se, but rather the plays' main themes: good and evil, truth and lies, love and hate.

Of all the Kasper plays performed by Kulturbund members, either by professionals or amateurs, there was one touring play written explicitly for life in Nazi Germany that directly addressed its historical reality: Liesel Simon's 1938 show *Kasper wandert aus*. No script or reviews of this play are extant, but knowledge of its existence comes from local Kulturbund

program listings.<sup>89</sup> Its title suggests the play's plot, and mirrors its writer's real life: Liesel Simon fled Germany in 1941 and settled with her children in Ecuador (her husband did not escape and was murdered by the Nazis). A number of the performers from the Münchner Marionettentheater Jüdischer Künstler also escaped to America, Bolivia, Brazil, and Israel, but many of artists and their relatives, including the puppet maker Maria Luiko, were murdered by the Nazis. The puppet vanishes.

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The activities of the Kulturbund have been both praised and condemned by participants and outsiders.<sup>90</sup> Did the organization provide a false vision of normalcy and delusional hope that ultimately led to greater destruction of the German Jewish community? Did the cooperation between Jewish artists and Nazi censors border on collaboration? Or did the Kulturbund provide artists with dignity and a means of survival during dark times? Was the organization an important venue of cultural continuity in a moment when Jewish culture was under threat of erasure? Although her work focuses on the orchestra of the Kulturbund, historian Lily E. Hirsch describes the organization as complex one: "The League cannot be described as wholly positive or negative but rather a combination of the two—a grey zone. Admitting this lack of resolution has certain advantages. . . . Acknowledging and examining the paradox, in this case, leads to a more complete consideration of the extraordinary Jewish Cultural League and the light it sheds on Nazi politics . . . , Jewish survival, and racial/national categories in music."<sup>91</sup>

The history of Jewish puppetry in Germany during the Third Reich is inspiring, absurd, comic, and tragic. Puppetry was itself an art form more closely connected with German culture

than with Jewish heritage, and the whole project aspired to a defiant, impossible synthesis. During the puppetry revival of the Weimar era, when the medium was revitalized as art rather than lowbrow fairground entertainment with anti-Semitic characters, Jewish artists engaged with it as a secular practice or, in some cases, as a didactic vehicle suited to Jewish cultural education. But after the Nazi takeover, all Jewish artists in Germany were confronted with the notion that they were Jewish first and foremost. Both the Nazi authorities and the Jewish community (a diverse collective now thrust together as a single cultural entity), forced Jewish artists of the Kulturbund to define Jewish art. The challenge for all involved inheres in the fact that there is no such thing as a single definition of Jewish art.<sup>92</sup> A study of Jewish German puppetry in the Third Reich certainly provides a case study to explore the Nazi regime's mechanisms of control, but it also reveals that Jewish art is contextual rather than essential.



Fig. 5.30: Jacqueline Simon with Liesel Simon's puppets in Ecuador, n.d. Private collection. Historisches Museum Frankfurt.

In 2015 Liesel Simon's granddaughter, Marcia Simon Álvarez, repatriated thirteen of her grandmother's puppets from Ecuador to Germany through a donation to the Historisches Museum Frankfurt. [Fig. 5.30] Simon had taken the puppets with her on her late departure from

Germany in 1941, and according to her other granddaughter, Jacqueline Simon Plat, the puppeteer continued to perform for German émigré children in Quito, where she spent the remainder of her life and raised her family.<sup>93</sup> The descendants' goal with the donation to this German museum was “to enrich and inform the new generations and become a part of their cultural identity.”<sup>94</sup> In this way, the repatriation of the puppet cast reestablishes an old truth for Jewish German puppetry: Simon's works now define a chapter of Frankfurt's history. [Fig. 5.31] Deliberately underlining the return of the puppets to Germany, rather than the story of their exile, Álvarez commented in a magazine interview: “It's good, when things are returned to the places that they belong to.”<sup>95</sup> *Der Kasper ist wider da!*



Fig. 5.31: Marcia Simon Álvarez with her grandmother's puppet at the Historisches Museum Frankfurt, 2015. Frankfurter Neue Press. [www.Fnp.de](http://www.Fnp.de).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, interview with Günter Gaus, *Zur Person*, Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen, October 28, 1964. Youtube.com.

<sup>2</sup> Vera Craener, “‘Kasper und die Wunderlampe’: Puppenspiel im Berliner Kulturverbund,” *C. V. [Centralverein] Zeitung*, December 9, 1937. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Simon.

<sup>3</sup> Advertisement from the Jüdischer Kulturbund Rhein-Main Dezember, *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitische Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 3 (1937): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Sonnenfeld, “Seid Ihr alle da?? Hört Ihr mich?,” *C. V. [Centralverein] Zeitung* 47 (November 26, 1937): 8.

<sup>5</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Lily E. Hirsch, *A Jewish Orchestra in Nazi Germany: Musical Politics and the Berlin Jewish Culture League* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Liesel Simon, “Kasperlespiel im Rundfunk,” *Frauen- und Jugendfunk, Funk. Die Wochenschrift des Funkwesens* 34 (August 22, 1930): 135.

<sup>8</sup> For an image of the members of the Kulturverband zur Förderung des Puppentheaters from 1928, including Simon, see Gerd Bohlmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown: Zur Organisation eines Unterhaltungsmediums im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Die Spiele der Puppe*, ed. Manfred Wegner (Cologne: Prometh-Verlag, 1989), 170; “Deutsche Bund für Puppenspiele: Der Vorstand” *Der Puppenspieler* 1, nos. 11/12 (1930/31): 174.

<sup>9</sup> Max Jacob, *Mein Kasper und ich: Lebenserinnerungen eines Handpuppenspielers* (Stuttgart: Ogham Verlag, 1981), 201.

<sup>10</sup> Liesel Simon, *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure (Frankfurt: Brüner Druckerei, ca. 1928), 3. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Simon (hereafter *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure).

<sup>11</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1921 cited in *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Kasperle, “Liebe Kinder!,” *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 2, no. 10 (March 7, 1926): 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Simon, “Kasperlespiel im Rundfunk,” 135.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “Kinderbesuch im Rundfunkhaus,” *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 2, no. 12 (March 21, 1926): 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Volksstimme, Frankfurt am Main*, March 9, 1927 cited in *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure, 10–11.

<sup>19</sup> *Frankfurter General-Anzeiger*, December 3, 1927 cited in *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Hans-Dieter Kübler, *Medien für Kinder: Von der Literatur zum Internet-Portal. Ein Überblick* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2002), 99; Horst Heidtmann, *Kindermedien* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1992), 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure, 16.

- <sup>22</sup> Unpublished letter. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Simon.
- <sup>23</sup> *Kasperl und die Kasperltante*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1929, Grammophon 22333, DRA Archive no. K727510.
- <sup>24</sup> *Schlaraffenland*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1928, Polydor 22013B, DRA Archive no. K665453.
- <sup>25</sup> *Die drei Wünsche*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1928, Polydor 22013A, DRA Archive no. K665454.
- <sup>26</sup> *Kasperl rettet Hänsel und Gretel*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1929, Polydor 27082-B, DRA Archive no. K665452; *Rotkäppchen*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1928, Polydor 27021-B, DRA no. K665456; *Rumpelstilzchen*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1928, Polydor 27021-A, DRA Archive no. K665455.
- <sup>27</sup> *Rumpelstilzchen*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1928, Polydor 27021-A, DRA Archive no. K665455.
- <sup>28</sup> *Kasperl und der Polizist*, Liesel Simons Kasperl-Theater, 1929, Grammophon 22334, DRA Archive no. K631275.
- <sup>29</sup> Anton Kaes et al., eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 594.
- <sup>30</sup> Lecia Rosenthal, ed., *Radio Benjamin*, trans. Jonathan Lutes with Lisa Harries Schumann and Diana K. Reese (London: Verso, 2014), xvii.
- <sup>31</sup> *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung*, cited in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds., *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* 7.2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), 832.
- <sup>32</sup> Tiedemann and Schweppenhäuser, *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* 7.2, 832.
- <sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Berliner Puppentheater*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* 7.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 80.
- <sup>34</sup> *Radau um Kasperl: Kasperl auf dem Jahrmarkt* and *Radau um Kasperl: Kasperl im Zoo* are available as a CD accompanying the book Philippe Baudouin, *Au microphone: Dr. Walter Benjamin* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, France: Éditions de la Maison des science de l'homme, 2010).
- <sup>35</sup> Karl Zimmermann, "Radio," *Frankfurter Zeitung* 76, nos. 199/200 (March 3, 1932): Abendblatt, 3, reproduced in Thomas Küpper and Anja Nowak, eds., *Rundfunkarbeiten Walter Benjamin Werke und Nachlaß* 9.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2017), 721.
- <sup>36</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Reflektionen zum Rundfunk," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 2.3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 1506–7.
- <sup>37</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Radau um Kasperl," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 4.2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 674. On the theme of blindness and its relation to fog in this play see Lecia Rosenthal, "Walter Benjamin on the Radio: An Introduction," in *Radio Benjamin*, xxv.
- <sup>38</sup> Benjamin, "Radau um Kasperl," 677.
- <sup>39</sup> Rosenthal, "Walter Benjamin on the Radio: An Introduction," xxvi, xxviii.
- <sup>40</sup> Kaes et al., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 594.
- <sup>41</sup> Rosenthal, "Walter Benjamin on the Radio: An Introduction," xix.
- <sup>42</sup> Benjamin, *Berliner Puppentheater*, 83.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Helen Rosenau, "Lotte Pritzel Exhibition," *AJR Information* [Association of Jewish Refugees] 5, no. 11 (November 1950): 4.
- <sup>46</sup> Deuteronomy 4:16–20.

- <sup>47</sup> Edward Portnoy, “Modicut Puppet Theater: Modernism, Satire, and Yiddish Culture,” in *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 105.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 111.
- <sup>49</sup> “Kasperle Makkabi,” *Aus Alter und Neuer Zeit*, supplement to *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, no. 52 (December 29, 1932). Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Judaica.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> The Zionist youth organization Jung Juda published the following collection of puppet plays: *Judische Puppenspiel* (Prag: Verlag Jung Juda, ca. 1920). Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung. File: Judaica.
- <sup>52</sup> Review of *Biblische Puppenspiel* by Albert Baer and Käthe Baer-Freyer in *Menorah: Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur*, no. 10 (1923): 222.
- <sup>53</sup> “Das Lämmchen,” *Julius Pinschewer: Klassiker des Werbefilms*. Dir. Julius Pinschewer. Germany, 1910.
- <sup>54</sup> *Weihnachtsmärchen* are listed as standard repertoire in *Liesel Simon’s Kasperl-Theater* brochure, 16.
- <sup>55</sup> “Kasperle und der Osterhase,” *Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk-Zeitung* 2, no. 13 (March 28, 1926): 3.
- <sup>56</sup> “Chanuckafeiern,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 9, no. 5 (January 1931): 162.
- <sup>57</sup> “Chanukka-Feier der Jüdischen Wohlfahrtspflege,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 4, no. 5 (January 1932): 116.
- <sup>58</sup> L. H., “Kasperletheater Liesel Simon,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 12, no. 5 (January 1934): 200–201.
- <sup>59</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–6; Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 14.
- <sup>60</sup> L. H., “Kasperletheater Liesel Simon,” 201.
- <sup>61</sup> Simon performed a detective play called *Wo ist Schulli-Pulli?* in July 1936. G. Sch., “Kasperl in Philanthropin,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 14, no. 10 (July 1936): 379.
- <sup>62</sup> “Purimveranstaltung,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 13, no. 7 (March 1935): 274; Ghr., “Purimveranstaltung,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 8 (April 1935): 307.
- <sup>63</sup> “Veranstaltung in der Arnold Lazarus-Halle,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 15 no. 7 (April 1937): 17.
- <sup>64</sup> “Ferienspiel 1935,” *Gemeindeblatt der Israelitischen Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main* 13, no. 13 (September 1935): 513.
- <sup>65</sup> Wolf Gruner, *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945: Band I Deutsches Reich 1933–1937* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008), 262.
- <sup>66</sup> Erich Ercks, “Entwurf: Rechtlinien für einen JKB in Bayern,” cited in Waldemar Bonard, ed., *Die gefesselte Muse: Das Marionettentheater im Jüdischen Kulturbund 1935–1937* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 1994), 13.
- <sup>67</sup> Till, *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (Munich: Puppentheater Museum Münchner Stadtmuseum, 1986), 106.

- <sup>68</sup> Berthold Wollf, *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*, 1935, no. 2, p. 31, cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 28.
- <sup>69</sup> *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*, 1936, no. 2, p. 38, cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 33.
- <sup>70</sup> Rebecca Rovit, *The Jewish Kulturbund Theatre Company in Nazi Berlin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 43.
- <sup>71</sup> Erik Levi, "Opera in the Nazi Period," in *Theatre under the Nazis*, ed. John London (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 139.
- <sup>72</sup> Rovit, *The Jewish Kulturbund Theatre Company in Nazi Berlin*, 5.
- <sup>73</sup> Graf Franz von Pocci, *Die geheimisvolle Pastete* (Bonn am Rhein: Heidelbergmann, 1910).
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>75</sup> For biographies of the people involved see Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 44–91.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>77</sup> Perez Hirschbein, "Das Gelöbnis," in *Jüdisches Theater: eine dramatische Anthologie ostjüdischer Dichter*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Alexander Eliasberg (Berlin: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1920), 197–246.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.
- <sup>79</sup> Georg Hirschfeld, *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*, 1936, no. 2, p. 38, cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 40.
- <sup>80</sup> Diana Oesterle, "So süßlichen Kitsch, das kann ich nicht": *Die Münchner Künstlerin Maria Luiko 1904–1941* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 128.
- <sup>81</sup> Georg Hirschfeld, *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*, 1936, no. 2, p. 38, cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 40.
- <sup>82</sup> *Bayerische Israelitsche Gemeindezeitung*, 1935, no. 4, p. 79, cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 38.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>84</sup> Schalom Ben-Chorin, "Ein Münchner Künstlerkreis," cited in Bonard, *Die gefesselte Muse*, 8–9.
- <sup>85</sup> Rovit, *The Jewish Kulturbund Theater Company in Nazi Berlin*, 115.
- <sup>86</sup> W. Hinzemann, "Künstlerische Handpuppenspiele," *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt*, nos. 9/10 (December 23, 1938): 4.
- <sup>87</sup> Akademie der Künste, ed., *Geschlossene Vorstellung: Der Jüdische Kulturbund in Deutschland 1933–1941* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992), 417.
- <sup>88</sup> "Künstlerische Handpuppenspiele im Jüdischen Kulturbund," *Jüdisches Nachtrichtblatt*, no. 1 (January 3, 1939): 5.
- <sup>89</sup> Jüdischer Kulturbund Hamburg brochure, Leo Beck Archive: Juedischer Kulturbund Hamburg Collection, 1933–1938, Box 1, Folder 4 (Programs and Circulars).
- <sup>90</sup> *Es waren wirklich Sternstunden: Der Jüdischer Kulturbund, 1933–1941*, Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1988) VHS.
- <sup>91</sup> Hirsch, *A Jewish Orchestra in Nazi Germany*, 15.
- <sup>92</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, eds., "Introduction," in *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3.
- <sup>93</sup> Jacqueline Simon Plat, Marcia Simon Álvarez, Hanna Eckhardt, and Dr. Nina Gorgus, "Liesel Karoline Goldschmidt Simon (1887–1958): A Legacy from the Simon Family to the City of Frankfurt am Main," *Numbers Magazine*, February 26, 2016:

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<sup>94</sup> Jacqueline Simon Plat, quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>95</sup> Marcia Simon Álvarez, quoted in *ibid*.

## Curtain Call

Around the time that he was writing *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) penned a one-act play titled *Retablo de las maravillas* (Puppet Show of Marvels, ca. 1609–14). The tale begins with two grifters, the man Chanfalla and the woman Chirinos, who approach the governor of a village with an offer to perform their special, marvelous puppet show, written by the wise man Tontonelo. Requesting and receiving payment in advance for their performance—a show so profound, the people are told, that only those of old Christian blood and children born of legitimate matrimony will be able to fully grasp it—Chanfalla and Chirinos describe scenes from the Bible for the assembled audience. But they don't actually have any puppets, and the stories they describe do not actually take place, since there are no puppets to perform them. The audience, however, is too fearful to admit that they see nothing, lest they be mistaken for Jews, Moors, or bastards, so they play along, pretending to watch the events relayed by the swindlers. As the plot progresses, the townspeople grow ever more convinced of their own lie (forgetting that they know there's nothing to see), and come to genuinely believe in the existence of Tontonelo and his marvelous powers. A Quartermaster appears at the play's conclusion with news that the King's cavalymen are heading to the village, but the audience is convinced that this too is part of the performance. Disrupting the line between fact and fiction, the Quartermaster announces that there is nothing on stage, no puppets to be seen. In response to this truth, the crowd charges, "He's one of them!" meaning a Jew, a Muslim, or a bastard. The Quartermaster draws his sword and the curtain drops, right at the moment when violent chaos is about to erupt. Chanfalla and Chirinos conclude the

play with a victory song, delighted that they can perform their puppet show again tomorrow.

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The stories we are told and the belief we place in those stories have the power to shape our engagement with the world around us. Puppets manifest this relationship. At its most basic, a puppet show invites us to believe in a simple illusion: that an inanimate puppet is alive. But in a different register, the worldview we bring to a performance is activated, too, and takes literal shape when we play along. The imaginary and the real collide as puppets elicit the participation of audience members who, in turn, become co-creators of the experience. In the cases described in the preceding chapters, set in early twentieth-century Germany, the worldviews of both avant-garde artists and Nazi propagandists are presented via their puppet creations, and the audience, complicit in the action of the play, brings political and social issues into focus. Because they eliminate the divide between art and life, these puppets reveal right from wrong in very real ways.

When a belief is present and enacted on the puppet stage, abstract ideas take physical form, often with real-world consequences. The stock story of Kasper, our tramp-like everyman hero, corresponds with his actual history: as he moves from one adventure the next, from the Weimar Republic through the Third Reich, Kasper switches up his role as an avant-garde icon of subversive resistance, and a propagandistic agent of manipulation. A shape-shifter, a vehicle for different political projections, he is a rebel, abstracted and poeticized. On the hand of one puppeteer, he represents the

*Volksgemeinschaft*; on the hand of another, a Hanukkah miracle. His nose grows and shrinks. And at the end of each play—when Kasper turns to the audience, triumphant after delivering a thrashing to his foe—his victory is also that of the audience. Fictional worlds—of stage and story—are not separate and discrete from our consensual reality and historical experience. They shape and inform one another.

Looking at history through the aspect of puppets presents a wide and inclusive view: from civilians to soldiers, including men, women, girls, and boys. Inclusivity is important in scholarship not only for its own sake, but also because it provides a more historically accurate account of the past. Everybody plays a part. Although we have seen some familiar art historical groupings, puppets expose a different side of these well-known artists; the men of the Bauhaus are influenced by modernist manifestos and their canonical peers, to be sure, but they are also inspired by their children, their experiences during the Great War, and by fairy tales, clowns, and puppet shows. Studying puppets also opens up a historical space where female artists shine: some of the most important and memorable works by the Dada artists Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Hannah Höch were made with puppets. In cinema history, too, reframing the view according to a puppet perspective, rather than forcing an exploration of female filmmakers and feminized themes, allows for a fuller account of visual culture. Moreover, considering the place of children in the course of major historical events has the power to challenge our usual positions; we may be used to thinking about Anne Frank, but it is unsettling in a different way to imagine the everyday lives of Nazi children. Puppet history presents new ways of thinking about the past, revealing how different ideologies played out across broad segments of the German population.

When we look at this history, the contradictions and the continuities between the Weimar Republic and Third Reich come into focus. The story of good and evil is not as straightforward as one might have expected. Given the vehemence of the Nazi attacks on avant-garde artists and institutions, it is easy to interpret avant-garde works as anti-fascist. This was indeed the case in some situations, as we saw with Paul Klee and the Dadaists. But history also reveals situations that were more complex and ambiguous. Avant-garde artists such as Oskar Schlemmer or Lotte Reiniger created works that could be understood in a number of different ways, depending on the set of beliefs an audience brought to the viewing. We also know of a few works where artists seemingly adjusted their style to accommodate the regime. In other cases, such as the puppet shows of the Jüdischer Kulturbund, artists were in a unique historical position and it was necessary to make concessions to the Nazis for their very survival. When we put these stories together, we find that there was nothing inherently anti- or proto-fascist in the Kasper character. He was what was made of him, by entertainers and spectators alike.

Kasper's story is one of defiance, and the thrashing conclusion brings about a resolution, but it is not necessarily a straightforwardly happy ending. Although order is usually restored and there are certainly many comic moments along the journey, Kasper's tale is full of cruelty and violence. Yet the triumph of the puppet hero represents a tacit promise that things *might* be different next time—after all, the good guy won and the villains have been put in their place. Play can run free and we can imagine possible alternatives for the future. For example, Liesel Simon's granddaughter's repatriation of her grandmother's puppets to the Historisches Museum Frankfurt makes visible an otherwise forgotten history and recalls long-silenced voices. It is much bigger than

merely the recollection of a puppet, a puppeteer, or her audiences. When Marcia Simon Álvarez returned her grandmother's puppets to Germany, she was undoing a moment of cultural erasure attempted by the Nazis. Nothing can ever make up for the loss and the damage of World War II, nothing will ever be truly healing, but taking control of the narrative is a defiant, Kasper-like move (albeit with a gentle touch). And it gives the imagination rein to imagine that things might be different next time.

Puppet stories have endured, in part, because they are so easy to repeat. But they can also be changed. Cervantes's one-act play was a satire on the prejudices of Spain in his own day, but it can also be understood as a prophetic vision of the prejudices of future eras. As we envision different possible destinies for our puppet hero, we can also spot the cruelty and violence of our own time. There are lessons to be gleaned from history and art that also have the power to reshape the world—so that we don't have to perform the same show again tomorrow.

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Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv, Berlin

Center for Jewish History, New York

Columbia University Libraries, New York

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Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, Leipzig

Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt am Main

Hannah Höch Archiv, Berlinische Galerie, Museum für moderne Kunst, Berlin

Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar

Historisches Museum Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main

Lotte Reiniger Archiv, Stadtmuseum Tübingen

Lovejoy Library, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois

Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich

Museum für Sächsische Volkskunst, Puppentheatersammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen  
Dresden

Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York

Museum of Modern Art Archives, Queens, New York

Museum of Modern Art Library, Manhattan, New York

New York Public Library, Art and Architecture Collection, Spencer Collection, and Dorot  
Division

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins Dance Division

New York University Libraries

Northwest Puppet Center, Seattle

Jüdisches Museum, Berlin

Princeton University Libraries, Princeton, New Jersey

Puppentheater Museum, Berlin

Puppentheatermuseum und Archiv, Münchner Stadtmuseum

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße

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File: Hohnsteiner Max Jacob Kritiken 1923–1945. Münchner Stadtmuseum, Puppenspielsammlung.

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