

Walter Spies and Weimar Culture

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I. "Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens (Beauty and Richness of Life)"

There occasionally appear people who are gifted with surprisingly varied talents. Walter Spies, a German artist who spent some 20 years in Indonesia from 1923 until his death in 1942, was one such person. While he is known in Japan as a Western painter who lived in Bali and greatly influenced the development of painting there, he was not only a painter who was attracted by the South and painted lyrical landscapes. Blessed with brilliant talents as a musician and a dancer, he first landed in Java and served as the conductor of the Court Orchestra of the Sultan, Hamengku Buwono VIII. As a pianist, he learned Javanese music, for which he invented a scoring method. After he moved to Bali, he contributed to the prosperity of Balinese culture by introducing techniques from Western painting and by helping stage folk dancing performances. He also published a book on Balinese folk dancing and was involved in the production of movies set on the island. His amazing versatility and connection with Javanese and Balinese cultures may represent one of the most fruitful encounters between East and West. To some people, the name Walter Spies even sounds legendary.

Nevertheless, his name is not very well known in his home country, Germany. However, in 1995 in recognition of the 100th anniversary of his birth, the Walter Spies Retrospective Exhibition was held in Cologne.¹⁾ As 1995 also marked the 50th anniversary of Indonesia's independence, an exhibition on the history of Indonesia was also held in Germany.²⁾ The two exhibitions, along with a publication of the reprinted photos he used for the above-mentioned book in the same year,³⁾ provided an opportunity to re-evaluate Walter Spies.

Walter Spies was born in Moscow at the end of the Czarist era, educated in Germany and spent his youth in the stimulating creative environment of Weimar culture. At the age of 28 he went to Java, where he spent four years before moving to Bali. He was not only an artist, but was also interested in botany, entomology, archaeology and anthropology, and contributed to the establishment of the Bali Museum. As a painter, he continued his artistic endeavors until his death on the Indian Ocean during World War II. Even the arc of his life, which spanned the oceans during an era of dramatic change, seemed to be a work of art representing the beauty of life.

A book entitled *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens (Beauty and Richness of Life)*⁴⁾ is a collection of letters that Walter Spies wrote to his family and friends from his youth until his death at 46, along with reminiscences of people who knew him. As he was not interested in writing, this collection of letters is the only record of his life by his own hand. As seen

from its title, it offers evidence of how a man's life can be fulfilling and fruitful. It can also be read as a record of the changing times which both Europe and Asia had been undergoing. However, this book has been out of print for many years due to the lack of interest from German-speaking communities in Spies. As he is now being re-evaluated in Germany, it is worth revisiting this book and reconsidering his life. I would like to put special emphasis on his life in Europe, on the period of transition from the Czarist era to the Weimar era. Specifically, the period when his talents developed and his strong interest and love for life grew. Why did he leave Germany so suddenly, when Weimar culture was at its peak, and what was it about Balinese culture which satisfied the desires of his soul? *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens* tells us many things. It is also an attempt to succeed in the quest to obtain a more complete portrait of this unique "artist of life".

II. "Paradise" of the Urals

In 1939, Spies wrote a letter to Niehaus, a Dutch art critic, about the first half of his life; "I grew up in a rich and 'grandiose' atmosphere in pre-war Russia. (31)" As he said himself, he was born into a wealthy German merchant's family in Moscow on September 15, 1895. His family were agents for many German companies, and his father also served as the honorary vice-consul of Germany, which he had taken over from his father. Spies's grandfather on his mother's side was an aristocrat who had served as a diplomat for the dukedom of Württemberg. Spies grew up in a very favorable artistic atmosphere. There were many artists in the family, and five children, including Walter, studied painting and music. Four of the children became artists; a pianist, a painter, a conductor and a ballet dancer. His parents loved music and often held concerts at their home.



Walter Spies, Moscow, 1914

Their house in Moscow served as a salon frequently visited by artists. Spies was brought up surrounded by artists such as Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Gorki. It was this bourgeois upbringing in Czarist Russia which fostered his generous nature, which was admired by all those who knew him. Charles Chaplin, who met Spies during a trip to Bali, called him "a typical German aristocrat. (365)"

However, what Spies remembered best were summer vacations on a country estate in a suburb of Moscow. In his childhood, he loved animals and drew them all the time. "Everything crawling or flying was collected: butterflies, beetles, dragonflies. The verandas of our big country villa were always packed with terrariums and aquariums. This love and enthusiasm for nature and all the natural sciences has never left me, and I probably should

have become a zoologist or a botanist! (31f.)” Although he did not become a scientist, his commitment to natural history remained an important part of his daily routine in Bali, where he collected insects and creatures on the beach to make specimens and contributed them regularly to the botanical garden. Even when he described the timbre of the gamelan, he used such expressions as “wild forest” of sounds and tones, or “needle-fine coloratura of delicate reeds. (166)” He also tried in his later years to incorporate elements of music in his painting. His imagination and love for painting, music and nature were nurtured during his childhood in Russia.

In 1910, the 15-year-old Spies was sent to Dresden for schooling. Dresden, one of the centers of German culture at that time, was where the Expressionist group “Die Brücke” started and where Richard Strauss often gave the first public performances of his innovative works. German culture, which Spies had contact with for the first time, was full of stimulation. According to recollections of his siblings, he happily talked about his new cultural experiences in Germany to his younger brother and sister when he returned to Russia every summer. He spoke of modern German music, exotic popular dance and Expressionist paintings. By the time he had graduated, he was painting pictures with strong Futurist, Cubist and Expressionist influences. At the time, he must have had enough inspirations to pursue a career as an artist. However, during World War I, he had an experience that would cause his ideas of art to differ from those of other contemporary German painters. Living in Moscow when the war broke out, he was sent as an enemy to an internment camp for Germans in the Urals. The collection of his letters begins with those written in this internment camp. Surprisingly, all his letters presented a life full of joy and creativity with no worries about internment, describing such things as walks in the mountains, sketching trips, concerts held with other German internees, his studies of the Tatar and Kirghiz languages, Arabic literature he was reading and his own paintings. The foothills of the Urals were a place where the cultures of the Bashkir, Kirghiz and Tatar, as well as many other groups mixed with each other. Spies, who had already experienced the last prosperous days of the Russian nobility and modern German culture, was influenced immeasurably by the simple cultures and lifestyles of the Ural region. He communicated with local people through labor, such as farming and pasturing, learned their languages, painted them and became fond of their folk music and dancing. He was particularly attracted to Bashkir folk music. “I have never heard anything so beautiful before (71),” he wrote. He copied the tunes, studied their lyrics and often played the songs himself. Local people warmly welcomed him as the first foreigner to show interest in their culture. He soon left the internment camp, started living with the Tatars and earned his living by giving piano lessons. This life of painting, reading and holding concerts with local singers was so fulfilling and comfortable that he was compelled to say “I wouldn’t like to have it any other way! (74)”

The people in the Urals had a different concept of art from that of Western Europe. No one knew who wrote the songs that they had sung for many generations. Spies began to believe that “in most folk art, truth is hidden in anonymous works. (104)” Songs exist no

matter who sings them, but they must be sung by someone to exist. “If people were emptier, how much of God could flow into them!! (104)” This remark implies his later appreciation of Balinese art, including trance. His sensitivity, which would strongly respond to anonymous Balinese music devoted to Gods and people, was formed here in the Urals. From that time on, he had little sympathy for art that was armed with principles, theories and techniques.

The greatest talent of Walter Spies was probably his ability to enjoy the “present.” He wrote to his mother from the Urals, “I am just enjoying the present, whatever it is. One can always find something good about the present. But what’s the future to me, if I may not be alive tomorrow? (72)” He learned how to enjoy “now” and “here” in the “paradise” of the Urals, and became a confident epicurean. While his “talent to stay happy without asking for too much (114)” strongly impressed his friends in Germany, it was later mixed with Hindu outlooks on life and death in Bali and formed a unique Epicureanism with religious overtones, which caused him to say, “I only live for now! In this nature possessed by Gods, people die easily, (...) because death keeps flowing into life. (229)”

During these three years in the Urals, the flexible soil of his soul was cultivated and formed the foundation for his outlook on life and art.

At the end of 1917, after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, Spies was released and returned to Moscow. His family had already fled to Germany, and he followed them the following year, leaving Russia forever. With Walter back, the Spies family started looking for a place to settle in Dresden.

III. Invitation to Dance

Spies must have realized how much his talent deserved, when giving piano lessons in the Urals. He decided to make a living in Dresden giving dance lessons. He had a talent for dance, as well as for painting and music, and as a student had enjoyed ballroom dancing. What was waiting for him back in Germany was an “invitation to dance” by Weimar culture.

Since the turn of the century, new relations between soul and body had been explored in Europe. Wandervogel, for example, which began in 1896, was a movement based on new independence and physical strength. In the first decade of this century, Isadora Duncan and many other dancers established dance classes throughout Germany. Postwar Germany was then experiencing a “dance craze,” with various types of dance, such as artistic modern dance, party dancing to jazz music, folk dancing and nude dancing, enjoying an explosion of popularity.

In 1919, Spies moved to Hellerau, near Dresden, a garden city conceived according to notions of social welfare and constructed to offer better lifestyles. The town was home to the Dalcroze Dance School operated by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who was said to be the first to set physical rhythms at the center of total education concept. Hellerau was also known as an artistic colony. The Dalcroze school festival featured innovative staging and effects, and attracted international attention. Artists such as Diaghilev, Bernard Shaw and Rach-

maninov visited the festival to see the experimental works. Future leaders of modern dance in Germany got their starts in Hellerau. Through a friend, the Spies family found a house there, a boardinghouse which was also used as the dormitory of Dalcroze School.

Spies had a sister who was ten years younger and also loved dancing. Daisy Spies later became a prima ballerina of the National Opera House in Berlin. They both belonged to a generation of Germans who were fascinated by Russian ballet and inspired by modern dancing. After seeing performances of Pavlova and Nijinsky in Berlin, they could not stop deploring that they were “not among them themselves and could not move so beautifully and effortlessly... (112)” He found a suitable dance teacher for Daisy and assisted in the lesson serving as pianist. Along with his brother, Leo, he also played the piano in the Dalcroze studio. He even sometimes performed Bashkir and Tatar dance music. Teamed up with Daisy, he took part in dance competitions and won many prizes. In Dresden he taught ballroom dancing, which was not taught at the Dalcroze School. His income as a dance teacher was very comfortable. Frustrated with Dresden, he began to consider moving to Berlin, but his students tried to stop him, agreeing to pay higher lesson fees. Finally, however, he decided to go to Berlin, saying “there is no meaning any more living in Dresden (...) I can do the same in Berlin as well. (90)” However, in Berlin, he did not have to teach dancing anymore.

Spies was an invaluable advisor to Daisy. There were some letters to her on dance which showed his basic attitude toward aestheticism in art. He criticized contemporary dance for catering to popular tastes and wondered, “why after all shouldn’t dance be ugly? (97)” He believed that people should be released from a standardized ideals of beauty. After he moved to Bali, this thinking was strengthened and he became a defender of Balinese art against the standardized Western sense of beauty.

Daisy Spies progressed steadily in her career as a dancer. By 1922, she was appearing in the age’s top dance productions, dancing on the stage for Max Reinhardt and performing Oskar Schlemmer’s *The Triadic Ballet*. In 1934, she became a prima ballerina at the National Opera House in Berlin, where her brother, Leo, was a conductor. She produced a ballet piece, *A Song of Bashkir*, jointly with him which would not have been made without the influence of their brother, Walter. Recognized as a leading ballerina between the wars, Daisy took the position of ballet director of the National Opera House in East Berlin after World War II, and strove to revive dancing based on socialism.⁵⁾ Walter, who remained interested in dance even after moving to Indonesia, wrote an introduction to Balinese folk dancing, *Dance and Drama in Bali*,⁶⁾ and became known as one of the inventors of the present style of Kecak dance. Although a letter from the 1930s showed his joy at hearing of Daisy’s popularity from German guests who visited Bali,⁷⁾ he died in 1942 and did not live to see his sister struggle to create realistic ballet in East Germany.

IV. Music Career

Though he became aware during his days in the Urals that painting was the most

sincere expression of himself, his love for music stayed with him all his life. In his youth he admired Scriabin, calling him “my God (67),” and learned composition under his influence. Spies first preferred modern music, but learning the folk music of the Ural region, he became more antipathetic to academicism. In a letter to his father in 1919, he wrote, “Why should Ljowa (Leo) compose just as Humperdinck showed him? Through the practicing he now does alone, he has surely learned twice as much as he did in the entire curriculum. (83)” Soon after that, the perfect friend for Spies entered his life. Hans Jürgen von der Wense was known as talented in composition and introduced Spies to a circle of musicians in Berlin. Among these eccentric and talented young men in Berlin, von der Wense was one of the most influential. He was said to be an outstandingly unique person with “all-round knowledge, an original way of thinking and flamboyant means of expression. (113)” He and Spies each found a kindred spirit in the other and established a spiritually uplifting friendship. They spent long periods of time together reading poems, strolling, playing Mahler on the piano and composing music. Von der Wense’s diary, which is included in *Schönheit und Reichum des Lebens*, indicates the spiritual upsurge and overflowing hope that ruled young people in the early Weimar days. A few lines from the diary are quoted here.

June 20, 1919: In the morning, to Hellerau. Walked through a corn field with Walter. We fantasized. We talked in poems that make no sense, only feelings. He is absolutely elemental. A Futurist urchin, like Rimbaud. (86)

October 1, 1919: Far more than happy! Unfettered! No more to think, purely to be! Each day is our aeon!

October 2, 1919: We are like the clouds in summer, sailing into the distance... or the stars... People love us. We give yearning to all who behold us. (88)

Von der Wense, Spies’s “one and only true friend (127),” became a scholar and was never successful as a composer. However, his friendship with Spies gave him precious memories of youth, which he remembered vividly all his life,⁸⁾ colored by the Weimar period, where democracy was newborn and still unthreatend.

In 1920, Spies moved to Berlin, and through von der Wense he became acquainted with prominent musicians like Erdmann, Buzoni, Schnabel, Pfitzner and Hindemith. Berlin in those days was affected by the Russian Revolution and the downfall of the Dual Monarchy in Austria-Hungary. It was changing into an international city with many talented people arriving. The various backgrounds of these people and confrontations between old and new ideas became fuel for productivity. The Anti-Wagnerian Buzoni and the Romanticist Pfitzner who opposed him both taught at the Art Academy. Younger artists like Hindemith and von der Wense were active in popularizing modern music on their own terms. Berlin was in a state of creative enthusiasm. Spies also became active in composing music. According to his brother Leo, his compositions of this time, which are lost today, “had a unique allurements through the expression of unusual, sometimes facetious feelings —

probably corresponding to his taste in the plastic art (Kubin, Chagal, Klee, Henri Rousseau). (59)”

Popular for his friendly nature, Spies often found himself embroiled in discussions involving music theory. While he hated barren discussions and was able to voice his objections without being offensive, the contradiction between his success in fashionable society and his hatred for its formalities was becoming a source of concern. Schnabel, Spies's piano teacher, made an impressive epigram, “Walter Spies/Der den Spalt erwies?/ Spielt er was?/Wilder Spaß. (Walter Spies/Is he a proof of split?/Is he going to perform something?/It's a bad joke) (313),” as if he was aware of the conflict Spies was going through.

One day, Spies met Johan Schoonderbeek, a Dutch conductor who was known for his annual performance of *St. Matthew Passion*, and discovered his love for music made before Bach's time. His interest in baroque music was connected to his love for Arabic miniatures and medieval art. These preferences indicated his inclinations toward an explicit kind of art. In a letter to a friend in 1922, he wrote about Kirghiz folk songs which were “like a great upsurge of a C-major chord (107)”, with “a continuation of unbelievable calmness” following. “You don't know at all, how much these things touch me. Such calm and clear things, which go so straight into the truth. (104)” He then named the music of Johann Hermann Schein, altar paintings by Bertram and Franke, and gothic sculptures as examples of this kind of art. While this yearning for “calm, clear and straight” things was gained from his experience in the Urals, “a distinctiveness and lucidity” were characteristics of the composition method of Hindemith in the 1920s. Avoidance of excessive expression of feelings and the maintenance of balance with spiritual things was one of the trends in music at the time, along with the re-evaluation of baroque music. It was the start of “Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity)” in music.

In addition to the inclination toward neo-Classicism and “New Objectivity”, Spies had a deep nostalgia and yearning for non-European culture. In a letter written shortly before he left Germany, he wrote, “as I saw, learned and felt a real life with the Bashkir people during my three-year internment, it is impossible for me to feel comfortable in Europe. (...) Things that were simple and obvious there are confined by theories and laws here. I must have opinions about everything and take sides. Over there, nobody asks if something is beautiful or ugly, good or bad. Everything is just there and is self-evident. (128)”

In contrast to other painters, whose distant yearnings were stimulated by so-called “primitive art” in exhibitions or expositions, a culture foreign to that of Europe's was a reality to him. The new enthusiasm for the creation of Weimar culture seemed too artificial for Spies, who looked to “self-evident” art.

Responding to the trends of the times on the one hand, his life was on the other hand taking a distinct turn to the south. His encounter with the Schoonderbeeks introduced him to Holland and its colony, Indonesia.

V. Magic Realist

While Spies is known for his minute landscapes of deep black palm trees and dimly shining paddy fields, the change of his style from abstract to representational painting occurred in the Urals, when he decided to be a painter. His paintings, which had been full of “triangles, lines and planes” under the influence of Futurism and Cubism, changed gradually, and toward the end of his internment his objects “assumed more and more the forms of a simplified Realism. (32)” When he was back in Moscow, he encountered a painting that influenced him for the rest of his life. It was a Henri Rousseau, and “it was like a revelation or a confirmation! Finally I found something that seemed to me so open, honest and straightforward. I came of course directly under his spell and influence!(33)” In this way, he started anew to acquire his own style, parting from Futurism and Expressionism, while digesting the inspiration he received in the Urals.

In 1918, he escaped the upheaval of Moscow and returned to Germany. He was disappointed by the art he found there, as the same pre-war Expressionist style was still prevalent. Only Klee and Chagall were the “absolute” individuals Spies approved of. “The nonsensical fantasy and crassest prose of Chagall. And the deep, deep philosophy and most delicate and gentle poesy of Klee. Both have overcome ‘techniques.’ ‘What purity and naïvety of feeling they both have! These two are the only ways that art can take up now — the third is of course to be found by oneself. (83)” On the way to acquiring his own style and individuality in Germany, he realized that his sensibilities were formed by a different culture. Although he joined the ‘clique’ of Nolde, Pechstein, George Grosz and others, he never felt a sense of belonging.

By his brother’s account, Spies hated fruitless factional arguments, but had an unbending love for truth, and “was able to keep disagreeable people away from him by telling the most unpleasant truths plainly. (59)” The two painters he felt respect and friendship for were Otto Dix and Oskar Kokoschka. He thought highly of Dix’s technique and Kokoschka’s personality. Dix and Spies stimulated each other as painters. In later years, Dix described the remarkably sincere Spies as “one of the people I have most sympathized with. (91)”

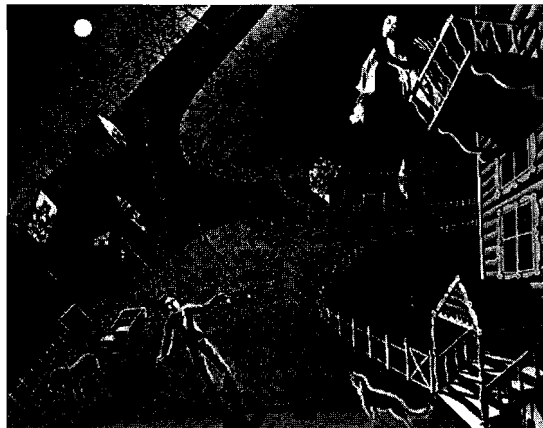
In the summer of 1919, Spies’s first exhibition was held in Dresden, and he made his debut as a painter. One day, his paintings attracted the attention of Franz Roh, an art historian from Munich. Roh is known for having coined the term, “Magic Realism,” to describe the Verist trend in art in the 1920s, which was also called “New Objectivity” by G. Hartlaub. In his 1925 book, *Nach-Expressionismus (Post-Expressionism)*,⁹⁾ Roh listed Spies as a Magic Realist, along with Dix and Beckmann. He introduced Spies in a magazine article and recommended him for exhibitions. Spies’s major turning point came in 1923. With Roh’s advice and the assistance of the Schoonderbeeks, his two exhibitions in Holland were successful. By selling paintings there, he earned valuable foreign currency in those inflationary times and was mentioned in a famous art magazine, *Das Kunstblatt*.¹⁰⁾

The return from Expressionism to Realism was noticeable by 1920, when stability was

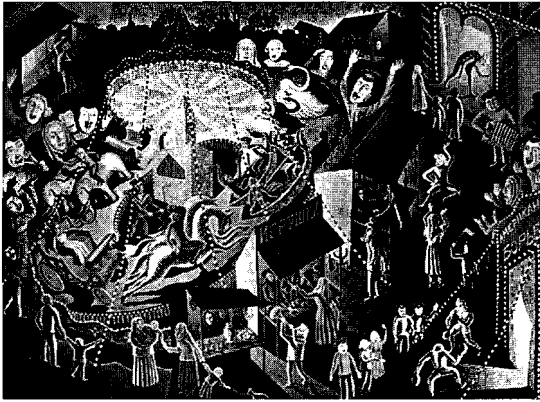
required in politics. While both “New Objectivity” and “Magic Realism” were signs of transition from a time of hope and rapture to one of objectivity and reality, “Magic Realism” implied a more metaphysical aspect. As Beckmann aptly said that “I’m building a bridge between visible and invisible things,”¹¹ “Magic Realism” was about the relation between reality and what surrounded it rather than the reality itself. Subjects painted by new-type Realists, who had experienced loss of hope during and after World War I, were not the same as previously. They appeared to have a mysterious order, as if the connection of the laws of causality established through memories and cultures had been broken into pieces. People in the paintings look stiff, as though on guard against unseen things. What was created between those things and people was something “weird” or “magical”. Paintings that were called “magically realistic” by Franz Roh were dark, cold and emitted certain secrets that were almost breathtaking. “Magic Realist” paintings typically depict vague areas, like world of night, theaters and carnivals. They have unique perspectives such as the “view from a window” and the people in the paintings are small and look powerless. While backgrounds of Spies’s works such as *Das Karussell (The Merry-Go-Round)* and *Die Schlittschuhläufer (The Skaters)* for instance, were set in Russia, they obviously showed the characteristics of German “Magic Realism” of the 1920s. Transient and fragile happiness, just like that described in a scene from *Fabian*, a novel by Erich Kästner which depicted the decadence of the Weimar period, seems to emit from Spies’s work *Der Abschied (The Farewell)* (1921), which was painted on the basis of his experiences in Dresden. In Kästner’s book, the main character, Fabian, walks down a street at night with Miss Battenberg. They are walking through a quiet residential area on the outskirts of Berlin. The street is quiet, gardens are filled with the fragrance of flowers and a couple embrace in front of a house before parting. “Even the moon is shining in this city,” says Miss Battenberg. Fabian says, “Isn’t it just like



Die Amsel (The Blackbird), 1920



Der Abschied (The Farewell), 1921



Das Karussell (*The Merry-Go-Round*), 1922



Die Schlittschuhläufer
(*The Skaters*), 1922

home? But it is an illusion. The moonlight, the scent of flowers, the quiet and the kiss at the gate of the house are all illusions.” Then he tells her about decadent and perverse sexual dealings in the back streets and says the famous phrase “there are crimes in the east, frauds in the center, misery in the north and prostitution in the west. The downfall is starting in all directions.”¹²⁾ Such feelings of two people left stranded are also depicted in the quiet scene portrayed in Spies’s *Der Abschied*. It shows his sensitivity responded to the spirit of the Weimar period.

He maintained his style of “Magic Realism” throughout his life. His refined landscapes of Java and Bali have unique perspectives with some tension, and their sense of quiet has an atmosphere like the revealing of secrets. This mysterious tension draws a line between Spies and his imitators, and this is probably what captivates people most viewing his paintings.

VI. Murnau, the Partner

In Berlin, he allied himself not only with musicians, but also art-related people such as Bienert and Archipenko, as well as members of the Bauhaus including Walter Gropius and Mohaly Nagy. Somewhere in one of these circles he met the movie director, F. W. Murnau. The two, both being homosexual, found in each other important partners in a society where homosexuality was considered a shameful depravity. Murnau, just turned 30, had made his directorial debut the previous year and was a particularly ambitious figure in the rapidly growing movie industry. Spies, who had a experience in theatrical art,¹³⁾ joined Murnau as his “artistic advisor” and became involved in the movie industry. He moved into Murnau’s house in Grunewald. Murnau rented a piano for him, made a space for his painting and “did everything to make Walter’s life easy. (121)” Spies accompanied Murnau to many film sites,

and his brother, Leo, provided music for some of Murnau's films. The productive director managed to make seven movies from 1920 to 1922. Although Spies's involvement in the movies gave some stability to his life, it never satisfied him spiritually.

An intellectual who majored in art history at university, Murnau was an exceptional figure in the film making world. "Most German producers, particularly those of UFA, think movies are about period dramas, a crowd of extras, parades, battles and, if possible, full of reckless patriotism. However, Murnau proved that movies could be made in different ways,"¹⁴ wrote Curt Riess, a German journalist, about Murnau, who is sometimes referred to as "the greatest master of silent movies". One day in 1923, Spies wrote as follows to an acquaintance, "my friend and I are the worst enemies of the movie business and all the people in it. We stay away from them wherever we possibly can. It's probably true that those who have anything to do with film making industry are just inferior, shallow and frivolous people. Neither these people nor any films in general are worth taking seriously, but one should be satisfied and even thankful, that one can earn some money by these perhaps not-so-noble means. And this may be what spurs most of the people to the film, and after all, avarice doesn't belong to the noblest instincts of human beings. (...) You don't understand at all how disgusted I am with all this and how unhappy I feel living among those impassive and emotionless people in Germany! They don't have anything natural. Everything is false and artificial. (131)"

It was natural for Spies, who hated ostentation, to see in movie production the most prominent artificiality of Weimar culture. According to Riess, Murnau, who was definitely the person referred to as "my friend," always stood aloof from others and looked very different from other directors. Spies and he might have been guarding each other from the "frivolous tastes" of the movie industry of Berlin.

Spies greatly missed non-European culture, and he visited the Colonial Institute (the present-day Tropenmuseum) in Amsterdam, where he went in 1923 for an exhibition, spending many hours there every day. There he became obsessed by the idea of going south. What hindered his dream was the conflict with his "guardian," Murnau. According to recollections of Mrs. Schoonderbeek, Murnau was usually a reserved person and his strength was only apparent when he was making films. He needed Spies's sunny brightness and his unconditional joy for life. Seeing Spies's dilemma, Mrs. Schoonderbeek attempted to persuade Murnau, who was trying to stop Spies. She wrote, "I went to Berlin and had a long conversation with Murnau face-to-face until very late; I tried to make him understand that what one gave up and let go voluntarily would remain eternally and what one tried to keep would be lost inevitably. He who renounces, retains; he who tries to hold crampedly, loses forever. And, suddenly, Murnau understood this truth, so that he said full of confidence: "Walter should be free to go. I mustn't stop him." And the next day, he said that to Walter himself. (122)"

Soon after that, in August 1923, Spies left Europe on board the steamship 'Hamburg'. Those around him wondered why he left when he was favored with so much artistic stimula-

tion and the love of many people.

Oskar Kokoschka wrote an impressive essay about his friendship with and sudden parting from Spies. Although it was a recollection written after many decades, he remembered Spies surprisingly vividly. One day Spies visited Kokoschka in his hotel and they spent some time together.

“It was a dampish cold autumn in Berlin in 1922. He showed me translations of folk songs and myths he had heard from local people in the Urals and Lake Baikal. He also recited poems by Puschkin from memory. He gave me a graphic account of the constellations of stars in the icy-cold northern sky which he often gazed at during his internment. He tried to meet people, wherever he could. In particular, the dance rhythms of the Tatars in the Steppes, who swiftly ride over the times, made us forget the passage of the time, or even the passage of this century, which has just started but already looked so miserable.

He brought some of his small illustrations for fairy tales. They were painted on a board with colorful lacquer, like Russian icons of priests. The crimson used there looked so persistent, as if a poppy blown by a strong wind had hit the priest's head and tangled with his hair, and as if the man could not rid himself of it, no matter how furiously he shook his head. I laughed at Walja, at him whom I have never heard laughing aloud. But I still remember the gentle smile on his delicately shaped lips even now. I also remember the brightness of his eyes and his high forehead, like that of the bust of Schiller, with his throat showing from the open collar.

That's how Walja remains in my memory. Behind him were the wet and misted windows of my room in the Hotel Adlon. Then he left. If the window panes had not been opaque and if the night had not been monotonously gray outside, I would have said that as he left the sun went down. Even the archangel who exiled the first human couple from the paradise would have been touched and felt human by Walja's smile. I heard only afterwards that, soon after that night, Walter Spies became a sailor and went to Java. (119)”

After a two-month voyage, Spies arrived at the port of Batavia in October 1923. He never returned to Europe. Although Murnau planned several times to visit Spies, he did not and they never saw each other again. However, Murnau regularly sent money to Java and Bali in exchange for Spies's paintings, which was a great financial support for Spies. When Murnau was killed in a car accident in the suburbs of Hollywood in 1931, he left Spies a large sum of money enough to “live without worries for years. (341)” Spies's report on it was quite simple. However, Murnau's faith and love for the friend who had left him deeply affects people who know the artistic greatness achieved by this solemn man.

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A new world was opened to Walter Spies in Java. Artistic stimulus and happiness he found there was much greater than he had expected. A number of exciting events he experienced there are described in *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens*. These shall be discussed at another opportunity.



Walter Spies (l.) and Hans Jürgen von der Wense. 1922



Friedrich Murnau in his workroom. On the wall a Persian miniature painted by Walter Spies. 1921

Notes

- 1) *Walter Spies – Maler und Musiker auf Bali (Walter Spies – Painter and Musician on Bali)*, 15.9–21.10. 1995. Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum für Völkerkunde, Cologne.
- 2) *Versunkene Königreiche Indonesiens (Lost Kingdoms of Indonesia)*, 13. 8–26. 11. 1995. Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim.
- 3) Hitchcock, Michael and Norris, Lucy. *Bali, the Imaginary Museum*, London, 1995.
- 4) Rohdius, Hans (ed.). *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens, WALTER SPIES*, Den Haag, 1964. Pages quoted from the collection of letters are shown in parentheses.
- 5) Spies, Daisy. “realismus im tanz,” in *TANZDRAMA 31*, No.4/1995, Köln, p.20-25.
- 6) de Zoete, Beryl and Spies Walter. *Dance and Drama in Bali*, London, 1938, (Reprint Oxford in Asia, 1978).
- 7) Rhodius. *ibid.*, p.345.
- 8) Rhodius. *ibid.*, p.85.
- 9) Roh, Franz. *Nach-Expressionismus — Magischer Realismus*, Leipzig, 1925.
- 10) Rhodius. *ibid.*, p.109.
- 11) Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture — the Outsider as Insider*, New York, 1968, chap. 5.
- 12) Kästner, Erich. *Fabian, Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*, dtv, 1989, p.98.
- 13) Spies designed a set of Donizetti’s Opera *Don Pasquale* in 1918 in Moscow and Knut Hamsun’s play *Spiel des Lebens* in Dresdener Schauspielhaus in 1919.
- 14) Riess, Curt. *Das gab’s nur einmal*, Vienna-Munich, 1977. chap. 4.

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