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Partie 3:
Faire voir les multiples visages de la modernité
Les cultures européennes au XIXe et dans la première moitié du
XXe siècles

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Partie 3: Faire voir les multiples visages de la modernité

Les cultures européennes au XIXe et dans la première moitié du XXe siècles

The third part of this work brings out the main lines of cultural and artistic life and of the history of ideas in the period concerned (it is the only part of the work devoted to this kind of subject). We can only welcome a work that enforces a transdisciplinary approach, allows the student to grasp the interconnections among disciplines, and encourages genuine reflection on cultural history in a Franco-German and European context.

This section consists of chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 is divided into three lessons: 7.1 "From Romanticism to Impressionism (1815-1880): The Invention of 'Modernity'," 7.2 „The Origins of Contemporary Art (1880-1914)," 7.3 „Art in Revolution: The Interwar Period (1919-1939), and three special sections, „La Belle Époque, the Golden Age of European Culture," "The Culture of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933)," and „Picasso in his Century." Chapter 8 is divided into two lessons: 8.1 „The Masses' Broader Participation in Culture, and 8.2 „Mass media and Leisure Activities in the Twentieth Century," and two special sections, „The Fascination with Sports" and „Europeanization or Americanization of Culture?" The chapter ends with an overall assessment.

The introductory pages in chapter 7 present a short text and a chronological table on one page while on the facing page two tables are juxtaposed: one „Romantic" and the other „Cubist" (even though the latter is simply called „modern," which may be misleading, since Romanticism is already modern). Nonetheless, a teacher might easily take advantage of this chronological and visual disposition, because both tables provide very appropriate ways of approaching the subject.

The reader may be disappointed by the presentation of Romanticism. According to the chronological scheme adopted, Romanticism begins in 1815 (whereas a parenthesis specifies that it began in Germany in 1790). Of course, this presentation depends on the periodization chosen, and the manual wants to start with the Congress of Vienna, but the application shows that at any given time there are not always the same artistic movements in all European countries. In this case, it would have to be explained that German Romanticism (in the strict sense of the term--that is, the first phase of Romanticism) was already coming to an end in 1815. Otherwise we are led to bracket the Romanticism of Iena and Heidelberg, which are nonetheless essential for the history of literature and German and European thought, and to present as incarnations of Romanticism phenomena that are instead avatars of Romanticism's first phase, in particular Richard Wagner and his views. Speaking of German Romanticism, it seems legitimate to expect to run into the names of Novalis, Schlegel, or even E.T.A. Hoffmann, and in the area of philosophy to find the concept of idealism and the names of Fichte and Schelling.

The following page (7.1, p. 132) very sporadically compensates for this

absence. The development of German literature and culture is summarized in a phrase that opposes the German Enlightenment to Romanticism, but skips over Sturm und Drang, German classicism, and the first phase of German Romanticism.

Finally, the synthesis also tries to remedy this gap. But the remedy may not be sufficient. Once again taking its inspiration from representations common in French manuals probably inspired by Mme de Stael's already false visions, it presents Goethe and Schiller as representatives of a first phase of German Romanticism in a way that is false from a Germanist's point of view (unless we take into account the very late works of both authors), and again all the eminent representatives of German Romanticism such as Novalis, Schlegel, Tieck, Wackenroder, Brentano, et al. are not mentioned.

Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that each of the chapter's subsections (7.1, 7.2, 7.3) is concerned to problematize, to elicit reflection on the period, by means of words, visual shocks, and examples. Thus in section 7.1, complex movements are characterized by a well-chosen title and a phrase that remains elliptical, of course, but fairly accurately describes the movements. Romanticism is presented under the title "The Romantic Revolution" (which is also particularly right for Germany, concerning which some people claim that it had in the guise of a revolution only an aesthetic revolution led notably by the first Romantics—that is, once again, outside the chronological framework thus adopted). Romanticism is moreover characterized by "its way of privileging inspiration and artistic sensibility." It is certain that an informed professor might draw on this characterization, asking his students to try to apply it and discussing with them the theories of the artist formulated by Novalis and Schlegel in the early phase and Baudelaire and Rimbaud in the late phase, in order thereby to link European literature and the Franco-German context.

In the same way, modernity is presented through the expression that serves as a title: "invention." This is very clever. We see that the author is well aware that there are all kinds of modernities, but that here it is a matter of modernity's assertion as such. It is defined as the period in which "writers and artists sought the main themes of their inspiration in their own time." This echoes Schlegel's questions regarding what might characterize his period, Baudelaire's reflections on fashion, and Rimbaud's determination to be modern.

These brief definitions are thus starting points that students and teachers can use to reflect, demonstrate, fill out, and enrich the representation. Of course, when it is a question of the alliance between Romanticism and liberal and national movements, we might regret that in the case of Germany the rediscovery of certain popular arts such as the Lieder and fairy and folk tales, especially by the Grimm brothers, is not mentioned, but we must also keep in mind that such a collection cannot aim to be exhaustive.

In section 7.2, the authors have tried to describe the multiplicity and explosion of cultural and artistic movements in this period by setting up various back-and-forths between symbolism and the philosophical background (Nietzschean philosophy, Freudian psychoanalysis), or again between art and the urban context. Regarding these pages, which are accurate and for which the examples seem well chosen, we will express only one small reservation concerning the chronological impression left by the work, which seems inverted. In the presentation of urban aesthetics, futurism is mentioned first,

and then Art nouveau and the decorative arts, not without explaining that the new arts are those of the turn of the century. This gives the impression that the latter were preceded by the futurist movement, which in fact followed the decorative arts movements and in any case, even though it was contemporary with the decorative arts, resolutely turned its back on their artistic conception. As is well known, the first futurist manifesto, which dates from 1909, emphasizes celerity and energy rather than the sinuosity of curves. If it is absolutely necessary to compare it with something, it would be better situated in proximity to Adolf Loos's functionalism.

In chapter 7.3, the authors place the First World War at the origin of the new cultural processes, which is far from unjustified. We know to what point the war destroyed the illusions of humanist thought. This also allows us to understand the Europeanization of artistic movements, since the war led to the erasure of national borders among cultures. Nonetheless, we might ask first whether it is right to consider the war not only as a turning point but also as a parenthesis. Cultural life, while being inflected by the war, continued during the latter. Dada was born during the war, first in Zurich and then in Berlin. As a result, the chronological limits set seem difficult to maintain. Moreover, the distinction between the Berlin avant-garde and Dadaism seems in fine factitious (they are dealt with in separate paragraphs). The notion of avant-garde is convenient, of course; it can designate in turn this or that movement of the period. At the same time, it seems a little too general and in any case cannot be defined either as a chronological period or as the quality of a particular movement. It might have been possible, on the one hand, to make more reserved use of this term, or on the other to offer a more detailed presentation of certain movements, for instance the development of the Dada movement, which is described too succinctly. The latter, which first grew up in Zurich, and then spread over Europe and ended up in the United States, did indeed pass through Berlin, where it became partly politicized. This politicization might have been emphasized to present the dichotomy of an anarchist movement on the one hand and a Marxist one on the other, thus going beyond the rather cursory description of the insurrection "against the absurdity of their age" (p. 136) and abandoning the vague characterization of the "Berlin avant-garde" used just before. Without indulging in tasteless pedantry, we might also suggest that the authors pay closer attention to Grosz's first name. Throughout the work the original patronymic "Georg Ehrenfried Groß" is coupled with the artist's name „George Grosz". In each case the reference is to George Grosz;

The three special sections make a choice that offers first of all a European perspective (in the section on the Belle Époque), a national perspective (in this case, the German one, with a view of the culture of the Weimar Republic that seems particularly judicious because this period offers a stimulating complexity), and finally an illumination of the trajectory of „Picasso in his century." The idea of presenting the trajectory of an artist emblematic of the period on the cultural level (Picasso, who in fact passed through all these movements and appropriated them) seems perfectly justified and makes it possible to ask the student to discern in this trajectory the effects of movements studied elsewhere.

Chapter 8 is also very pertinent. The questions asked in the introduction are fundamental (the relationships between mass culture and everyday life,

between the mass media and society, and finally between mass culture and politics). Here we find no serious flaw. Two questions might have been dealt with differently: On the one hand, there is certainly a link between "the culture of the Weimar Republic," especially in its avant-garde incarnations, and so-called „mass culture“; Because it does not make this link, the chapter on mass culture seems to incarnate what it wants to challenge: the separation of popular culture and elite culture. Furthermore, the questions for further study proposed on page 151 following the section on sports, which are taken up again in the concluding question, concerning the development of the condition of women or the image of the athletic body are not convincing. In any case, the teacher will have to emphasize that it is necessary to examine critically the magnified presentation of the body that is activated and hardened by exercise and to be especially curious about a presence of women in public life that goes beyond the impressions left by images.

The synthesis is presented in the form of various tables, key words, and two opinion pieces by Richard Wagner and Paul Adam. It might be regretted that Richard Wagner, whose first statements of his position are cited, is not described more precisely in ideological terms; his text, unlike that by Paul Adam, is not preceded by a short introduction. On the other hand, we may note the interest of the short introduction to Paul Adam, which makes it possible to put into perspective the enthusiasm he showed for German culture and the ideology for which he was the spokesman.

The second part of the synthesis is a recapitulation of the three chapters that shows both the advantages and the disadvantages of a synthesis of presentations that are themselves rather brief. The references proposed under the rubric "For further study" might have included more German ones (there is only one in the whole table).[1]

Nonetheless, in conclusion we can say that these special sections are sure to arouse curiosity, and that their diversity, which corresponds quite exactly to students' perceptual universe, is also very well conceived. Certain additions could easily be made in future editions and an attentive teacher will benefit from the richness of the work and provide complementary explanations when necessary.

[translated by Steven Rendall]

[1] For example, Helmut Schanze, *Romantik Handbuch*, Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2003 ; Detlef J.K. Peuckert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*, Suhrkamp, 1987 ; Walter Fähnders, *Avantgarde und Moderne 1890–1933*, Metzler, Stuttgart, Weimar, 1998.