Modernity @ Zero Hour: Three Women (Lee Miller, Hannah Höch, Anonyma)

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Abstract: This essay is a part of a longer work on literary and visual modernism at the "moment" of destruction in 1945: *Stunde Null* or Zero Hour. Here, I focus on the "constructedness" of universals via the material, psychological, and political destruction in Germany at war's end. At this moment, destruction and universals interconnect in three temporal modes: anticipatory, punctual, and retrospective. For "punctual" universals, I read Lee Miller's war journalism, published in *Vogue*, in relation to her war and Holocaust photography, as uniting modernist aesthetic values and the "event" of destruction. For the construction of "anticipatory" universals, I discuss the work of Hannah Höch, dada painter and collagist, who emerged from internal exile in Berlin to participate in the first modernist exhibitions in the destroyed city after *Stunde Null*. Finally, the anonymously authored *A Woman in Berlin*, documenting the survival strategies to mass sexual predation by Soviet troops immediately at and after *Stunde Null*, extends from punctual accounts of destruction to a retrospective narration. In each case, modernist visual and verbal forms—and an ethical imperative to keep interpretive horizons open—negotiates between the "radical particularity" of the lived experience of destruction and universal values. The constructedness of universals in modernist works anticipates the construction of political, ethical, and aesthetic universals in the global order after 1945.

Keywords: modernism, World War II, feminism, art history, destruction, universals

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In modernity, Zero Hour is an event waiting to happen, as critical theorists from Theodor W. Adorno to Slavoj Žižek have presciently seen; our experience of the COVID-19 pandemic reconfirms the event as a "noonday panic fear" that structurally recurs.[1] This essay is part of an on-going study on the punctual crisis and inauguration of global modernity at the historical moment of Zero Hour at the end of World War II—in Germany, *Stunde Null*; in Japan, "Ground Zero"; in Poland, *Godzina wo*; in Russia, Victory Day; in the United States, VE/VJ Days—through its representation and enactment in a series of key texts of literary and visual modernism. Modernism, in its high degree of reflexivity, its combination of the "transitory and the eternal," and its transvaluation of values of all

kinds is uniquely addressed to the event of Zero Hour, which it imagines in anticipatory, punctual, and retrospective forms.[2] Following the New Modernist Studies, I expand the repertoire of texts and works of art to be considered as modernist—as well as extend its conventional endpoint, which I see as equally a moment of reflection, ethical transformation, and historical new beginning, at 1945. As a result, the writers and artists I examine begin with mid-century late modernist canonical figures but are not limited to them.[3] In an expanded account of what ought to be considered as "modernist," I find historical, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives on the crisis of modernity.[4]

My examples are a revisionist series of mid-century modernists writing and making art before, during, and after the end of the Second World War, the destruction of European cities, the dismantling of colonial empires, the disclosure of the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb.[5] In Germany, this moment of destruction is conventionally known as *Stunde Null*, which we may translate as "Zero Hour." I use the concept of Zero Hour—seen as the punctual moment of political and material destruction that ended Germany's *Totaler Krieg* (total war) through unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945—as a metahistorical concept, after the work of narrative and conceptual historiographers.[6] As such, Zero Hour is not simply reducible to its historical date; it has a structural relation to real-time historical unfolding in both narrative and nonnarrative terms; it brings structure and history together at an impossible but realized juncture. Zero Hour did not simply happen; rather, it is a structural, narrative, and phenomenological moment that took place "as if" it were an actual event, no matter how the particular details of history coincided with it.[7] Psychoanalytic processes of destruction, repetition, and *Nachträglichkeit* (retroactive determination) are crucial for making the historicity of Zero Hour into a punctual moment, an opening to the Real "that can only be known in its effects"—even as I am concerned not to limit my use of psychoanalysis to negative interpretations such that the traumatic event is only an "absent cause"; it is material, as well.[8]

My approach is twofold: first, to identify a series of anticipatory, retrospective, and punctual constructions of Zero Hour in literary and visual art where it is a desiring projection, absent cause, inescapable fact, and finally narrative frame; then to associate these prior or posterior constructions with the historical and material *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself), however it may be accessed. To do so necessitates a concept of the historical event both negative and positive terms (but not some abstract concept of "the event"); it is the absent cause located in material conditions, the "history that hurts" around which interpretations congeal (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*), articulated in narrative or nonnarrative form. In identifying this non/narrative moment, I distinguish three temporal dynamics of destruction within aesthetic and narrative forms: *anticipatory, retrospective*, and *punctual*. Looking forward to 1945, certain modernists anticipate the cataclysm to come, almost seeming to hasten the event: theirs is an "anticipatory" destruction. After the historical fact of the cataclysm, others contain the traumatic moment in a construction of universals: theirs is a "retrospective" containment of destruction in form. Yet others attempt to approach the cataclysm itself as a "punctual" event. Surveying a disparate range of exemplary modernist forms in their relation to the historically unrepresentable, I want to show how a poetics of destruction leads to the construction of universals (epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic)—by virtue of their interpretive openness. Modernism connects to the universal through radical historicity at the moment of its Zero Hour; here, I explore a range of temporalities in which this occurs with the "punctual" event. Finally, it is the nature of the universal itself that is laid bare by

modernism at Zero Hour: on the one hand, through the radical contingency that must attend any claim to the universal; on the other, by virtue of the historical imperative to claim one.[9]

In this portion of my project, I read the written and visual testimony of three women caught up in the moment of destruction as witnesses, victims, survivors, even perpetrators. The American photographer Lee Miller's war journalism, published in *Vogue* through the war, is complemented by the traumatic record and reparative work of her war and Holocaust photography. Hannah Höch, the dada painter and collagist, emerged from internal exile outside of Berlin to participate in the first modernist exhibitions in the destroyed city after Zero Hour; these early exhibitions set the stage for the recuperation of modernism after its banishment and humiliation under Nazism. Finally, the anonymously authored *A Woman in Berlin* documents the survival strategies necessary in a climate of mass sexual predation by Soviet troops immediately after the defeat, and may be read in relation to search for or critique of universal values in modernity. In each of these works, the question of the universal is put, but not necessarily called, by means of their contingent particularly. In each case, writing or art not only add their testimony to history but posit new ways of being during and after the punctual moment of historical experience—they are prospective *and* retrospective. It will be for processes of reparation, only begun, and retrospection to come that the question of the universal may be answered, however provisionally. Seen through the lens of modernism, each asks the question of the universal as destruction at the Zero Hour of modernity in 1945. (Due to space considerations, I will not include the section on Lee Miller's war photography here, though it is important that my essay juxtaposes the experiences of three women—hence my title.)[10]

Internal Liberation: Hannah Höch

Modernism at Zero Hour, in its instances, reveals an indissociability of artistic form from the "event," in its material construction but also as an unrepresentable substrate that will be misapprehended as "abstraction." In Germany at *Stunde Null*, the tentative reemergence of modernism after fascism coincided with conditions of featureless desolation, disorientation, and self-reflection—materially, through destruction and occupation; politically, in the dismantling of the fascist state and killing machine by military occupation, denazification, and democratization; and ethically, in the positing and testing, prior to the adoption, of universal values. Hannah Höch, the most significant woman artist of Berlin dada,[11] experienced the *NS-Zeit* as a modernist artist who was blacklisted at the time of the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art, 1937) exhibition and in due time adopted a self-imposed artistic exile—an "inner emigration" that lasted until the moment of liberation by Soviet troops in May 1945. Höch's modernist "going in" stands as an unusually pure form of a concept that, in postwar debates about German accountability, would be questioned as a form of quietude or indifference to the ethical monstrosity of the NS regime, a charge that in Höch's case is refuted.[12]

Höch is best known for her dada collages and photomontages of public and urban imagery and also, from the 20s, her critiques of race and gender through the use of ethnographic images that eerily anticipate the perversions of the racial state in the 30s.[13] Höch was aware of, and subjected to, the Nazi program of antimodernism in the *Entartete Kunst* and Great German Art (1938) exhibitions.[14] She saw the *Entartete Kunst* show four times in several cities, and in 1939 she was put on a blacklist of proscribed

artists.[15] Her description of that show is an eerie prefiguration of the psychological condition of "going in" that many modernists and others who were not able to externally emigrate were forced to adopt:

> Afternoon in the exhibition *Entartete Kunst*. . . . The most important works from the post-war years [1920s] are here. All the museums and public collections are represented here. After the public persecution it's astonishing how disciplined the audience is. There are a lot of closed faces and you can see opposition in many of them. Barely a word is said. (Ades et al. 12, 171)

Nazi antimodernist cultural politics followed the pattern of institutional and psychological "transvaluation of values" enacted in March 1933 known as *Gleichschaltung*, the "switching over" and "coordination" to Nazi ideology that would be internalized at the same time that it was acted out by public acts of violence and the anti-Semitic April Laws.[16] The "going in" of modernists and their supporters, then, was a result of the cultural *Gleichschaltung* ratified by the philistine Great German Art Exhibition but also by cultural persecution and ethnic violence.[17] Höch's modernism in the 30s and 40s was intensified by, but also an intellectual and aesthetic resistance to, the demand for cultural conformity and/or exclusion in the larger context of NS terror, especially after Kristallnacht in 1938.[18] While she was able to travel up to the outbreak of war with her then-husband, she moved her studio to the outskirts of Berlin, avoiding the destruction of her work during the subsequent air raids. Her internal emigration was neither resignation nor quietude but due to an immediate threat; with the end of her marriage a period of total social isolation begins, which she describes:

> Since 1942 I've lived alone in a little house with a big garden on the outskirts of Berlin [Heiligensee]. Here I survived the war, the bombs, the battle of Berlin, and the postwar years, often in dire circumstances. Around 1937 my great loneliness began. Friends went away and could not be reached by post. I had long since ceased to exhibit. Everyone was suspect. One ceased to speak with anyone. Language was forgotten. . . . (Lavin 215; Ades et al. 12, 237-238; Pawlow 78)



Fig. 1. Hannah Höch in her garden in Berlin-Heiligensee, n.d. Photo Kai-Annett Becker/Berlinische Galerie.

After her death in 1978, Höch's house has been preserved as a "site of memory," opened once a year as a part of the Day of Open Monuments program (fig. 1), where her carefully tended garden, surrounded by a high hedge, stands as a figure for her condition of exile.[19]

Höch experienced the final collapse of the Nazi regime, during the Battle for Berlin and with the arrival of Russian troops on April 22, from her garden—taking the precaution of burying part of her archive, and negotiating with the occupiers, whom she reports did not harass her (taking only some garden tools) even as they paid many "visits" to women in the neighborhood (Makela and Boswell 199). Writing of this period, leading up to the final collapse at *Stunde Null*, she describes liberation as a punctual release from unfreedom:

> Unspeakable feeling of gratitude in my heart. Twelve years of misery—forced on us by a mad, inhuman, yes, bestial 'clique,' using every kind of common force, every mental device, every resource of a barbarism that baulks at no crime—*are over*. In my soul there is a calmness, such as I haven't felt for many years. I am not yielding to delusions, and know that many many terrible things will still crash down on me—and yet—there is an underlying feeling of peace—and it is indescribably exhilarating. (Ades et al. 172; Makela and Boswell 138)

The moment of liberation is a release of that which had been contained and proscribed in the period of inner emigration, while looking forward to a future that could be equally perilous. This was Höch's *Stunde Null* as an artist, looking back at her dada past and forward toward her postwar rediscovery, such that "aller Anfang ist dada!" (every beginning is dada!).

By the end of the year, under the auspices of Soviet authorities, Höch began to show work in the district of Reineckendorf,[20] met the surrealist-influenced artist Heinz Trökes and through him the gallerist Gerd Rosen, and by early 1946 participated in the first exhibitions of modernism in Berlin, as contributor to "Fantastenaustellung" (Fantasy Exhibition) at Gerd Rosen Galerie (Makela and Boswell 199; Feist 78). The "inner experience" of fantasy is highlighted in Höch's emergence from inner emigration (rather than formal innovation, representation, or abstraction); lived experience and the moral authority of modernism in the postwar period are at this point linked, in a discourse of liberation not confined to either side of the representation or expression divide, the aesthetic faultline that would emerge with the East-West division of Germany. In Höch's artist's statement for the show, she privileges inner experience and the gap between the real and ideal as a source for modernism that transcends its periodized movements and styles:

> The abyss between the real world and the idea has never been split open as it is today. This abyss has never been so laden with tragic, grotesque, destructive tensions. Our present reality lies smashed on the ground, and the ideal image of a new, thoroughly rationalized world still rises high above it. As long as reality is not fully rationalized, art will move in districts beyond the rational, it will be 'fantastic'—if we use this expression summarily for everything that has been more or less aptly called Cubism, Expressionism, Abstract Art, Surrealism. (Translated from Gillen and Schmidt 171-172; see also Ades et al. 233)

For Höch, "fantastic" art—as a general rubric for modernism—is not "illustrative" of the real but an attack on it: "[It] brings the fantastic into the things themselves. These phantasms are not an escape but an attack. . . . It tackles reality with a rigorousness not seen before" (qtd. in Barron and Eckmann 277-278). This "attack" proved immediately controversial with the postwar art-going public; as Höch describes debate after the show: "Strong opposition to contemporary art, that is, to everything not recognized by the Nazis as art, by the youth. Developing these blinkered, obstinate, and dehumanized young people, incapable of any free thought, into *human beings* is perhaps the most difficult task of all in this German wasteland" (Barron and Eckmann 278).[21] The rejection of "fantastic" or modernist art here evidences its cultural exclusion in the *NS-Zeit* (but also the willful ignorance of the Youth Movement, which largely supported Hitler). It follows that to exhibit such art would be to perform a kind of reverse *Gleichschaltung*, an attack on the conformity by which it was excluded. Höch's refusal of representation, figuration, or even expression would be later interpreted, after the first philistine response, as the faultline between modernist abstraction and figurative realism that would, during the Cold War, parallel the division of Germany into two political systems. But for now, the claim to have establish a "Zone 5" of pure art, without regard for representation, elicited a reaction: for a skeptical critic, modernist/fantasists are "distancing themselves from everything that 'signifies' reality for us in Germany today in order to enter their own dreamed reality. . . . 'Zone 5' is situated on a very uninviting planet hostile to *human beings*. It is positioned, as they say, on the moon."[22]

A teleology of resurgent modernism, seen as opposed to nationalism, realism, and classicism, could be extended from this moment to the present, but the history is more complicated. It has only been in recent decades that attention has been paid to the historical specificity of the origins of post–1945 art, immediately at or following the Zero Hour, before the Cold War split Germany into two states and, it has been claimed, two competing aesthetics. Two major exhibitions—*The Art of Two Germanys* (Los Angeles County Museum, 2009–2010); and *Geteilte Himmel*, a three-year retrospective at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2010–2014)—were preceded by *Zone 5: Kunst in der Viersektorenstadt 1945–1951* (1989), at the Berlinische Galerie at the moment of Die Wende, which sought to create a baseline account of early postwar aesthetics and exhibitions. While the purposes of the two later shows were to reunite two art historical traditions that were politically separated, and to resolve the antinomy of realism and abstraction in the process, the earlier wanted to demonstrate the heroic impossibility of modernism at its reemergence. The rubric "Zone 5," from an actual exhibition at the Galerie Franz in 1948, becomes the aesthetic complement to the four-sectored city under occupation—the zone of the modern. The exhibition itself, with its catalogue image of Karl Hofer's *Schwarzmondnacht* (1944; fig. 2), sees the return of modernism as a kind of "traumatic realism," in Michael Rothberg's sense, focusing on the Real as trauma, with questions of aesthetic technique or tendency subordinated to the historical moment. The works chosen to represent this reemergence have little to do with the inner freedom of Höch's internal immigration: they are largely bleak testimonies to destruction, at once psychic, cultural, and material. Höch is represented by an oil painting titled *Trauernde Frauen* (Mourning Women; fig. 3), in the company of equally disturbing figurative works by Karl Hofer, Jeanne Mammen, and Theo Balden (Gillen and Schmidt 61; Barron and Eckmann 55). If the telos of German modernism is toward abstraction, after Nazi kitsch and in competition with GDR state-sponsored realism, one critic concluded that the art of Zero Hour was more backward-looking than futural:

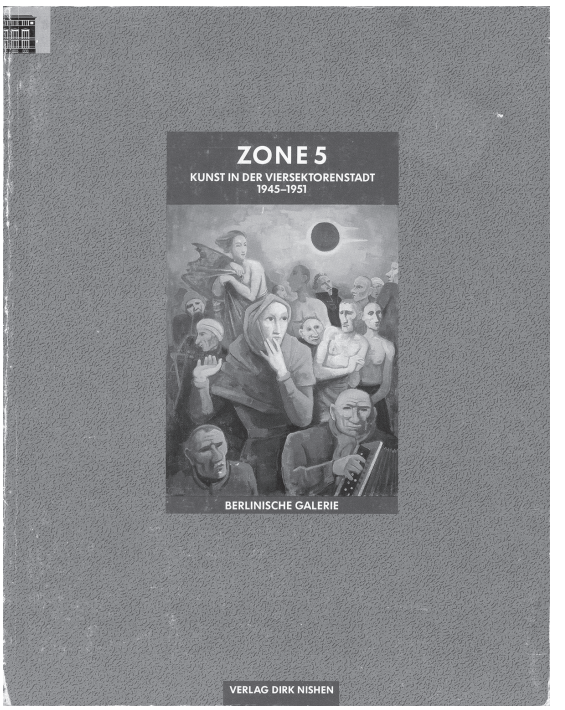


Fig. 2. Cover of *Zone 5*: *Kunst in Der Viersektorenstadt*, 1945–1951 (Berlinische Galerie), with Karl Hofer, *Schwarzmondnacht* (Black Moon Night, 1944). Photo author.

Fig. 3. Hannah Höch, *Trauernde Frauen* (Mourning Women, 1943), oil on canvas. Photo Berlinische Galerie; © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



> Postwar works by Hofer, Balder, and Höch represent, through deindividualizations and stylizations, medieval panels. More importantly, we may comprehend them as giving voice to the annihilation of human life and individualism during the Nazi regime. . . . Through their enclosed contour lines and stability of composition, these works insist, in a Heideggerian and existentialist manner, on being and remaining grounded in the place in which they are situated. The concreteness of being in these artworks becomes an absolute phenomenon that unites all temporalities in itself.[23]

Good examples of this traumatic realism would, in fact, be Hofer's *Schwarzmondnacht* and Höch's *Trauernde Frauen*. But this partial claim—that the materialist, existential, and narrative concerns of art at Zero Hour have not yet joined the liberating progress toward abstraction—does not do justice to the artists' synthesis of the avant-garde past, its horizon of freedom placed under erasure by twelve years of Nazism, with the traumatic, material present, making the moment of *Stunde Null* one of material reinscription at a moment of emergence. In Höch's *Trauernde Frauen*, the ethnographic critique of German national identity in her photomontages of the 20s, as well as her frequent recourse to group portraits to indicate the leveling of group identity, becomes a concealed subtext in her depiction of the complicitous and defeated women who supported the Nazi regime. These women are not representations of loss or mourning or hope but masks of realism covering over their duplicitous past:

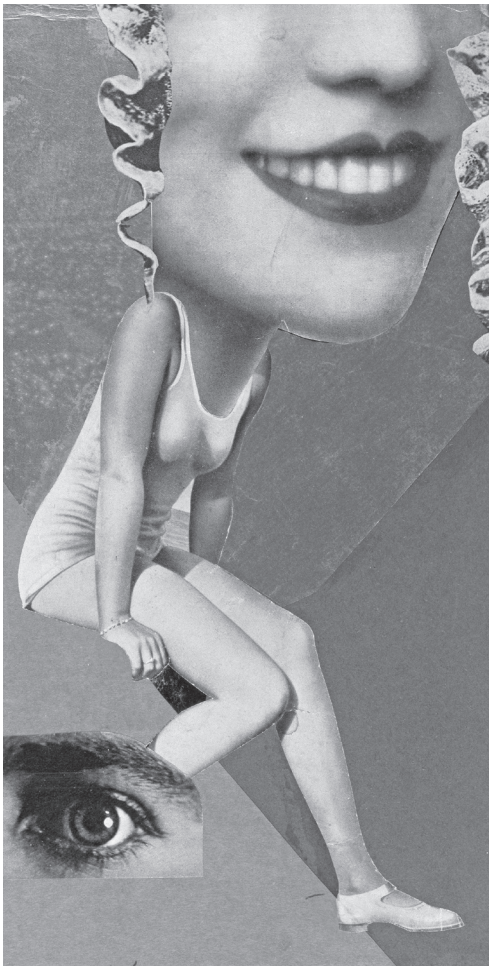
> In the painting "Mourning Women," also from around 1945, this reference to collective suffering and hope is missing: seven old women are lined up side by side as in a wall frieze. . . . If we look more closely, focusing on their faces looking forward or straight ahead, it becomes clear that, contrary to their gestures and color semantics, none of them shows a genuine expression of grief. Instead, there are traits of hardness and a goblin-like, almost bigoted wickedness; only the two old people on the left edge of the picture seem more concerned and thoughtful. . . . Here, Hannah Höch overcomes the pathos of collective grief common in postwar art. Her knowledge of human nature and here skepticism enable her to perceive behind the facade the unteachability of their compatriots and their "inability to mourn." (Translated from Feist 78)

Höch succeeds in overturning the conventions of traumatic realism through her distancing devices—the preeminent concern of dada after Hugo Ball.[24] The stylistic periodization of art history—limited to a succession of styles, so that modernism's formal features inevitably overtake its realist and narrative concerns—needs to attend to the complex negotiation evident at the historical moment of *Stunde Null*. On one end of the spectrum falls her post-traumatic work, typified by *Trauernde Frauen* or two series of dark, nightmarish watercolors: "About 1943, with the heaviest bombing raids on Berlin, she created the series 'Notzeit' [Time of Suffering] and 'Totentanz' [Dance of Death]. Social criticism and indictments without any trace of dada were already contained in watercolors and drawings from the early 30s. . . . The wartime series shifts the social-critical pathos to a more universal level," recalling the expressive realism of Käthe Kollwitz.[25] At the same time, Höch was producing the fantastic photomontages that would become her chosen works to exhibit, along with a children's book that "combining photomontage with the hallucinatory plant imagery she had come to favor," worked

to distance traumatic concerns.[26] The art-historical split between figurative realism and modernist abstraction was negotiated during her period of internal emigration, while it is the fantastic work of the photomontages that she privileged as a necessary "attack on the real." In Höch's work at *Stunde Null*, the "inability to mourn," seen as the crux of postwar German denial, is being directly challenged, both by the figurative work and the dada-inspired photomontages.[27] Höch's liberation drew on the multiple genres and motives at the moment of *Stunde Null*, supporting the more nuanced account of the origins and meaning of postwar modernism now under way.

It is important, then, to distinguish the representational aims of Höch's traumatic realism from the "attack on the real" she exhibited in her "fantastic" photomontages in 1946. Here, the difference in technique and medium is important: while Höch's oil paintings and watercolors have a deliberateness and saturation, due to their materials, that tends toward a dark immobility or stasis, her photomontages enact an opposite principle of defamiliarizing juxtaposition, desiring play, critical distance, and cognitive reorientation. While her paintings and watercolors are often expressive of states of trauma or injury, the photomontages are an enactment of freedom found in the technique of cutting up images and recombining them in order to disrupt prior categories and to propose a new order of reality. If *Gleichschaltung* is the "switching over" and "coordination" of categories into an ideologically fused totality that, at the same time, perpetuates the perverse and distorted unreality of fascism, Höch's photomontages are the undoing of fused categories, toward the latent energies that are congealed or suppressed in them—a future-oriented, rather than trauma-recovering, account of the work of "inner emigration."[28] The work of survival, for Höch, is not a process of mourning but the process of rigorous recovery of cognition and the senses from a condition of automatization: "As long as the rationalization of reality has not yet been achieved—and it will never be completely—'fantastic' art will show what is wrong with such a goal and its reality. . . . This is the task of psychological discipline, the antidote, the change from reaction to action, indignation and conscience." Positive values succeed the destruction of all values—not a totalizing transvaluation but an intuition of a "suprareality" to come (Translated from Gillen and Schmidt 171-172; see also Ades et al. 233).

The consistent aim of Höch's work in photomontage was, from the 20s through to Zero Hour, to create a future-oriented "suprareality" that was both utopian and realizable, not only as a work of fantasy but also as a critique of pregiven categories (as they had become calcified and perverted through the "coordination" of *Gleichschaltung*). While I am not reading her critique of categories as necessarily queer, it is informed, indeed develops, through the gender hybridity and racial mixing in her work from the 1920s on. An example from the early Nazi period is *Fur ein Fest gemacht* (Made for a Party, 1936; fig. 4) (Makela and Boswell 128; Ades et al. 137; Burmeister 60), which performs a quick ideology critique of Aryan gender stereotypes of youth, health, and media/physical culture. Höch's montage cuts up and reconstructs a feminine figure, combining an oversized, kewpie-doll head without eyes with a bathing-suited, svelte but headless body; a glaring woman's eye dissociates the gaze from the body in a dimensionless space below. As the critic Carolyn Lanchner writes, "For its affective impact, *Made for a Party* depends almost wholly on the performative efficacy of the 'already seen'": commonplace media images that communicate not referentially but in terms of conventions and codes. This use of the "already seen" renders the "distancing devices" of dada into a form of ideology critique, as it is the "coordinated" system of such conventions and codes that is



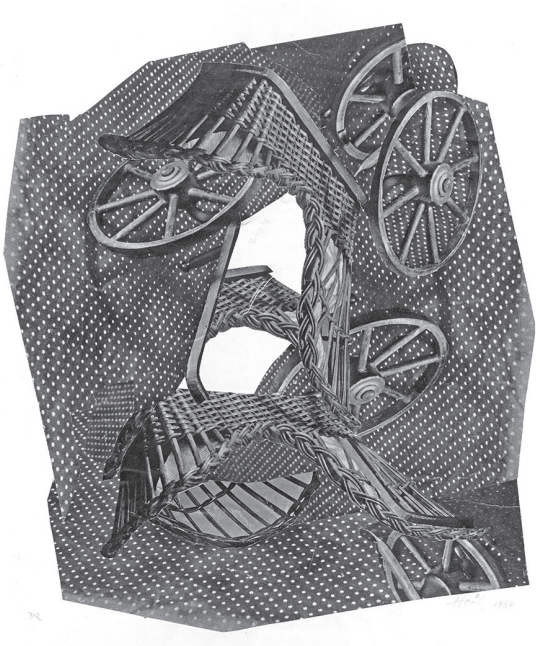


Fig. 4. Hannah Höch, *Fur ein Fest gemacht* (Made for a Party, 1936), photomontage. Photo ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Stuttgart; © 2020 ARS/VG Bild-Kunst.

Fig. 5. Hannah Höch, *Der Unfall* (The Accident, 1936), photomontage. Photo ifa, Stuttgart; © 2020 ARS/VG Bild-Kunst.

invoked (Lanchner 134). But rather than agree that the image is only mildly shocking in its flirty displacements, we may also see a pointed attack on the fixing of the woman's body within cultural codes that are being dismantled before our eyes, almost without notice, mimicking and reversing Joseph Goebbels's facile propaganda effects. A similar sleight-of-hand is at work in *Der Unfall* (The Accident; fig. 5), which dismantles a baby carriage accident into a combination of perspectives that circle around an empty center, the "event" of catastrophe itself (Makela and Boswell 126; Ades et al. 161; Burmeister 138). For Lanchner, the viewer's attempt to make sense of the jumbled image "creates a kind of duck/rabbit oscillation between attention directed to content [the accident] and that directed to structure [compositional elements]," between "totality and its constituent parts." But "a fatal indexical trait of 'the already seen' ruptures initial attention to the elegancies of [such] work when its parts ask the 'What am I?' question [of] photographically produced replicas" (Lanchner 134, 139); the use of "already seen" images provokes a question of their reality. Höch's production of enigma in her photomontages is an ideology critique that questions the relation of part to whole that leaves the latter suspended and unknowable, a space of freedom in opposition to the "coordination" of categories.

In the photomontages from her period of isolation, Höch intensifies the derealizing effects of the "already seen" in fantastic and impossible dreamscapes reminiscent of Max Ernst. *Nur Nicht mit beiden Beinen auf der Erde Stehen* (Never Keep Both Feet on the Ground, 1940; fig. 6) records a fantasy of weightless ballerinas levitating into an ambiguous, light-dark sky/void, where hovers an African-masked birdlike object with stony feathers and talons (Makela and Boswell 153; Ades et al. 165; Burmeister 57). The ballerinas' weightlessness could also be a consequence of their being hung by the neck, kept from view by the denying, masked bird object, a possible reading at the time. The grounds of both physical reality and cognition are effaced and held in tension, depending on the path of the bird object (which might continue its journey out of the frame). Far from registering any kind of escapism, a space of unknowing attends a feeling of weightlessness, while objectification connotes dread. Höch is moving from the ideology critique of categories to a form of fantasy that can only be seen as holistic, as its parts become ever more obscure. In *Traumnacht* (Dream Night, 1943–1946; fig. 7), the fantasy darkens to the point that none of its elements are distinguishable from each other; each creates the others' meaning effects (Makela and Boswell 159; Burmeister 114). Submersion in a dreamlike state becomes the consequence of political submission. A collaged orchid, originally from an ethnographic image where it appears as a head ornament, turns into a spider-like denizen of a garden of inhospitable shapes (giant nail, metal sphere on pole, fallen blossoms, spider legs) within an ambiguous, subterranean space. An affect of suffocating interiority is intensified here, disclosing accumulating toxins that offer no imaginable absorption to another state, while parasites feed on

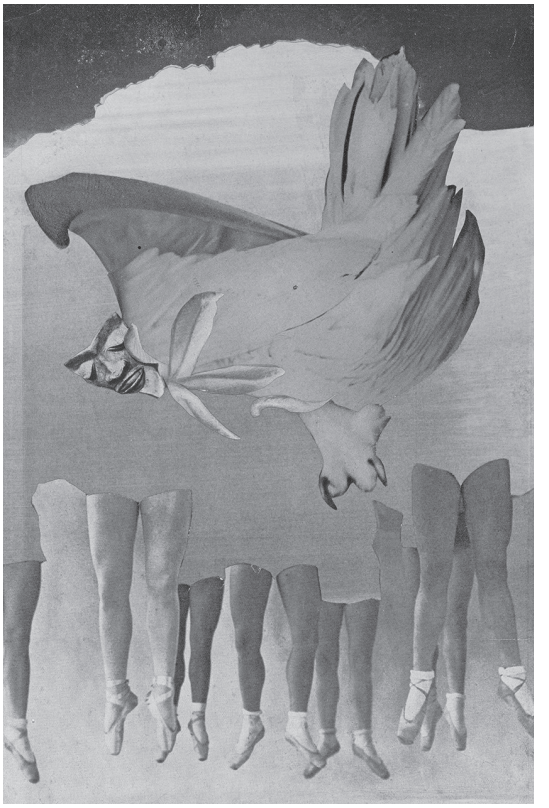




Fig. 6. Hannah Höch, *Nur Nicht mit beiden Beinen auf der Erde Stehen* (Never Keep Both Feet on the Ground, 1940), photomontage. Photo ifa, Stuttgart; © 2020 ARS/VG Bild-Kunst.

Fig. 7. Hannah Höch, *Traumnacht* (Dream Night, 1943–1946), photomontage. Photo ifa, Stuttgart; © 2020 ARS/VG Bild-Kunst.

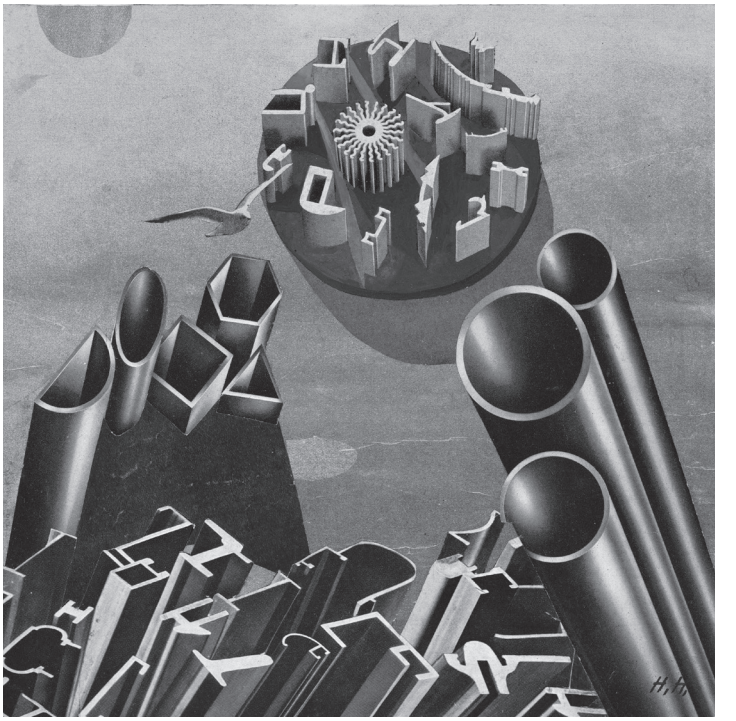


Fig. 8. Hannah Höch, *Friedenstaube* (Dove of Peace, 1945), photomontage. Photo © 2020 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; © 2020 ARS/VG Bild-Kunst.

decomposition. In this work, the natural (and transitory) effaces the cultural (or manufactured); in the condition of inner immigration, boundaries disappear, leaving both the body and psyche open to decay. When the manufactured returns, in the military-industrial fantasy of *Friedenstaube* (Dove of Peace, 1945; fig. 8), the distancing device triumphs over submersion (or submission) (Makela and Boswell 160; Ades et al. 170; Burmeister 153). In this dream of peace after *Stunde Null*, the machinery of war is dismantled and repurposed; manufacturing components are separated to be set to work; the barrels of artillery transform into nonlethal, playful shapes; the type fonts of propaganda are reordered, ready to use. The dove of peace negotiates these formerly threatening mechanisms with ease, over a landscape no longer seen through bomb sites. The repurposing of the machine is also a return of perverted categories to their productive uses: a modernity at Zero Hour that did not go wrong.

Traversing the Zone: *A Woman in Berlin*

A key text for conceptualizing the cultural logic of particular and universal, destruction and renewal at Zero Hour is the anonymously written *A Woman in Berlin*, a narrative of survival through eight weeks of military assault on civilians from 20 April–15 June 1945. The work's publication history testifies to its conflicted reception: it was first published not in German but in English in 1954, then in German in 1959, re-edited (and authenticated) in 2000, published in a second German edition in

2003, retranslated into English in 2005, and made into a movie starring Nina Hoss in 2008 (dir. Max Färberböck).[29] Anonyma's, or the Woman's, narrative spans the period of the first arrival of Soviet troops until the provisional stabilization of the occupation; during this time tens of thousands of German women were raped and sexually predated, in a wide range of circumstances, by victorious Soviet troops.[30] *A Woman* was thus initially read (and criticized) as a document of national humiliation during the Cold War and, as evident from its paperback cover, as a spectacle for prurient interest (fig. 9).

With increasing critical respect for the book, and the question of its authenticity addressed but not entirely put to rest, the work has become a literary classic, not just document, of Zero Hour—valued as a record the occurrence of mass rape in the Fall of Berlin but also as an erudite and philosophical essay on sexuality, ideology, and values. The feminist legal scholar Janet Halley has produced a critical reading of the text frame by the Human Rights discourse of rape as a war crime after Bosnia and Rwanda. Balancing its truth content with its literary value, Halley shows how rape in conditions of war is not reducible to a univocal criminal act but opens a faultline between contingent experience and consent that even now is still under negotiation.[31] For the Americanist Werner Sollors, the work's literariness is the reason it is an exemplary text of the Zero Hour, in its cosmopolitan erudition and modernist form. Sollors identifies a panoply of literary references, ranging from the classics to modernism: "There may be more literary references in *A Woman in Berlin* than in any other writer's diary of the period, [with] numerous passages of foreshadowing and backward glances, recurring rhetorical devices, structural elements, and leitmotifs" (39).[32] For Sollors, Anonyma's refusal to melodramatize rape is enabled by her literary acuteness, confirming Halley's account of rape as "highly differentiated, ranging from horrifying gang rapes…to close-to-consensual relations that the narrator herself analogizes to prostitution" (45). Following both, I read the work's gendered account of traumatic experience of sexual violence at Zero Hour between the author's (proto-)modernism and post-1945

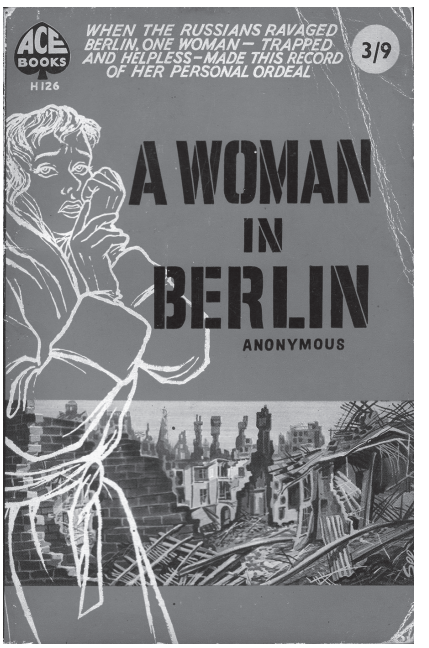


Fig. 9. Cover of Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*. London: Harborough Publishing, 1955; Ace Books, 1957. Photo author.

discourses of consent and universal law, from the Nuremberg Trials and Geneva Convention to decades of Human Rights discourse. Anonyma's narrative both demands and postpones judgment; it is crucial to *A Woman*'s modernism that judgment—its political and ethical consequences—is an open question.

The narrative of *A Woman in Berlin* is in both aesthetic and ethical ways modernist; Baudelaire's "transitory and eternal" moment informs its self-reflexive, openly constructed narrative, which becomes a scene of ethical decision. The narrator Anonyma, while living under fascism and not disavowing her participation in it, seems always to have been "modern" in her high degree of self-reflection and sophistication. As a journalist and translator, she writes, "I've been in twelve European countries; I've seen Moscow, Paris, and London, among other cities, and experienced Bolshevism, Parliamentarianism, and Fascism up close, as an ordinary person among ordinary people" (175). Her knowledge of basic Russian from her work as journalist provides her means for negotiating and surviving sexual predation at the hands of the occupiers, while it also leads to nuanced comparisons between and among nationalities, languages, beliefs, and genders. At the same time, Anonyma comprehends the disruption of everyday life in the "zone" of Zero Hour as an "ordinary person," using her basic knowledge or insight; experience itself becomes the test of a politics.[33] Anonyma's modernism takes place at a crux between the materiality of everyday life at the moment of destruction and a horizon of interpretation kept open in the process of self-reflection. The prerequisite for her modernity is thus her questioning, ironic stance toward events, which finds its correlative in the reduction of material conditions to a state of ruin. The ruined condition of Berlin, and of the lives within it, provide the building blocks of the narrative that may succeed and transform it.[34] The narrative event of Zero Hour thus takes place as a fractal series of incommensurate moments, adding up to an inexorable sequence of episodes that emerges from conditions of "bare life" that could not be otherwise. At Zero Hour, prospective, punctual, and retrospective aspects of the event are each unlinked and intertwined. In a representative passage, which amounts to a synecdoche for the narrative as a whole, the author's modernism emerges as stylistic, conceptual, and historical:

> Some people equipped with heavy scoops called us down to the street, where we shoveled the pile of refuse on the corner, loading the rubble and horse manure onto a wheelbarrow. Then we carted it to a nearby rubble site: ancient plaster and scrap metal from the air raids had been covered with fresh debris from the recent artillery bombardment, which in turn was strewn with rags and cans and lots of empty bottles. I found two silver bromide postcards, made in Germany, with pictures of nudes embracing—all covered with thumbprints. I was reminded of the time I was in an office in Moscow and left some German and American newspapers lying about for a few minutes. When I picked them up and went back to reading I noticed some pages were torn—several ads for women's girdles and bras had been hastily ripped out. The Russians never see ads like that; their newspapers are utterly devoid of sex appeal. So in their eyes even a stupid ad that a man from the West would hardly give a second glance must seem like the most amazing pornography. (155)

In this passage, the defeat and occupation of Germany at Zero Hour is allegorized in the minutest details: as "rubble and horse manure," and also some dirty pictures. The *grande histoire* of state

politics and war is demolished as a universal, turning out to be the same as *petite histoire*—anecdotes that seem to have no bearing at all on Universal History, such as the sex life of Louis XIV. History as necessity, rubble, and dirty pictures becomes the baseline reality she negotiates for survival in everyday life.[35] What is remarkable in this passage is first its layering of detail—a palimpsest of particulars, adding up to nothing but their own evidence, placed in relation to the sexual politics of survival that may or may not transcend them. At the basis of her modernism is a critique of masculinity, and hence any Universal History of the positive and political. The less advanced Russians are seen as backward from the perspective of a cosmopolitan, thus rationalizing their collective brutality in a moment of self-preservation, just as their ripping out of newspaper ads is a way for Anonyma to process her serial rapes. In both layering and reflecting on the experience of devastation, both material and sexual, Anonyma gains agency while she posits a horizon to come—where the unmasking of normative assumptions discloses a truth that is otherwise concealed, opening toward a kind of freedom in destruction. At this textual moment, conflating material history and sexual identity, Anonyma creates the context for posing the question of the universal: What is justice in the face of radical contingency, when not guaranteed by a universal order? The destruction of all values is an enabling condition for the question of rape and consent.

In posing the question of the universal, Anonyma's politics of everyday life take place at the very moment that the basic unreality and perverse normalization the National Socialist regime installed in collective fantasy are disclosed. In this sense, Zero Hour as *Stunde Null* is overdetermined in Germany; it is not just the end of the war, seen as a conventional laying down of arms when at least one side is exhausted and there is no point to continue fighting.[36] Rather, it is the end of an ideological epoch that aspired to totality with the institutionalization and internalization of *Gleichschaltung*, the "switching over" and "coordination" of the twisted forms and fantasies of fascism in April 1933, which will culminate in Joseph Goebbels's hysterical summons to "*Totaler Krieg*" (total war) in February 1943.[37] "Switching over" as the negation of all that came before leads to a condition of "total war" as impossible futurity. The prior condition of Anonyma's ideology critique is the total violence of the historically specific end of the regime. Where there is no distinction between combatants and noncombatants, the call for the "shortest war" as *Totaler Krieg* risked destruction for all—in the defense of Berlin to the "last man"; the mobilization of the *Volkssturm* (People's Storm) of adolescents and seniors; and the punishment for any form of surrender in public executions.[38] If *Gleichschaltung* and *Totaler Krieg* provide the frameworks in which destruction "makes sense" as predicted, the actual events of Zero Hour/*Stunde Null* become their fulfillment but also their critical undoing. Anonyma's narrative begins with the onset of the "event" not only of attacking troops but of ideological undoing: "It's true: the war is rolling toward Berlin. What was yesterday a distant rumble has now become a constant roar. . . . We are ringed in by barrels, and the circle is growing smaller by the hour" (1).[39] The principle of *Totaler Krieg* moves quickly in defeat from the scale of Universal History to the material conditions of everyday life, seen as identical to history.

My reading of her text begins with the ways the material condition of an event that is *no longer* contained by ideology—and thus *not* allegorical—offers her a means to survive it. What takes place is an immediate defamiliarization of persons, places, and things in a condition of destruction as material that will survive itself—substituting particulars for ideology:

> These days everything is up for grabs. People no longer feel so closely tied to things; they no longer distinguish clearly between their own property and that of others.
>
> I found a letter wedged inside a drawer, addressed to the real tenant. I felt ashamed for reading it, but I read it all the same. A passionate love letter, which I flushed down the toilet. (Most of the time we still have water.) Heart, hurt, love, desire—how foreign, how distant those words sound now. Evidently a sophisticated, discriminating love life requires three square meals a day. (3)

At the moment of de-individuation, a process in which culturally inscribed "things" turn into mere matter takes place: a love letter meant for someone else is flushed down the toilet. This is a moment of "reverse *Gleichschaltung*," in which totalizing inscriptions of meaning and value are themselves "switched off" and we revert to an unknown prior state. At the same time this happens, language becomes material in a form of critical awareness (which recalls Victor Klemperer's critique of LTI, the "language of the Third Reich").[40] As it deindividuates, the process also collectivizes, but in material rather than ideological form:

> Our radio's been dead for four days. Once again we see what dubious blessing modern technology really is. Machines with no intrinsic value, worthless if you can't plug them in somewhere. Bread, however, is absolute. Coal is absolute. And gold is gold whether you're in Rome, Peru, or Breslau. But radios, gas stoves, central heating, hot plates, all these gifts of the modern age—they're nothing but dead weight if the power goes out. At the moment we're marching backward in time. Cave dwellers. (5)

A condition of ur-sociality emerges in the reversion of things to materials that leads to a kind of de-individuation, where each person's personhood is unlinked from its former ideological position, figured through reversing the "objecthood" of things. When this happens, the condition of a materialized collectivity ushers in a new process of individuation, in which "distance" from events and materials is critical. To begin with, those preinscribed within the state ideology become merely one variant among many other strands; a cultural relativism emerges that redefines sociality as communal, not national. Describing the denizens of the new social order she inhabits at Zero Hour, Anonyma describes "the usual cave dwellers on the usual chairs," each unlinked from their prior social (class) positions:

> First is the baker's wife, two plump red cheeks swaddled in a lambskin collar. Then the pharmacist's widow, who finished a training course in first aid and who sometimes lays out cards on two chairs pushed together and reads them for other women. Frau Lehmann, whose husband is missing in the East and who is now a pillow for the sleeping infant on her arm and four-year-old Lutz asleep on her lap, his shoelaces dangling. The young man in gray trousers and horn-rimmed glasses who on closer inspection turns out to be a young woman. (7-8)

The persons in this cave are unlinked particulars—a random collection of individuals on its way to becoming a *Bevölkerung* (demographic population) rather than a *Volk* (people), much less a

Volksgemeinschaft (ethnic community; Koonz 191). The condition of sociality they attain in this reversal of being a preconstituted *Volk* appears as a premodern "cave," soon to become a "zone" under conditions of occupation, without strictly defined boundaries or constitution. Where sociality under present conditions, as I write, is structured on "distancing," here distance collapses as a reduced condition of collectivity, which Anonyma stands outside of and observes. Unlinking sociality occurs at the same moment that language is freed from the LTI of *Gleichschaltung* at a moment of ideological re-inscription brought on by the terror of the event, and that becomes a permanent fixture as a language-centered critique:

> The brain clings to set phrases, fragments of sentences: "Pass lightly through this world, for it is nothing … and each one falls as God desires.… *Noli timere*." And so on, until this wave of bombers passes.
>
> As if on command, everyone starts chattering feverishly, laughing, joking, shouting over one another. Fräulein Behn steps up with the news sheet and reads Goebbels's speech in honor of the Führer's birthday (the date had slipped most of our minds). She reads with a new intonation, a mocking, sarcastic voice we haven't heard down here before: "Golden fields of grain… a people at peace." "How about that," say the people from Berlin. Or: "That would be nice!" (11-12)

The ironic reference to "the Führer's birthday" (which is also seen as evidence of the work's authenticity) is an apt measure of the degree of ideological undoing in the process of destruction. In this moment of reverse *Gleichschaltung*, things drop out of conformity and their basis as a perversion of language is disclosed. This is a process that takes place sequentially, in unfolding episodes, day by day over an eight-week period. *Totaler Krieg* is itself destroyed by the material conditions of defeat—the Soviet containment of Berlin, the last futile acts of resistance (including many instances of suicide), deprivation and hoarding, the arrival of an occupying army, the predation of civilian population. While not experienced as liberation, the moment of Zero Hour has an element that is life-affirming, at least for Anonyma. The destruction of the ideological rationale for the destruction leaves nothing but bare life itself, a moment of positing a (pseudo-)universal ("life") in the foregrounding of materiality:

> What's clear is that every threat to your life boosts your vitality. My own flame is stronger; I'm burning more fiercely than before the air raids. Each new day of life is a day of triumph. You've survived once again. You're defiant. On the one hand you stand taller, but at the same time your feet are planted more firmly on the ground. (15)

It is an open question, however, whether this moment of "renewal," a hallmark of NS discourse, is itself an ideological reinscription, or a new horizon under historical conditions.[41]

Yet this moment of transcendence was written before the acts of sexual assault that Anonyma suffered and managed, in the end, to survive. Reading the central core of her narrative—the series of rapes that begin a week into its account, about April 27 with the arrival of Russians troops on her block—shifts from the layering of particulars that establishes both the timeline and relativism of her

account, to inassimilable events that demand another level of judgment. The handbook *Crimes of War* (compiled in 1999 after the events of Bosnia and Rwanda) frames rape as a war crime in broadly universalist terms that must be considered in any account of it: "Rape as a spoil of combat can be found through history," while "rape has been considered a war crime for centuries" (Gutman and Rieff 323). Framing the modern history of rape as a war crime, the authors cite events of *Stunde Null* that were first ignored in historical accounts: "The Soviet Army raped its way across Prussia and into Berlin in the final days of World War II, yet Moscow's military judges took a victor's place of honor on the bench at Nuremberg. In fact, the founding statute of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg made no specific reference to rape, relying on language prohibiting inhumane treatment to encompass rapes committed by Nazis" (324).[42] Moral relativism on a grand scale occurs between acts of NS atrocity as covered by a general statute while the "victor's justice" of the Russians (and Americans) is not mentioned, even as this elision is corrected with the Geneva Convention of 1949. Precisely on this faultline, Soviet troops were ordered by the "ukaz Stalina" (Stalin's order) not to rape, although Stalin reportedly commented, "We lecture our soldiers too much; let them have their initiative."[43] In Halley's account, the "ukaz Stalina," rather than preventing abuse, only helped weaponize it.[44] Part of NS propaganda was, as well, to urge civilians to resist by terrorizing them with narratives of Soviet atrocities already committed; the saturated fear of civilians at *Stunde Null* was ideologically produced in this sense. But the event itself is nonidentical to its anticipation; its particulars cannot be absorbed into narrative continuity.

The traumatic moment of rape is the Zero Hour itself, on an ethical faultline of representation that still produces shock:

> One of them grabs my wrists and jerks me along the corridor. Then the other is pulling as well, his hand on my throat, so I can no longer scream. I no longer want to scream, for fear of being strangled. They're both tearing away at me; instantly I'm on the floor. Something comes clinking out of my jacket pocket, must be my key ring, with the key to the building. I end up with my head on the bottom step of the basement stairs. I can feel the damp coolness of the floor tiles. The door above is ajar and lets in a little light. One man stands there keeping watch, while the other tears my underclothes, forcing his way— (53)

It was an act of great courage for Anonyma to have written this, and for her narrative to be published, translated, and circulated. My quoting the passage follows this intent—to counter the long historical denial of events and to draw out their implications for judgment.[45] At the same time, this is not only the central episode in a narrative of injury; it is an opening to the Real of historical trauma as lived experience. In this sense, as Halley argues forcefully, the crime of rape cannot be separated from the material destruction of war; at the same time, rape is quintessentially ideological as it conflates representation with the event. Anonyma's narrative registers this dual aspect in her focus on material details—the key on her key ring, the coolness of the floor tiles—as evocatively incommensurate from the experience she is narrating and its meaning (or lack of it). From this point forward, her account operates on a dual register of material facts in a deferred horizon of judgment—acts that are in fact war crimes, but who could know or judge them to be so, if not her? That judgment intersects with

her own process of decision, of how to act given the material condition in which she finds herself, as well as how to write through its discontinuity. While her narrative to this point is updated on a daily basis, after the first two forced rapes on April 27, followed by a third by a brawny soldier named Petka, whom she appeases, she stops writing until May 1. In this interim she is forcibly raped a fourth time, in a brutal act of "victor's justice" that is both physical and symbolic, and in which "with great deliberation he drops a gob of gathered spit into my mouth" (63).[46] Halley comments that there are only four moments in Anonyma's narrative of "direct encounter with the limit unbearable feeling," and that this moment counts not because of the rape per se but because it places her at a crux, between being utterly reduced to material destruction and summoning the will to live. On the one hand, "rape in the mouth, rape negotiated for under coercive circumstances, it's all rape"; and yet also "reaching this nadir instantly provoked her life-preserving and affirming capacities." At this point she decides she has no choice but to take matters into her own hands:

> Damn this to hell! I say out loud. Then I make up my mind.
>
> No question about it. I have to find a single wolf to keep away the pack. An officer, as high-ranking as possible, a commandant, a general, whatever I can manage. After all, what are my brains for, my little knowledge of the enemy's language? (64)

As much as the initial rape, this moment of decision is the crux of her narrative in terms of judgment. In her refusal to be "mere mute booty, a spoil of war," in grossly material terms, does her decision involve consent, even under the circumstances, or is it made under duress? Her immediate question of consent, which may not be identical to "consent" in retrospective sense, splits into two aspects, both indissociable from the event itself. On the one hand, she is reduced to a material condition, in which she has no choice but to accept the fact of rape as "victor's justice"; on the other, she is not: she can bargain so that her experience is a lesser injury, a kind of willful "prostitution" that she can negotiate as circumstances require. Thus asserting her autonomy in a situation of collective rape, Anonyma takes to the street, as it were, to find "a single wolf," which she does in roughly a half an hour; he is "Anatole," with whom she makes a brief relationship until he is reassigned. From this point on, Anonyma's partners—and her protection—are negotiated across a wide range of availabilities. The collectivization of rape turns into a hybrid form of sexual mores as conquest evolves into fraternization; this in turn allows Anonyma greater choice, to an extent. After a sixth semi-forced rape, she is solicited by an unnamed "major," who, due to injury, is less physically aggressive; she goes on to develop a more personal, emotionally intimate, compact with him that opens the question of consent under the historical circumstances of collective rape:

> By no means could it be said that the major is raping me. One cold word and he'd probably go his way and never come back. So I am placing myself at this service of my own accord. Am I doing it because I like him or out of a need for love? God forbid! For the moment I've had it up to here with men and their male desire; I can't imagine ever longing for any of that again. Am I doing it for bacon, butter, sugar, candles, canned meat? To some extent I'm sure I am. . . . In addition, I like the major, and the less he wants from me as a man, the more I like him as a person. (116)

Along with the episodes of unquestionable rape—and they will end with the major—this is a third narrative crux in which the question of consent, thus a universal, is put. Does Anonyma have autonomous consent under these historical circumstances; otherwise put, how does her contingent narrative put the universal question of whether she does? On what basis can she claim to have autonomy, and should we as readers doubt her testimony (or also its veracity)? Again, this question splits between the materiality of rape and the absence of any normative frame; there is no final rule that can be applied. Once the possibility of autonomy is established, along with the increasing sociality of fraternization, a process of reparation begins. This process is both political and personal—repairing the rupture of ideological *Gleichschaltung* as a parallel to the negotiation of rape, toward what appears to be a provisional normalization as the period of conquest is succeeded by political reorganization under occupation. The question of consent is suspended in a zone that is occupied Berlin, but also our reading.

Prospectively, *A Woman in Berlin* begins in the undoing of the false totality of Nazi *Gleichschaltung* and *Totaler Krieg* that took place with the historical end date of the war—in conventional terms, 8-9 May 1945. Anonyma's narrative shows that this overdetermined "end" in fact takes place episodically, on multiple layers of contingent experience, while still asking a larger question of ethical judgment as historical. In her narrative, the punctual moment of *Stunde Null* occurs—as material fact and narrative figure—as the series of rapes that begin on April 27 and that finally become absorbed in the process of survival, fraternization, and occupation; the question of autonomous judgment, whether consent exists under the historical pressure of events, differs at each succeeding stage—or is distributed equally among them. The concluding one third of Anonyma's narrative, as Halley notes, can seem repetitious and inconsequential in its account of mere survival in terms of food, shelter, and work. But it is precisely the form of reintegration, if not reparation, the narrative advances that allows us to understand the degree to which any kind of normative framework was suspended. This is not closure, even as, retrospectively, the reorganization of everyday life under occupation constructs a new conceptual framework to replace the false totality of *Gleichschaltung*. The political overcoming of fascism becomes a politics, to begin with, of impossible destruction—of the city but also a person—but then a perspective from which it is impossible to claim there exists a normative framework. If so, Adorno's "New Categorical Imperative" may be invoked—the demand that an event on the scale of Auschwitz or the mass rape of women "should never happen again"—leading to post–1945 efforts to codify the universal, and thus post-national, frameworks of human rights.[47] A second lesson of this text, however, is that these rights are still "contingently universal," after Judith Butler; if they are historical, they are subject to change and must be reasserted time and again (11-43). The degree of contingency is precisely identical to the condition of war that contextualizes rape. Considering such relativism, *A Woman in Berlin* asks its question of the event and the language used to depict it, including the narrative coherence of the narrator, a.k.a. Anonyma:

> Now there are holes in my memory. Once again I drank a great deal, can't recall the details. The next thing I remember is Monday morning, the grey light of dawn, a conversation with Anatole that led to a minor misunderstanding. I said to him, "You are a bear." I know the word well—*medvede*'—which was also the name of a well-known Russian restaurant on Tauentzienstrasse.

> Anatol, however, thought I was getting my words mixed up, so he corrected me, very patiently, the way you'd speak to a child: "No, that's wrong. A *m'edv'ed* is an animal. A brown animal, in the forest. It's big and roars. I am a *chelovek*—a person." (82)

Before human rights, there must be a *person*, defined as the one who can bear rights and has speech. Anonyma's writing unlinks and reconstructs personhood from the ideological ruins of Zero Hour. But "personhood," too—like the events of her narrative—is a crux, a contingent moment held open in the absence of any framework of norms, under the material conditions of destruction. Anonyma negotiates her survival between the ruins of *Gleichschaltung* and the discourse of universals that will succeed it—the Nuremberg trials, the Geneva Convention, the series of legal conventions of an as-yet unrealized horizon of international law and Human Rights discourse. Anonyma's experience of trauma remains in the *zone*, and in many ways our understanding and judgment of its final meaning is likewise suspended.

Questioning Universals: Three Women

I conclude with a question: What do the vastly different experiences of three women at Zero Hour, each informed by modernism but in very different ways, mean for the construction of universals? To claim the universal, either epistemological, ethical, or aesthetic (or in some combination), as the predicate of destruction is the force of their modernist exemplarity, as both historical and gendered. And in each, the temporality of Zero Hour is experienced in a different way: for Lee Miller, the punctual moment compels her onward to an uncanny event that she captures in her photography; any further implications seem to stop right there, with an open question that can only be pursued later, at another time, apart from its dangers. With Hannah Höch, the experience of inner emigration is fulfilled in the anticipation of a freedom yet to come, realized in the medium of her collages as dismantling and reconfiguring of prior categories that had become fused in *Gleichschaltung* and *Totaler Krieg*. Finally, Anonyma's narrative begins with the experience of destruction, as consequence of the forced participation and refusal of protection of civilians in the Fall of Berlin, but works to retrospectively convert that experience into a reversal of Nazi ideological conformity. In each case, the horizon of the universal depends, to begin, on how each woman realizes her personhood and experience *as a woman* in relation to the historical event of destruction. For Judith Butler, an "incompletion" of the subject as historical is a fundamental precondition, apart from any a priori or procedural logic, for "restaging the universal": "The subject which comes into existence through [Lacan's] 'bar' is one whose prehistory is necessarily foreclosed to its experience of itself as a subject. That founding and defining limit thus founds the subject at a necessary and irreversible distance from the conditions of its own traumatic emergence" (12). That barred prehistory is, for each author, gendered and constructed on the basis of drive and sexuality. Before the universal, personhood must be reclaimed in the material conditions of Zero Hour; this necessity establishes the gendered dynamics of each trajectory through it. For Miller, overcoming the denying male gaze that had been the condition of her development as a photographer (*not* as a model) propels her through the masculinist environment of the war toward its end point or nadir, Hitler's private apartment or Dachau and Buchenwald. With Höch, her internal emigration

was made necessary to due to her association with the ideological impurity of modernism, but was enabled by her ability to seek unnoticed refuge, tending her garden and appearing remote from conflict until the moment of liberation. And finally, in the most literal manner possible, Anonyma is defined as a gendered subject held hostage and violated in total war and defeat, a synecdoche for a civilian population confined within an ideological system that withheld any agency and denied any relief. For Butler, "To claim that the universal has not yet been articulated is to insist that the 'not yet' is proper to an understanding of the universal itself: that which remains 'unrealized' by the universal constitutes it essentially" (39). Each woman, to different effect, asks the question of the universal as the "not yet," extended from Zero Hour as a horizon to be continually desired and achieved.

Notes

1. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*; Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*.
2. My account of modernism draws on the following, in the context of revisionist Modernist Studies: Charles Baudelaire, "Painter of Modern Life"; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pierson, translated by Carol Diethe, 2nd ed., Cambridge UP, 1997; Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno*, U of California P, 1984; Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Cornell UP, 1990.
3. In earlier versions, I discuss the poetics of destruction in William Carlos Williams's *The Wedge*; other canonical figures include T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, André Breton, and Gertrude Stein.
4. On late modernism, see Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars*, U of California P, 1999; my usage differs from his, however, in focusing on the political context of mid-century modernity as much as on the poetics of alienation and formal autonomy in authors like Samuel Beckett.
5. I cannot represent the substantial literature on the Holocaust that bears directly on the concept of Zero Hour here; see Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, Cornell UP, 1994; On comparative trauma, see Michael Rothberg, *Multi-Dimensional Memory*: *Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford UP, 2009.
6. See Hayden White, *The Concept of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Cornell UP, 1987; Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe, Columbia UP, 2004; F. R. Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, Stanford UP, 2005.
7. On the historical *Stunde Null*, see Geoffrey J. Giles, editor, *Stunde Null: The End and the Beginning Fifty Years Ago*, Occasional Papers no. 20, German Historical Institute, 1997; Reinhard Rürup, *Berlin 1945: A Documentation*, Wilhelm Arenhövel, 1995; D. G. Williamson, *Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963*, Pearson, 2001; and Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at Zero Hour*.
8. After Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, Žižek sees the Real as absent cause of ideology: "That would be, then, the precise definition of the real object: a cause which in itself does not exist—which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way" (*Sublime Objec*t 163).
9. On contingent universals, see Butler, "Restaging the Universal"; on historicism and universals, see Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 361-368.
10. Previous versions of the introduction and Lee Miller section appear in Barrett Watten, "Zero Hour/Stunde Null: Destruction and Universals at Mid Century," *Die amerikanische Reeducation-Politik nach 1945: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf "America's Germany,"* edited by Katherina Gerund and Heike Paul (transcript Verlag, 2015); and "Destruction and Universals in William Carlos Williams's *The Wedge* (1944)," *William Carlos Williams Review,* vol. 32, no. 1-2, Spring 2016, pp. 197-216. Thanks to the editors, and to Käthe Erichsen and Maggie Rosenau for their comments.
11. Catalogues of Höch's work consulted include Lavin, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife*; Makela and Boswell, *Höch: Photomontages*; Ades, et al., *Hannah Höch*; Burmeister, *Hannah Höch: Aller Anfang ist Dada!*; and Pawlow, *Hannah Höch: Gotha 1989—1978 Berlin*.

12. Makela and Boswell, p. 23, n. 25; on postwar debates over "inner immigration," see Brockmann, chap. 3, pp. 90-114.
13. On Höch's 20s and 30s collages, see Lavin, esp. chaps. 5 and 6; and Makela and Boswell, pp. 81-128.
14. On Nazi cultural politics and exhibitions, see Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, esp. chaps. 10 and 11.
15. For Höch's chronology during the *NS-Zeit* and after *Stunde Null*, see Makela and Boswell, pp. 198-199.
16. On *Gleichschaltung*, see Koonz: "The word adapted by the Nazis to describe this unique process, *Gleichschaltung*, has no equivalent in other languages. 'Nazification,' 'coordination,' 'integration,' and 'bringing into line' all come close, but none carries the mechanical overtones of *Gleichschaltung*. *Gleich* means both 'equal' and 'the same.' *Schalten* means 'to shift'" (72). See also *Wikipedia*, s.v. *Gleichschaltung*.
17. See Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*; Olaf Peters, *Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, Neue Galerie/Prestel Verlag, 2014; Sabine Brantl, *Haus der Kunst, Munich: A Locality and Its History in National Socialism*, Allitera Verlag, 2014.
18. Höch "becomes aware of the pogroms against Jews in Germany. In her journal, she writes of the burning of the synagogues on November 11 and the plight of her many Jewish friends. . . . Her fear of the Nazis escalates during this period, and she appears to tear many pages from her private journals"; Makela and Boswell, *Photomontages*, p. 198.
19. Her house and garden are described in Feist, "Hannah Höch," p. 77. On German sites of memory, see Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, *Deutsche Errinerungsorte: Eine Auswahl*, C. H. Beck, 2005; on Tag des offenen Denkmals (Day of Open Monuments), see the website of the Berlin program: www.berlin.de/landesdenkmalamt/veranstaltungen/tag-des-offenen-denkmals.
20. See her artist's statement in Ades et al., *Hannah Höch*, p. 232.
21. On the politics of youth before and after *Stunde Null*, see Koonz, chap. 6; Brockmann, chap. 6.
22. Gerhard Pomerantz-Liedtke, writing in the Left journal *bildende kunst* (1948); qtd. in Barron and Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys*, p. 278.
23. Sabine Eckmann, "Ruptures and Continuities: Modern German Art in Between the Third Reich and the Cold War," in Barron and Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys*, pp. 48-63; 54.
24. Ball, Flight out of Time, p. 56: "The distancing device is the staff of life. Let us be new and inventive. Let us rewrite life every day."
25. The "Totentanz" series is reproduced in Gillen and Schmidt, p. 79.
26. See Hannah Höch, *Picture Book*, translated by Brian Currid, The Green Box, 2010.
27. The "inability to mourn" is the central thesis of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's eponymous study of German denial, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, Piper, 1967; English ed., *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, Grove, 1975/1984.
28. Höch's interest in categories of visual images is well documented in her albums, which sort visual information according to theme, gender, culture, and so on, drawing from ethnographic publications as much as department store catalogues. In them, Höch can be seen to criticize, and dismantle, the cultural and ethnic categories that would rigidify in the *NS-Zeit*. See Burmeister, pp. 144-157; Lavin, chap. 3, pp. 71-121; and Höch, *Album*, edited by Gunda Luyken, Berlinische Galerie/Hatje Cantz, 2004.
29. On the work's publication and manuscript history, see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Forward," and Antony Beevor, introduction to *A Woman in Berlin*; Halley, "Rape in Berlin," n. 78; Wikipedia, s.v. "A Woman in Berlin."
30. This history, like *A Woman in Berlin* itself, took decades to become discussible; Beevor, *Fall of Berlin 1945*; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Rape During the Occupation of Germany." Beevor's book has, since publication, been banned in Russia, evidencing the continuation of denial.
31. It is important that, at the time of Halley's essay, the status of rape as a war crime was still a matter of unfolding debate, and depended on recent historical examples as well as the on-going work of the International Criminal Court.
32. As well, its "employment of irony, anaphora, euphemism, emphasis, rhetorical questions, similes, reification, apostrophe. . . , of clipped sentences and sentence fragments, of alternating past and present tense makes *A Woman in Berlin* a text one could explore exclusively for its formal devices"; Sollors, *Temptation of Despair*, p. 41.
33. The moment of Zero Hour provides a historical test case for the politics of "everyday life" as a critical project, after Henri

Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (translated by John Moore and Gregory Elliott, Verso, 2014) in particular.

34. This is anything but the discourse of "ruin porn," which sees only a negative pleasure of the sublime in ruins. Nor is it *Trümmerliteratur*, realist narratives reduced to material conditions, named after women who cleared the rubble from German cities; see Brockmann, p. 191.
35. *Wikipedia*. *fr*, s.v. "petite histoire": "La petite histoire est la description de l'histoire centrée sur les anecdotes et sur les détails, illustrant ainsi celle-ci." With the Annales School, of course, the distinction breaks down entirely, but it is interesting that "mere" sexual politics are seen as defining the nature of the divide. On the critique of Universal History, see Adorno, *History and Freedom*: "While the traditional view inserts facts into the flow of time, they really possess a nucleus of time in themselves. [In] accordance with this, we might say that history is discontinuous in the sense that it represents life perennially disrupted" (91; qtd. in Schuster 53).
36. Rose, *How Wars End*, chap. 1, shows that the end of war in total capitulation is a historically unusual event.
37. As well, the Allies' demand for total capitulation meant that the war would be fought to a standard of total destruction, not military calculation; see Rose, *How Wars End*; Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization*, Simon and Schuster, 2008; *Wikipedia,* s.v. "Sportpalast Speech."
38. See *Germany 1945: The Last Month of the War*; Beevor, *Fall of Berlin 1945*.
39. On the "event" see Osborne, *Politics of Time*; Wagner-Pacifici, *What Is an Event?*
40. Or *Lingua Tertii Imperii*; Klemperer, *LTI*.
41. On "renewal" in fascism, see Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2002; Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
42. The unresolved legal framework for rape as a crime of war will develop over the next two decades, toward a universalizing standard in which consent cannot be given in circumstances of war—which Halley, in reading *A Woman*, believes is unhistorical and overreaching.
43. Beevor, *Fall of Berlin 1945*; *Wikipedia,* s.v. "Rape During the Occupation of Germany."
44. Halley generalizes this claim, pointing out that moving rape up the "hierarchy of crimes" makes it at once more universal and more likely to occur.
45. I have taught this text twice at the upper division and graduate levels; I discuss the question of representation as itself traumatogenic and contextualize our reading both theoretically and historically. When I have shown excerpts from the 2008 film, I have skipped the most graphic depictions of rape in a way that I would have not done ten years ago. Halley's discussion of the "weaponization" of rape as a politics bears directly on the teaching situation.
46. I am not quoting this episode at length here for the same reason I did not show the scene in class: its traumatogenic effects overwhelm the discourse that surrounds it—a point that may be best made with its elision, given that the text itself is electively available.
47. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 365; discussed in Schuster.

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