

John Heartfield (1891 – 1968)

The Formative Years (1891-1913)

John Heartfield was born Helmut Herzfeld on June 19, 1891 in Berlin-Schmargendorf, Germany to Franz Herzfeld, a socialist writer and Alice nee Stolzenburg, a textile worker and political activist. Eight years later in 1899, Helmut, his brother Wieland, and his sisters Lotte and Hertha were abandoned by their parents. For a while, the four children resided with an uncle in the small town of Aigen before each was sent out to various other guardians, Helmut landing in a monastery.

However, young Helmut continued his education having already shown a gift for painting. In 1908 he studied in Munich at the Royal Bavarian Arts and Crafts School. It was here that encountered commercial designers Albert Weisgerber and Ludwig Hohlwein. The two influenced Herzfeld greatly.

Once 1912 came around Herzfeld was working as a commercial artist himself. He was employed designing book jackets, ironically for *The Selected Works of Franz Held*, his estranged father.

In 1913, he moved to Berlin where he studied under Ernst Neumann at the Kunst-und Handwerkerschule [Arts and Crafts School].

World War I and the Seeds of Protest

In September of 1914, amidst the turmoil of World War I, Herzfeld was drafted into the German military. He served in the Kaiser-Franz-Josef-Regiment, a guards regiment based in Berlin. Later that year, Herzfeld's brother Wieland joined the army as a medical orderly and was sent to the Belgian front.

In 1915, with the threat of a move to the front lines hanging over his head, Helmut faked a nervous breakdown and was released from service. His brother, Wieland, was also removed from duty following an act of insubordination. Both in Berlin, this gave the brothers an opportunity to resume their relationship.

In the summer of 1916, Germany had been utilizing a rather offensive nationalistic slogan: "Gott Strafe England" or May God Punish England. This angered Helmut who protested by changing his name to John Heartfield. His brother Wieland changed his last name from Herzfeld to Herzfelde and their new acquaintance, George Gross changed his name to George Grosz. During the remainder of the year, Heartfield and Wieland revitalized an old German monthly magazine with their newly founded publishing company, *Neue Jugend*, or New Youth.

The next year, Heartfield worked along side his brother as a film set designer and as the director of the Military Educational Film Service. The year 1917 also turned out to be a very memorable year for Heartfield because later that year he wed a woman by the name of Helene Balzer.

In 1918, Heartfield made a decision that would ultimately impact the rest of his career. He became a member of the Berlin Club Dada as a protest to Germany's current barbaric state and also joined the German Communist Party.

Later that year, his first son, Tom was also born.

In 1919, Heartfield continued his controversial ways as he was dismissed from the UFA (formerly the Military Educational Film Service) because he called for a strike after the questionable murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. After co-editing a satirical magazine that was banned after its first edition, Heartfield joined Wieland and Grosz to found *Die Pleite*, a satirical, political magazine.

Continuing his activity in the Dada club, in 1920, he helped organize the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin. It was an all around happy year for Heartfield, who also celebrated the birth of daughter Eva in 1920.

Photography as a Weapon

Heartfield continued to ruffle feathers in 1923, working for the KPD (German Communist Party) editing such periodicals as *Der Knoppel* and *Die Rote Fahne* [The Red Flag].

In early 1924, he met and struck up a friendship with Bertolt Brecht, an individual who would have a major impact on his life. On the 10th anniversary of the beginning of WWI, Heartfield showed his very first photomontage, entitled "After 10 Years-Fathers and Sons" in Berlin.

In 1927, John Heartfield married his second wife Barbara Friedmann.



As time went by, Heartfield became more and more involved in photo-montage. At an International Werkbund exhibition FILM UND FOTO, in Stuttgart, he exhibited a great deal of works too numerous to even count.

In 1930, he worked on a regular basis at the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* [Workers Illustrated Newspaper] in Berlin, where he became acquainted with Vladimir Mayakovsky and Ilya Ehrenburg.

From 1931 to early 1932, Heartfield trekked to the USSR where he traveled, lectured, and gave lessons on behalf of the newspaper USSR in Construction. While there he exhibited over 300 of his works in Moscow.

One Man's War Against Hitler

As Hitler's fascist regime began to take over Germany in 1933, Heartfield fled the country to Czechoslovakia where he continued to work. In 1934, he took part in an international caricature exhibition at the Prague art society, Manes. This exhibition began to cause diplomatic difficulties between the Czechs and Germany. Heartfield, given the troubled situation, was urged to move to Moscow yet decided to remain in Czechoslovakia.

In 1936, he participated in an international photo exhibition, again at Manes. In 1937, with Heartfield taking part in the exhibition *50 Years Manes*, threatened to break off all diplomatic ties to Czechoslovakia causing some of Heartfield's works to be removed from the exhibition.

Feeling the effects of the turmoil that his presence had caused and fearing the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Germany, Heartfield fled to England in 1938. His brother, Wieland, followed shortly after.

In 1939, however, Wieland was refused a Residence permit and Heartfield bid his brother and his family farewell as they left for the United States of America.

Later that year, Heartfield showed one of his more famous exhibitions, *One Man's War against Hitler*, at the Arcade Gallery in London.

With the second world war reaching full swing in 1940, John Heartfield was interned as an enemy for his German ancestry. He was held in the English internment camps in Luton, Huyton, and York. While interned, he became acquainted with fellow German emigre Gertrud Fietz but he also became severely ill during this period.

In 1941, in celebration of his 50th birthday, the League of Culture honored Heartfield with an exhibition of his book jackets and photomontages. At the exhibition, Heartfield lectured on his methods of photomontage.

Over the next few years, with his health constantly in question, Heartfield found work in a variety of places including working as a free-lance cartoonist in 1943.

In 1945, Konrad Farnert published *John Heartfield. Photomontagen zur Zeitgeschichte* or "John Heartfield. Photomontages on Contemporary History."

"Immigrating" Home and Gaining Recognition

While living in London in 1948, John Heartfield received an offer to be a professor of satirical graphics at Humboldt University in East Germany. With the aid of his brother, Wieland and old friend Bertolt Brecht, arrangements were made to allow Heartfield, along with Gertrude, to return to Leipzig in East Germany. Once there, Heartfield taught while also collaborating on projects with his brother and founding their own publishing company, "Werkstatt: H & H."

Due to a resolution by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, all "Western emigrants" were suspected of "treasonable connections". This included Heartfield and Wieland. Luckily, Heartfield had enough contacts to be overlooked and was not charged with any crimes. Later that year, he suffered his first heart attack while traveling on a train and an exhibition that had been scheduled had to be cancelled. A year later, Heartfield would finally marry his long time companion Gertrude, making her his third wife. Unfortunately, later that year, he would also suffer his second heart attack.

In 1954, after many decades had passed, Stefan Heym called for public recognition of Heartfield's life's work. Heym's pleas did not go unheard. Political changes throughout Europe had at least some effect on the state of Germany and the GDR. In October of 1956, Heartfield was elected a full member of the Deutsche Akademie der Kunst and his party membership was regarded as being uninterrupted.

The first GDR exhibition for Heartfield was titled *John Heartfield und die Kunst der Fotomontage* (John Heartfield and the Art of Photomontage) and took place at the Akademie in 1957. Later that year, he and his wife moved to Berlin and Heartfield was given the National Award Second Class.

Heartfield remained active in the next few years despite health problems, traveling to China and making his first film, an autobiographical piece. Finally in 1960, he was given the title of professor. In 1964, nearly 50 years after the fact, his name change to John Heartfield was officially recognized.

For the next few years, he participated in numerous art exhibits all across the continent of Europe until in 1968, John Heartfield succumbed to severe illness and passed away at the age of 77.



Millions Stand Behind Me



Adolph the Superman



He will gas the world with his words.



This is the "happiness" they bring!



Hurrah, die Butter ist alle!

Goering in seiner Hamburger Rede: „Erz hat stets ein Reich stark gemacht, Butter und Schmalz haben höchstens ein Volk fett gemacht“

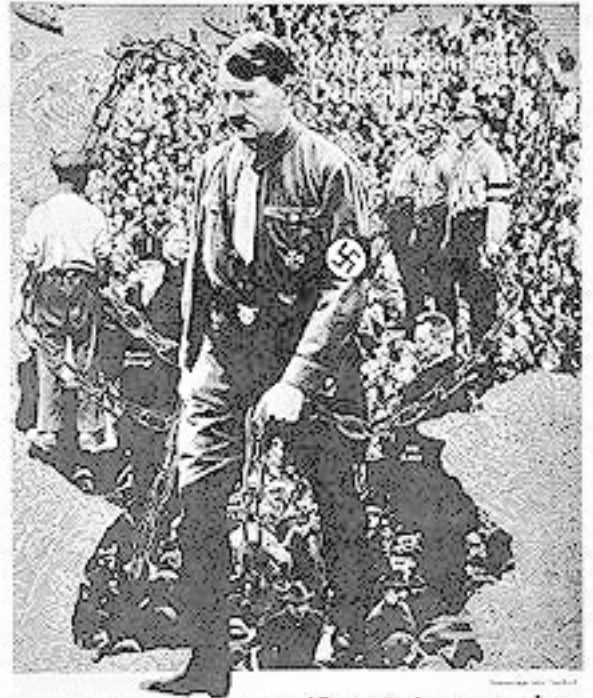
Zeichnung: John Heinrich

Hurrah! The butter is all gone!



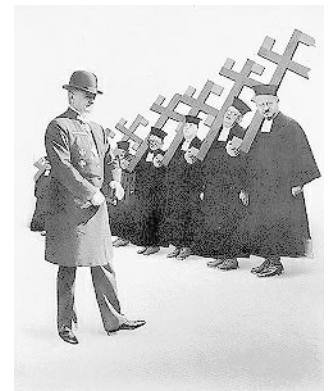
Goering the Executioner

„Die Nation steht geschlossen hinter mir“



Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr,
Ich kenne nur noch Gefangene!

*The Nation Stands Behind Me.
I don't see parties, I see prisoners.*



*The Protestant pastor
Dr. Ludwig Muller calls for
the Nazification of the
Church. As long as you are
born again into the right
religion, you have nothing
to fear.*



*War and Corpses.
The Last Hope of the Rich.*

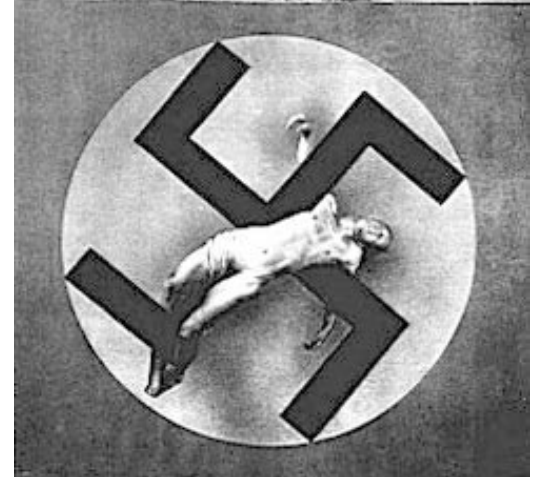
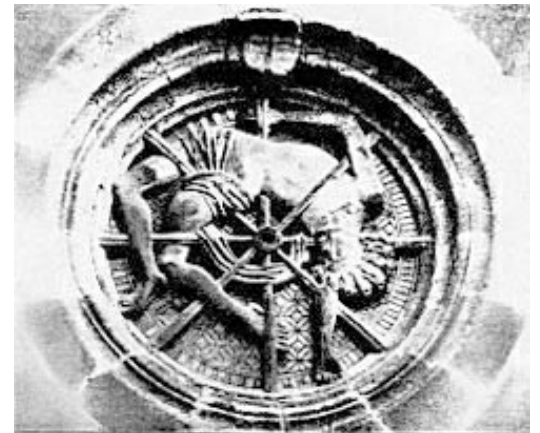


Adolph Puppet

He will tell
us scary
bedtime
stories



From Light to Night

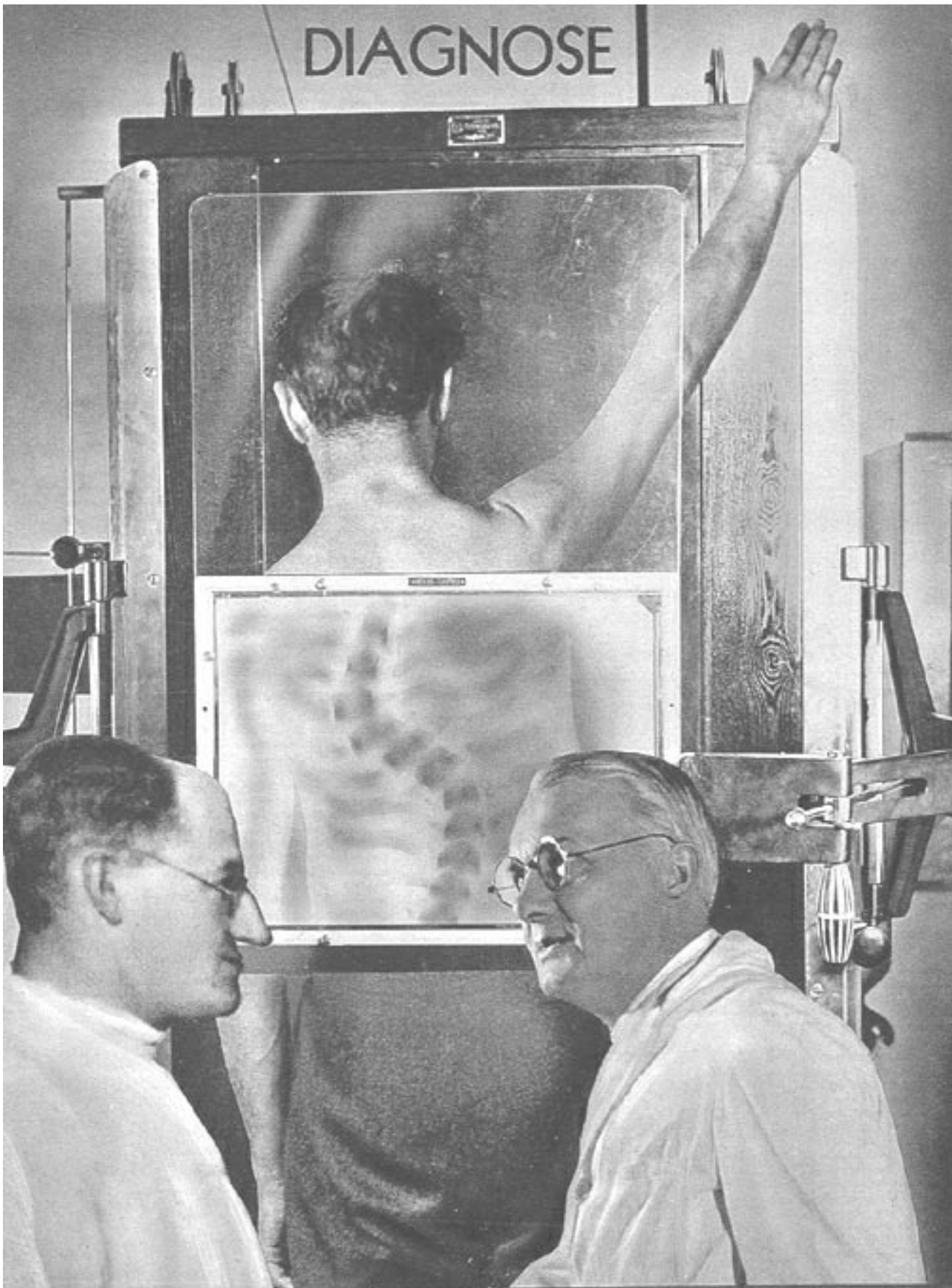


As it was
in the
Middle
Ages, so it
is in the
Third
Reich



O Joyful, O blessed miracle-bringing Christmas time!

„O du fröhliche, o du selige, gnadenbringende Zeit“



"How did the man get this curvature of the spine?" "That is the organic result of the endless 'Heil Hitler!'"

„Wodurch zog sich der Mann denn die Rückgratsverkrümmung zu?“
„Das sind die organischen Folgen des ewigen »Heil Hitler!«“

Fotomontage: John Heartfield