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Brawny male workers vs. bulging bourgeois men. Working-class mothers burdened by the hardship of poverty and childcare vs. elegant upper-class women enjoying a lifestyle of privilege. Such juxtaposed images of workers and the rich were prevalent in the visual culture of communism throughout the twentieth century, appearing on posters, illustrations, and other genres of political propaganda across countries and continents. Although these didactic propaganda images have rarely been considered in histories of modernism and the avant-garde, this article argues that they were among the key visual inventions of twentieth-century communist visual culture given their highly innovative aesthetics and juxtaposed structure that provided them a potential to become dialectical. Drawing on examples from interwar Europe and Soviet Russia, this article examines how didactic juxtapositions could become dialectical images, triggering political transformations while also making revolutionary class consciousness visible for the viewer.

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"Us" vs. "Them". Communist Dialectical Images from Interwar Europe and Soviet Russia

> ...at the same time as the official British Health Report of 1864 was bemoaning the deficiency of fat-forming substances among a large part of the working class, a certain Dr Harvey (not, however, the man who discovered the circulation of the blood) was doing well by advertising recipes for reducing the surplus fat of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.[1]
>
> Karl Marx, *Capital*

This observation about the deficit and surplus of fat in mid-nineteenth-century Britain appears as a side note to Karl Marx's intricate explanation of the mystified operations of money and the circulation of commodities in Chapter 3 of *Capital*, Volume 1. Notwithstanding the problem of using what today would read as a fat-shaming comment against the British bourgeoisie, the footnote encapsulates the avant-garde method of Marx's scientific investigation and especially the surprising array of sources he mobilizes to describe the political economy of capitalism. In *Capital*, as David Harvey has noted, Marx often draws on contemporaneous appearances of social distinctions to point to a much deeper entanglement of social structures beneath the surface.[2] In this case, Marx confronts the conclusions of an annual state health report with a frivolous piece of bourgeois advertising. His juxtaposition suggests a clear (if invisible) relation between the fact that while the bourgeoisie happens to be over-supplied with fat, workers suffer from a lack of proper nourishment.

The piercing remark in the footnote serves to highlight Marx's argument that price – or what he refers to as the "money-form" of the commodity, usually displayed on a ticket – is not the only means to express a commodity's value. Marx reminds his readers

that in some cultures, the act of licking articles with the tongue plays a key role in procedures of exchange and the appropriation of commodities. If such a gesture, otherwise commonly associated with food consumption, directly relates to barter and commerce in other cultures, it is, according to Marx, no surprise that "in the South the stomach serves as the organ of accumulated property, and that a Kaffir estimates the wealth of a man by the size of his belly."[3] "The Kaffirs know what they are doing," Marx concludes, with a cruel irony that ultimately targets the rich and fat British upper classes of the 1860s, whose corpulence, his remark suggests, is the result of their social privilege.[4] Here, in this lengthy and rather complex footnote, one finds an early manifestation of what, half a century later, would become one of the most widespread visual clichés of Soviet communism: the grotesque depiction of the fat, evil capitalist, contrasted with the oppressed worker.

This article turns to such visual comparisons commonly associated with twentieth-century communist visual culture in order to ask: what makes a juxtaposition dialectical? While grappling with the visual and ideological operations of communist dialectical images, I seek to probe the capacity of still images – such as drawings, paintings, prints, or photographs – to challenge their own static statuses by forming juxtapositions and thus provoking political transformations. Juxtapositions, I argue, were particularly suitable for
Soviet-style propaganda, given the visual, material, and structural tensions embedded in them, which provided their potential to both become dialectical and to visualize the invisible: communist class consciousness.

Dialectical images – some definitions

One could hardly find a more illustrative visual image to go with Marx's unorthodox footnote than *Oben und unten: Zwanzig Pfund zu viel / Zwanzig Pfund zu wenig* [*Top and Bottom: Twenty Pounds Too Much / Twenty Pounds Too Little*], a drawing by the leftist German artist George Grosz, published in the April 1932 issue of the German Communist Party's satirical picture magazine *Roter Pfeffer* [Fig. 1].[5]

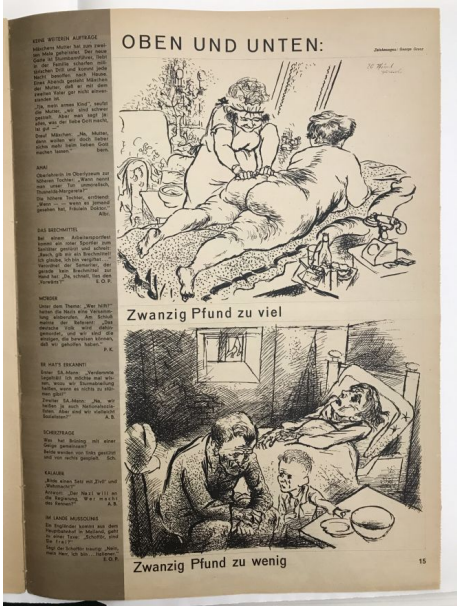

Fig. 1. George Grosz, *Oben und Unten: Zwanzig Pfund zu viel/ Zwanzig Pfund zu wenig* [Top and Bottom: Twenty Pounds Too Much/Twenty Pounds Too Little]. Published in *Roter Pfeffer*, April (1932): 15. Copyright: Estate of George Grosz, Princeton N.J./VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021.

Born in Berlin in 1893, Grosz became an ardent critic of war, conservative politics, and bourgeois society during World War I. Known as one of the founders of the Berlin Dada group, Grosz joined the newly founded Communist Party of Germany (KPD) at the end of 1918, along with Dada friends such as John Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde.[6] Although Grosz gave up party membership by 1923, he did not break his ties with the workers' movement.[7] Up until his 1933 exile to the United States, his images of biting social critique appeared in various Communist Party publications, including *Roter Pfeffer*.[8]

The aforementioned drawing is divided into two equal parts along a horizontal line, contrasting the surplus and deficit of fat to visualize the structural imbalance of nourishment among the rich and the poor [Fig. 1]. On the top, the lavish body of a bourgeois woman is fully displayed, lying on a fancy, soft sofa,

while a masseuse works hard to rub the fat from her left buttock. The room itself is also excessive, from the pattern of the sofa to the overloaded side table which seems too small to hold all her objects of consumption. Fat burning may not be the most pleasant form of bourgeois entertainment, but it certainly entails a whole circuit of privileges, intended to prompt moral disgust in the viewer, especially when contrasted with the image below.[9]

The lower part of the page also shows a woman lying at rest; this time, however, she is skin and bones.[10] The luxurious sofa is replaced by a small and rigid bed, which may soon become the sick woman's deathbed. A child and a man – whose posture is strikingly similar to that of the masseuse above – accompany the working-class woman, along with a table that can only display absence. The entire bottom image is defined by the misery of deficiency: the child's finger is pointing to an empty plate, yet his demand for food meets no response, since his father, we may suppose, is fully consumed by the vicious circle of poverty. The depressing atmosphere of the scene is further emphasized by the decay and darkness of the room: in contrast to the brightness of the bourgeois scene, the working-class family lives in a basement, where they can only see the feet of pedestrians passing by on the street.[11]

With its juxtaposed composition, *Zwanzig Pfund zu viel / Zwanzig Pfund zu wenig* exemplifies the novel type of dialectical image that George Grosz had begun to experiment with in the early 1920s. The term *dialektisches Bild* [dialectical image] is most often associated with another radical German leftist, Walter Benjamin, and the implicit philosophical method of his unfinished *Arcades Project*, which Susan Buck-Morss has called the "dialectics of seeing."[12]

As Buck-Morss suggests, in spite of – and in line with – Benjamin's fragmentary comments about his method, the "dialectical image" is potentially most tangible and apparent in

the invisible and incomplete structure of his *Arcades Project* or *Passagen-Werk*.[13] "It is a way of seeing," Buck-Morss writes,

> that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes for their alignment. [...] His unfolding of concepts in their 'extremes' can be visualized as antithetical polarities of axes that cross each other, revealing a 'dialectical image' at the null point, with its contradictory 'moments' as axial fields.[14]

In Benjamin's own words, the "dialectical image" appears "[w]here thought comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions [...] It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its positioning, of course, is in no way arbitrary. In a word, it is thought to be at the point where the tension between the dialectical oppositions is the greatest."[15] More recently, Anthony Auerbach has sought to trace Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image in his surviving correspondence with Theodor Adorno, arguing that the dialectical image was less the method than the goal of the practice of materialist historiography that Benjamin envisioned. In short, Auerbach argues that "the dialectical image is the proper form of the materialist presentation of history."[16]

Despite the pervasive elusiveness of Benjamin's concept, art historians such as Uwe M. Schneede and Eckhart Gillen have used the term "dialectical image" in more specific ways, to describe George Grosz's visual principle that seeks to unveil otherwise hidden social relations and structures of inequality.[17] According to Schneede, Grosz's argumentative images manage to visualize structures of misery and oppression by way of the "dialectical confrontations that are always about relations [Zusammenhänge]."[18] Instead of simply offering satirical caricatures of the upper class, Schneede argues, Grosz's dialectical images reveal the social contexts and causes of specific problems or phenomena through the gesture of linking together contradictory images. With his dialectical *Roter Pfeffer*

illustration, Grosz seems to have visualized the same structure of nourishment inequality that Marx pointed out in the 1860s in *Capital*. Both the working class and the bourgeoisie suffer from the uneven distribution of fat; however, it is the worker's body that has to bear the more painful burden of capitalism, and unlike the bourgeoisie, workers have no choice but to live and die in deficit.

This essay revolves around a set of communist dialectical images from the interwar period, when this type of visual imagery served as a fundamental tool of political agitation. Building on the visual strategy of juxtaposition, the goal of the communist dialectical images I analyze was not only to unveil hidden class relations and social structures, but also to show the very possibility of changing such structures and prompt the viewer into political action. This type of image might then be seen as one of the key aesthetic innovations of the international communist visual culture that emerged in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. While visual representations of work and workers might be as old as the practices of craft and art-making themselves, what was decisively novel and modern about Bolshevik visual culture was its effort to raise the political consciousness of workers and, ideally, help them imagine themselves as a class with power against the bourgeoisie.[19]

Juxtapositions were especially fitting for that task, due to their potential to both depict and trigger political transformations through the tension that simultaneously divides and holds the two sides of the juxtaposition together. In dialogue with Fredric Jameson's thinking about the different meanings of the dialectic, this paper contends that a juxtaposition may become "dialectical" when its two parts "cease to be two separate items and become united in that very unity called juxtaposition," endlessly maintaining that unity through the very tension that constantly seeks to undo the union of the two sides.[20] In the case of the

communist dialectical images, that unity may be seen as communist class consciousness: the desired self-understanding of workers as a collective body diametrically opposed to the bourgeoisie and empowered to end its exploitation.[21]

With these criteria in mind, one may argue that Grosz's *Zwanzig Pfund zu viel / Zwanzig Pfund zu wenig* is not an overtly successful example of the communist dialectical image. It offers no solution to workers, showing them as anything but fit, strong, and powerful. To the contrary, it depicts the working class in its deepest misery and within a set social hierarchy that is further crystallized by the spatial imagery of the composition, namely the division between the upper and lower sections. It is a static image on a printed page that, one could argue, freezes the tension between the two parts and thus between the two social classes. Nevertheless, Grosz's work could have had the potential to inversely trigger readers to political action, by forcing them to face social injustice while grappling with moral disgust. The image's indirect political potency is especially worthwhile considering in the context of the agitative pages of the issue of *Roter Pfeffer* published in the run-up to the 1932 elections in Weimar Germany, a time of heated political debate prior to the National Socialists' seizure of power the following year. At the end of the day, in 1932 in Weimar Germany, communist agitation had entirely different possibility, potency, and power – to adopt Italian communist thinker Franco Berardi's conceptual trio from *Futurability* – than it did, for instance, in the spring of 1919 in the Hungarian Soviet Republic, at the height of the short-lived but victorious Bolshevik revolution in Budapest.[22] Accordingly, this article's examples take us to different places and times within interwar Europe and the Soviet Union, introducing variations on the dialectical image by artists who were part of the transnational communist circuits primarily mobilized by the international communist organization, the Comintern,

during those years.[23]

In what follows, the article considers three works of art as potential communist dialectical images: a 1919 newsreel from the Hungarian Soviet Republic; a 1930 collage of photograms by German communist artist Alice Lex-Nerlinger; and finally, a c. 1930 maquette of an unrealized agitprop album by Hungarian-Soviet artist Béla Uitz. In contrast to what we may call George Grosz's "dialectical image at a standstill" [Fig. 1], the abovementioned examples showcase alternatives that put pressure on the assumed static nature of still images, introducing juxtapositions that can be transformed, altered, and read in different ways, without demolishing the relations between the parts. I thus examine these artworks as different models for juxtapositions that may at once depict and enact transformation, as well as crystallize and provoke a potency for change.[24] Despite their different approaches to the dialectical image, these examples are nevertheless united in their efforts to use the aesthetic gesture of juxtaposition as a strategy to visualize what is otherwise invisible, immaterial, and relational: the class consciousness of the international proletariat.

Variations of communist dialectical images

1. Fit worker vs. fat capitalist: a unity of emergence and decay

A comic episode of a March 1919 newsreel from the newly born Hungarian Soviet Republic shows two artists' hands at work as they sketch with chalks a set of still images on the left and right sides of a blackboard [Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5]. Comic film reports – a novel visual genre which debuted in Hungary in September 1918 with the appearance of the first newsreels – depicted in fast motion the drawing of caricatures pertinent to contemporaneous political events.[25]

Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke? [*Who Is Protected by the Red* (soldiers)*? / Who Used to Be Protected by the Pike-Gray* (uniform of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers)*?*], a three-minute film report, is a piece of Bolshevik propaganda par excellence.[26] It shows the very making of the visual icons that – just like the film itself – symbolize the newly constructed Bolshevik present in contrast to what was becoming the bourgeois past.

This comic film was shot in late March 1919, roughly a week after the post-World War I socialist government of Hungary abdicated from power, and the Hungarian Communist Party, merging with the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, established the world's second Bolshevik-type regime in Budapest, on March 21, 1919.[27] The film is primarily attributed to the young Hungarian graphic artist Marcell Vértes (1895–1961), whose satirical and comic images were a regular feature in the weekly "moving image" version of the magazine *Est* [*Evening*], shown in Hungarian movie theaters since 1918. Known also for his 1918 political posters that offered a stirring critique of the monarchy and World War I, Vértes contributed a number of propaganda items to the success of the new Bolshevik regime in Hungary.[28] As Hungarian scholar Galina Torma has noted, the short comic film *Kiket véd a vörös?...* was likely produced by Vértes for a special propaganda event organized in honor of the new Red Army – called "The Day of the Red Soldier" – which took place in movie theaters around Hungary on April 3, 1919.[29] "[W]ith a tangible sensation of propaganda," Torma writes, the comic film "showed the

Figs. 2, 3, 4, 5. Screenshots from the newsreel titled *Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke?* [Who Is Protected by the Red [Soldiers]? / Who Used to Be Protected by the Pike-Gray [Military Uniform of Former Austro-Hungarian Soldiers]?]. Drawn by Marcell Vértes [left] and Alajos Dezső [right], March 1919, Est Film 20. Source: Magyar Filmhíradók Online [Online Collection of Hungarian Newsreels].

differences between the Red Army that was being formed and the old army of the monarchy."[30]

Yet neither the Red Army nor the Monarchy's Army is depicted in the film.[31] As Red Army soldiers dressed in the same uniforms that the Monarchy's Army had previously used, the two armies likely did not look so different in terms of appearance.[32] Instead, the film highlights the major ideological differences between the two institutions, which are mostly invisible yet become legible through juxtaposed depictions of the people protected by the respective armies. As such, the film altogether shows four juxtapositions: a blacksmith against a capitalist; a mother and her children versus an extremely fat, balloon-like priest; a war cripple contra a fancy, elegant bourgeois man; and a strong, bellicose peasant against an overweight landlord. The fixed camera records the whole process of drawing, depicting the concurrent birth and decay of the paired images, as one juxtaposition gives way to another after its erasure by the artists' hands. Through this unique form, the comic film provides a dynamic approach to dialectical images while also fundamentally challenging the static nature of drawn images.

Fig. 2. Screenshot from the newsreel *Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke?* Source: Magyar Filmhíradók Online.

The film begins by showing what at first might appear as a mirror image of two hands [Fig. 2]. The gloved right hand of a man in a dark suit jacket is shown on the left side of the screen, against the left hand of a man in the same outfit on the right side. As soon as the hands get to work, however, it becomes clear that they belong to two different men. In a few seconds, two simple sentences materialize on the top part of the blackboard thanks to the laborious hands [Fig. 3]: "Kiket véd a vörös?" [Who Is Protected by the Red (soldiers)?] appears on the left, in tandem, on the right, with: "Kiket védett

a csukaszürke?" [Who Used to Be Protected by the Pike-Gray (uniform of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers)?]. The sentences, which remain on the top of the blackboard for the rest of the film, even as the images below transform, establish from the beginning a clear juxtaposition – not only between the Red Army and the old army of the monarchy, but also more broadly between the present and the past. The tension between the stability of the text and the flux of the imagery adds an additional dialectical tone to the comic film as a whole: it is a tension that is at once the result and the constitutive element of the film's structure.

Firstly, the view of a strong, muscular male worker emerges on the left under the right hand of Marcell Vértes, displaying a blacksmith with a large hammer, an apron, and an anvil [Fig. 4].[33] Curiously, the blacksmith is not working but turns his back to the anvil. He holds his hammer like a weapon, as if he were about to strike the giant capitalist surfacing on the right side of the image, under the left hand of Vértes's friend and colleague, Hungarian artist Alajos Dezső.[34] In contrast to the empowering image of the confident, athletic blacksmith, the capitalist resembles a hot-air balloon more than a human being. Along with his bourgeois top hat and lavish fur coat, his unrealistically oversized body identifies him as a rich aristocrat.

Fig. 3. Screenshot from the newsreel *Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke?* Source: Magyar Filmhíradók Online.

Such juxtapositions, between brawny, dignified workers and the dehumanized, bulging bourgeoisie, were ubiquitous in the visual culture of Soviet communism throughout the twentieth century. These class types appeared on posters, political caricatures, and other forms of political propaganda across diverse countries, eventually emerging as one of the

dominant visual clichés of communist iconography. As noted by art historian Victoria E. Bonnell, at the time of the 1917 October Revolution, the Bolsheviks still lacked effective political imagery. Nevertheless, a new communist iconography soon arose in Soviet Russia, drawing on the visual traditions of Orthodox religious art. From the beginning, Bolshevik imagery therefore operated with the binary model of saint-like worker-heroes versus the evil enemies of the working class.[35] As Bonnell notes:

> Like their medieval precursors, the Bolsheviks were deeply rooted in a framework of antinomies, and they organized their conception of the world around such diametric opposites as the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat, tsar versus people, kulak versus poor peasant, and White versus Red.[36]

The visualization of opposites, however, is only one part of the operation of dialectical juxtapositions. Arguably the most powerful aspect of the outlined juxtaposition of the 1919 Hungarian newsreel is the meaning derived from the tension between the contrasted images of the worker and the capitalist, who nevertheless form a united pair. When seen from this perspective, the goal of the newsreel is not simply to show the diametric opposition between the "good and heroic" proletariat and the "bad and evil" bourgeoisie. Rather, with the help of the verbal elements (the use of the Hungarian simple present tense on the left, versus the simple past on the right), the image depicts the radical social and political transformation that was taking place between the past and the communist present. Indeed, the significance of the "Red" norms of "the now" on the left can best be evaluated when understood in relation to the capitalist norms

Fig. 4. Screenshot from the newsreel *Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke?* Source: Magyar Filmhíradók Online.

that were still in place yesterday.

One may argue, then, that understanding juxtapositions of workers and capitalists in Bonnell's framework of antinomies could easily lessen – if not completely silence – their fundamentally relational and potentially dialectical nature. In the operations of dialectical images, the emphasis is not so much on the mutual incompatibility and absolute division of the two sides, but rather on the meaning that is produced, in the words of Fredric Jameson, in the "process in which the negative and the positive are inextricably combined, and whose emergence and development at one and the same time constitute its own inevitable undoing, its own decay or dissolution," as he puts it in his narration of realism as a dialectical phenomenon.[37]

The 1919 film report portrays the working-class and the bourgeois figures in antagonism and, in the first case, the worker seems to initiate the confrontation by boldly turning his body and hammer toward the bourgeois character. Remarkably, however, the newsreel is not just the visualization of the novel, Bolshevik type of class antagonism; rather, it shows how the new Bolshevik class consciousness of workers is constructed against, as well as in conjunction with, the bourgeoisie. Indeed, the Hungarian newsreel literalizes the very process of dialectics by showing two artists as – step by step – they synchronously draw and destroy their separate images on a blackboard [Fig. 5]. At all times, the figures of the blacksmith and the bourgeois man are inevitably bound together in their opposition – emerging and disappearing together, side by side, visualizing the creation of the new Bolshevik class consciousness in the making, as a process.[38]

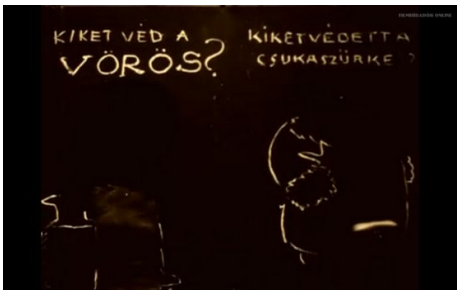

Fig. 5. Screenshot from the newsreel *Kiket véd a vörös? / Kiket védett a csukaszürke?* Source: Magyar Filmhíradók Online.

Overall, the pun of the comic newsreel depends on the tension and entanglement of the two figures. Ultimately, however, only the working class got to laugh at the joke, as its members learned that they were the robust, confident, and awakened Other of the ludicrous and obsolete bourgeoisie, whose rule was over – at least for the time being.

2. Poor and rich mothers: dialectics with unequal proportions

Arm und reich [*Poor and Rich*] [Fig. 6], a 1930 collage of photograms by the German communist artist Alice Lex-Nerlinger, is an outstanding example of what Elisabeth Moortgat has called Lex-Nerlinger's "simple dialectical compositions," which offer piercing images of the most burning socio-political problems of Weimar Germany.[39]

Fig. 6. Alice Lex-Nerlinger, *Arm und reich* [Poor and Rich], 1930. 12 photographic prints of photograms, glued on cardboard. 63 x 62 cm. Kunstsammlung, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Copyright: Frau Sigrid Nerlinger.

While *Arm und reich* operates with a familiar contrast between the bourgeoisie and the working class, it nevertheless disrupts the usually equal proportions of simple juxtaposition with symbolic and literal repetition. As the replicated imagery of the working class outweighs the bourgeoisie three times in proportion, *Arm und reich* aptly visualizes the extreme social inequalities of the interwar Weimar Republic. In a way, it is through the dialectics of literal and abstract reproduction that the harsh exploitation of the masses surfaces against the leisurely life of the privileged few. At the same time, the visual gesture of reproduction might also illuminate the potential

for workers to liberate themselves from the capitalist structure, especially within the dialectical set-up of the artwork, which enables the juxtaposition between the rich and the poor to be read in multiple ways.

An extraordinary photomontage artist, photographer, painter, and graphic artist, Alice Lex-Nerlinger (born in 1893 as Alice Pfeffer) joined both the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the union of German communist artists named the Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler Deutschlands (ARBKD, also known as ASSO – Association of the Revolutionary Artists of Germany) in 1928.[40] By the late 1920s, her work demonstrated a commitment to both party politics and aesthetic innovation; *Arm und reich* exemplifies her remarkable approach to linking revolutionary politics and aesthetics, experimenting with figuration and with abstraction.

To begin with, there is an apparent tension within the material make-up of the work. In size and format, *Arm und reich* resembles an easel painting; yet, the technique of photogram denies the artist's unique, authentic touch.[41] As a collage, however, the work is made up of twelve photographic reprints of photograms that are tightly – if somewhat imprecisely – placed next to each other in three rows: four prints in each, glued onto cardboard. Especially when viewed in person, the work has an evident DIY quality, which reverses the impersonality of the photographic technique.[42]

All three rows of the collage present a contrast between the rich and poor segments of society, underscoring that the rich minority have the exclusive privilege of enjoying life, while the poor masses suffer for their survival.
On the top, a well-dressed bourgeois man is depicted enjoying his time with a drink, set against a war cripple begging for money on the street; in the middle, a fancy, rich mother and her child are contrasted with a toiling, working-class mother and her multiple children; meanwhile, the

bottom row juxtaposes a rich man who keeps himself entertained and healthy by playing tennis, against a worker drilling with the full force of his body, engaged in hard physical labor that also requires immense concentration. In each case, the expected one-to-one proportion of the comparison is altered by the replicated photograms of the working class. As Rachel Epp Buller has put it, the unique composition of *Arm und reich* "highlights the startling differences between the rich minority and poor majority populations, where the poor outweigh the rich three to one in the photogram."[43]

For both sides of these juxtapositions, Lex-Nerlinger used a set of geometric shapes to create and abstract her figures. Notice, for instance, the prominent use of the round shape that makes up the heads and hands of both the elegant aristocrat – leisurely sitting in a restaurant, surrounded by fancy cocktails – and the crippled beggar on the street, who is leaning on a crutch to support his body. The gap between the two classes does not primarily manifest in the physical appearance of their bodies. *Arm und reich* does not build on the common contrast between overweight and undernourished bodies, nor does it apply a different pictorial mode – caricatured and comic versus life-like depiction; abstract versus figurative – to the bodies of the upper and the lower classes. Rather, the juxtaposition centers on their activities and surroundings, and thus their consequent positions within social structures.

The contrast might be most sharply visible in the middle row, which pairs the labor of motherhood across the two classes. On the left, a slender young woman is strolling on the street or in a park with a single child who is comfortably seated in a pedal car. While the mother's slightly twisted posture suggests that she is keeping an eye on her child, her parental labor does not entail arduous physical exercise. Instead, she seems to be enjoying a relaxing outdoor walk, keeping her hand in her pocket while resting a fox-fur shawl around her shoulders, which further

emphasizes her chic, modern outfit. Note also the fashionable, straight cut of her hair: just like the rest of her appearance, her hairstyle suggests that she is a mother who can afford the time and energy to take care of her looks before going out for a walk with her child.

Compare this image of the seemingly pleasant walk of the upper-class mother and her child with the devastating image of a working-class mother and her children. In contrast to the sharp edges of the bourgeois woman – such as the deep, V-shaped cut of her dress or the sharply formed head and ears of the fox on her shawl – the working-class woman's shape is all rounded. Most notably, the curve of her belly signals that she is expecting a baby – for at least the third time, given the two smaller kids who sit inside the family's street cart. While the rich woman's hands are empty and thus kept in her pocket, the poor woman has too much to hold on to – so much that one wonders how she can even move along the street. In addition to carrying the extra weight of her pregnancy and a bag in her left hand, she also needs to push the cart, even though it is packed not only with the two children, but also a huge pile of newspapers. The latter indicates that at the same time as she is doing unpaid parental labor, she is also distributing newspapers to earn some money. Her experience is anything but relaxing, just as her motherhood is overburdened by the harsh reality of her social position. With her body tightly trapped between the cart, the wall in the background, and the right edge of the picture, there hardly seems to be a way out of her situation. The slight twist of her head might be her only means of momentarily escaping the scene. Even without any features, her face is a haunting image which confronts the viewer with its blankness.

Regardless of one's position within the social hierarchy, the female body became a highly abused platform of conservative politics in Weimar Germany, given the criminalization of abortion and contraception by the infamous "Paragraph 218,"

reintroduced into the Weimar Constitution in 1919.[44] Yet, the Communist Party of Germany consistently emphasized in its propaganda that Paragraph 218 primarily punished working-class women, who lacked not only the financial means and social connections to perform safe illegal abortions, but often also sufficient knowledge to challenge their situation.[45] Lex-Nerlinger's dialectic image, with its juxtaposition of rich and poor mothers, fits into this narrative, as it highlights class as the most essential factor of the experience of motherhood. In *Arm und reich*, the different situations of the rich and the poor mothers do not simply contrast each other, but also mutually maintain one another: the rich mother's privileged experience is enabled by the suffering of the poor mother, and vice versa. They are both part of a social and economic structure that produces their opposed experiences and, as such, their class opposition.

We might then read the repeated image of the working-class mother against the single image of the rich lady and her child as more than just the literal visualization of the quantitative proportions of the oppressed masses and the privileged few. The act of repetition – especially when performed by technical means – is necessarily an act of re/production, which here may be read as a visual metaphor for both the systematic reproduction of social structures and for biological reproduction. Lex-Nerlinger's work thus offers a crucial example of depicting the struggle of a poor mother, yet without turning her figure into an empty, decontextualized visual cliché. As Marsha Meskimmon has noted in her foundational study on women artists in the Weimar Republic, across left and right political fronts, the "'poor mother' and the 'working mother' quickly became simplified tropes, showing the misery of 'poor mother' which obscured the complicated interplay between economics and maternity,"[46] because it presented the misery of poor mothers outside any social context. The juxtaposition in *Arm und reich*, however, manages to do just the opposite. With its unequal visual

proportions and technically reproduced visual repetition, Lex-Nerlinger's work ties together, on the one hand, capitalist biopolitics and control over women's bodies, and, on the other hand, the production of unequal social structures and the resulting poverty of the masses.

Overall, while repetition might stress the structural oppression of the working class, it can also be read as a gesture toward its liberation, since it creates an asymmetrical juxtaposition that may undo itself due to the energy deriving from the lack of symmetry. As Jameson notes, this is precisely the logic behind Marx's "solution" to class struggle, an archetype of asymmetrical oppositions: "Its 'resolution' then presumably lies in the obliteration of both terms, or in other words the effacement of the opposition as such [...] the effacement of the very category of the social class as such (and of the system of value which produces it)."[47] In Lex-Nerlinger's work, the technologically reproduced dissymmetry between rich and poor also allows for multiple ways of reading the juxtaposition: for instance, one can contrast the poor and rich mothers one to one, or read the three poor mothers as a collective against the single rich mother.[48]

Moreover, the grid-like structure of the work enables not only horizontal but also vertical or even diagonal readings, along with the possibility of combining rows and columns in numerous ways using the eye. The rich mother, for instance, can be seen as a woman with the social obligation of childcare when contrasted with the bourgeois men above and/or below her, or even in contrast to the otherwise deeply unprivileged – yet always depicted singly – working-class men. At the same time, however, the juxtaposition with the poor mothers to her right endlessly reminds the viewer of the rich mother's cardinal privileges deriving from her class position. Similarly, the complexity of the poor mothers' situation emerges from the juxtaposition with the rich mother, on the one hand, and with the tirelessly laboring men below them, on the other. Men and women both perform

strenuous work if they belong to the lower classes – and if they are lucky enough to have a job. Nevertheless, working-class women endlessly carry the burden of childcare on top of their paid labor.

In the case of Grosz's static dialectical image *Zwanzig Pfund zu viel / Zwanzig Pfund zu wenig* [Fig. 1], the horizontally arranged, one-to-one juxtaposition of the upper and lower classes may leave the viewer with little revolutionary fervor in the face of the rigid structure of inequality, as I argued at the beginning of this paper. When looking at Lex-Nerlinger's large-scale collage, however, one cannot disregard the visual disproportion between the two poles of the image, and its damning (if depressing) evidence of social injustice. Furthermore, the asymmetry of Lex-Nerlinger's juxtapositions allows for alternating readings, triggering different conflicts and tensions which at once maintain and are maintained by the dialectical structure of the work.

3. Capitalism or communism: the dialectics of transforming vision and history

OT VAS ZAVISIT! [*It Depends on You!*] is a monumental experiment in the production of a dialectical agitprop album that the Hungarian-born Soviet artist Béla Uitz designed in Moscow in the early 1930s. Born in 1887 in Mehala (a small village on the outskirts of Temesvár, Austro-Hungarian Empire, known today as Timisoara, Romania), Uitz became a well-known revolutionary artist in the Soviet Union by the 1930s. A Soviet citizen and Moscow resident since 1927, Uitz was one of the 1930 awardees of the prestigious title "Honorary Art Worker of the RSFSR," and, the same year, a founder of the Comintern's International Art Union (MBRKh, International Bureau of Revolutionary Artists).[49] Despite his accomplishments, Uitz's agitprop album was, as far as we know, never published.[50]

Yet even its surviving maquette displays the work's unique potential to trigger readers to political action by mobilizing dialectical juxtapositions.[51]

With its large-scale red, black, and white papers glued and sewn together by hand, the maquette was designed as a dialectical object, in terms of both its material and conceptual make-up. Divided into three sections, it consists of eleven double pages which include figurative images, not to mention several blank pages which impress the reader with the sheer monumentality of color contrast between the white and red pages.[52]

The first section, titled "Dve sistemy" [Two Systems], compares capitalism to communism in six juxtapositions between "them" and "us" [Fig. 7]. On each double page, Uitz plays with the same structure: against a white or black background, the left side highlights a typical feature of capitalism, illustrating how a factory or agriculture is organized "by them" [*u nikh*]. The right side of each double page, consistently displayed on a red background, responds to the left, showing how the same institution is operated "by us" [*u nas*] in the communist system of the Soviet Union.[53] The middle section of the album, "Ot vas zavisit" [It Depends on You], uses the same structure of white and red juxtapositions to show, on four double pages, possible futures. Labeled simply "ili-ili" [or-or], the pages of this section prompt the reader to choose between gas warfare (*Gaz* [*Gas*]), on the one hand, and brotherhood on the front (*Bratanie* [*Fraternity*]), on the other; or between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie,

Fig. 7. Béla Uitz, *Bezrabotnye / Sotssorevnovanie i udarnichestvo* [The Unemployed / Socialist Competition and Shock Work], c. 1930, from the album *Ot vas zavisit* [It Depends on You]. Black and white tempera and ink on newspaper, glued on black and red papers. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Copyright: Veronika Belovna Chursanova. Despite the best efforts, the author was unable to contact the copyright holders.

on the left, and its red alternative, a worldwide October revolution (*Mirovoi Oktiabr'* [*Worldwide October*]), on the right. The final section, "Nash Obet" [Our Pledge], offers a straightforward resolution to the fierce battle of the two systems. Breaking the album's juxtaposed structure, the concluding section includes a single image displayed on the red side of the double page, with the title "Kommunizm" [Communism] [Fig. 8]. This is a drawing of a genderless couple forcefully marching forward, one with a hammer and the other with a sickle, embracing each other with their free hands. The indivisible unity formed by the geometric bodies of a peasant and a worker is an explicit affirmation of the way forward, which aptly brings the dialectical album to an end.[54]

Although the conspicuous conclusion seems to terminate the dialectical structure of the album by freezing the force of juxtapositions into a single, ideologically unambiguous image, the tension between capitalism and communism is maintained throughout the pages, until the very end. Indeed, the double pages of sections 1 and 2 offer a novel take on dialectical images, despite their rigid and simplistic "them" vs. "us" and "or-or" structures. The material make-up of these pages, however, allows the reader to activate them and transform the juxtapositions within the structure of the page.

Fig. 8. Béla Uitz, *Kommunizm* [Communism], c. 1930, from the album *Ot vas zavisit* [It Depends on You]. Black and white tempera and ink on newspaper, glued on red paper. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Copyright: Veronika Belovna Chursanova. Despite the best efforts, the author was unable to contact the copyright holders.

The second picture page of the album, *Bezrabotnye / Sotssorevnovanie i udarnichestvo* [*The Unemployed / Socialist Competition and Shock Work*] [Fig. 7], contrasts the situation of industrial workers in capitalist countries and the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. On the left, skeletal workers take to the streets

in desperation over unemployment and starvation. "Fermè" [Closed], "Kenyeret" [(Give Us) Bread!], "Hunger," "Es lebe di[e] Diktatur d. Pro[letariats]" [Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!] – the numerous languages of the protest signs suggest that French, Hungarian, English, and German workers suffer equally the mass unemployment and economic crisis that capitalist countries faced following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. In contrast to the depression that sits heavily on workers' faces, the right side of the page is laden with the energy of Soviet workers immersed in their fight for communism and the speedy completion of the first Five-Year Plan, launched in 1929. In the lower section of the image, a collective of shock workers strain their bodies to hammer at full swing, their arms moving with the sweeping energy of waves as they put all their force into their physical task.[55] Meanwhile, overseeing the shock workers on the floor, a group of their comrades hold a meeting to register and look over the latest production numbers, in order to amplify their collective work performance in socialist competition, the economic strategy that was mobilized to boost industrialization to maximum speed during the Five-Year Plan.[56]

With the vertically displayed union of managerial and physical labor carried out by the workers, the right-side image visualizes what historian Lewis Siegelbaum called the "new, specifically Soviet work culture," cultivated by such mass mobilization instruments as shock work and socialist competition.[57] The image of the Soviet workers, self-consciously engaged in their labor, is especially powerful in contrast to the drawing on the opposite side, which offers insight into how workers live – or better said, suffocate – under capitalism. The difference is in fact so grave that, without the materialized juxtaposition as displayed on the double page, one may at first see the two images as incommensurables. "Governed by distinct laws and dynamics," in Jameson's characterization, incommensurables "cannot be made to apply to or to govern the opposite term."[58] Yet Uitz sets up

a visual juxtaposition that in fact helps readers see unemployment in relation to shock work and socialist competition, connected as diametrically opposed means of mass mobilization and the labor practices of political consciousness in capitalism and communism.

In addition to the contrast between the figurative imagery on the left and right sides of the double page, the juxtaposition also operates on another level – as an opposition between the black and red colors, which is at once more abstract and more material than the contrast of figurative imagery. Along with the large-scale pages which serve as base and background for the images of capitalist unemployment and Soviet socialist competition and shock work, the black and red colors reappear on the back of the figurative images too. Painted with tempera and ink on hand-cut pieces of newspaper, the figurative depictions are glued onto the larger base but can be flipped with a simple gesture of the hand, revealing the ultimate opposite of the figurative composition: the abstraction of red and black colors [Fig. 9]. The front and back of each individual paper, therefore, are similar to the faces of a coin: never visible in full at the same time, the two sides are the diametrical opposites of each other, which nevertheless belong together in inseparable unity.

Fig. 9. Béla Uitz, Back side of *Bezrabotnye* [The Unemployed], c. 1930, from the album *Ot vas zavisit* [It Depends on You]. Black and white tempera and ink on newspaper, glued on black paper. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Copyright: Veronika Belovna Chursanova. Despite the best efforts, the author was unable to contact the copyright holders.

Beyond the opposition between the visual regimes of figuration and abstraction, the front and back sides also signify the incommensurability of political regimes, due to the ideological meaning that colors acquire within the material set-up of the album as well as each double page. When flipping the depiction

of capitalist unemployment on the left, the reader encounters the totality of communism – since the back of the newspaper sheet is painted red [Fig. 9]. The printed words of the newspaper peek through under the red tempera, showcasing typical features of the Soviet press, such as "Pod kontrol' mass" [Under the Control of the Masses], a regular column in the Soviet daily *Pravda*, filled with critical reports by Soviet worker- and peasant-correspondents about the resolvable pitfalls and deficiencies of Soviet life.[59] This was, in fact, yet another standard element of the new Soviet work culture, an initiative designed to motivate workers and increase productivity by providing workers on the floor with the means to actively participate in criticizing, transforming, and thus building Soviet life. This material as well as abstracted representation of the worker-correspondence movement thus dovetails with the figurative imagery of communism on the right side of the double page. Similarly, when the reader turns around the right-side image of Soviet workers, the diametrical Other of communism appears: capitalism, represented by the severity of black color. This time, however, the black tempera on the back side renders the printed words of the Soviet newspaper invisible. If the reader turns away from the Soviet Union, only the desolation of capitalism remains.

Uitz's design for the agitprop album invites the reader to engage with the object and activate the pages and juxtapositions by flipping the images and thus creating different visual experiences as well as political scenarios. By transforming the static opposition between capitalism and communism, the reader can image and imagine different futures and possibilities. The seemingly rigid and simplistic juxtaposition between "them" and "us" can thus be set in motion and seen as processes – all the while retaining the ideological and material structure of oppositions. Only the last section, "Our Pledge," breaks the tension and energy of dialectical juxtaposition; its double page is occupied by a single image on the right, "Communism" [Fig. 8],

which is glued to the base paper and cannot be lifted or flipped. The energetic image of the desired future, with its harmonious and forceful unity of workers and peasants, is therefore ultimately frozen into material and ideological fixity.

Even though the maquette, which the artist himself sold to Moscow's Pushkin Museum, is the only known exemplar of this agitprop object, the work has been shown in several exhibitions since the late 1960s. Ironically, however, none of the museum displays has managed to show the object's dialectical potential. Note, for instance, how the album was displayed in Berlin at the artist's retrospective exhibition in 1970: a black-and-white photograph shot during the opening ceremony shows seven of the juxtapositions framed on the exhibition wall as individual works of art [Fig. 10].[60] Removed from Uitz's original, hand-made album, the individual images were remounted on black and red papers and covered with protective glass. Taken outside its historical and material context, the dialectical agitprop album was transformed into a static exhibition object in post-World War II socialism.

Fig.10. Béla Uitz (seated in the first row, first from left) at the opening ceremony of his one-man show in Berlin, Neue Galerie, September 1970. *Ot vas zavisit* album exhibited on the wall behind him. "Uitz kiállítás Berlinben, Neue Galerie 1970. szept.11-okt.11. / Prága, 1970.nov. X 1970 Uitz Béla (122/b. dob)" [Uitz's Exhibition in Berlin, Neue Galerie, Sep. 11-Oct.11, 1970 / Prague, Nov. 1970] Műcsarnok-Kunsthalle, Budapest. Copyright: Műcsarnok Library and Archives, 2021.

Toward dialectics?

"Simple," "obvious," "kitschy," "totalitarian," and "self-explanatory" – these are some of the most common labels used to characterize communist propaganda art, especially when describing the visual products of the Stalinist years.[61] This paper has tried to show that communist dialectical juxtapositions –

– a key image type of Soviet propaganda – were anything but obvious or self-explanatory.[62] Although all the examples discussed in this paper share a strong commitment to communist politics, such ideological certainty does not do away with the complex operations of these works as visual objects.[63] Nor, in my view, do they offer a straightforward, rigid, simplistic legibility of their politics, as is usually imagined when it comes to discussions on Soviet propaganda.

That said, one may argue that the ultimate dialectical potential of the images discussed above derives exactly from the unspoken or invisible dissymmetry of ideological commitment embedded in each of these juxtapositions (with the exception, perhaps, of Lex-Nerlinger's collage, whose main visual feature is disproportion). Although visually the juxtapositions are set up as proportionate oppositions between two equal sides, they all nevertheless center on workers, the poor, the oppressed, while marginalizing the rich, the bourgeoisie, the capitalists – or even capitalism itself – as the immoral, disgusting, oppressive "Other."[64] It is perhaps the never-ending tension between the visible symmetry and the invisible dissymmetry of the juxtapositions which might provoke the viewer into action – whether that entails the act of flipping a page or protesting on the street.

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1 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 1*, translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 189–190. I am indebted to the discussions I have had with Viola Bao, Adam Goldsmith, and Kang Kang, members of our self-organized *Capital Volume 1* reading group at Northwestern University. Cheers to more discussions to come!

2 See especially the commentary on Marx's "method of descent" in: David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London & New York: Verso, 2010), 8.

3 Marx, *Capital*, 190. Today, a critical reading of this fat-shaming commentary should be informed by recent, radical scholarship on the discourse and politics of fatness. I have encountered the emerging field of Fat Studies through the writings of Charlotte Cooper, whose 2016 book offers not only an indispensable introduction to fat activism but also an alternative for a more ethical, personal, and radical knowledge production. See: Charlotte Cooper, *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement* (Bristol, England: HammerOn Press, 2016). I would also like to note the colonial language of Marx's footnote as it describes the "savages and semi-savages [who] use the tongue differently," quoting an 1821 British travelogue in the colonial fashion, by a certain Captain Parry.

4 Marx, *Capital*, 190.

5 *Roter Pfeffer: satirische Zeitschrift der KPD* [*Red Pepper: The Satirical Magazine of the KPD*] was the monthly satirical picture magazine of the Communist Party of Germany, published between January 1932 and February 1933. It was the successor to *Der Eulenspiegel*, published from 1928. *Roter Pfeffer* was not only similar in style and format to the Soviet caricature magazine *Krokodil*, but also republished some of its caricatures. Moreover, the 1932/2 issue of *Roter Pfeffer* was a special "Gastnummer" [guest issue], with contributions by *Krokodil* co-workers.

6 *George Grosz: Berlin – New York*, ed. Ralph Jentsch (Milan: Skira, 2008), 133; Brigid Doherty, "Berlin," in: *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art in association with D.A.P., 2005), 103.

7 The literature on Grosz often assumes that he distanced himself from the Communist Party due to his disillusionment with the Soviet Union during his 1922 trip to Soviet Russia; see, e.g.: *George Grosz* (2008), op. cit., 135. Beth Irwin Lewis, however, points

out that Grosz "continued an active relationship with communist organizations and individuals for several more years after he returned from Russia." Lewis also mentions that three of Grosz's images were published in 1932 in *Roter Pfeffer*: Beth Irwin Lewis, *George Grosz: Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), 109, 186.

8 After an initial 1932 trip to New York, Grosz went into exile in 1933. See, e.g.: *George Grosz: The Years in America, 1933–1958*, eds. Juerg M. Judin, Ralph Jentsch, and Barbara McCloskey (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

9 Note that Grosz's satirical imagery of the "bourgeois privilege" of fatness reads today as not only potentially hurtful toward fat people, but also politically outdated, given the complete shift in food politics that now exclusively preserve healthy, fat-free, vegan, and bio foods for people of higher socio-economic status.

10 In line with Grosz's common practice of recycling his images in different publications and with different titles, the lower section of the full-page *Roter Pfeffer* image is also known as "A Modern Oliver": George Grosz and Imre Hofbauer, *George Grosz* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1948), 54. In a 1960 publication, however, the same image appeared as "Fifteen Pounds Underweight," dated to 1935: George Grosz, *George Grosz* (New York: Arts, Inc., 1960), n.p. (image 60).

11 The spatialized social hierarchy of Grosz's image calls to mind the juxtaposition of the upper and lower classes and their respective spaces in Bong Joon-ho's 2019 movie *Parasite*. I am grateful to Andrew Day for our discussions about the movie.

12 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1989), 6.

13 See especially Buck-Morss's discussion in Chapter 7: "Is This Philosophy?" with quotes from Benjamin's "Konvolut N" section "On Epistemology, Theory of Progress," in: Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing,* 216–252.

14 Ibid., 210.

15 Quoted in: ibid., 219. On Benjamin's interest in how constellations of opposites produce meaning, see also Matthew Rampley's reading of Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* in dialogue and contrast with Aby Warburg's *Atlas Project*: Matthew Rampley, "Aura and Memory," in: *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 73–100. Furthermore, see the 2003 special issue of *boundary 2*, a constellation of articles that approach the dialectical image and the *Passagen-Werk* from different perspectives: "Benjamin Now" (issue eds.

Kevin McLaughlin and Philip Rosen), *boundary 2* vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003).

16 Anthony Auerbach, "Imagine no Metaphors: the Dialectical Image of Walter Benjamin," *Image [&] Narrative* [e-journal] 18 (2007), http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/thinking_pictures/auerbach.htm (accessed June 19, 2021).

17 Eckhart Gillen, "Die Sachlichkeit der Revolutionäre," in: *Wem gehört die Welt – Kunst und Gesellschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 1977), 205–233; Uwe M. Schneede, *George Grosz. Der Künstler in seiner Gesellschaft* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1975).

18 Schneede, *George Grosz*, 129.

19 From the vast literature on the histories of visual representations of work and craft, see for instance: *Work and the Image: Volume 1: Work, Craft and Labour – Visual Representations in Changing Histories*, eds. Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000). See also Sabine Hake's recent work on how the German proletariat was constructed as a class-based emotional community through cultural objects such as songs, images, performances, and symbols, in: Sabine Hake, *The Proletarian Dream* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter GmbH, 2017).

20 Fredric Jameson, "The Three Names of the Dialectic," in: idem, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010), 36.

21 On some of the theoretical issues around class consciousness in Marx's work, see György Lukács's early essay, written during his Viennese exile in March 1920, in the aftermath of the fall of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic: György Lukács, "Class Consciousness," in: idem, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968 [1971]), 46–82.

22 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2017), 11–61.

23 On the international communist culture of the Comintern, see especially the recent interdisciplinary publication *Comintern Aesthetics*, eds. Amelia Glaser and Steven S. Lee (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

24 See Christina Kiaer's stimulating reading of the transparent and transitional objects of the Russian Constructivists as the "material incarnations of Benjamin's dialectical image," which were "operating within the semi-capitalist context of NEP but looking toward the socialist future." In Kiaer's argument, the Constructivist objects – just like Benjamin's "materialist history" – sought to provide "the flash of critical understanding

of mass culture under NEP that would be necessary for waking up from the commodity phantasmagoria of capitalism into the future socialist culture." Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2005), 38.

25 On the history of the weekly Hungarian newsreel *Est Film Híradó* [*Evening Film News*], see for instance: "Száz éve rejtőző filmfelvétel került elő Szomory Dezső íróról" [Newsreel about Writer Dezső Szomory, Languishing for a Century, Surfaced in the Film Archive], *kultúra.hu*, November 2, 2020, https://kultura.hu/szaz-eve-rejtozo-filmfelvetel-kerult-elo-szomory-dezso-irorol/ (accessed December 10, 2020); Zsolt Kőháti, *Tovamozduló ember tovamozduló világban. A magyar némafilm 1896–1931 között* [*Moving Man in a Moving World: Hungarian Silent Movies Between 1896 and 1931*] (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1996), 128–129.

26 The newsreel is available online at: https://filmhiradokonline.hu/watch.php?id=5508 (accessed December 10, 2020).

27 The Hungarian Soviet Republic lasted only until August 1, 1919, when the Bolshevik government resigned under military pressure from neighboring countries. For recent accounts on the history and visual culture of the Hungarian Soviet Republic available in English, see: *Everything Is Ours!*, eds. Judit Csatlós and Ádám Albert (Budapest: Kassák Múzeum-Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2018); Bob Dent, *Painting the Town Red: Politics and the Arts During the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); as well as the online exhibition *From Harvest to Harvest – Hungarian Calvary, 1918–1919*, curated by the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest, https://fromharvesttoharvest.osaarchivum.org/?lang=en (accessed December 17, 2020).

28 In his memoirs, Vértes devoted only a short paragraph to his 1919 activities, noting that he made political posters in support of the proletarian dictatorship, which was the reason for his escape to Vienna after the fall of the Soviet regime in Hungary in August 1919. See: Marcell Vértes, *Vértes varieté* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, 1971), 151. See also the pamphlet of Vértes's 1960 exhibition in Budapest: Dénes Pataky, *Vértes Marcell festőművész kiállítása* [*One-Man Exhibition of Painter Marcell Vértes*], Budapest, Műcsarnok Kamaraterme, 1960.

29 Galina Torma, "1919. március 25–31. Megalakul a Vörös Hadsereg" [March 25–31, 1919. The Red Army Is Founded], *filmarchiv.hu* (2019), https://filmarchiv.hu/hu/aktualis/filmhiradok-100-eve/megalakul-a-voros-hadsereg (accessed April 19, 2021).

30 Ibid.

31 I use "Monarchy's Army" as a synonym for the Austro-Hungarian Army, which was dissolved in the aftermath of World War I along with the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself (also known as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy)..

32 In her short article, Torma reads the newsreel as a caricature, due to the fact that there was no visible difference between the two armies, despite the reference in the film's title to the different colors of the "red" and "pike-gray" uniforms. Torma explains that the old uniforms were collected from the Monarchy's Army and redistributed immediately among the Red Army soldiers. As such, she concludes, "one would only know that the soldiers in pike-gray uniforms belonged to the Red Army because no one else was allowed to wear this uniform." See: ibid.

33 See Victoria E. Bonnell's analysis of what she has called the "syntax" or "distinctive markers" of the figure of the blacksmith in Russian Bolshevik visual culture: Victoria E. Bonnell, "Iconography of the worker in Soviet political art," in: idem, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1997), 23.

34 Alajos Dezső (1888, Baja, Hungary – 1964, New York, USA), caricaturist and graphic artist. Just like Vértes, Dezső also emigrated from Hungary following the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and eventually moved to the United States. For a short biography in Hungarian, see: *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon, I. Kötet, A-K* [*Hungarian Biographical Lexicon, Volume I, A-K*], ed. Ágnes Kenyeres (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), 376.

35 Bonnell, *Iconography of Power,* 23.

36 Ibid., 187–188.

37 Fredric Jameson, "Introduction: Realism and its Antinomies," in: idem, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London & New York: Verso, 2013), 24.

38 In his memoirs, artist Marcell Vértes noted that he had learned to draw in a bar in Pest, while playing pool. He taught his "Master" the tricks of pool, and he, in exchange, taught Vértes the basics of drawing on the blackboard where they also kept track of their pool scores. See: Vértes, *Vértes varieté*, 126–127.

39 Elisabeth Moortgat, "Using Stencils, Scissors and Spray-Pistol," in: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger. 1893–1975: Fotomonteurin und Malerin / Photomontage Artist and Painter*, ed. Marion Beckers (Berlin: Das Verborgene Museum, Lukas Verlag, 2016), 143–146.

40 See again the bilingual German-English publication on her work and life: ibid., 151.

41 The current frame also suggests that the work should be displayed on the wall like an easel painting. I am grateful to dedicated colleagues at the Kunstsammlung der Akademie der Künste, Berlin – especially Meike Herdes and Anna Shultz – for giving me access to the work in the fall of 2020, despite the ongoing pandemic. On Lex-Nerlinger's photograms, see: Rachel Epp Buller, "Photograms," in: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger. 1893–1975*, 153–154.

42 Along with John Heartfield, Alice Lex-Nerlinger often used photographic prints of her photograms, which she could retouch by hand, as in the case of *Arm und reich*. In fact, each photographic print is "singular" due to the artist's touch on the surface of the print. On John Heartfield's technique, see e.g., the recent exhibition catalog of the Akademie der Künste: Angela Lammert, Rosa von der Schulenburg, and Anna Schultz, *John Heartfield – Fotografie plus Dynamit* (Munich: Hirmer & Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2020).

43 Rachel Epp Buller, "Paragraph 218 and the Fight for Reproductive Rights," in: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger. 1893–1975*, 158.

44 Paragraph 218 had been part of the German penal code since 1871, and was once again reiterated by the Weimar Constitution in 1919. See for instance: Buller, "Paragraph 218," 157–158; Marsha Meskimmon, "The Mother," in: *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 75–120.

45 Specifically on the KPD's rhetoric and visual propaganda against Paragraph 218, see: Michelle Vangen, "Chapter One: The Image of the Mother as Ideological Weapon: Artists and the Communist Campaign to Legalize Abortion," in: idem, *Left and Right: Politics and Images of Motherhood in Weimar Germany*, PhD dissertation, The City University of New York, 2017, 26–77.

46 Meskimmon, "The Mother," 86.

47 Jameson, "The Three Names of the Dialectic," 20.

48 See Walter Benjamin's argument about how a technologically reproduced work can break free from the bourgeois norms of culture, cutting its ties to religious or bourgeois

rituals, and enter *politics* instead, in: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version) [1936]," in: idem, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 101–140.

49 For Uitz's biography in English, see: Éva Bajkay, "Uitz, Béla," *Grove Art Online* (2003), https://www-oxfordartonline-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000086935 (accessed April 25, 2021); as well as the recent article: Angelina Lucento, "Painting Against Empire: Béla Uitz and the Birth and Fate of Internationalist Socialist Realism," *The Russian Review* vol. 79, no. 4 (2020), 578–605. In Hungarian, Éva Bajkay has written extensively about Uitz's life and work. See: Éva Bajkay, *Uitz Béla* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1974), and Éva Bajkay, *Uitz Béla* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1987).

50 Having no evidence to think otherwise, we can assume that the album did not make it to press due to its high production costs. Note that Bajkay believes that Uitz wanted to turn the series into frescoes – an argument she bases on the fact that Uitz adapted one of the images from the album into a larger, yet formally more simplistic and abstracted sketch, which could be seen as a cartoon for a planned fresco. Yet Bajkay notes that there is no documentary evidence for Uitz's exact plans. Bajkay also assumes that Uitz picked the topic in line with the 1931 Anti-Imperialist Art Exhibition in Moscow, which was co-organized by the Comintern's Art Union, headed by Uitz himself. See Bajkay's description of the agitprop album in: Bajkay, *Uitz Béla* (1987), 74–75.

51 The maquette of the album is preserved today by the Department of Graphic Arts and Drawings at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, Russia. I am grateful to Anna Chernysheva for her generous help with my research in the collection in spring 2019.

52 In addition to the title pages that introduce each section, the typed table of contents – annotated with pencil – that Uitz glued in the maquette also confirms the three-part structure of the planned album.

53 Note the smaller, glued labels on the top of each double page, which verbally contrast "u nikh" [by them] on the left with "u nas" [by us] on the right.

54 Uitz's image of the peasant-worker alliance calls to mind a later work, Vera Mukhina's iconic sculpture *Rabochii i Kolkhoznitsa* [*Worker and Peasant Woman*], displayed on the top of the Soviet Pavilion at the 1937 Paris World's Fair.

55 According to historian Lewis H. Siegelbaum, the term *udarnichestvo*, or shock work,

originates from the civil war period, initially denoting "the performance of particularly arduous or urgent tasks." By the late 1920s, it came to be used for work brigades organized by workers "to fulfill obligations over and above their work assignments." See: Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity In the USSR, 1935–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

56 Siegelbaum defines *sotssorevnovanie* (socialist competition, also translated as "socialist emulation" in an effort to clearly differentiate it from capitalist notions of economic competition) as the systematization of the efforts of the shock worker movement, "usually in the form of open letters, resolutions, and challenges to emulate or outdo the examples of pioneering shock workers." See: Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism,* 40. I am grateful to Yiannis Kokosalakis for all our inspiring discussions in Moscow on Uitz's dialectical album.

57 Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism,* 40. In the context of art history, see Maria Gough's compelling analysis of what we may see as an earlier chapter in the emergence of a novel Soviet work culture: Maria Gough, "Red Technics: The *Konstruktor* in Production," in: idem, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 2005), 151–190.

58 Jameson, "The Three Names," 25.

59 As Maria Gough's research has revealed, this regular feature by the so-called Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, or Rabkrin, was introduced in *Pravda* in the late 1920s. See: Maria Gough, "The Press," in: *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia!: Soviet Art Put to the Test*, ed. Matthew S. Witkovsky (Chicago, IL: Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), 85. Note also how this "transparency" of the red tempera on the back side helps to date the work more precisely: my research has identified the newspapers that Uitz painted on as Russian and German, including *Pravda*, published between 1929 and the summer of 1931. The latest newspaper cut-out that I could identify is a piece from the June 24, 1931 issue of *Pravda*.

60 See the photograph among the archived documentation of the exhibition: "Uitz kiállítás Berlinben, Neue Galerie 1970. szeptember 11. - október 11. / Prága, 1970. november [Uitz Exhibition in Berlin, Neue Galerie, September 11 – October 11, 1970 / Prague, November 1970], X 1970 Uitz Béla (122/b. dob)," Műcsarnok Könyvtár és Adattár, Budapest. A catalog was published at both locations: Éva Bajkay, Helga Weißgärber, and Béla Uitz, *Béla Uitz / Volksrepublik Ungarn / Aquarelle und Graphik [Neue Berliner Galerie, Berlin; Ausstellung V.; 11.09. - 11.10.1970]* (Berlin: Neue Berliner Galerie, 1970); Éva Bajkay and Béla Uitz, *Béla Uitz* (Prague: 1970).

61 For an alternative model of thinking about socialist realism, see Christina Kiaer's inspiring essay, which has sought to counter such Cold War orthodoxies: Christina Kiaer, "Fairy-tales of the Proletariat, or, Is Socialist Realism Kitsch?," in: *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920–1970*, eds. Matthew Bown and Matteo Lanfranconi (Milan: Skira, 2012), 183–190.

62 See e.g. the online commentary that aims to contextualize the 1919 Hungarian comic newsreel, stating that "Further explanation for the cartoon is needless to this day": "Filmhíradók - 100 éve ezen a héten 22. (2019. március 25–31.) Newsreel – What happened during this week a century ago? 22. (March 25–31, 2019)," ed. Galina Torma, *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ax2D6nULrM&list=PLVtv3NILJrBymLyrqSDaiBw0qaBDBoKA9 (accessed December 18, 2020). See also the scholarship on Lex-Nerlinger and her supposedly "simple dialectical compositions," in: *Alice Lex-Nerlinger. 1893–1975.*

63 For a counter-example, see Sabine Kriegel's stimulating discussion of the Nazi juxtaposed photomontages that aimed to copy John Heartfield's dynamic image-making technique: Sabine Kriebel, "Photomontage in the Year 1932: John Heartfield and the National Socialists," *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 31, no. 1 (2008), 124.

64 See again Jameson's discussion on asymmetrical oppositions: Jameson, "The Three Meanings," 19–21.

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