

# V A N I T Y F A I R

APRIL, 1923



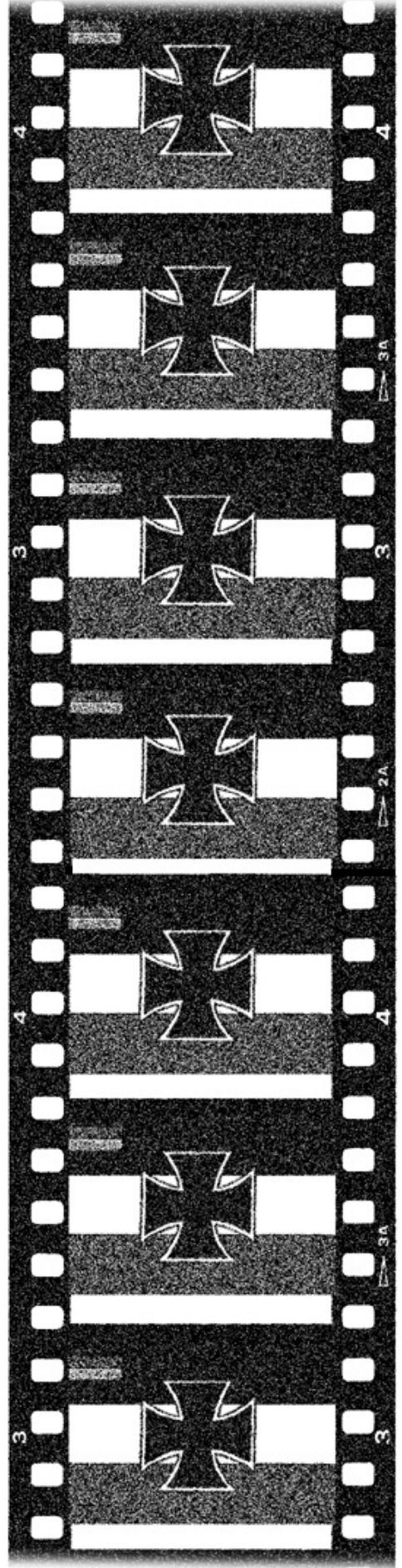
## Germany—A Serial Film

*Some Considerations, Without Malice or  
Enthusiasm, upon What is Going on in  
Germany Between the Acts*

By **TRISTAN TZARA**

**I**T is surely in ethnographical conversations that the most banal generalizations come to light. They attempt to penetrate psychologically the souls of peoples, and they twist a word which is only an isolated statement of fact into an epithet of praise or of contempt. How often have we heard "The Frenchman is such, the German such, the American such," but when we come to verify it, we find the opposite. We do this in society and in business, individually, however incompetent our judgment, and in every possible group.

Eager psychologists will perhaps explain to us that our observations are based upon exceptions, but as I find only exceptions interesting, the whole system of ethnographical nonsense seems to me fit to be relegated to some deep and musty drawer. There it will join many other too-affirmative systems, and all easy and puerile explanations of the mysteries of the universe. If someone says to you, "Germans are thus and so," you may safely contradict him, and announce that they possess the very opposite characteristics. And you will be right. So will your adversary. It is to be noted that our form of civilization, the development of modern intelligence, has evolved a formula of mental acrobatics which restores equilibrium in all things: "I believe that everybody is right." With me, this nostrum has been most successful.





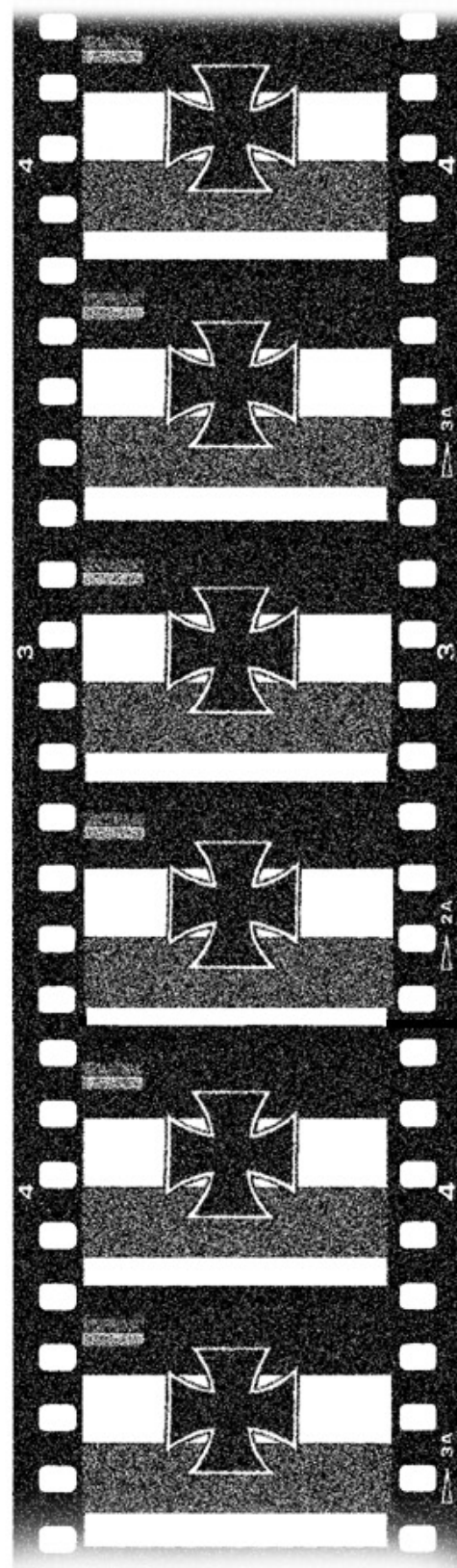
A monument erected at Weimar to the memory of the workmen who died in the German Revolution. It was designed by W. Gropius, and represents, as M. Tzara says, an attempt to show the superiority of thought over matter. He points out that the angels and apocalyptic monsters which usually run riot on memorials are conspicuously absent from this one

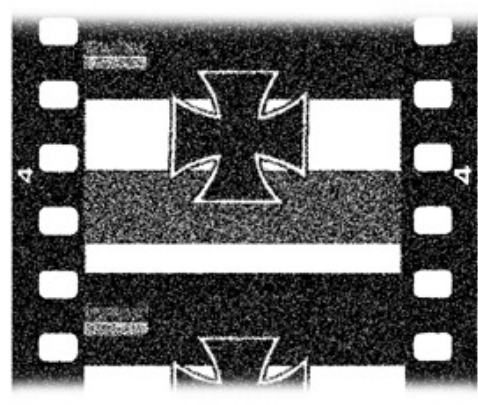
*The German Movie*

**B**UT to return to our subject. Heinrich Heine, the poet, wrote: *Germany, a Winter's Tale*. It was a satire. A few men who have had too much publicity have said: "Germany, something which must be put above the rest of the world." But that was a pre-war paradox. Now Germany is a serial film. A vast drama in many divisions, sprinkled with the vinegar of comedy. All the world turns about her, like horses in a circus ring. It might be said that she has a diseased exchange. This is a more delicate organ than the stomach! Events come in quick succession, and I have often had the impression that Germany is playing, before an enormous lens, in an immense studio, episode after episode of a scenario which remains mysterious to us. Among the incidents of the plot, of which we breathlessly watch the sequence from one week to another, I have gleaned some fugitive impressions on art and on the entr'actes. How much longer will the unfolding of this sensational film last?

I am not about to describe how Mr. Z, having stolen the pearl necklace of Mrs. X, finds himself by chance, at dusk, on the road to Babylon. That kind of film is out of date!

The great preoccupation of German artists is form. This is as it should be, for what they lack most is measure. They will impose on their style, which is straight, squat, square and architectonic, lines of flowers positively soaked in sentimentality. It gives a strange effect of cubistic "Louis XVI" or "Empire". In Munich they have built immense halls for a permanent art exhibition called "Gewerbeschau". The most successful parts of it are the advertising and the architecture. Some of the advertising booths, in unbelievable shapes of superimposed Chinese hats, are completely adapted to their purpose. A cubist church, built by the architect Peter Behrens, has provoked much controversy. On the façade of this church, which resembles some picture by Picasso, was placed an enormous, impressionistic Christ, with arms and legs terribly, painfully, elongated. The idea of bringing believers into such a church is essentially a Dadaistic one. Thus have Expressionism, Cubism and Dadaism been combined in a church at Munich. It is



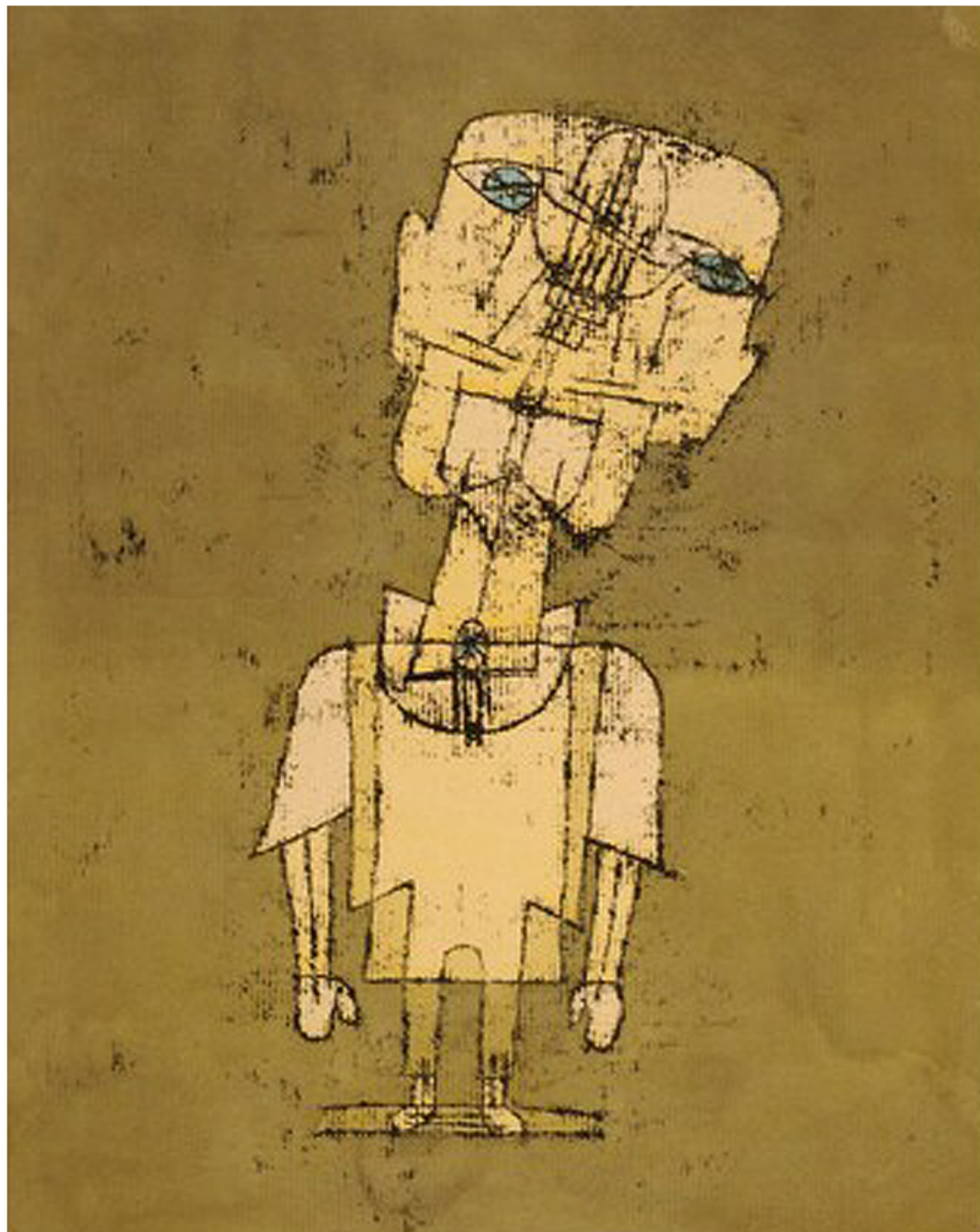


true that Expressionism quickly lost its part in it: the congress of Roman Catholic clergy protested so strongly that it was found necessary to remove the

Christ. It is very symptomatic that German artists should apply modernism to such unexpected provinces. I must admit that I prefer a simple white church in the country.

In decoration, the Germans bring to bear the influence of the Orient, of India, China and Persia upon a kind of Gothic primitivism which they call Expressionism. While Austria turns to a heavy over-charged and vulgar "baroque", Germany is charmed by the sweet harmonies of the exotic. This is of a piece with their mysticism in music. All that takes place in the mind, eyes tightly closed, from Dostoevsky to psycho-analysis, from Tagore to the introspection of the Buddhists, enchants them and allows them to forget the burdens of the flesh. They assimilate very fast what comes from far away, partly through romanticism, partly through lack of mental equilibrium and an inferiority complex.

And yet at this moment in Munich, in an enormous meadow, is beginning the great feast of the new October beer; a real modern bacchanale, surpassing, as a flood of humanity rushing towards an earthly pleasure, any gathering in the world. The German forgets his race with Tagore or with beer.



"The Phantom of a Genius"—a painting by Paul Klee, one of the most celebrated of the German Expressionist artists

### *Expressionism*

**U**NDER this vague term which designates modern art in Germany, varying tendencies have succeeded in obtaining important places and have become the official art. Its first theoretician was the Russian painter Vassilij Kandinsky, who lived in Germany. He it was who brought independence to color, by making abstract pictures in which forms and colors were no longer placed according to likeness or to a model, but according to some subjective musical harmony. His paintings made a certain sensation toward 1912: they had a real freshness and a kind of impressive monumentality, where the tragic Russian soul was clearly reflected with its disorder and the ceaseless flood of feelings which characterize it. Kandinsky stands at the very opposite pole from Picasso, so measured, clear, ordered, subtle and elegant. With Franz Marc, the painter who died during the war, Kandinsky gathered a group of artists of advanced tendencies, under the name "Der blaue Reiter". Their first manifestation was an anthology of art.

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The Viennese composer, Arnold Schoenberg, till then unknown, was launched on his success in this book.

Herwald Walden, the Berlin composer and writer, who for thirteen years has edited *Der Sturm*, managed many art shows and a publishing house, gives quite another interpretation of the word Expressionism. He unites Cubism as well as Futurism and the other tendencies under the term. To me, Expressionism means more especially the exaggeration of post-impressionistic painting deriving from Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin, which in France is represented by Matisse, Derain and van Dongen, in Germany by the group called "Die Brücke". Max Pechstein deforms appearances, his science of color is inherited from Cézanne. Schmitt-Rotcuff and Kirchner have felt the form influences of negro sculpture. J. Eberz, W. Morgner, L. Meidner, and others are clearly influenced by popular art and the old Gothic motifs. Among the sculpturers, W. Lehmbruck, who died three years ago, is of importance.

As a result of political events, the citadel of the Expressionists is now the art school at Weimar, put by the Government at their disposal, in which the best known artists have become teachers. It is run by the architect W. Groppius. He has conceived buildings which are striking in their elemental simplicity, utility and good proportions. Factories with glass towers, houses which shine like precious stones, and, lately, the theatre in Jena, are among the newest efforts. Groppius has also done a monument to the workmen killed during the revolution at Weimar, which is an endeavor to translate into stone a tragic and powerful idea.

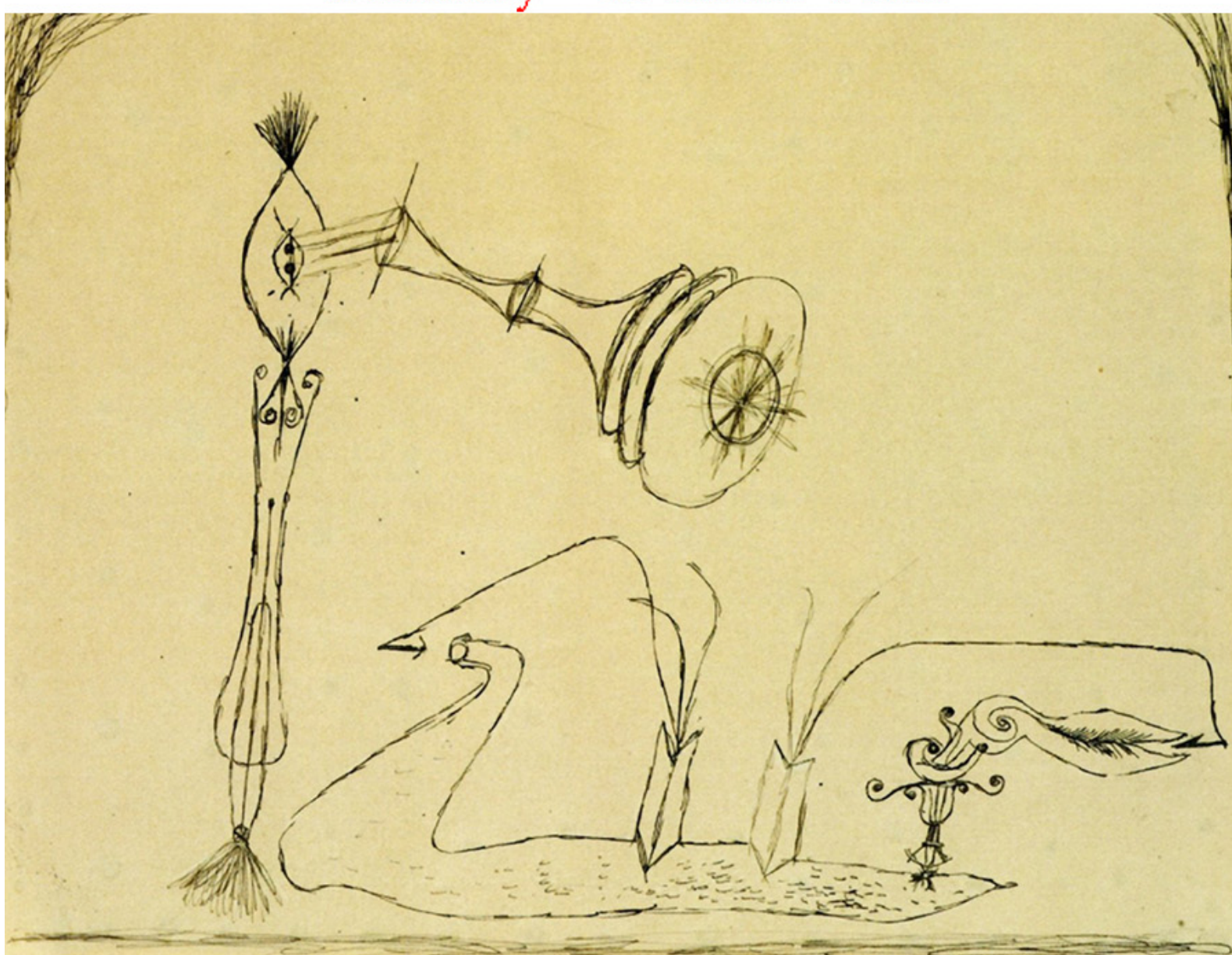
Although very different, Poelzig who built the Schauspielhaus for Max Reinhardt in Berlin, and Bruno Taut, author of plans for phantasmagorical cities, may be counted among the Expressionist architects.

The painter who is the most remarkable personality of this school at Weimar is Paul Klee. Son of a well-known musician of Berne, he was educated to be a violinist. Musical assonances characterize his art—harmonic or capricious passages, the sound of discreet colors and the delicacy of forms. Klee has succeeded in creating an important work in a small compass, when all the other painters were working for an external monumentality. His exquisite water-colors might be likened to a child's drawings were they not so etherealized. But it is by the freshness of its imagination and its grotesque and ironic spirit that his talent charms us. Lyonel Feiniger is also a teacher in the Weimar school. His cubist pictures are visions of churches or of forests embodying a very definite sense of order. Lothar Schreyer and W. Schlemmer teach the art of the theater. Willy Baumeister has made experiments for uniting abstract sculpture with mural construction so as to produce an artistic organic whole.

The school at Weimar has to face the attacks of the Dadaists, who, however, contend only with its spirit and aesthetic, having nothing but respect for the men who compose it. Expressionism is applied today to advertising, to interior decoration, to industrial products. What was really new in this tendency becomes lost in its vulgarization, a result surely not unexpected in a country where culture is after all only a question of fashion and of mass production.

### *Dada at Weimar*

**WEIMAR** is a pretty city which enshrines the memories of the great



"Apparatus for the Magnetic Treatment of Plants"—by Paul Klee. The illustration of a sub-

German epoch: Goethe. Its architecture is of charming and noble proportions. It was here that during the serious days of the German national assembly, the great Dada Baader accompanied by a Dada of Weimar, Peter Roehl, protested against tradition by organizing a procession of children with banners and inscriptions, while other Dadaists flooded the parliament with proclamations which hid under a witty form more or less bitter truths.

Last summer an international Dadaist congress met at Weimar. Delegates came from Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, Jugo-Slavia, Lettonia, Russia, Holland, Switzerland, Germany and France. It was a great success.—I gave a lecture there on "Dada in Paris". I repeated it in Jena and in Hanover. At Jena I was prepared for danger, for I was speaking in French, and to the young Fascisti students a man's life is not of much account. Apparently in Germany life is cheap. To my great disappointment nothing happened. I had hoped in a row to learn some interesting things about German character. And I do so love to see men manifest their true nature, even through noise and unpleasant behavior.

#### *The Novel of the German Revolution*

**I**T was written by Kurt Schwitters. Schwitters lives in Hanover in a curious house, which he has covered with tramway tickets and bits of newspaper pasted together. He is young, and his mind has an intriguing twist. Although amusing, he yet spreads not a little awe about him, for he is a Dadaist. His wit is a singular blending of mockery, scepticism, satire and poetry. The boundaries between these different provinces are never very apparent, and it is hard to tell when he is serious and when he is laughing at himself or at the public.

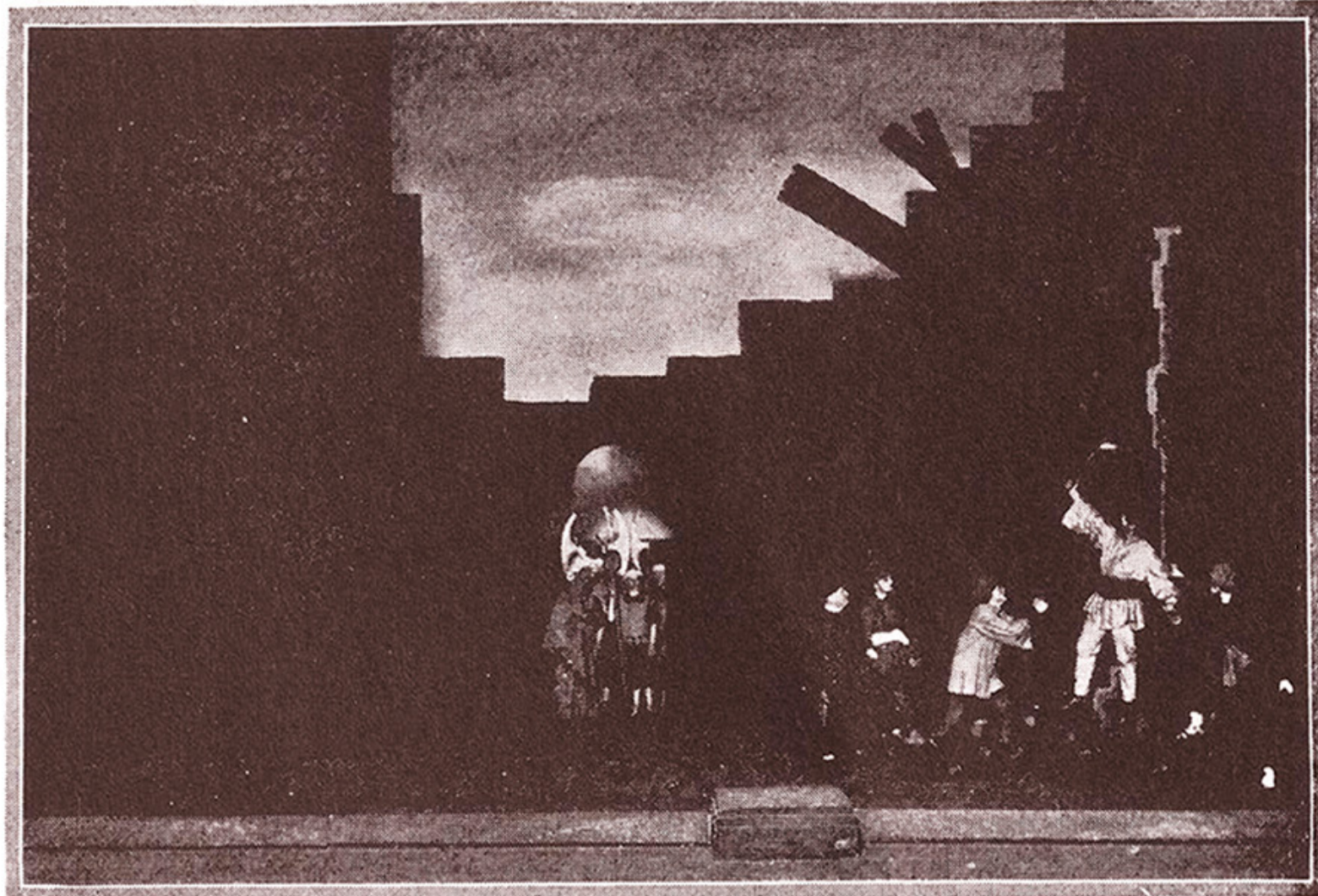
His novel begins with a very funny conversation between a child and his mother about a man who is standing in the street. This conversation is repeated time and again through the book, and around that man who does not want anything and is just standing in the street, center admirably grotesque and unexpected dramas: there you have the beginning of the revolution.

Schwitters is also a painter, and even a sculptor. I saw in his studio a sketch for a monument. After having lit two candles, he explained to me that it should be thousands of meters in height and end in a child's head of enormous size. The laughter with which I greeted his words seemed to please him. This is indeed a rare attitude among susceptible artists, for whom laughter is excluded from among human expressions of emotion. His pictures employ what we might call natural materials. He uses whatever he

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happens to find in the street: bits of rusty metal, padlocks, broken wheels. His pictures do not emerge from his studio, as other artists' do, bright and new—but half broken, rusted and dirty—for, says he, all things become worn, and there is nothing perfectly clean in life, neither men, furniture nor feelings.

Germany is a vast country, and full of activity. She slips through your fingers like a balloon; if you press on one end, it gives, but swells bigger at the other end.



The National Theatre at Weimar, where Goethe was once director, has come a long way in a hundred years. The above is a scene designed in black and white planes for "Assus, Fitne and Sumurud" a play by K. Vollmoeller, a German symbolist poet

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