

The New Woman International

Representations in Photography and Film
from the 1870s through the 1960s



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Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*

Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, EDITORS

Foreword by Linda Nochlin

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30. Melissa A. Johnson, "Souvenirs of Amerika: Hannah Höch's Weimar-Era Mass-Media Scrapbook," in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 135–52 (136).

31. Miriam Silverberg, "After the Grand Tour: The Modern Girl, the New Woman, and the Colonial Maiden," in *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dong, and Tani E. Barlow) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 354–61 (360).

32. *Ibid.*, 357.

6

Hannah Höch's New Woman: Photomontage, Distraction, and Visual Literacy in the Weimar Republic

MATTHEW BIRO

The New Woman of Weimar society was a figure of both imagination and material reality.¹ The term referred to the new social roles that women increasingly adopted during the Weimar Republic as a result of changes in German work, politics, consumer culture, and entertainment. It also signified a set of stereotypical images or "types"—created by the burgeoning mass media—that affected male and female behavior alike. On a seemingly more basic level, the New Woman further suggested a changed mode of modern female identity that was to be distinguished from the traditional types characteristic of Wilhelmine society and was connected to the rationalization and "Americanization" of everyday life during the Weimar Republic. She thus quickly became a primary sign representing the radical transformation of Germany after the war, a symbol of how its politics, society, and everyday life had been irrevocably altered. As a result, she was constantly represented, lauded as an embodiment of new possibilities open to women of the time, and demonized as a primary force threatening the nation's social, moral, physical, and economic stability.

As I shall argue, the representation of the New Woman was central to the Weimar photomontages of the Berlin Dadaist Hannah Höch, because Höch's fundamental project was an interrogation of modern identity, and it was through photomontage that the New Woman's various forms, meanings, and actual states of being could be examined and reconfigured. Neither fully accepting nor fully rejecting the New Woman, Höch used her art to analyze the New Woman's myth and thereby to reveal both her ideological and her revolutionary potential. Central to Höch's analysis was an exploration of the New Woman's fundamentally cyborgian nature, which Höch suggested by representing the New Woman as an assemblage of

organic and mechanical parts. In this way, Höch revealed the New Woman to be both a consumer and a producer of representations in the mass media, a creative consciousness fundamentally concerned with the impact of technology on human bodies and minds and the ways in which technology's effects were influenced and channeled, strengthened or mitigated, through practices of montage.

Two of Höch's photomontages reveal the fundamentally hybrid nature of the New Woman as well as the influence she was beginning to have on her culture and society. Directly after the First World War, the compositional strategies of Höch's photomontages underwent a series of changes. She began to move away from the simultaneous "all over" montage structure of her earliest Dada works, completed in 1919 and early 1920, toward the simpler forms of composition that the other Berlin Dadaists were also beginning to favor.² Instead of multiple figures, Höch's later Dada photomontages, completed during 1920, began to focus on a much smaller set of main characters, generally between one and three in number. Like traditional forms of painterly and photographic representation, these photomontages articulated clear centers of interest or focus, and, by allowing for definite size differences between the various photomontage elements, the compositions also became more hierarchically organized. In addition, the indexical relationship between the photographic fragments and the photographic subjects was transformed. No longer choosing for the most part to appropriate specific historical individuals, Höch instead opted to construct common social or psychological types, often created out of a multiplicity of carefully cut fragments that left the spectator with little or no idea of the actual person from whom the components were originally drawn.

The Dadaist photomontage *Das schöne Mädchen* (The Beautiful Girl, 1919–20) (fig. 6.1), wherein Höch presents the New Woman as a seemingly brainless cyborg, is a good example of this new, more indexically distanced, anonymous, and general type of subject. Although the background is still extremely busy, the relative size and positioning of the figure make her the central element and thus the focus. Here a bathing beauty, dressed in a formfitting black bathing suit, sits on an I beam, her head—but not her bouffant hairdo—displaced by an electric lightbulb. She is surrounded by circular motifs, which seem to stand as symbols of her desire but also have connotations of danger or menace. The American boxer and heavyweight champion Jack Johnson, to whom the New York Dada artist Arthur Craven lost a boxing match in Barcelona in 1916,³ moves in from the left, his body penetrating a thin motorcycle tire and his gloves touching the beautiful girl's

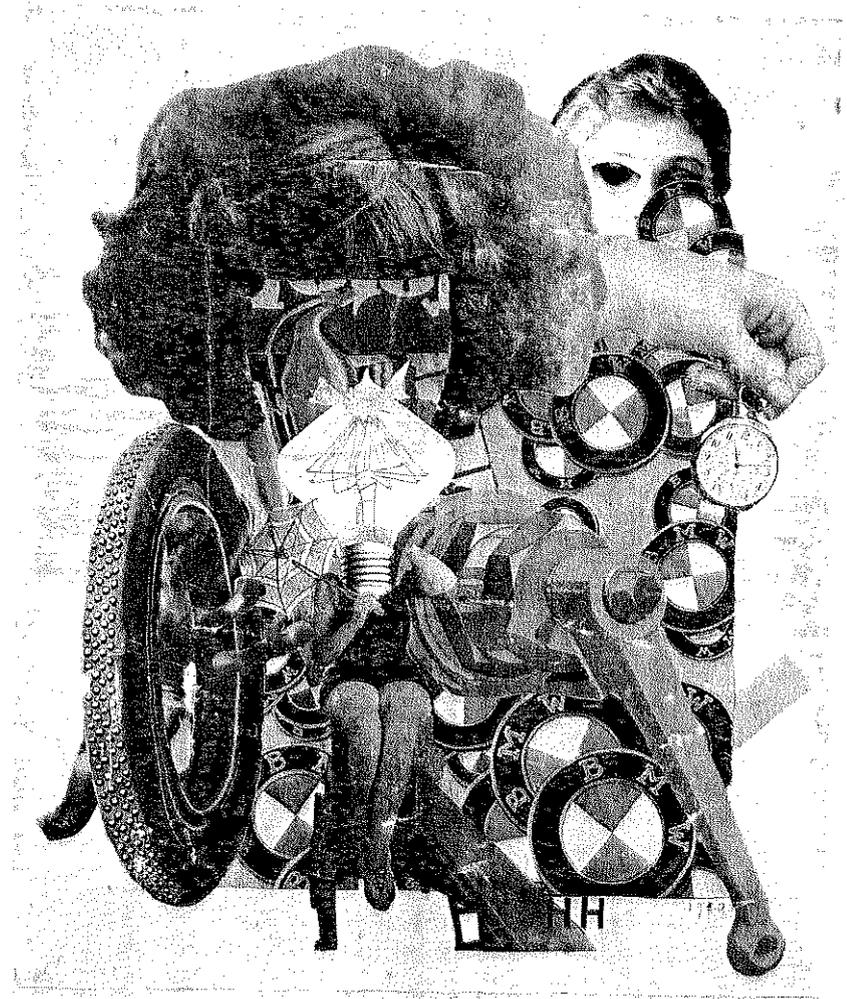


Fig. 6.1. Hannah Höch, *Das schöne Mädchen* (The Beautiful Girl), 1919–20, photomontage and collage, 35 x 29 cm (13 3/4 x 11 7/16 in.). (Private collection. Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz and Art Resource, New York. © 2010 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York, and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.)

arm and parasol.⁴ Perhaps a subterranean reference to Dada's international history, the Johnson figure also connotes sport, athleticism, and, because of his nakedness and proximity to the girl cyborg, cross-racial desire. To the right of the beautiful girl, a crankshaft juts aggressively outward toward the viewer, and around it appear BMW insignias of varying sizes. The crank-

shaft echoes the I beam, which also thrusts forcefully into the spectator's space. Partially balancing this suggestion of extended space in front of the main figure, the circular BMW logos, which are partly superimposed on one another, suggest a similar extension behind the beautiful girl as well. In addition, a young woman's face stares out at the spectator from the upper right corner. One eye has been replaced with a larger, cropped eye, and the lower portion of her visage is obscured by a woman's hand holding a pocket watch, which extends from the side of the beautiful girl's hairdo. In conjunction with the hand and watch constellation, the clusters of BMW logos perhaps suggest the hypnotic nature of commodity culture.

In many ways, Höch's girl cyborg follows the traditional forms of allegory in that it seems to present an embodied representation of an abstract concept or quality, in this case the new ideas about beauty created by the growth of commodity culture and spectacle during the early years of the Weimar Republic. Like traditional allegorical emblems, the cyborg's photomontage attributes—or in this case her signs of desire—can be read and enumerated. Here, because they are represented by means of idealized depictions appropriated from the mass media, these signs of desire—namely, of beauty, sport, sexuality, travel, and status—are all shown to exist as different types of manufactured products. And because they reveal the commodification of even the most intimate aspects of human existence, they also function as indicators of anxiety, a connotation that is reinforced by Höch's photomontage technique, which is characterized by disturbing physical and spatial disjunctions. At the same time, however, Höch's figure also interacts with its attributes and environment in strange and heterogeneous ways that seem odd in comparison to most traditional allegorical representations. In particular, it is unclear if the countenance in the top right corner belongs to the cyborg. On the one hand, it seems to be the correct size for her hairdo, and if the visage with the montaged eye did belong to the beautiful girl, then the power of commodity culture could perhaps be seen to emanate from the cyborg. On the other hand, the face of the woman with the montaged eye seems radically separate from the girl's body; and all the other photographic elements—hairdo, hand, and BMW insignias—seem to divide it from her lithe form. Following this reading, one could imagine the beautiful cyborg's consciousness being left behind as she explores physical pleasure and consumption in the modern world. No longer the figure in control, she is, instead, a passive and gullible consumer, a woman seduced by a field of attractive but ultimately two-dimensional images.

Although composed of different fragmentary photographic images, *The Beautiful Girl* represents a type not an individual. Unlike Höch's most famous photomontage, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (1919–20), and other early works, such as *Dada Panorama* (1919), for the most part *The Beautiful Girl* did not encourage its spectators to identify specific historical personages or imagine their particular histories and implied transformations as envisioned by the artist. (In the context of *The Beautiful Girl*, the historically specific figure of Jack Johnson seems like a remnant of Höch's earlier approach.) Thus, because it drew attention to a common type, *The Beautiful Girl* could have prompted its spectators to focus on the mass media and commodity culture as institutions and how they functioned to create, channel, and repress both female and male desire. Expressing both pleasure and anxiety about the identity roles offered to German women through manufactured goods and the culture industry, it suggested that its viewers examine their relationship to the modern myths circulating in the early years of the Weimar Republic.

As Maria Makela notes, *The Beautiful Girl* is very similar to another work of approximately the same size and format, *Hochfinanz* (High Finance), a photomontage with collage from 1923, which is understood to belong to Höch's post-Dada moment (fig. 6.2). Although it is dated two years later than *The Beautiful Girl*, *High Finance* seems closer in imagery and composition to the works that Höch created around 1920 than it does to those created after 1922, which were even simpler and more abstract.⁵ This suggests that the photomontage has been misdated or the similarity can stand as evidence of Höch's continuing Dadaism during the Weimar Republic, the fact that she continued to use photomontage to investigate changes in the mind and body under the conditions of mass reproduction. Most important for understanding Höch's representations of New Women, however, is the fact that *High Finance* presents cyborgian New Men, figures with which Höch's New Women were dialectically interrelated.

High Finance presents two full-length male figures striding across a landscape that consists of a bird's-eye view of a fairground with ceremonial buildings and a stadium. They are surrounded by other objects, including an aerial view of a factory complex hovering at the level of their shoulders, a large tire with a truck positioned at its apex, a shiny chrome nut or ball bearing that appears to prevent the tire from rolling, and two fragmentary double-barreled shotguns, each showing a stock, a trigger, and a breech broken open to receive shells. Both men clutch machine parts in their right

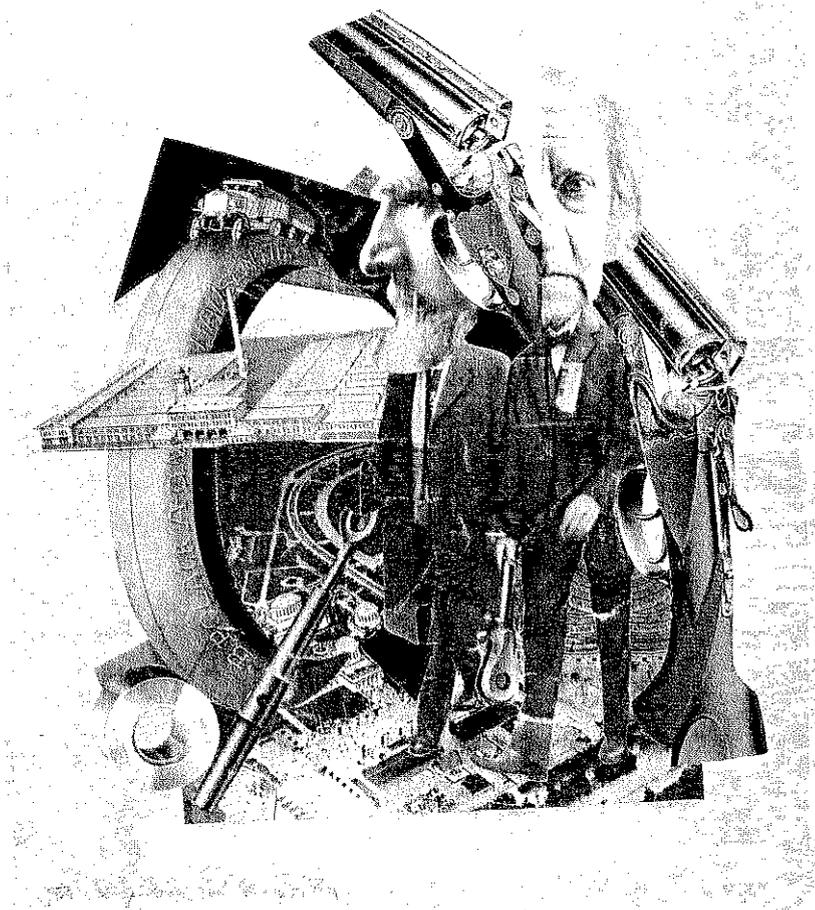


Fig. 6.2. Hannah Höch, *Hochfinanz* (High Finance), 1923, photomontage and collage on paper, 36 x 31 cm (14 3/16 x 12 3/16 in). (Galerie Berinson, Berlin and UBU Gallery, New York. © 2010 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.)

hands as if they were clubs or canes, and to the left of the leftmost figure, two or three small fragments of what is possibly a striped flag appear. Both men, moreover, have had their heads replaced with new ones, which seem too large for their bodies. The carefully cropped profile of the man on the left has not been identified, while the man on the right sports the countenance of Sir John Herschel, the nineteenth-century British chemist. Originally shot by Julia Margaret Cameron in 1867, this portrait was

appropriated from an article on Cameron published in the ladies' fashion magazine *Die Dame* in May 1920.

Höch's photomontage is inscribed on the bottom left margin with a dedication to László Moholy-Nagy, who published it in 1925 in his book *Painting Photography Film* where the photomontage was given an alternative title, *The Multi-Millionaire*, and a caption, "The dual countenance of the ruler."⁶ As implied by its two titles and caption, Höch has constructed a rather threatening image of two bourgeois men that suggests connections between capitalism, militarism, and nationalism during the Weimar Republic and, depending on how the spectator reads the "flag" in the background, perhaps monarchism and Americanism as well. (Because its colors are faded, the flag could stand for a number of different nations, including the German Imperial Empire or the United States of America.) The men hold machine parts in their hands like tools, their heads and bodies have been augmented with oversized shotguns, and they are pressed together shoulder to shoulder almost as if they were parts of the same organism. Höch thus depicts these traditional figures of the capitalist ruling order as having been transformed through technology and having adapted themselves to their modern postwar world. The violence and power of these two members of the economic ruling class are suggested by the threatening way in which they hold their tools, the shotguns that have become parts of their bodies and heads, the fragmented and mismatched character of their figures, and the fact that their size relative to the other elements suggests that they dominate their environment. In addition, the ground on which they walk, the Fair Grounds and Centennial Hall in Breslau, evokes their nationalism. Built by the architects Hans Poelzig and Max Berg in 1913 to commemorate Germany's defeat of Napoleon in 1813, this complex was regarded by many Germans in the early 1920s as a symbol of hope and renewal for a nation that had once again been defeated and occupied by the French.

Like the beautiful girl, the capitalists of *High Finance* are portrayed as types not individuals. Although the figure on the right can be easily identified as Herschel, his identity seems to have more to do with self-reflexive concerns than it does with Herschel's role in German society or culture. One of the reasons that Höch might have chosen to appropriate Herschel's visage may have been to establish a lineage for her work. Just as she possibly cited the expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* to refer to an important woman artist who preceded her historically and whose achievements had perhaps helped to make Höch's own career

easier, the Herschel reference in *High Finance* may have been a way to acknowledge Cameron as another important precursor or role model for Höch. In addition, Herschel himself was an early photographer, and he made several key contributions to the history of photography.⁷ Höch might thus have included his portrait as a subtle way of indicating part of the history out of which her practice of photomontage emerged.

For these reasons, it seems that *High Finance*, like *The Beautiful Girl*, used its photomontage fragments not for political satire but rather to explore broader currents in German society, specifically, the manifold and reactionary connections between capital, the military, nationalism, and counterrevolution that characterized the Weimar Republic's early years. To emphasize the newness of this dangerous amalgam of concepts, forces, and institutions, Höch made her financiers cyborgs. The old Wilhelmine order had been changed by war and revolution, but, as Höch's photomontage suggests, this did not mean that it had renounced its conservative and authoritarian values. Instead, as the photomontage implies, German capitalists were using all possible means of technological enhancement to maximize their profits irrespective of the human costs. And by representing its cyborgian capitalists as giants violently ruling an industrialized world, the photomontage suggests that divisions in wealth and power would only become greater over time.

In addition, when compared to *The Beautiful Girl*, *High Finance* implies something perhaps unexpected about gender difference in the modern world, namely, that the growth of technology did not seem to radically alter traditional differences between men and women but, rather, to intensify them. The beautiful girl is identified with the mass media, commodity culture, spectacle, and perhaps (because of her montaged eye) spectatorship, attributes that can all be read as rendering her passive. The financiers, on the other hand, are associated with the means of production and, furthermore, with movement, activity, and violence. Although technology, the photomontages suggest, has changed both genders in the modern world, these transformations can still be understood in terms of an active-male, passive-female dichotomy. Pairing these two montages raises the question of whether technology—often seen as a force that overcame distinctions and linked opposites—could also increase and reify gender differences in a manner similar to the way it augmented and solidified social and economic stratification. For this reason, despite their greater simplicity, these more traditionally composed works are just as ambiguous as the early Dada works characterized by the compositional strategy of simultaneous montage. The

critique characteristic of Höch's earliest photomontages has here become more general, but, like the earliest works, *The Beautiful Girl* and *High Finance* do not appear to have been made to provide answers. Instead they provoke disturbing questions about the relationship between gender and industry, commodification, capital, spectacle, and the broader technological system that subtends them.

In recent years, Höch's photomontages have provoked debate around how to properly interpret them. As Peter Nisbet has argued, identifying Höch's photographic source material can serve a number of different purposes. It can help refine and correct the dating of the works; it can "shed some light on the artist's choices, by showing what was omitted, excised, transfigured; and it can, perhaps, contribute to the interpretation of the work in question."⁸ By raising the question of interpretation, Nisbet draws our attention to the problem of "allegory" in Weimar culture. In the discourse on avant-garde art of which writings on Dadaism form a part, "allegory" is an important but problematic concept. On the one hand, it defines avant-garde art's primary mode of signification or meaning making. On the other, it has over time bound together radically contradictory meanings. One of the thorniest aspects of allegory has to do with the relationship between appropriation and meaning. When an artwork appropriates a fragment from the culture around it—be it a literary theme, a visual style, a material object, or a visual source cut from another form of representation—does that work thereby convey to its various spectators significations drawn from the original work and its context? Or does it, on the contrary, substitute new meanings for the fragment's original ones?

Walter Benjamin argued the latter even if his actual practices of interpretation sometimes contradicted this contention. Discussing the things that the allegorist appropriates, Benjamin argued that the appropriated object

is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense. In his hands the object becomes something different; through it he speaks of something different and for him it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge; and he reveres it as the emblem of this.⁹

Numerous theorists of modern and contemporary art have agreed with this understanding of allegorical appropriation. Peter Bürger, for example,

argued that avant-garde art continues aestheticism's emancipation of art from subject matter. Directly citing Benjamin's theory of allegory, Bürger insisted that avant-garde art negates the original contextual meanings of its various appropriated parts.¹⁰ Instead of drawing the viewer's or the reader's attention to what is actually represented, the parts of the avant-garde artwork put the focus on the conceptual principles behind the work's construction.¹¹ As a result, there is no room for subject matter in Bürger's account of the historical avant-garde.

Höch's photomontages, on the other hand, support both forms of reference; at times they seem to refer to specific historical individuals and contexts, while at other times they seem to use the photographic fragment as a representative of a type and thus in a manner that does not seem historically specific. But can we really assume that Höch intended to trigger knowledge of real people and particular historical situations through her photomontages? As suggested by the growing interest in visual literacy as promoted by the mass media during the Weimar Republic, the answer is yes. Moreover, as suggested by her photomontages, she also saw the New Woman as one of the central figures promoting this development, an insight that was shared by other cultural producers working in the mass media.

As scholars have noted, the Weimar Republic represents a moment in which the modern language of photojournalism was first developed, where newspaper and magazine layout became a significant form of creative endeavor, where the photograph became a primary mode of communication, and where much thought was devoted to analyzing these transformations.¹² Magazines and illustrated newspapers, it was argued, promoted a new form of reading that was impatient, distracted, and tailored to an active life.¹³ This was a mode of apprehension in which, for better or for worse, bits of reading time were snatched amid other activities. As a result, reading materials became more visual, fragmented, and emphatic, thereby beginning a development in which changes in reading habits and changes in material culture mutually reinforced one another and contributed to lasting transformations in the ways in which ordinary Germans received and processed information. Periodical covers, for example, were changed in order to address the new, supposedly less-attentive reader. Whereas before the war they had featured illustrations, single posterlike photographs began to be used more and more during the Weimar Republic, with a prominent series title above the image to lodge the periodical brand in the reader's consciousness and a caption below it to explain its significance. Articles, moreover, became shorter and were increasingly broken up by

photographs, illustrations, and captions. In addition, images became less closely connected to the texts. Now, instead of directly illustrating the text all the time, pictures could also function as amplifications of the article and represent aspects of the subject to which the text only alluded. Pictures, furthermore, became the primary means of communicating meaning—although few believed that they could function easily without some text—and many argued that a largely visual mode of understanding the world was becoming dominant.

As suggested by *The Beautiful Girl*, Höch associated the cyborgian New Woman with this new, more “distracted” consumption of montages of images and texts that characterized the experience of reading illustrated magazines and newspapers, a mode of perception that was strongly debated. In 1927, for example, Siegfried Kracauer argued that the illustrated newspapers—whose aim, he quipped, was “the complete reproduction of the world accessible to the photographic apparatus”—promoted a profound loss of historical understanding.¹⁴ Because they merely represented topical subjects wrenched out of their original contexts and juxtaposed without being given a new, historically informed significance or structure, “the flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. . . . Never before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding.”¹⁵ Benjamin, on the other hand, argued in 1936 that the distracted mode of perception that characterized the experience of film, illustrated magazines, and architecture was potentially revolutionary.¹⁶ It was a mode of perception that was tactile (as opposed to optical), habitual, and collective, and as such it was much more suited to the new tasks that confronted human awareness at turning points of history. Although Benjamin never explained how this not-fully-conscious form of perception allowed human beings to achieve revolutionary consciousness, he clearly defined how distracted perception helped to mobilize the masses and condition people to the increased threats to life and limb characteristic of modern life, a conditioning that it achieved by exposing people to the shock effects of montage. For Höch, as we have seen, the distracted perceptual experience promoted by the modern media was a mixed bag, a way of apprehending things that could be used for both revolutionary and reactionary ends.

The *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, or *BIZ*, provides a good example of the new modes of distracted viewing and reading to which Höch was responding through her photomontages—and not simply because it was

the illustrated newspaper from which Höch appropriated a number of her photomontage fragments. Founded in 1892 and taken over in 1894 by the Ullstein Verlag, the publishing company for which Höch worked between 1916 and 1926, the *BIZ* was the most popular illustrated newspaper in Germany during the Weimar Republic. The weekly paper regularly published photographs encompassing a wide variety of different subjects, including contemporary political and social events, the lives of politicians and celebrities, war and other forms of social and political unrest, natural catastrophes, foreign lands and people, scenes from popular films and theatrical productions, new technologies, and, significantly, all forms of modern life. Its articles were generally short and interspersed with photographs, illustrations, and captions that broke up and amplified the blocks of printed text. It also published poetry and serialized novels, and it had regular advertising and humor sections. Although it is commonly thought to have been a news-magazine, it did not present an overall or balanced account of the news of each week; rather, its coverage was determined by the interest and appeal of its visual materials. As Kurt Korff, the editor in chief from 1905 to 1933, explained, "The *BIZ* adopted the editorial principle that all events should be presented in pictures with an eye to the visually dramatic and excluding everything that is visually uninteresting. It was not the importance of the material that determined the selection and acceptance of pictures, but solely the allure of the photo itself."¹⁷ The *BIZ* was thus in many ways a central medium through which the German public was exposed to the new and developing practices of photomontage, here understood in a broad sense as juxtaposing photographs with texts and other forms of illustrative materials. Despite its emphasis on visual communication, juxtaposing words with images, and breaking up and shortening blocks of text, however, the *BIZ*'s layout was for the most part designed so as to smooth over the dislocations produced by its strategies of montage. The experience of simultaneously (and distractedly) viewing and reading was intended to be new and exciting, but, like the *BIZ*'s advertisements, it was also expected to be easily intelligible and not thus radically transformative of the status quo.

Significantly, as suggested by the following brief inventory of articles and photomontages that appeared in 1919, the *BIZ* also published features that were self-reflexive, promoted visual literacy, and taught its growing audience about the new forms of optical communication being introduced by the mass press. The cover of the February 16 issue, for example, stressed the new speed of information delivery. It depicted newspapers being unloaded from a two-cockpit biplane with a caption that noted that

the *BZ am Mittag*, another Ullstein publication, was the first newspaper to be delivered regularly in this way.¹⁸ An article from August 17, on the other hand, instructed readers on "the art of instantaneous photography," detailing all the considerations that went into creating successful candid images of modern life.¹⁹ Underwater lights and observation tools were featured in a November 9 article on new technological developments; the profession and technical tricks of newspaper photographers and their contributions to "a change in our way of thinking" were discussed on December 14; and a brief history of newspapers' roles in fostering crime prevention, world exploration, technological advance, economic growth, political engagement, democracy, bureaucratic reform, and public works was printed on December 28.²⁰

Contests for cash prizes were also used to promote visual literacy, their puzzles designed to encourage readers to engage with and comprehend the new ways of combining photographs and texts. A Christmas contest announced on December 28, 1919, for example, awarded cash prizes to viewers who could identify six people or objects photographed from above (fig. 6.3).²¹ In terms of images, the layout of the contest page is evenly balanced from side to side and weighted slightly toward the bottom, the main element of dynamism coming from the central circle with its strong diagonal orientation. The text is presented in three small pieces on the top, left, and right, all of which are surrounded on three sides by larger images. The written material reinforces the idea that we generally perceive things from a normal or usual vantage point, telling us that the world appears differently from "above" and that from the perspective of a zeppelin or airplane things reveal "a completely different form." Readers were encouraged to identify with the nontraditional viewpoint implied by the photographs by describing what was depicted and submitting their answers. If they identified the images correctly, the *BIZ* promised, they might be rewarded; out of all the correct answers, up to eleven lucky entries would be chosen to receive cash prizes ranging from fifty to three hundred marks. The answers, moreover, which were published a month later, were all cyborgian or technological in subject matter: a photographer hunched over his camera, a soldier wearing an assault helmet, a fireman in a smoke helmet, a coffee mill, a lantern, and an arc lamp. Not only did the editors encourage their readers to identify with a technologically enhanced viewpoint associated with planes, zeppelins, and tall modern buildings, but, through their choice of photographs, they also suggested the ubiquity of machines and technologically augmented human beings in modern life.

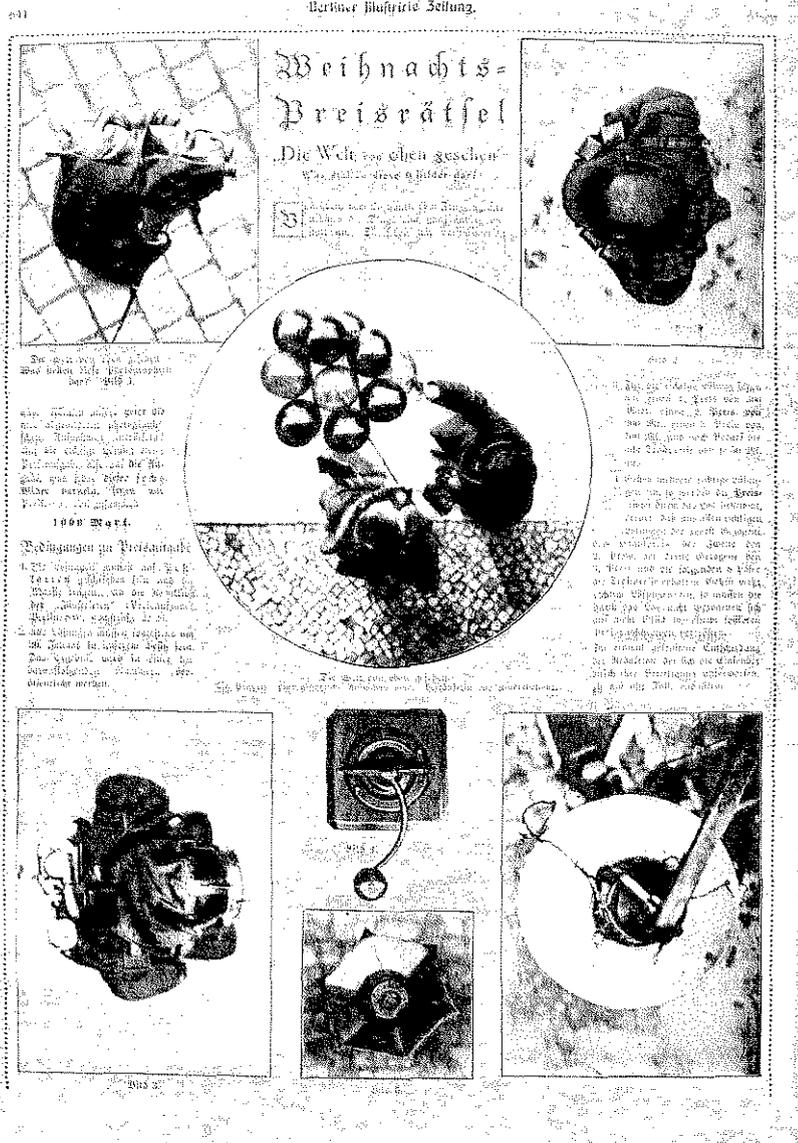


Fig. 6.3. "Christmas Prize Puzzle: The World as Seen from Above," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (Berlin Illustrated Newspaper) 28, no. 52 (December 28, 1919): 544.

Cyborgian images, as mentioned earlier, are images that are reflexively concerned with the impact of technology on the human body and mind. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, Ernst Jünger was already pursuing a very disturbing line of thought about the transformation of perception by the mass media. Citing aerial photographs like the ones used by the *BIZ* editors, Jünger argued that film and photography were altering human physiology and ethics, producing people with a "second, colder consciousness."

The photograph stands outside the realm of sensibility. It has something of a telescopic quality: one can tell that the object photographed was seen by an insensitive and invulnerable eye. That eye registers just as well a bullet in midair or the moment in which a man is torn apart by an explosion. This is our characteristic way of seeing, and photography is nothing other than an instrument of this new propensity in human nature.²²

By developing a second consciousness, human beings would learn to see themselves as objects, stand "outside the sphere of pain," and, finally, evolve an objectified—that is, more pragmatic and less feeling—worldview.²³ Although the *BIZ* editors probably did not share Jünger's authoritarian understanding of the specific changes that new photographic angles and perspectives would foster in human consciousness, it is clear that they found the novel, nontraditional viewpoints exciting and expected that their readers would derive pleasure from them.

A later contest in visual literacy, announced by the *BIZ* on July 5, 1925, also attempted to foster an identification with new forms of distracted perception—in this case, the recognition and naming of image fragments. In addition, it simultaneously brought in a new focus on gender. It promised its viewers potential cash prizes if they could successfully identify photographic fragments depicting partial faces and body parts of the famous, including Charlie Chaplin, Dr. Hugo Eckener, Gerhard Hauptmann, Jack Dempsey, and Benito Mussolini (fig. 6.4).²⁴ This contest is particularly significant as it also implies that—as photomontage developed during the Weimar Republic—an expectation arose in the popular press that certain readers could be expected to recall the identity of a represented person or object from a fragmentary image presented in a photomontage. It thus suggests that during the 1920s Höch might also have assumed that at least some of the viewers of her works would remember the original subjects, meanings, and contexts depicted in the cut-up printed photographs they

"Oh, diese Kinder!"

Die zerschnittenen Bilder.

Unsere Preisaufgabe für die Ferienzeit.

Wer sind die fünf Personen?

Bedingungen zur Preisaufgabe:

1. Die Zeichnung soll die Lösung zeigen, wie die zerschnittenen Bilder zu einer neuen, sinnvollen Gesamtbildung zusammengesetzt werden können.
2. Die Zeichnung soll die Lösung zeigen, wie die zerschnittenen Bilder zu einer neuen, sinnvollen Gesamtbildung zusammengesetzt werden können.

Fig. 6.4. "Oh, These Children!" Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung 34, no. 27 (July 5, 1925): 846.

contained and, furthermore, that they would call on these memories when interpreting them.²⁵

The contest page's layout and strategies of communication are noteworthy. Not only do they reveal a debt to both Dada and constructivist montage, but they are also fairly radical for a mainstream newspaper of the time. The photographic images are ambiguous, sharp-edged, and strangely shaped; two of the largest are pasted in at an angle, and the meaning of the page must be created by connecting elements across three different media: a handwritten title and drawn top image of a little girl holding scissors and a male portrait, the oddly shaped photographic fragments depicting pieces of important male figures, and columns of text anchoring the bottom of the page. In addition, the contest reveals and obscures a central tension subtending the rise of both photomontage and the mass media during the Weimar Republic, namely, the role of the New Woman in mass society.

Although the photomontage contest page depicts a little girl and not a New Woman, the girl could easily be interpreted as a stand-in for the latter figure. This is the case because of the girl's clothing and chin-length haircut with bangs, which evoke the New Woman's frequently girlish appearance, short skirt, and bobbed or pageboy hairstyle. In addition, like the New Woman, the little girl is represented as both the subject and the object of the mass media, and, like the New Woman, she is shown as active, powerful, and even threatening vis-à-vis the New Men whose images she transforms. Read in this way, the contest page communicates contradictory messages. On the one hand, the New Woman is empowered through the images; she is represented as the creator of photomontages, and powerful men are shown to be subject to her ability to cut and splice. On the other hand, she is trivialized through the written text, which characterizes her as "Little Katherine, the daughter of one of our editors," who, while unattended, has "destroyed" the masculine portraits on her father's table and who now requires the BIZ's readership to restore meaning to an assemblage of fragments. Although they have a clear and powerful effect, her actions are suggested to be without thought or purpose. As was also the case with Höch's *The Beautiful Girl*, a female figure is simultaneously represented as both a producer and a depicted subject of the new mass media, potentially powerful but brainless at the same time.

The BIZ's representation of the female photomontagist suggests that with the rise of the mass media women come to define not only themselves but also men in ever more powerful ways. As was suggested by the conjunction of the two photomontages by Höch analyzed earlier, technology

made men and women more interrelated as well as more able to affect one another. The contest seems to acknowledge this new more powerful interrelationship while at the same time partially obscuring the insight through the implied narrative, which blurs the lines between the powerful New Woman whose existence radically destabilizes the traditional patriarchal order and a silly little girl who can still be controlled by masculine discourses and institutions. In addition, the contest further obscures this insight through aspects of its heterogeneous printed form, which identifies the little girl and the expression of paternal condescension with historically earlier forms of representation—namely, drawing and handwriting—as opposed to the modern photography and type, which characterize the masculine sections of the page. Indeed, in the contest's narrative, the New Woman appears to have lost her ability to splice, another sign of patriarchal fears of the New Woman's power to define both herself and others in the age of technological reproducibility.

As indicated by the specific montage strategies and self-reflexive tendencies of her photomontages, Höch responded to the new modes of simultaneous seeing and reading promoted by the illustrated magazines and newspapers, and to some extent she incorporated forms and strategies derived from these new types of print journalism into her art. Contrary to even the most radical examples in the establishment press (such as the *BIZ*'s contests promoting visual literacy), however, Höch used photomontage to encourage her spectators to employ their distracted modes of perception to dismantle the status quo and reveal the hidden political agendas, social ideologies, and "ideal" psychological types that the mass media promulgated. Thus, although Höch was in many ways inspired by the German culture industry, she also remained fundamentally opposed to it, seeking, as she did, to turn the strategies of mass communication and advertising against the mass media itself. As Höch demonstrated through her art, the mass media and new practices of photomontage potentially empowered the New Woman by allowing her to redefine herself and criticize the patriarchal figures that still attempted to dismiss and control her.

Notes

Some of the ideas that inform this essay are treated at greater length in chapter 5 of my book, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

1. Atina Grossmann, "Girlikultur, or Thoroughly Rationalized Female: A New Woman in Germany?" in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, ed.

Judith Friedlander, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 62–80.

2. Hanne Bergius, "Dada Triumphs!" *Dada Berlin, 1917–1923, Artistry of Polarities* (New Haven: G. K. Hall, 2003), 113–88.

3. Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–1923* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 162–63.

4. Maria Makela, "Notes to Plate 9," in Peter Boswell, Maria Makela, Carolyn Lanchner, and Kristin Makhholm, *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 34.

5. *Ibid.*, 35.

6. See László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 106.

7. On Herschel, see Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 27–29, 32, 46–47, 197.

8. Peter Nisbet, "A Cut-Up at the Dada Fair," *Boston Book Review* 4, no. 3 (April 1997), 8–9.

9. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1925, 1928) (New York: Verso, 1990), 184.

10. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 69.

11. *Ibid.*, 79–80.

12. See, for example, Tim N. Gidal, *Modern Photojournalism: Origin and Evolution, 1910–1933* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 5–30; Fred Richin, "Close Witnesses: The Involvement of the Photojournalist," in *A New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 591–611 and in particular 599–600; and Torsten Palmér, *The Weimar Republic Through the Lens of the Press*, ed. Hendrik Neubauer (Cologne: Könemann, 2000), 4–37.

13. See Edlef Köppen, "The Magazine as a Sign of the Times" (1925), Kurt Korff, "The Illustrated Magazine" (1927), and Johannes Molzahn, "Stop Reading! Look!" (1928), all in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 644–45, 646–47, 648–49.

14. Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" (1927), in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 57–58.

15. *Ibid.*, 58.

16. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 238–41, 250.

17. Kurt Korff, "The Illustrated Magazine," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 646–47.

18. "Zeitungs-Flugdienst Berlin-Weimar," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 28, no. 7 (February 16, 1919): 49.

19. "Die Kunst der Moment-Photografie," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 28, no. 33 (August 17, 1919): 318–19.

20. "Interessantes aus dem Reich der Technik," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 28, no. 45 (November 9, 1919): 462–63; "Der Fotograf als Journalist," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 28, no. 50 (December 14, 1919): 522–23; "Die Zeitung als Pionier," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 28, no. 52 (December 28, 1919): 546–47.

21. "Die Welt von Oben Gesehen," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 28, no. 52 (December 28, 1919): 544; "Auflösung unseres Preisräzels aus Nr. 52," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 29, no. 5 (February 1, 1920): 55.

22. Ernst Jünger, "Photography and the 'Second Consciousness,'" excerpt from "On Pain" (1934), in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989), 208.

23. *Ibid.*, 207–8.

24. "O, diese Kinder!" *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 34, no. 27 (July 5, 1925): 846; "Ergebnis unserer Preisaufgabe aus Nr. 27," *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 34, no. 31 (July 31, 1925): 991.

25. After the First International Dada Fair in Berlin in 1920, Höch did not exhibit her photomontages again until the landmark Film and Photo exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929. Although she continued to make photomontages throughout the Weimar Republic (and, indeed, until her death in 1978), she appears to have regarded photomontage as a more private pursuit during most of the Weimar years. Thus the only audience for her photomontages during most of the 1920s was a private one.

7

Acting the Lesbian: *Les Amies* by Germaine Krull

CLARE I. ROGAN

Sometime between 1922 and 1924, Germaine Krull (1897–1985), a young female photographer, decided to create two portfolios of double female nudes in interiors, titled *Akte* (Nudes) and *Les Amies* (Girlfriends). While *Akte* presented the women in flirtatious poses, *Les Amies* reveals overtly sexual lesbian scenes. Produced in Berlin, a center for experimental sexual politics and advocacy for homosexual rights in the interwar years, these photographs reveal one private response to the possibilities of the city. Seizing a role previously allowed only to men, Krull photographed explicit sexual material yet posed her models in ways that curiously frustrate the expectations of the male gaze and of the genre of erotic or pornographic material. The compositions and costumes suggest playful enactments or temporary diversions rather than statements of identity,¹ yet once circulated and viewed by others they risked charges of pornography. Indeed, reproductions of three photographs were ultimately included in the extensive study *Die Erotik in der Photographie* (The Erotic in Photography) (1931–32), where they were reinserted into the dominant discourses on erotic images.

Throughout her life, Krull avidly seized the new professional and personal opportunities available to women, as Kim Sichel has detailed. From 1915 to 1917 or 1918, Krull studied photography at the Munich Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt für Photographie, and by 1918 she had established a studio in Munich. Following the Bavarian socialist revolution of 1918, Krull was expelled from Bavaria in February 1920 for her attempt to smuggle two communists across the border to Austria. From January 1921 to January 1922, she traveled with her husband, Samuel Levit, to the Soviet Union, where she attended the Third World Congress of the Communist International in Moscow. During this time she was jailed twice as an antirevolu-