CHAPTER 13

New York City

Isolation

This winter was one of the most terrible in my life. I hated to open letters; I could no longer stand the misery that spilled out of them.¹

The profound silence that descended on political life in the United States after the war took even pessimists, Mattick included, by surprise. The Matticks moved into a loft in the Chelsea district of New York City, just below mid-town, during the first week of May 1946.² The top floor of a four-story walk-up, it was a large space, well-lit and without internal walls. For furniture, Paul and Ilse scoured the streets on sanitation days, pending a return to Chicago to collect their belongings (Mattick’s step-son had taken over their apartment). Lithographs from Mattick’s artist friends in Cologne and reproductions of other artwork hung on the walls.³ The loft required considerable work, with a leaky roof, a water heater in need of patching, and a newly-purchased but reconditioned oil burner that itself needed repair. These were chores to which Mattick now devoted himself.⁴ The couch served as a guest bed, and in general the place was sparsely furnished. To friends, Mattick explained: ‘I have succeeded making New York one large room in which I sit and read’.⁵

Ilse directed the preschool programme at the Hudson Guild School, a nearby settlement house. The centre handled 150 children, the parents of whom spoke some eighteen languages. While she directed its programmatic aspects, another colleague handled the administration. Whenever parents were late or unable to pick up their children, Ilse and the other employees took them home.⁶ Ilse found the work purposeful, and as long as she worked,

¹ Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 16 April 1947.
² Address: 153 West 21st Street, between 6th and 7th Avenues, where Hans Schaper had lived. Mattick to Kenneth Rexroth [No Date] (UCLA); Mattick to Kenneth Rexroth, 11 May 1946 (UCLA); Conversations with Ilse Mattick, 21–5 May 2005.
³ Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 11 May 1946; Interview with Sam Abramovitch, 14 November 2006.
⁴ Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 9 October 1946; Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 29 May 1950.
⁵ Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 16 April 1947.
⁶ Mattick Jr 2009b; Conversations with Ilse Mattick, 21–5 May 2005.
Paul could write full-time. Equally important to her was keeping him out of the factories, a critical consideration in light of the lung ailments that plagued him (that he was a cigarette smoker only slowly came into consideration). Mattick transferred his unemployment benefits from Chicago and stayed at home—cooking, cleaning, entertaining, and also caring for their son whenever Paul Jr. did not accompany Ilse to her job. Paul remained the primary caretaker until their son was ready for preschool. Friends were free to drop by whenever they pleased. There was no need to call ahead.

In these first months, a long list of people visited, including Korsch (sometimes alone, sometimes with his family), Hans Schaper (like Jake Faber, a merchant mariner), other IWW colleagues, Walter and Pit Auerbach (but independently, now that they had separated), Fritz Henssler (who the following summer was ‘on Porter’s Island busy with Porter’s wife’), both his step-children, Emil White (visiting from Big Sur in California), Frances Francis (who helped launch Willem de Kooning’s career), the Arringtons from Mississippi (‘they have difficulties understanding my English and thus the discussions are rather awkward’), Ruth Fischer (former head of the German Communist Party, who Mattick satirised in 1925 in his article for *Die Aktion*), Heinz Langerhans (‘the best creature I have met in New York’), and others already in New York like Dwight Macdonald and Walter Boelke.

The Matticks discovered a new set of friends in the art scene that was located in their neighbourhood. Fairfield Porter’s studio was down the block, taken over from Walter Auerbach when the latter’s marriage broke up and he left for Europe. Willem de Kooning, the abstract expressionist, lived a few doors down; Nell Blaine (painter) across the street, until she moved into the flat beneath them; Edwin Denby (dance critic and poet) and the photographer Rudy Burckhardt in an apartment that could be reached across the rooftops; the painter Edith Schloss was also nearby, as were James Schuyler, Jane Freilicher, and others. These were circles in which intimacy flowed easily—Langerhans

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7 Conversation with Paul Mattick, Jr., 6 August 2004.
8 Interview with Sam Abramovitch, 14 November 2006; Interview with Norman Epstein, 4 November 2006.
10 Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 21 August 1946. Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 6 June 1946; Mattick to Dinsmore and Midge Wheeler, 21 August 1946; Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 9 October 1946; Mattick Wheeler, 14 November 1946; Frances Francis to Mattick, 20 November 1946; Sam Moss to Mattick, 1 December 1946; Anton Pannekoek to Mattick, 6 February 1947 (*iish*: Pannekoek); Mattick to Dinsmore Wheeler, 24 October 1947. Other guests included: Anna Auel, Minerva Roitman, Magarete Marcus, the Blumes, Isaac Rabinowich (*The Western Socialist*), Van Albada from Holland, and Joe and Ann Walsh.