

MUSIL AND THE CITY

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Since the early epics and the Old and New Testaments, the city has been a central image in Western culture, and consequently a central image in Western literature.¹⁾ Cities, in their monumental buildings and activity, embody man's largest and most visible accomplishments; the city itself may be called man's greatest creation. The founding and destruction of cities have been ritual occasions for acting out sacred myths; but cities have also been seen as places of dehumanization, isolation, and danger. Many of these responses to cities, deeply rooted in the past, have survived as a substratum in the collective and individual mind, underlying our practical urban concerns. These attitudes surface most frequently as expressions of a profound cultural ambivalence or anxiety. This ambivalence is not of recent origin; it has been a consistent pattern in the history of Western literature and culture. The first city-founder, according to Genesis, was Cain; Babel was a city, as were Troy and Atlantis. Heaven and Hell both figure as cities in Christian thought. Jerusalem is the city of Revelation and Babylon is the whore of corruption. Sodom and Gomorrha are bywords for sin.

The city, in short, may be seen as a reified emblem of ambivalence. Any writer who chooses to use this emblem is, whether consciously or unconsciously, conjuring up a cultural archetype which has had a long and powerful hold on the human imagination. The development of a high civilization has always been an urban phenomenon; even those works which most extol the virtues of the simple country life over the corrupt city have been written by and for city-folk.

The ambivalence of the city in culture has been reflected differently in the literature and art of different periods. A

major theme in European and American literature of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the adversary relationship between an individual urban character, whether ordinary person or extraordinary artist, and fragmented, depersonalized city life. Among the many characters set against the fragmented culture of cities are Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, Mann's Thomas Buddenbrook and Aschenbach, Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge, Kafka's Joseph K., Musil's Ulrich, Joyce's Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, Eliot's Prufrock, Proust's narrator, Döblin's Franz Biberkopf, various Brecht characters, Broch's urban heroes, Sartre's Roquentin, and Saul Bellow's Herzog. In these and a swarm of other works the city appears as the emblem of fragmentation and depersonalization. In the painting and drawing of this period too the city appears most frequently as either empty space or a place of anguished isolation, as in DeChirico, Escher, Magritte, Hopper, or Grosz.

This is the peculiar phenomenon. The city is, after all, a community, or the sum of many communities; its metaphoric ground should naturally be the idea of community, of mutual attachment, shared assumptions and shared values. But for writer after writer in that time it had the opposite sense.

As a writer, Musil was socially rather than existentially oriented. He did not, like many of his contemporaries, follow the Romantic model of presenting a suffering or exulting central character as a universe in himself, in revolt against society; his characters interact in and against a carefully articulated social fabric. Musil is also socially oriented in another sense, in that for him literature is a medium of mediation directed at an audience, rather than primarily a medium of self-expression. He assumed that the task of a writer was a moral one, to give voice to his culture, to formulate its problems.

For Musil the city is the crucible for the crisis of modern culture. He regarded the city, to use Henri Lefebvre's phrase,

as a "social text"²⁾, a text which is toponymical rather than topographical. The name, in Musil's case, is not meant to conjure up a specific place but to evoke a dense concentration of social and ethical conflicts.

Like Lefebvre, Musil saw the image of the city as the aesthetic formulation of a moral problem. Basically, this problem is the extreme ambivalence of everyday life in modern urban society. This ambivalence expresses itself in two contradictory obsessions, integrating and disintegrating. As Lefebvre sees it, one of these obsessions—the compulsive need of the individual to integrate with and to be integrated in society— is a response to the other, the desintegration of the very idea of community in modern culture.³⁾ How to establish a sense of community in a disintegrating society is an ethical problem in the everyday life of the twentieth-century city dweller. In literature, the figure of the sensual, highpowered urban intellectual incorporated this problem for Musil as did the character of the urban aesthete for Hofmannsthal, the urban bourgeois artist for Thomas Mann, or the urban bourgeois bureaucrat for Kafka. As Renate von Heydebrand has shown, the concept of everyday urban life is a major theoretical element in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'; it is the locus for Musil of two important problems, the deadening life of habit which must be broken through, and the *D u r c h - s c h n i t t s m e n s c h* who must be transformed if a new morality is to be achieved.⁴⁾

In his fiction Musil typically presents a sensitive individual who is searching for coherent ethical guidelines in life, for society as well as for himself. These guidelines are not to be found in the jumble of values which is crystallised in the image of the "Großstadt"; on the contrary, the "Großstadt" contains the essence of the problems to be overcome. In both his fiction and his non-fiction, Musil presented the city as a place of dissociation, cacophony, fragmentation, and anomie. This urban culture contained the collective heritage of the past, aimlessly

adrift in a present which was abstract, disoriented, and had no sense of style. This heritage was the Austro-Hungarian Empire as distilled in its cities, principally, even where it is unnamed, Vienna.

At the beginning of 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' Musil wittily spatializes this jumbled heritage in describing Ulrich's house in the capital city:

"Das war ein teilweise noch erhalten gebliebener Garten aus dem achtzehnten oder gar aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert, und wenn man an seinem schmiedeeisernen Gitter vorbeikam, so erblickte man...etwas wie ein kurzflügeliges Schlößchen, ein Jagd- oder Liebesschlößchen vergangener Zeiten. Genau gesagt, seine Traggewölbe waren aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert, der Park und der Oberstock trugen das Ansehen des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, die Fassade war im neunzehnten Jahrhundert erneuert und etwas verdorben worden, das Ganze hatte also einen etwas verwackelten Sinn, so wie übereinander photographierte Bilder; aber es war so, daß man unfehlbar stehen blieb und 'Ah!' sagte...Diese Wohnung und dieses Haus gehörtem dem Mann ohne Eigenschaften".⁵⁾

"Diese Wohnung und dieses Haus": The repetition is not a tautology, but calls attention to the building's triple function in the narrative. It is a synchronic image as a dwelling for Ulrich, part of the dissonant city of present. It is diachronic through Musil's descriptions of its historical styles, a representation of different stages of culture. Ulrich's crazy-quilt "Schlößchen" expresses the crazy quilt of both late Austrian and modern European culture; it is a continental version of Shaw's "Heartbreak House". At first glance Ulrich's "Schlößchen" does not seem to express Ulrich himself, the man without qualities who has rented this house as his dwelling; yet this discordant culture has produced Ulrich as well as the house. There is an affinity between them, and as the novel proceeds the reader finds that Ulrich is aware of a jumble of ideas, feelings, and values in himself which reflects a similar confusion in his

environment. His mind looks like his house, and this is the third function of Musil's witty description of the "Schlößchen".

The city in Musil's fiction is a frequent setting or point of reference. Most of his protagonists come from or live in cities; where these cities are not explicitly in the foreground, as in 'Tonka', 'Die Amsel', and 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', they are a significant background matrix which has formed the characters. Törleß, Homo, Claudine, and the figures in 'Die Schwärmer' and 'Vinzenz' are all urbanites, although some of them may be transposed to small town or rural settings. In these novels, plays, and novellas, men, women, and boys always seem to be leaving or to have left home, which is usually in a city. They leave either physically or mentally, in order to leap into voids of one sort or another, taking their urban attitudes with them. If they return home at all, it will be in a transformed state. Törleß is displaced from his city home and family to a remote boarding school. Claudine is displaced from city to town. The central figures of 'Tonka' move from one "Großstadt" to another. In the completed part of 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' Ulrich moves from his home in the capital city of the Empire to his father's home in a provincial "Großstadt" and back again.

In 'Törleß' the city is an abstract presence, but a determinant one. It both frames the action, and anchors the central character in an environment different from the one in which we see him in the story -- the environment of the "Großstadt" which he comes from and to which he returns. The absent city also serves to anchor the narrator, whose anonymous voice is that of an adult psychologist observing and judging the behavior of developing adolescents at the boarding school. This narrative voice is thoroughly urban. It has no interest in the isolated setting other than the opportunity it affords of recording the subtle psychological changes going on in Törleß as the boy begins to confront his confusions.

Musil's first novel opens and closes with departures back to

the city from the distant town where the boarding school is located. The first return is that of Törleß' parents, who have been visiting their son. The second return to the city is that of Törleß himself, after his initiation into his own identity. Törleß is also returning from the failure of the school as a social institution to understand him. This failure is the context within which his finding himself takes place. The same thing happens to the pupil Ulrich in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'.

The opening of 'Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß' is not a description of the character or the school, but of the railroad tracks by the station:

"Eine kleine Station an der Strecke, welche nach Rußland führt. Endlos gerade liefen vier parallele Eisenstränge nach beiden Seiten zwischen dem gelben Kies des breiten Fahrdammes..."⁶⁾

The reader's introduction to the novel leads out of the frame, so to speak, and the parents' departure is subtly but firmly tied in with the direction which leads back to the distant capital. The small town of the story is almost immediately located in reference to the capital ("Die kleine Stadt lag weitab von der Residenz, im Osten des Reiches"); and the reader is informed that the school was founded in this remote location "wohl um die aufwachsende Jugend vor den verderblichen Einflüssen einer Großstadt zu bewahren". The school prepares its students for university, military, and civil service careers, and having attended it provides them with entree into the upper levels of society and the professions.⁷⁾ It is an important social institution of the Empire.

Thus the world of this school is both a deflection from the world of the city and a reflection of it. There are no rural values as such in the novel; rather, the non-urban locale provides that displacement from a life governed by habit - life in the city - which enables both character and narrator to confront the problem of establishing one's personal identity in a de-

caying society. At the conclusion of the novel Törleß, having made some sort of start in this process, returns to the undefined world of the city, perhaps to become, *m u t a t i s m u t a n d i s*, the narrator of 'Tonka', Thomas in 'Die Schwärmer', Alpha in 'Vinzenz', and Ulrich in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'.

Urban culture plays an important role in 'Drei Frauen'. 'Tonka' is, of course, an urban story, but even 'Grigia' and 'Die Portugiesin' have significant urban backgrounds, although both stories take place in small communities remote from cities. The urban principle in all three stories is that of *A b b a u*, devolution or deconstruction. This is a concept which sociology has borrowed from biology; it involves a process of reverse evolution. When an organism becomes through evolution overcomplex or overorganized, it evolves downward toward a simpler, more economical, or more primitive form. One American urban sociologist even provides an accurate, if unintentional, description of the setting of 'Grigia' when he offers a mining town as an example of *A b b a u*: "To this day", he writes, "these towns remain...among the darkest and most benighted parts of the world; their inhabitants, often cut off from physical contact with the rest of the world because of their mountainous terrain, cut off likewise by poverty and cramped desires, are even in free countries the most feudally organized part of the population".⁸⁾

The protagonist of 'Grigia' comes to such a primitive mining community from a big-city home and background. What he experiences during the story is an *A b b a u* of his highly complex culture. 'Die Portugiesin' and 'Tonka' also both contrast two different states of community, one sophisticated and over-refined, the other more natural in a primitive sense. The Portuguese Lady devolves, finally, to the primitive community of von Ketten's mountain fortress; the man in 'Tonka' is drawn to, but finally cannot devolve to the simpler state of which Tonka is the emblem.

I would like to examine 'Tonka' in more detail, since in this story the role of the city is most explicit. The world of the "Großstadt" here is the world of the unnamed hero of the novella, its central character. The girl Tonka comes into this world -metaphorically if not in actuality- from the realm of nature. This "Großstadt" is a highly deterministic setting. It is a brutal representation of the life of deadening habit led by the man's family, and it is a mental and physical prison for both him and Tonka. The descriptions of the "Großstädte" in 'Tonka' -there are two of them- are at the same time oppressively realistic and surrealistic. These city-settings resemble those of Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment' and Kafka's 'Prozeß'. They do not resemble the abstract and transparent cities in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften'.

In the dualistic structure of 'Tonka', the girl Tonka is a mystery of inarticulate nature. She stands at one extreme and the unnamed, sensual-intellectual narrator at the other. In this tale of two cities Musil presents the narrator as the product of a constricted and enervated middle-class urban society. Both cities in the story -Vienna and "eine deutsche Großstadt"- are presented the same way: They are places of dark houses and squalid rooms, of petty social conventions, and of surface respectability covering a host of sleazy relationships. Appearances are everything and they cover nothing. In this stifled world there is a proper madam, an empty marriage, a morbid affair between the narrator's mother and an "uncle" Hyacinth, who is a sentimental-romantic writer; there are relations who are not relatives, hard-hearted shopkeepers who ruthlessly exploit their help, and shoulder-shrugging doctors. All these characters lead deadened lives of habit. This novella presents everyday life in the modern city as unrelievedly gloomy, depressing, and banal.

The narrator had rejected life in this urban prison. Before he had met Tonka, he had decided on a scientific career as offering the best means of escaping it, while at the same time offer-

ing an outlet for his frustrated idealism; science would lead to the creation of a better society at some indefinite future time. As the narrator reconstructs his involvement with Tonka from memory, he repeatedly visualizes her in rural settings or in images from the natural world, such as the snowflake. But he must keep reminding himself that in reality -the expressions "wirklich" and "in Wirklichkeit" recur throughout the story like the refrain of a ballad- his encounter with Tonka had taken place almost exclusively in the world of the "Großstadt". Tonka had been the outsider who had come into this world; not from a different place, but from a different order of things. She had revealed to him the possibility of a different order in things than the young scientist could allow for.

Thus the image of the city in this novella represents the whole complex of dead values which the narrator, "der vielseitig Begabte", was struggling to escape, while Tonka represents an *Abba* to a simpler, more genuine life which the narrator somehow wanted to reach. He failed. His ultimate course of action was to keep faith in the final success of the scientific career he had chosen before he met Tonka. The reader is told that this faith was eventually to bring him fame. This fame, however, would be in the world he grew up in and rejected, not in the intuitively mythic realm which Tonka represents. The affair with Tonka, recalled by the narrator many years after it happened, thus appears as a temporary deflection in his life. He states that this deflection has made him understand a little better the realm of natural feeling, and opened up for him the life of images. But since he could not escape from the values he grew up with, nor reach Tonka's, the only possible resolution of this curious affair, especially in fictional terms, was her death. To borrow a chapter heading from 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', it had been an affair between "den Ungetrennten und nicht Vereinten".

To proceed from the claustrophobic cities of 'Tonka' to the

semi-transparence of the city in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' is to realize how Musil has both complicated and schematized his urban canvas.⁹⁾ The image of the city operates on two levels in this unfinished novel. One is direct presentation of the city itself. There is very little of this in the novel, but what there is is significant and strategically placed. The second level is more pervasive, if less explicit: The characters of 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' are all urbanites, formed by the city and defining and expressing the civilization of which the city is the concentrated symbol.

There are two cities in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', the metropolis and Imperial capital of Vienna, with which the novel opens and in which most of the novel is set, and the provincial "Großstadt" which Ulrich grew up in and to which he returns briefly on the death of his father.¹⁰⁾ Both cities are highly generalized, but Musil insists on their individuality just enough to keep alive an ambivalent tension between the city as an emblem of a culture in crisis and the city as a specific place. Thus on the first page the narrator states, on the one hand, that one can identify the city as Vienna by its characteristic noise "nach jahrelanger Abwesenheit mit geschlossenen Augen". On the other hand, three sentences later, the same narrator states that "die Überschätzung der Frage, wo man sich befindet, stammt aus der Hordenzeit, wo man sich die Futterplätze merken mußte". Throughout the novel Musil is careful not to localize features of his cities on maps; in this he is the opposite of Heimito von Doderer, whose novels can not be understood without a street-map knowledge of Vienna and its customs. We do not know, in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', where Ulrich's "Schlößchen" is, or Diotima's house or Graf Leinsdorf's palace, or the house of Walther and Clarisse. Nor do we know the topographic relation between these spots. There are almost no identified landmarks. The picture of the city is one of isolated buildings and streets which have no connection with each other, except that the characters (principally Ulrich) are suddenly present or not present in different places, usually the interior of houses.

This technique automatically isolates the discussions, actions, and characters; the disjointed city is embodied in the disjointed sequence of scenes.

As they are presented directly in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', these cities are surfaces. Musil schematizes both the static spatial relationships of buildings and the dynamic relationships of moving automobiles, pedestrians, and mobs. Let me cite one example out of many at the beginning of the novel. Immediately after the description of the "Schlößchen", Ulrich himself is presented for the first time. What is he doing?

"Diese Wohnung und dieses Haus gehörten dem Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Er stand hinter einem der Fenster, sah durch den zartgrünen Filter der Gartenluft auf die bräunliche Straße und zählte mit der Uhr seit zehn Minuten die Autos, die Wagen, die Tram-bahnen und die von der Entfernung ausgewaschenen Gesichter der Fußgänger, die das Netz des Blicks mit quirlender Eile füllten; er schätzte die Geschwindigkeiten, die Winkel, die lebendigen Kräfte vorüberbewegter Massen, die das Auge blitzschnell nach sich ziehen, festhalten, loslassen, die während einer Zeit, für die es kein Maß gibt, die Aufmerksamkeit zwingen, sich gegen sie zu stemmen, abzureißen, zum nächsten zu springen und sich diesem nachzuwerfen;..."¹¹⁾

In this passage Ulrich is physically separated from the everyday life of city traffic and the scurrying "man on the street". Cut off by the window and by the "zartgrüner Filter der Gartenluft", he observes the pedestrians's "quirlende Eile". This is Ulrich's introduction to the reader, and first impressions are lasting. Ulrich is cut off from the street scene of everyday life. The reader is doubly detached, looking at the spatialized image of Ulrich's detachment from within the same room of Ulrich's house.

For the reader, if not for the character, this detachment of perspective serves the function of what Shklovsky called defami-

liarization, a way of breaking through that deadening film of habit which replaces thought as the guide of life. Defamiliarization makes "the familiar seem strange, so that we can see it again".¹²⁾ But there is a paradoxe here, or rather an impossibility, for the character who is trying to measure his chaotic culture from a detached point of view is still inside it, in this case inside the patchwork house which is an emblem for the culture, and which had been introduced into the novel before the main character.

Ulrich does not seem to be aware of this impossibility. In this first appearance he is typically engaged in trying to measure the discrepant, to reduce the chaos of everyday urban life to order by means of his watch and mathematics. This attempt to apply scientific time-motion studies to everyday life is enough to defamiliarize it for the reader, but it is not enough for the character to transcend it. Ulrich's inability to account scientifically for all the factors involved in even the smallest of these daily urban motions is, in a nutshell, the reason why he is "ein Mensch, der gar nichts tut".

The introduction of Ulrich into the novel through his house also brings in the indirect presence of the image of the city. The city is the locus of Musil's ethical concern through the characters who are part of it and who embody its values. As Ulrich attempts to be the unifying principle of his house and dwelling, he also attempts to be the common meeting point of the disjointed strata of the city, from the extreme of Moosbrugger to the extreme of Arnheim. But, as Musil has made plain from the beginning, this city has no common meeting point. These extremes are not opposites, but extreme in themselves; they are Leibnizian monads rather than elements of a social system. The problem with this culture is its chaos, which cannot be reduced to an ethical order. Ulrich is frustrated from the start in attempting to organize the unorganizable. His friends and acquaintances, the urban street scene, the class and power

structure of his society, remain isolated bits of paper in the kaleidoscope. They can be made to reflect patterns, but no patterns which have any intrinsic meaning.

Musil presents these bits of the fragmented city as twodimensional surfaces rather than in depth, and this technique also conveys a great deal of thematic meaning.

'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' is a fascinating example of the principle of spatialization which Joseph Frank develops in his essay, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature".¹³⁾ The most interesting section of this essay for my purposes is part of the argument which Frank derives from the art theorist Wilhelm Worringer. The first point in Frank's summary of Worringer is that a naturalistic mimetic style is characteristic of cultures which have in some way achieved an equilibrium between man and cosmos. The enjoyment of a naturalistic work of art, according to Worringer, comes not from its close imitation of empirical reality, but because it stimulates the viewer to a "heightened sense of active Harmony with the organic".¹⁴⁾ Worringer's second point is that in a historical period of disharmony between man and cosmos, the styles of art are non-organic and linear-geometric, rather than naturalistic. The city in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' is precisely a non-organic, linear-geometric place rendered in a non-organic, linear, geometric style, as a way of representing a culture in disharmony and disequilibrium. To demonstrate this further, I would like to analyze one complex of scenes which seem to me central to the novel, and then refer to two other significant occurrences of the city in this work.

The first part of this connected group of scenes, in Chapter 120, describes the development of a mob in the square before Graf Leinsdorf's palace. The perspective is double, that is, fragmented: It is divided between Walther, who is walking along below with the crowd and who is swept up in the action, and Ulrich, who is upstairs in the palace, in his characteristic stance of looking out a window. The reader's attention is thus split bet-

ween the irrational passion of the mob, and Ulrich's detached and isolated observation of the scene. Let us look down with Ulrich:

"An den Straßenrändern schritten Schutzleute mit und stoben Unbeteiligte wie eine Wolke aus dem Weg, die der geschlossene Marschtritt aufwirbelte. Weiterhin stand da und dort schon eingekeiltes Fuhrwerk fest, um das der gebieterische Strom in unabsehbaren schwarzen Wellen floß, auf denen man den aufgelösten Gischt der hellen Gesichter tanzen fühlte. Als die Spitze der Marschierenden des Palais ansichtig wurde, schien es, daß irgend ein Befehl die Schritte mäßige, eine Stauwelle lief nach hinten, die anrückenden Reihen keilten sich ineinander, und es entstand das Bild, das einen Augenblick lang an einen Muskel erinnerte, der sich vor dem Schlag verdickt. Im nächsten Augenblick sauste dieser Schlag durch die Luft und sah wunderbarlich genug aus, denn er bestand aus einem Schrei der Entrüstung, von dem man früher die aufgerissenen Münder sah, als man den Laut hörte. Schlag um Schlag klappten die Gesichter in dem Augenblick auf, wo sie auf den Plan traten, und da das Geschrei der weiter Entfernten von dem der inzwischen nahe Gekommenen übertönt wurde, konnte man bei fern gerichtetem Blick dieses stumme Schauspiel sich immer wiederholen sehn."¹⁵⁾

This scene is controlled by perspective: distance separates sight from sound. The mob is seen as a whole, from above. It is shouting, but the shouts arrive later, as a succession of waves. The bold metaphor of tensed muscle and released blow mediates this separation to some extent, restoring through imagery the kinetic force of the mob as a direct impression. But the overwhelming effect of this scene, on the reader as well as Ulrich, is one of alienation, "Verfremdung": "[man konnte] bei fern gerichtetem Blick dieses stumme Schauspiel sich immer wiederholen sehn".

Ulrich's reaction to this scene is one of violent and scornful hostility. He even responds to the mob's kinesis with a sudden involuntary physical movement of his own, which makes Graf

Leinsdorf think that Ulrich has cut himself on a sharp blade, "wozu weit und breit keine Möglichkeit vorhanden war".¹⁶⁾ There follows in the next chapter Ulrich's climactic scene with Arnheim, who offers him a post in his false but empirically mighty industrial empire. The chapter after that is called "Heimweg", and relates Ulrich's solitary walk home at night through the dark and empty streets of the city. In the mob scene we had seen the city overfilled with people in the wrong way: Ordinary motion through the streets was stopped, and a totally different kind of dynamics, that of the mob, had taken over. In this later scene, the city is shown at the other extreme, as dark and empty streets. This time Ulrich is isolated in the streets rather than above them, but his detachment and alienation are the same in both places. The contrast between the mob city and this empty city represents the total failure of social communication; to borrow Rilke's terms, it is a contrast between the "reines Zuwenig" and the "leeres Zuviel".¹⁷⁾ What is missing is the equilibrium of the middle between these two extremes, city streets full of activity and commerce and the everyday life of society.

Musil describes Ulrich's estrangement in this night scene in theatrical terms:

"Es war eine schöne, aber dunkle Nacht. Die Häuser bildeten hoch und geschlossen den sonderbaren oben offenen Raum Straße, über dem in der Luft irgend etwas, Finsternis, Wind oder Wolken, vor sich ging. Der Weg war so menschenleer, als ob die frühere Unruhe nun einen tiefen Schlummer hinterlassen hätte. Wenn Ulrich einem Fußgänger begegnete, so kam der Schall der Schritte durch lange Zeit allein auf ihn zu wie eine gewichtige Anmeldung. Man konnte das Gefühl von Geschehen haben in dieser Nacht wie in einem Theater. Man fühlte, daß man eine Erscheinung in dieser Welt war; etwas, das größer wirkt, als es ist; das halt und, wenn es an beleuchteten Flächen vorbeikommt, seinen Schatten zur Begleitung hat wie einen mächtig zuckenden Narren, der sich aufrichtet und im nächsten Augenblick wieder demütig an die Fersen kriecht."¹⁸⁾

This passage contains two elements: the stage setting of the city streets, and Ulrich's reactions, which they concretize. The narrator, who is usually obtrusively present in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', is here absent; the reactions are directly those of the character. This reduction of the city to a stage set, and the externalization of Ulrich's *d i a m o n* as a malevolent shadow, are both parts of a long and complicated figure of Ulrich's estrangement from what he implies is a real self - the other pole of his "Möglichkeitssinn". This estrangement is summed up in the sentence:

"Er kam sich jetzt nur noch wie ein durch die Galerie des Lebens irrendes Gespenst vor"¹⁹⁾, which repeats the metaphor of the theater and Ulrich's feeling "daß man eine Erscheinung in dieser Welt war".

Ulrich's impression of his own reality is an absence - a conspicuous absence - in his world of unrealized possibilities and projected utopias. In these last three chapters of the second part of the First Book of the novel, this sense of reality, whatever it is, crystallizes in Ulrich around Arnheim's offer of a position, Ulrich's sudden memory of an incident involving himself as a small child and his mother, who died early, and Moosbrugger. Ulrich's reaction, as in the preceding mob scene, is one of violence and hostility.

In this succession of key scenes in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' the image of the city serves, as it does throughout the novel, to concretize and externalize the estrangement of the culture and its inhabitants, most notably Ulrich. This process is made more explicit later, when Ulrich describes to Agathe his feelings whenever his travels had taken him to strange cities:

"Er hatte die Farben der Straßenbahn, der Wagen, Auslagen, Tore, die Formen der Kirchtürme, Gesichter und Hausfronten gesehen, und ob sie auch die allgemeine europäische Ähnlichkeit zeigten, flog doch der Blick über sie hin wie ein Insekt, das sich über ein Feld mit fremden Lockfarben verirrt hat und sich nicht nieder-

lassen kann, obschon es das tun möchte. Dieses Gehn ohne Ziel und deutliche Bestimmung in einer lebhaft mit sich selbst beschäftigten Stadt, diese gesteigerte Anspannung des Erlebens bei gesteigerter Fremdheit, die noch durch die Überzeugung verstärkt wird, daß es auf einen nicht ankomme, sondern nur auf diese Summen von Gesichtern, diese vom Körper gerissenen, untereinander zu Armeen von Armen, Beinen oder Zähnen zusammengefaßten Bewegungen, denen die Zukunft gehört, vermag das Gefühl zu wecken, daß man sich als noch ganz und geschlossen für sich wandelnder Mensch schon geradezu unsozial und verbrecherisch vorkommt".²⁰⁾

Here the image of the city arouses the Moosbrugger in Ulrich, and is a link between them.

Finally, but in the same vein, is the presentation of the provincial city to which Ulrich returns for a time following the death of his father. The first two pages of the chapter "Die vergessene Schwester" are devoted to this city; at the end of the chapter Agathe enters the novel for the first time. The chapter itself is the first of the Third Part of the novel. 'Ins Tausendjährige Reich or Die Verbrecher'. This city description is, in other words, parallel to the description of Vienna/metropolis with which the novel opened. This second city is a "große Provinzstadt", and repeats against a background of the provinces the same fragmentation of life that the capital represented on a larger scale. After a description of the features of this city, which repeats the specific/general presentation of Vienna, Musil arrives at a summarizing image:

"Diese Stadt hatte eine Geschichte, und sie hatte auch ein Gesicht, aber darin paßten die Augen nicht zum Mund oder das Kinn nicht zu den Haaren, und über allem lagen die Spuren eines stark bewegten Lebens, das innerlich leer ist".²¹⁾

Musil then goes on to connect this disconnected city to the arousal of uninhibited fantasies, preparing the way for Ulrich and Agathe's forgery and possible incest.

The city in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' may be summarized as the locus of Ulrich's problematic relation to his world. Ulrich and the novel's other characters may appear solipsistic, in that they are attempting to define their own identities. But they are also, like the characters in 'Tonka', trying to function in a world of disjointed social and societal relationships. This is another way of saying that Musil's ethics are socially determined. The figures in this novel who will somehow have to be brought to change their lives include the busy and unthinking citizens of the everyday city, such as those who stream past the window of Ulrich's "Schlößchen". This task, however, is doubly impossible, for if Ulrich is isolated as a thinking individual from the empty mass of urban citizens, this empty social mass is also isolated from any idea of community. It is, in Tönnies' distinction, a "Gesellschaft" which is not a "Gemeinschaft".

The image of the city in this novel, as elsewhere in Western literature, functions as the crystallization of an ambivalent tension. On the one hand the city stands for the ideal of a community of shared values. On the other hand, the absence of this ideal from the novel provides its major theme. Ulrich, despite repeated attempts, cannot find the lever to move the broken fragments of this social world toward community, and he ultimately chooses withdrawal to involvement. In his search for unity Ulrich is up against not only Austrian, but the whole of our splintered, urban, technological civilization. He himself is a product of this civilization, a "geprägte Form", and he cannot escape its finite limits except by making a leap into mysticism. In Musil's earlier works, except in 'Tonka' and 'Der Amsel', the city had been an absent frame for the action, but still a frame; in 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' the city embodies the central problem. In this enigmatic work the city remains the emblem of both the fragmentation of life and the absent and unattainable of community.

- 1 This article was given as a lecture at the International Robert Musil Symposium, co-sponsored by the Austrian Institute, the Department of Germanic Languages of Columbia University, and the Jerome Foundation at Columbia on October 20 and 21, 1978. My argument and a few passages are drawn from a book in progress on the image of the city in literature, although this article is not part of the book.
- 2 *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, transl. Sacha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1971), p. 176.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- 4 Die Reflexionen Ulrichs in Robert Musils Roman 'Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften', 2te. Auflage (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1966. Beiträge zur deutschen Literaturwissenschaft, hrsg. Wolfdietrich Rasch, Bd. I), Chapter 1.
- 5 *Gesammelte Werke in neun Bänden*, hrsg. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1978), Bd. 1, pp. 11-12. Further references are to this edition.
- 6 *GW 6*, p. 7.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 8 Lewis Mumford: *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 150-152; quote p. 152.
- 9 Because a definitive text for this novel has not yet been established, I am largely confining my discussion to the earlier, finished part.
- 10 An extremely interesting comparison is possible between the finished description of this provincial city (*GW 3*, pp. 671-672) and what is obviously an earlier draft, "Beschreibung einer kakanischen Stadt [Variante/Entwurf]" ('Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften' [Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1952], pp. 1258ff.). This draft is more literal, more personal, and more polemical than the final one, and is not well integrated thematically into the novel. In the draft this city is identified as Brünn, where Musil's parents lived.
- 11 *GW 1*, p. 10.
- 12 The formulation is Robert Scholes', in: *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 84. Musil like Proust, was actively aware of the importance of this principle as a lever on the reader; in Musil's case, an ethical lever. See e.g.: Marie-Louise Roth: *Robert Musil: Ethik und Ästhetik* (München: Paul List Verlag, 1972), p. 196.
- 13 "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", in: *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963) pp. 3-62.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

15 GW 2, pp. 628-629.

16 Ibid., p. 629.

17 Duineser Elegien V.

18 GW 2, p. 647.

19 Ibid., p. 648.

20 GW 3, p. 723.

21 Ibid., p. 672. See also the earlier draft of this passage referred to in footnote 10.