

2017

Ha Ha Hannah Höch: Beautiful, Dancing, Androgynous Girls, 1919-22

Iman Salty
Scripps College

Recommended Citation

Salty, Iman, "Ha Ha Hannah Höch: Beautiful, Dancing, Androgynous Girls, 1919-22" (2017). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1021.
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**HA HA HANNAH HÖCH: BEAUTIFUL, DANCING, ANDROGYNOUS GIRLS,
1919-22**

by
IMAN SALTY

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF THE ARTS**

**PROFESSOR JULIET KOSS
PROFESSOR FRANCES POHL**

April 21, 2017

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Acknowledgements

My thesis would not be what it is today without the help and support of the extraordinary art history professors at Scripps College and across the Claremont Consortium. I would like to thank Professor Pohl, who, when I was at a loss for a thesis topic during senior seminar, told me to reflect on my favorite art history and helped me arrive to a thesis topic on Hannah Höch, the wonder woman of photomontage. Thank you to Professor Koss for always being an inspiration at our weekly meetings, and encouraging me to explore new ideas as my thesis slowly but surely began to take shape. I would also like to thank my writing tutor, Alyssa, for maintaining an optimistic and uplifting attitude as she helped me improve my writing throughout the process.

Thank you to my mother, for reminding me to stay positive and believe in myself; to my father, for always supporting my academic endeavors and encouraging me to do my best; and to my older brother, for always providing me with that perfect older brother kind of advice whenever I needed it. Finally, to my Scripps community, thank you for an amazing four years filled with intellectual challenges, lifelong friendships, and lasting memories.

Introduction

The most famous photomontage by Berlin Dada artist Hannah Höch, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch* (1919-20), presents a scene of male faces, some politically identifiable and some unrecognizable, cut to various sizes and surrounded by images of technology from the early 20th century (fig. 1). Juxtaposed with the cutouts of these beheaded men are chopped up pictures of women along with various words scattered throughout the work. The images, texts, and clippings are disjointed to the extent that they appear to have been cut with the imprecision of an object as commonplace as a kitchen knife itself.¹ This work is well known for its visually chaotic yet extremely specific approach to criticizing the political, social and economic status of Weimar Germany. The work shows disorder, destruction, reconstruction and creation, all common to the process of photomontage; a practice in which images from newspapers and magazines are ripped apart, and pasted onto a page removing them from original contexts, often prompting a sense of discomfort and disorientation in the viewer.

Höch was first introduced to the medium of photomontage by Raoul Hausmann in 1915, who in 1918 would spearhead the Berlin Dada movement.² This movement grew from a larger international Dada initiative that aimed to use untraditional forms of art, like photomontage, performance and dance, as a means of rejecting societal conventions. Dada originated in Romania in 1916 as a response to the horrors of World War I. From there, this artistic style expanded across Europe and even the United States, holding an international presence in cities

¹ Maud Lavin, "The Berlin Dada Photomontages" in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 23.

² Matthew Biro, "The New Woman as Cyborg" in *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2009), 200.

like Paris, New York, Cologne and Berlin. The movement formulated as an artistic rebellion to the traditional imperial structures of Europe, which Dadaists found to be the cause of the catastrophic Great War. Dadaists desired a change for a better world that they believed could be achieved by dismissing the constraints of a rational society. As a result, it was the Dada mission to create art that was anti-art in its incorporation of performance, language, and everyday objects, that rejected conventional practices of fine art as defined by the world's institutions. Through creating art in this unorthodox fashion, the Dada movement aspired to embrace visual chaos and disorder to undermine the remaining social structures of imperial society. Thus, as a Dada artist active in Berlin, it was Höch's agenda to fulfill the movement's mission of using such visual lawlessness as an expressive and effective tool for creating anarchic art responding to traumas of World War I.

Similar to other Dadaists, Höch was attracted to photomontage for its potential to comment on the social and political conditions of the country through its recycled use of images from media. In 1916 she began working part-time at the *Ullstein Verlag*, a publishing company through which she had access to a multitude of images and photographs.³ By using pictures disseminated in newspapers, magazines and advertisements, Dada artists could tear apart these images and re-contextualize them to fulfill the Dada agenda of wholly rejecting monarchical structures that lingered in the new republic.⁴

Höch was the only female amongst a predominantly male group of artists, and as such experienced discrimination by her Dada peers and even by her partner, Hausmann, whom she was in a relationship with from 1915 through 1922.⁵ Although Höch and Hausmann were living together throughout their relationship, Hausmann was married and had a child. Despite having

³ Ibid.

⁴ Biro, 74.

⁵ Ibid, 199.

substantially contributed to the growth of photomontage in the 20th century, Höch struggled to gain recognition for her work by her male peers.⁶ As stated by Maud Lavin, “Höch’s links to the Dadaists were almost exclusively through Hausmann, and as she was the only woman in the group, she always held a marginal position in the ‘Club.’”⁷ Her contemporaries viewed her as the “good girl” of Berlin Dada, and Höch often provided her male peers with sandwiches, beer and coffee in an effort to help the group’s monetary struggles.⁸ These accounts of discrimination contribute to the power of Höch’s photomontages, which depict a problematic duality in the female experience of this modern era, post-World War I and post-women’s suffrage.

Berlin Dada reflected social, political and economic struggles of Germany after experiencing a debilitating loss in the war. The Weimar Republic was established in 1919 as a solution to government instability. However the new republic was temporary, lasting only until 1933, and failed to ease public concerns for Germany’s future. In a 1958 journal entry, Höch reflected on the widespread hopelessness felt by German citizens: “Berlin’s young people had become politically rebellious and were searching for new intellectual orientation...Dada here was probably above all else a kind of negative eulogy for a form of government and life whose time and past and world view had gone up in flames.”⁹ Berlin Dada was both a criticism of the nation spiraling into a frightening unforeseeable future, and also a coping mechanism that provided artists and the public with a community of activists against the republic.

The Weimar Republic obliterated all hopes of Germany becoming a socialist nation despite undergoing a November Revolution modeled after Russia’s October Revolution; it was

⁶ Biro, 199-200.

⁷ Lavin, 17.

⁸ Mary Allen, “Situating Hannah Maynard: A Comparison with Hannah Höch,” *History of Photography* 33 (June 29, 2009): 242.

⁹ Höch, quoted in Biro, 74.

through this Russia was able to successfully establish itself as socialist.¹⁰ Thus, in Germany the radical left was silenced by stronger efforts of the conservative right. Despite the destruction of the imperial structures of Germany post-War, political figures tied to the empire still held leading positions in new semi-democratic government. Additional controversies around the Weimar Republic revolved around the nation's plummeting economy, which affected Germany's ability to recover after WWI. In addition to economic and political instability, social instability grew out of the new republic, leading the public to question their role and influence as German citizens in this post-war society. Berlin Dada artists were vocal in their political concerns; which was often expressed through incorporating newspapers, magazines and advertisements in Dada art in an effort to politically criticize and satirize current events of the era.

A vocal community during this period of national instability were the women of Germany, who, after achieving suffrage in 1918, still experience gender inequality.¹¹ Many women organized in groups establishing themselves as the *Neue Frau* (New Woman). Throughout the first half of the 20th century in Berlin they fought for significant changes to gender roles as women became increasingly involved in the workforce during and post-World War I, occupying positions previously deemed masculine, like factory work.¹² Women actively established a new identity for themselves in order to successfully integrate in traditionally male-dominated spheres of society. One prominent way women achieved this was through establishing a "modern" image for the new woman, distinguishable by masculine hairstyles like the bob. This image of the modern woman certainly became prominent in Weimar mass media, which on the one hand welcomed women into the business world but on the other hand used the image of the

¹⁰ Biro, 73.

¹¹ Biro, 205.

¹² Katie Sutton, "Which One is the Man?: The Masculinization of Women's Fashions," in *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 2.

modern woman in an idealized manner, undermining their individuality. Working in this period of national transition, Höch's Dada art revealed the problematic structures in Weimar society that perpetuated gender stereotypes, specifically the media. For Matthew Biro, Höch "experienced and represented many of the most important issues affecting the 'new woman' of the Weimar Republic—those woman forging modern roles and new places for themselves in what was in many ways still a very tradition-bound German society."

This thesis focuses on three works created during Höch's Dada years that expose her concern for the modern woman. In each, she highlights the modern woman as a figure constantly objectified by media, rendering women in the Weimar Republic as still defined by traditional gender roles. These three exemplary works, *Das Schöne Mädchen (The Beautiful Girl)* (1919-20), an untitled work from 1920, and *Dada-Tanz* (1922), specifically reveal her examination of female identity and individuality, and its lack in the post-WWI climate of the Weimar Republic. Each collage incorporates images of women torn apart and re-contextualized as part machine and part androgynous bodies, distorting the female form to an absurd extreme. In doing so, these works exemplify Höch's chaotic and satirical approach to rebel against gender stereotypes perpetuated by the Weimar mass media, exposing the idealized image of the independent modern women as ridiculous given the reality of gender inequality. Over the course of these three years a stylistic progression in Dada is apparent, where earlier works are visually more chaotic while later works are compositionally simpler, yet still conceptually complex. Chapter one focuses on *The Beautiful Girl*, a photomontage created early on in Höch's Dada career that is visibly more cluttered than that of her later works. This work includes multiple images of the Weimar woman and provides a playful yet obvious criticism of media and its image of the modern woman as primarily stylish and trendy, less so as independent and individualistic. *The Beautiful Girl* is

extraordinary in its representation of the Weimar woman as unidentifiable through incorporating multiples of similar looking images of the modern woman as fashionable with bobbed hair iconic to the 1920s. Chapter two focuses on an untitled work Höch created in 1920 that directly criticizes the media's glorification of the ideal woman as represented by a celebrity. After a work that broadly represents multiple Weimar women as unidentifiable, this work distorts the body of famous ballerina Claudia Pavlova, denying her as representative of the modern woman. Chapter three focuses on one of her last dada works, *Dada-Tanz*, which evokes a larger discussion of female identity in the political climate of the Weimar Republic. This work is less visually chaotic in composition, yet features two distorted androgynous bodies that contradict any visual expectation tied to the female figure. Together, these three works integrate dismembered bodies, machinery and male-female interactions that satirize and criticize gender dynamics and the struggles of gender identity in the modern Weimar republic.

Höch's photomontages exemplify the paradoxical reality between the image of the *Neue Frau* as presented through mass media, and who this figure was in person. In the words of Biro: "The New Woman of Weimar Society was a figure of both imagination and material reality."¹³ In these photomontages, Höch uses media against itself to expose the duality of the female experience in the modern era. Through her disorienting and perplexing distortion of the female form, Höch playfully reveals the reality of the Weimar woman as tied to gender stereotypes. She places blame on Weimar commercialism for perpetuating these stereotypes that integrated the modern women in public spheres of society only through associations of materiality and consumption. Although the Berlin Dada movement was short lived, lasting only from 1918-22, Höch created a multitude of photomontages that addressed critical issues regarding gender,

¹³ Biro, 115.

sexuality and national identity in Weimar Germany that also reflected her personal understanding of the female experience.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter One: The Beautiful Girl

Hannah Höch's photomontage *Das Schöne Mädchen (The Beautiful Girl)* (1919-20) combines cut-out clippings of bodies, shapes, advertisements and machine parts to create a jumbled image that, given the work's title, can be understood to depict the quintessential beautiful girl (fig. 2). Yet, anyone encountering this photomontage will immediately realize the difficulty in locating the "beautiful girl" within the conglomerate of images presented. It might have been more helpful had Höch titled this work *Female Parts and Car Parts* or *Bodies and Technology*, as the overall impression is of a cluttered mess of advertisements and photographs combining hairstyles, fashion, machine parts, and even grotesque forms of incomplete human figures. Making up much of this clutter are the many logos for the automobile company BMW that layer the background of the work. The repeated use of advertisements frame this concoction of images as a commercial.¹⁵ Beyond this there is no clear, singular, beautiful girl; rather, *The Beautiful Girl* presents many female figural parts that together contradict the implications of the work's title. Höch represents the female body in an absurd, critical and playful way that encourages the viewer to question the role of women and the status of female individuality in the context of modern, industrial Weimar society.

Five separate incomplete female body parts are found in this photomontage, and none of these appears inherently beautiful. One of the first items that stands out is the centrally placed figure: part woman, part machine, and with a light bulb for a head. The viewer is instantly confronted with an incomplete and incomprehensible female form. There is a stark contrast between this mix-and-matched figure's identifiably female body—curvy, and with feminine

¹⁵ Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 87.

clothing—and her unidentifiable head. As Brigid Doherty has argued, women’s fashion in the 1920s drastically changed to expose parts of the female body that had been covered for centuries, such as their legs.¹⁶ The presence of a woman in a revealing swimsuit here exemplifies this revolutionary step in women’s fashion, especially in publicly displaying such clothing in magazines. Although the bathing beauty’s body is obviously female, her head is a light bulb, an object of technological innovation. Her lack of facial features obscures whatever unique traits would distinguish her as an individual, or reveal her personality, reducing her identity to be signified only by her gender. Her light bulb head disrupts the viewer’s expectation, given the work’s title, of seeing an image of a beautiful woman.

The expectation of seeing a “beautiful girl” is countered by images much more sinister and complicated as further visual contradictions become recognizable. The bathing beauty carries a parasol over her shoulder, but her right hand has been cut out, contributing to the image of a partial, incomplete woman. Her arm is raised as if to use her absent hand to fluff her similarly absent hair. Such actions mimic normal human behavior, but essential body parts are absent. Höch thus makes the female form incomplete, a fraction of the whole, leaving the viewer to find ways to make sense of its missing parts. In chopping up the female form, the work renders this incomplete, beautiful girl-like figure unidentifiable. Her commodified object of a head de-feminizes and dehumanizes her, reducing her to an inanimate object on display for the viewer’s gaze. The absence of distinguishable features contributes to an understanding of Höch’s notion of the “beautiful girl” as faceless.

Julie Wosk discusses the symbolism of the light bulb in Dada work more generally by contrasting Francis Picabia’s use of the object with that of Höch. Wosk states how “Picabia’s

¹⁶ Brigid Doherty, “Fashionable Ladies, Dada Dandies,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 1 (Spring, 1995): 46.

machine-women were satirical images of independent-minded women of the modern era,” while Höch’s achieved a different agenda:

[Picabia] produced an image of a young American woman as a spark plug, associating women with new electrical energy and the erotic.... His spark-plug female is both hot and cool, seductive and coy: she gives a short burst of generative power.... Berlin Dada artist Hannah Höch, however, used the light bulb image to create a construction of female identity without Picabia’s coy and erotic edge. The artist in her photcollages presented her own witty investigations of female identity and cultural constructions of female beauty that both embraced and satirized the machine aesthetic of the era.¹⁷

Wosk’s discussion of Höch’s satirical and critical use of the light bulb applies to *The Beautiful Girl*, in which this motif appears in a very unsexy and unsexy way. The light-bulb head is disproportionately large and not at all to the scale of its supporting body, making it appear unrealistic and absurd and cleverly obscuring female identity. The bulb itself is unlit, thus not carrying out its proper function: to bring light to a dark space. Light bulbs typically symbolize ideas, strokes of genius, yet this one appears dull, suggesting emptiness and brainlessness. This woman has a dead light bulb for a head, leaving her recognized and valued for her female form rather than for her intelligence.

The bulb appears yet more absurd when paired with this female figure wearing a bathing suit and holding a parasol. Within the context of these accessories, the bulb can also be interpreted as a source of light and warmth. And yet, the grey and white coloring of the bulb presents this object as turned off, and dead. Thus, merging the bathing beauty with the light bulb

¹⁷ Wosk, 86-7.

into a single image appears both deficient and dysfunctional. Kristin Makhholm describes the photomontages of Höch as a display of “the chaos and combustion of Berlin’s visual culture from a particular female perspective.”¹⁸ Such visual chaos is certainly apparent in Höch’s matching of these two visually unrelated pictures that work to create something wholly new: the image of the unidentifiable machine-woman in the new modern metropolis of Berlin.

If the light bulb were not the first thing to catch the viewer’s eye when looking at this photomontage, then it would have to be the enormous hairstyle that nearly takes up half of the image: a bob, a modern hairstyle worn by many German women in the 1920s. Höch most likely took this clipping from a fashion magazine, a source of commercial culture that signifies mass consumption of this feminine hairstyle. The title of the work suggests that one “beautiful girl” should be readily apparent, and yet this image satirically and critically highlights the notion of the beautiful girl as a generalized and commercialized image of *the* modern woman, with bobbed hair. The partial woman here is once again faceless, leaving her hairstyle as the only indication of her gender and identity. She is unidentifiable, without any way for the viewer to attach recognizable facial features to match her hair. Instead, the only recognizable aspect of this incomplete female is her fashionable hair.

The hair bob signified an aspect of the image of the modern woman. Wearing this shortened, androgynous hairstyle was often considered an act of rebellion against stereotypical ideas of gender roles in Western society. Especially receiving the vote in Germany in 1918, women took on new social roles, contributing to the commercialism of Weimar society.¹⁹ This image of the modern woman was publicized through the less stereotypically feminine hairstyle

¹⁸ Kristin Makhholm, “Strange Beauty: Hannah Höch and the Photomontage,” *The Museum of Modern Art*, no. 24 (Winter-Spring, 1997): 19.

¹⁹ Maud Lavin, “Representing the New Woman,” in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 1.

of the bob. Katie Sutton analyzes the prevalence of this trend and the social effects it had on gender relations in Germany:

One such article from the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* featured a photograph of a young woman with bobbed hair and a neat mustache, accompanied by “horrific news” from an American fashion guru: “Wenn man dem Haar nicht erlaubt, auf dem Kopf zu gedeihen, wird es auf dem Gesicht und dem Körper wachsen. Die Damen werden Schnurrbärte bekommen [When one’s hair doesn’t grow on the head, it will grow on the face and the body. Women will get mustaches].²⁰

Sutton’s example calls attention to the perceived masculinity of trends like bobbed hair that resulted in a backlash against women. This was especially true during a time when, as she puts it, “gender roles and relations were becoming ever less reliant on notions of “difference,” when men and women were working alongside each other.” Höch’s prominent inclusion of this iconic bob forces the viewer to focus on this controversial hairstyle that dominates the left side of the work. Its enormous size calls attention to the popularity of this trend. Yet again, the woman here is faceless, identifiable only by the commercialized fad of the early 1920s. Höch encourages a female defiance of gender norms while also criticizing the commercialism associated with this socially revolutionary effort, again emphasizing individuality, or its lack, in the early 1920s. Despite women receiving the right to vote just a year before Höch created this work, *The Beautiful Girl* conveys the Weimar woman as trapped in a one-dimensional, popularized image that reduces the individuality and capabilities of the modern woman. As stated by Biro, the publicized image of the Weimar woman had a “set of stereotypical images or ‘types’—created

²⁰ Katie Sutton, “From Dandies to Naturburschen: The Gendering of Men’s Fashions in Weimar Germany,” in *Edinburgh German Yearbook 2: Masculinity in German Culture*, ed. Sarah Colvin and Peter Davies (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 140.

by the burgeoning mass media.”²¹ Through Höch’s photomontages, a “fundamentally cyborgian nature,” of the modern woman is exposed.²²

The placement of this hair lines up almost directly with the light bulb connected to the bathing beauty, as if this hair could be visually attached to her to make her more complete. In mentally piecing together this collaged puzzle, it appears as if the large wig-like shape of the bob is meant for the bathing beauty, whose left hand is angled upward reaching to touch her hair. In realizing ways to visually connect seemingly incomplete parts of the work, the viewer sees how this photomontage can be pieced into something whole. As Biro puts it, “Höch’s figure also interacts with its attributes and environment in strange and heterogeneous ways....”²³ These figural parts together create a whole and complete image of the beautiful girl. The placement of the faceless bob appears as if it is the missing head of the bathing beauty positioned below. Regardless, both patterns of facelessness in the bathing beauty and in this bobbed hair signify something missing in the status of female individuality during this early period in the Weimar Republic.

Instead of providing the bobbed head with a traditional face containing a pair of eyes, nose, and mouth, Höch replaces it with the image of a fire extinguisher most likely taken from an advertisement, distinguishable by its red coloring, extended nozzle and hose-like handle. Biro discusses threatening elements in the work like the “circular motifs, which seem to stand as symbols of her desire but also have connotations of danger or menace” as gear-like machine

²¹ Matthew Biro, “Hannah Höch’s New Woman: Photomontage, Distraction, and Visual Literacy in the Weimar Republic,” in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film From the 1870s Through the 1960s*, ed. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 115.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 118.

parts closely frame the female parts in the work.²⁴ In considering this, the presence of a fire extinguisher is an object similarly suggesting danger or an emergency. The fire extinguisher functions when a flame, a pertinent threat, is near. These juxtaposed images do not have an obvious connection to one another; instead, they are rather absurdly combined, another example of Höch's Berlin Dada background coming into play. By nature of its function, the fire extinguisher represents an impending danger; a fire is burning uncontrollably and is in need of being extinguished.²⁵

Höch's placement of this object as part of a reconstructed face of the modern woman could indicate her commentary on female independence in the Weimar Republic as something short-lived. The presence of this fire extinguisher could also represent the reality of the New Woman as a temporary figure existing in the commercial world, and not in reality. This remnant of a female figure is presented, as Maud Lavin describes it, as "part human, part machine, and part commodity."²⁶ Positioning an advertisement as a replacement for a face contradicts the viewer's expectations. Expecting to see the face of a woman to match this hairstyle, the viewer is instead confronted with the unrelated image of a fire extinguisher. Höch's combination of dissimilar images serves to further complicate the viewer's ability to understand and identify this faceless, incomplete female figure.

Moving to the right side of the photomontage, another partial woman undermines the title of this work by merging animal qualities onto the female form. Here Höch is introducing the image of the grotesque, in which human features are distorted in an effort to break and contradict viewers' expectations for the female figure. This section of the photomontage contains a black-and-white image of a woman's face, as if from a photograph as opposed to a magazine or an

²⁴ Ibid, 116.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lavin, 43.

advertisement. Lavin describes the figural discrepancies in this partial woman when compared to other figural parts in the work:

The black-and-white tones of the observer's face are those of a newspaper photograph whereas the rest of the image consists of the brown tints and painted colors of an advertising poster – making the woman “behind the scenes” appear more realistic. The absurdity of the scene provides an ironic distance that is doubled by the presence of a spectator within the montage.²⁷

Lavin's labeling of the black-and-white face as more realistic also implies that this female part is closer to the idealized version of a “beautiful girl” than other incomplete figural parts in the photomontage. Katharina von Ankum even argues that this photograph is “the ‘real woman’ . . . who stares with incredulity at the embodiment of modern femininity.”²⁸

Yet the most realistic looking woman, the only one with a face attached to her, is pushed aside to the upper right corner of the photomontage. Her nearly hidden placement also acts as a position of visual supervision, as she “stares with incredulity” at these other commercialized representations of the modern Weimar woman. This “real woman” is further obscured by her mismatched features, where one of her eyes is replaced with that of a different image, an eye of a cat. This cat eye, in its positioning, resembles the shape of a monocle; a common Dadaist symbol that is also prominent in other works by Höch.²⁹ The purpose of the monocle is to work as a corrective lens, a way to see the world more clearly. Typically worn by men, its inclusion on a woman's face suggests overlap and perhaps tension between the genders, especially as the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Katharina von Ankum, “The Cinematic Engendering of Urban Experience: Walter Ruttmann's Berlin, Die Symphonie Einer Großstadt,” *Colloquia Germanica* 29, no. 3 (1996): 209.

²⁹ Lavin, 43.

modern woman holds a public presence in the traditionally masculine sphere of society.³⁰ This replacement of the eye can thus be representative of a new way of seeing, perhaps a re-imagined vision for the role of the new modern woman in Germany. Although the viewer may find comforting in seeing the more realistic image of a female face, as noted by Lavin, the familiarity of a nearly recognizable figure is disrupted by the inclusion of a cat eye.

The other eye of this figure is partially covered by a circular BMW logo that similarly obscures this woman's facial features, her identity and individuality. At first glance, layers of BMW logos line the edges of the photomontage. However the placement of this particular logo not only prevents the viewer from being able to see the full face of this woman, but also prevents eye contact with her. If this logo were to be removed, her line of vision would line up directly with the viewer's gaze. However, this barrier disrupts the gaze between the viewer and the woman, complicating the viewer's ability to identify this female figure. Furthermore, the woman's hair follows the pattern of the stylish bob that resembles that of the enormous hair to the left of her on the photomontage. This clipping from a photograph is small in comparison to some of the larger elements of this work that grab the viewer's attention early on in this photomontage.

The presence of a face here is especially confusing because of its lack of a body. When trying to imagine what the remaining pieces of this figure could look like, the viewer cannot help but draw a connection to the figural elements in the work's center. The merging of these unrelated elements creates a puzzle; the viewer must re-assemble the parts in order to create a whole, uniform image. The work acts as a visual assembly line, where Höch's montage of partial women requires factory work, or labor, to be done by the viewer in order to piece the whole

³⁰ Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, 3. In Weimar media, women wearing monocles contributed to the stereotyped image of lesbianism through women embracing masculine styles.

image together. This act of labor executed by both Höch, as the creator, and by the viewer, as the receiver, demonstrates the role of production and consumption in the early Weimar Republic. The face of the photographed woman, when combined with the gigantic bob and placed on top the body of the bathing beauty, creates a re-imagined, practically whole female figure. The missing face from that bathing beauty is found in this black-and-white newspaper photograph, and she wears the iconic 1920s bob marking her as a modern woman. Although this certainly does not represent the conventional image of a beautiful girl, these tangled parts convey the similarly ambiguous status of identity experienced by the modern woman in the Weimar Republic.

Below the black-and-white photograph, a part of a human hand can be identified. This body part is different from the other figural elements because of its androgynous features that obscure its gender. This absurdly large hand holds a silver pocket watch as its fingers extends past the edge of the photomontage. The hand branches off from the large bob cutout, and is overlapped against a background of circular BMW logos scattered behind it. It curves elegantly and smoothly over the edges of the photomontage and appears to have soft skin and well-kept nails. And yet, the hand is holding a pocket watch, an object tied to the image of a man and often associated with business or work. This male-female pairing gives the hand an overall androgynous appearance, leaving the viewer unsure as to whom this hand belongs. In noticing how the hand faces the viewer, the viewer can identify this to be the left hand of a person. Looking back to the bathing beauty in the center of this photomontage, it is noticeable that the left hand of this female figural part is absent. In realizing this missing piece, the viewer can imagine how this large androgynous figural part completes the bathing beauty's missing hand. While incredibly disproportionate to the bathing beauty's body, the viewer still can visually

restore it to create a nearly whole female body. And yet, the androgynous, not explicitly feminine features of this hand continue to disrupt the viewer's ability to imagine a whole female figure within this photomontaged clutter.

The image of this watch contributes to the complex relationship between technology and femininity in this photomontage, and acts as a reminder of the changing modern environment of the Weimar Republic post-World War I. As von Ankum notes, "The oversized pocket watch dangling from a male hand suggests that the principle of measured time controls her as well as industrial production and urban circulation."³¹ Von Ankum interprets this hand as male, perhaps because of the masculine role of the pocket watch, and yet its gender is ambiguous especially given the graceful manner with which it holds the pocket watch. The presence of the clock provides a sense of stress and urgency in the work. The photomontage is made up of only images relating to commercialism and consumption, and the pocket watch serves as a timer that "controls" the "industrial production and urban circulation" of these advertisements for the modern Weimar woman.

The circular shape of this pocket watch resembles the overlapping layers of the circular BMW logo behind it. The forms replicate each other to the point where the watch looks like an extension of the repeated logos in the background of the photomontage. Combined with the clock facing outwards, the cluttering of these circular shapes becomes almost hypnotizing to look at.³² Time is ticking by before the viewer's eyes, making the viewer feel rushed, as if he or she is struggling to keep up both in looking at the work and in understanding its context from a fast-paced environment of "industrial production and urban circulation."³³ By juxtaposing time with

³¹ von Ankum, 209.

³² Lavin, 43.

³³ von Ankum, 209.

the logo of the BMW automobile, Höch conveys the relationship between commercialism and modernity as intertwined. Both contribute to the industrial progress of the Weimar Republic, which was especially crucial in Germany's attempt to recover from World War I.

The repeating circular shapes of both the pocket watch and BMW insignias signify the constant, non-stop public exposure to advertisements, to the extent where the passersby are hypnotized by the repetitive logos that dominate magazines, journals, and store windows. Once again, Höch uses an androgynous body part as a means of complicating the viewer's ability to distinguish the individual in this increasingly fast-paced modernized society. The obscuring of gender in this hand implies a larger commentary on male-female relations in Weimar, especially with regard to advertisements and commercialism in this era. Von Ankum identifies some of the crucial aspects of the transformation of gender roles in the workplace in the modern urban city:

Women were everywhere: behind desks in offices and public buildings, behind sales counters and at department stores, on the street on their way to and from work. Even more than the presumed displacement of a more highly paid male work force by less expensive women and machines, the inter mixing of a gender-specific assignment of space defined male experience of modernity.³⁴

Women were increasingly involved in industrial production as cheap laborers displacing their male counterparts, and they are prominent in *The Beautiful Girl*, where nearly every female figural part is connected to machinery or surrounded by it. The Weimar image of the modern woman did not emphasize female individuality at all, and instead highlighted the woman as this ambiguous looking part-woman, part-machine creature. Women embraced what was considered traditionally masculine, both in their fashion and the roles they played in country's economy.

³⁴ Ibid, 211.

Höch highlights the ambiguity of the modern woman by merging technology with forms that resemble the human body, and this is apparent in another figural part that replicates the form of a female leg. On the right side of the photomontage, positioned adjacent to the bathing beauty, is a lever, or a crankshaft that mimics the shape of an extended woman's leg. This figural element is different from the other four female parts because this incomplete form is more recognizable as part machine rather than part-woman. Yet, the viewer can still recognize its long crankshaft as something that resembles a long leg wearing a pair of shoes. This leg-shaft mixture is extended across the lower right of the photomontage and breaks the borders of the background. The leg-shaft calls attention to itself, as if saying it too was part of these many parts contributing to the notion of "the beautiful girl."

This large crank is complemented by a small hook, or bend in the crankshaft that almost takes the shape of a smaller back leg kicking upward as the other juts out. Together, it even appears like these two extensions of the crankshaft are a pair of feminine legs dancing, with the core bolts acting as the hips providing such movement. The placement of the crankshaft frames the bathing beauty as something literally being hugged by technology, and thus presents the woman as an integral part in the function of these machines.³⁵ The size and downward positioning of this lever confronts the viewer directly as if asking the viewer to address it. This leg presents itself as a central component of this montage, to the extent where the viewer is practically forced to engage with it. It extends outward in an inviting and playful manner that encourages the viewer to take hold of it and start cranking it to explore what secret functions it will perform within this conglomerate of a montage. The purpose of a lever or crank is to propel something in another direction, or also to tighten or loosen its connection to another object. In visually cranking the extended leg-shaft, the viewer can begin to imagine how the seemingly

³⁵ von Ankum, 209.

disassembled beautiful girl begins to reassemble itself into a complete whole. Perhaps if the viewer were able to turn this crank in reality then he or she would no longer have to mentally solve how all these jumbled pieces work together. Instead, the puzzle would solve itself right before our eyes.

This crankshaft not only juts out towards the viewer, but also is an overwhelming presence within the photomontage as a whole. It dominates the bathing beauty, and appears about to knock the poised model off of her seat. Or alternatively, instead of a threat of impending danger, it could be that this force will allow the bathing beauty's light bulb head to properly function. In either scenario, Höch once again calls attention to the relationship between the female figure, machinery and technology. If these two clippings were separate from each other, a completely different situation would be before the viewer. However, the close, overlapping and juxtaposition of the bathing beauty and the lever symbolizes the ways in which technology and machinery are tied to the image of the modern woman. Lavin addresses the duality of this relationship as both ominous and integral to the public image of women in this post-World War I era.³⁶ The woman is presented here as a core element in the production and functionality of machinery. The gears connecting the leg shaft are made up of circles of various sizes. These circles mimic those of the BMW insignias dispersed throughout the background of the montage.

Another large circular element that dominates this page is the tire to the left of the bathing beauty. The repeating, overlapping geometric motifs provide a pattern of consistency, complicating what at first seems to be an incredibly inconsistent mix-and-matched montage.³⁷ In trying to imagine the significance of the circle as a symbol, often what comes to mind is the circle of life, the sun, the moon or even the cyclical nature of time. The cycle of time passing is

³⁶ Lavin, 46.

³⁷ Biro, 116.

applicable here with regard to the cyclical systems of machine production, as it becomes an increasingly prominent practice in modern society. Biro also notes that these circular motifs function as “symbols of her desire;” in referring to “her” he is addressing “the beautiful girl.”³⁸ This argument of desire is apparent through the many BMW logos crowding the background of the photomontage. This automobile insignia surrounds nearly every female figural part in this work, suggesting the female as a consumer of commercialism as well. Biro thus calls attention to the image of the modern woman as ultimately superficial, and easily hypnotized by industry. However, von Ankum considers the woman to be an integral part in the cyclical production of industry and urban modernization, thus more than just a figure of consumption. The bathing beauty is hugged by the circular tire to the left of her and the circular gears of the crankshaft to the right of her. Both objects of machinery are nearly the same size as the bathing beauty. Her body is framed by industry thus presenting the image of the bathing beauty, and women in general, as an integral part in both the production and visual consumption of commercialized objects.³⁹ Although the image of the bathing beauty appears to be equally as daunting as her nearby machinery, Biro still considers these circular motifs to be representative of an impending threat.

Extending through the tire is the image of a boxer, who is similarly presented as incomplete through his scratched out face and lack of lower legs to support his body propelling through the tire. Biro identifies this figure as Jack Johnson, the first black American boxer and heavyweight champion, distinguishable by his clothing and noticeably darker skin in the photomontage.⁴⁰ Johnson had a controversial media presence throughout his fame; he was publicly condemned for his interracial sexual relationships with white women. According to

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ von Ankum, 209.

⁴⁰ Biro, 116.

Randy Roberts, “Not only did [Johnson] think that white women were more beautiful; he accepted the other stereotypes—that white women were kinder, gentler, more thoughtful, more loyal, and better companions.”⁴¹ In identifying this male figure as Johnson, his presence and interaction with the bathing beauty perpetuates both racial and gender stereotypes, where Höch highlights the male gaze as contributing to the beautification of the white German women.

However, it is difficult to discern the boxer’s identity for certain, as the figure’s face appears to be blurred or cut out. This is another example of Höch’s tendency to obscure the identifiable features of an individual, even that of a male, making it all the more challenging for the viewer to understand the work. Biro finds that Johnson poses a threat to the bathing beauty because one of his jutting boxing gloves touches her arm.⁴² This body-to-body physical engagement is slight, but also is the only male-female interaction throughout the work. However, this boxer does not appear to be truly dangerous or threatening as the bathing beauty does not even acknowledge his presence. Furthermore, this female figure is much larger than that of her neighboring male body. Julie Nero clarifies the role of sport and athleticism in modern gender dynamics:

...the pugilist represented something essentially male: the genuine hard guy....

Boxing also appealed to German women, both as spectators and as participants.

And as women took up sport, several women artists in Berlin executed works in a variety of media, which explored pugilism from a range of perspectives.⁴³

The interaction of the “pugilist,” or the boxer, and the bathing beauty is rather uneventful, especially for a male figure meant to represent “the genuine hard guy.” Instead the boxer’s jab

⁴¹ Randy Roberts, “White Hopes and White Women,” in *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 73.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Julie Nero, “Engaging Masculinity: Weimar Women Artists and Boxers,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2014): 40.

barely touches the bathing beauty's arm and appears to inflict no pressure or damage. She still sits just as poised balanced on the high beam. There is a lot of playfulness in this interaction, especially when considering Nero's discussion of female involvement in sports. The figures are not engaging aggressively, and instead appear to be passive next to one another.

Despite elements of androgyny in other parts of the photomontage, here there is no confusion as to which figure is which gender. In this male-female interaction, Höch decided to make the bathing beauty larger than the champion boxer, which suggests not only the overlap of gender roles but also the transformation of how women were seen in public life in the Weimar Republic. This well-known boxer who is acknowledged for his strength and physical prowess appears to be similarly de-faced and de-famed, just as all the other female figures in the work. The gender dynamic presented by Höch here is one that breaks convention, and presents both figures as solely recognizable by the role he or she plays in public media, such as that of a boxer or a model.

Given the many incomplete female figural parts making up *The Beautiful Girl*, the singular, quintessential beautiful girl becomes impossible to identify. Instead, she exists as multiple unidentifiable parts, challenging the viewer to identify the beautiful girl through all of these jumbled body parts, machine parts and advertisements. In doing so, Höch implies that all of these elements together create the Weimar woman, who remains unidentifiable among the generalized and popularized image of the modern women in media. Lavin states this photomontage acts as an advertisement in itself, through which the femininity is commercialized as signified by its relationship with technology and media; Biro concludes that the female representations in this conglomerate work to highlight the modern Weimar woman as a

“brainless cyborg.”⁴⁴ Höch’s placement of these female figures highlights women as integral parts in machine function and production. There is a mutual relationship here between technology and womanhood in the early 1920s. The female parts acts as agents for industrial production and consumption. These figures embrace the commercialized image of the modern Weimar woman as someone who tries to stand out in the public sphere of society. Yet, the cyclical nature of media over-advertises this image of the modern women to such an extent that none of the female figures appear special or unique. Their various incomplete elements are displayed as objects available for consumption. As we gaze upon this photomontage and pick apart details and reassemble them with our eyes, we are engaging in a visual consumption of the images at hand.

⁴⁴ Biro, 116-7.

Chapter Two: The Dancing Girl

In a 1978 interview, Hannah Höch declared, “my work did not attempt to glorify the modern woman.... On the contrary, I was concerned more with the suffering woman.”⁴⁵ Höch denies any effort on her part to celebrate the modern woman and instead insists that her attention was focused on the psychological and emotional experiences of this suffering woman, which she formulated explicitly in negative terms. To glorify the modern woman is to glorify the mainstream, commercial image of femininity. Initiating a dialogue around the suffering woman involves an introspective look at womanhood in the Weimar Republic. In differentiating the modern woman from the suffering woman, Höch refers to the duality of female identity in the modern age, acknowledging completely different experiences of femininity in the private and public spheres of society.

Regardless of Höch’s intentions, her photomontages certainly convey a sense of female suffering. The act of creating images out of pictures torn from their contexts requires a process of destruction and renewal. As each scrap of paper, photograph, magazine and newspaper clipping becomes part of a photomontage, the original context of these cutouts are lost. The fragment’s removal from a complete image is an act of visual suffering. Through the action of photomontage and the lasting effect of this visual reconstruction, Höch expresses concern for the ways modernity has the potential to harm women's progress, especially with regard to how technology and media was being used to convey the modern woman as fashionable and trendy in the 1920s. Höch makes it clear that she was not attempting to create art that highlighted a single, generalized idea of modernity. Instead, she conveyed her concern for the “suffering woman”

⁴⁵ Hannah Höch, quoted in Maria Makela, “The Misogynist Machine: Images of Technology in the Work of Hannah Höch,” *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1997), 122.

through a complicated and confusing display of cut and pasted images. While revealing the multifaceted identity of modern women, Höch also reproduces the cyclical nature of the commercial industry. In using pre-existing images from mainstream media sources, Höch consumes these advertisements of the new woman for the purpose of perverting these images. As a result, she produces art that undermines the purpose of these commercial pictures. Höch artistic process is one of consumption and production in itself, exposing the relationship between women and media as easily manipulated, exemplified through her own mutilation of commercial images. It is through this act of visual distortion and of subversion that Höch captures the underlying struggles experienced by the everyday woman, an aspect of modernity personal to Höch as the only woman active in Berlin Dada. Höch's photomontages thus demonstrate the conflicting identity of the new Weimar woman as expressed through combined pictures of female parts, male parts, and machine parts.

In an untitled photomontage from 1920, Höch communicates her personal conflict with the public image of the stylish modern woman (fig. 3). Similar to *The Beautiful Girl*, this work contains an image of the female body surrounded by cut-outs of machinery that complicate and distort the mainstream representation of the modern Weimar woman. Yet, this untitled work presents an even more disorienting display of these jumbled pictures. Dominating the center of the work, both in size and location, is a dancing figure with a female body and an androgynous face, delicately poised on a platform of machine gears. The body is surrounded by markers of domesticity and technology that are flipped upside down and sideways, twisting the viewer's perspective to make it seem as if he or she is looking at this work from a variety of angles. This forces the viewer to approach this work from multiple angles of vision. The photomontage creates the effect of looking simultaneously through a window frame and from an aerial

perspective, pushing the viewer to move around the work in order to make sense of it as a whole. The overall impact of this disorienting display of images of the female body, male body, technology and household objects is one of confusion. In this way, Höch expresses concern and criticism of the commercialized female inconsistent with the reality of the female experience in modern Weimar society.

This untitled work, unlike *The Beautiful Girl*, has only one image of the female body that immediately plays with the viewer's expectations, as this identifiably female figure is contradicted by an androgynous, expressionless face. Other visual conflicts take place in this figural image, where the head and body differ in both color and scale. The photomontage takes familiar images of both the male and female form and places them on the same plane as that of technology. In effect, the human figures are made to have the same status as other representations of machine and household objects in this work. The disorderly placement of machine parts and kitchenware imitate the similarly perplexing display of the female and male body in this work. As a result, the man and woman are presented to be on equal terms as their surrounding objects, which associate the male body with objects of machine technology while connecting the female body to items of domesticity. In presenting gender as equal to these objects, Höch requires the viewer to acknowledge mainstream representation of the sexes, and how it differs from Höch's portrayal of gender as still tied to societal stereotypes.

In the center of the work is a female figure poised like a statue on top of an open box. The body of the figure is taken from a photograph of Russian ballet dancer Claudia Pavlova.⁴⁶ This light-hearted photograph of the dancer is contrasted by an androgynous mask-like cutout

⁴⁶ Kristin Makhholm, "Strange Beauty: Hannah Höch and the Photomontage," *The Museum of Modern Art*, no. 24 (Winter-Spring, 1997): 19. Claudia Pavlova is pictured taking a seaside break from her exhausting dance tour in Germany. Her stance is playful with arms up in the air as she flaunts a shimmery swimsuit.

that replaces the ballerina's face. According to Maria Makela, pictures of Pavlova in the 1920s always included the ballerina's iconic smiling face that was "typical of such photographs, which, without exception, portray only happy modern women."⁴⁷ Höch had access to photographs like these from her job at *Ullstein Verlag*, a German publisher for magazines. Thus, images of celebrities like Pavlova would have been prominent in these media sources. Makela attributes Höch's accessibility to magazine clippings to the artist's background in design, embroidery and fabric patterns that contributed to her work at the *Ullstein* from 1916 to 1926. She also created her own sewing patterns and designs that were used in these publication. During this period Höch's sketches and designs were printed by *Ullstein Verlag* in magazines like *Die Dame*, a women's fashion magazine.⁴⁸ Höch's work thus permitted her with firsthand knowledge of the material and images that her employers found worthy of publication.

Höch's decision to remove Pavlova's iconic smile from her body explicitly destroys the potential for this figure to be seen as the "happy modern woman." She intentionally removes any celebration of the famous ballerina and replaces her face with one that is androgynous and stoic. The stark contrast between Pavlova's playful stance and the serious, even expressionless, face resonates with Höch's conflicting ideas of the modern woman. In analyzing this work, Mary Allen even acknowledges Claudia Pavlova to be representative of *the* "alluring, independent and enfranchised new woman of mass media" because of international fame.⁴⁹ By severing the head off this exemplary modern woman, Höch discredits the media's beautified representation of femininity in the 1920s.

Pavlova's statuesque stance expands across the photomontage with her arms overlapping diagrams of automobile machinery and her feet positioned on the inside of an open box or

⁴⁷ Makela, 117.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 106-7.

⁴⁹ Mary Allen, "Situating Hannah Maynard: A Comparison with Hannah Höch," 242.

briefcase. Supporting her weight in this case is a circular gear that acts as a pedestal for the poised ballerina. Another form of conflict takes place between the dancing figure's cheerful pose and the refined metal gear she stands on. Inside the case is a dark red, velvet interior with the partial words, "Deu," "Waf," and "Muni" visible on the open back, abbreviations of "Deutsch", "Waffen" and "Munitionen," which translate to "German," "Weapons" and "Munitions," all referring to the German military and ammunitions industry.⁵⁰ With this context, the gear-like object appears to hold ammunitions for a weapon of some sort, thus placing the dancing figure in a dangerous and threatening position. The frivolous motion of the dancer highlights her as completely unaware of any impending danger of her surroundings. It even appears as if this machine pedestal is rotating the dancer in a circular motion, revolving her body around these military weapons. Or perhaps the figure itself is the weapon, supported by symbols of war as a reminder of the female role in World War I, where women first become publicly engaged in the workforce. This change in women's roles from the private sphere to the public sphere of society was threatening to men whose jobs were replaced by women during war. In juxtaposing these images, Höch creates another area of conflict where she exposes the woman as vulnerable and as a potential victim of technology and machine industry.

Yet, the serious and even expressionless face attached to the figure makes sense given the context of the situation of impending violence on the dancer's body. This androgynous face is cut out in a shape that resembles a mask, replacing the features of the ballerina, who, as a celebrity, would otherwise be easily identifiable. This separate head is disproportionately large for the dancer's body, and it appears as if its weight could force Pavlova's body to fall backwards. The heaviness of the head also impacts the viewer's experience of the work, where he or she becomes immediately confused by the incongruous body parts attached to the figure.

⁵⁰ Makela, 116.

The seriousness of the face is drastic in comparison to the rest of the body. The severity of her facial expression provides experience of reality that contrasts with the idealized celebrity body. This figural image exposes the duality of the modern female experience, which is shown in this untitled work as both as light-hearted and commercialized yet serious and harsh.

Höch plays with gender roles throughout this photomontage, and especially through her inclusion of the androgynous face that detaches the idea of femininity from the dancing figure. A visual confrontation that takes place between the viewer and this gender-ambiguous head that makes direct eye contact with the viewer. Here, the visual engagement between viewer and image provides a deliberate acknowledgement of gazes inflicted upon female bodies, particularly that of the male gaze. The dancer has the potential to be sexualized in this photomontage as she is shown wearing a revealing silver outfit. Yet her incomplete body that is merged with the androgynous head takes away the opportunity to objectify the female form. Confronting the viewer with this form of gender ambiguity has the effect of discomfort and confusion, offsetting the expectation of seeing a continuation of the dancer's shimmering body. In doing so Höch is deconstructs commercial presentations and conventional perceptions of femininity.

Another unusual aspect of this female figure is the absence of the iconic 1920s hair bob. Instead two scraps of paper are placed halfway across the forehead of the face. These pieces resemble both hair and a graduation cap. The effect of the graduation cap on the figure would serve to further counteract commercial representations of the superficially beautiful modern woman, without acknowledging her talents or education. Yet, Höch's decisive exclusion of hair also removes the superficial markers of femininity that are subject to the male gaze and commentary, as if the figure as a whole is asking the viewer to look at her body while also daring the viewer to make eye contact with the dancer's face. There is a constant identity struggle in

Höch's dancing girl that similarly leaves the viewer struggling to understand the significance of this person.

Höch battles with the media's binary presentation of gender, and further comments on the reality of the experiences of the modern woman through including a male body perpendicular to the dancing girl. Dividing the dancer from the male figure is a row of three diagrams of machine parts. These series of images look like automobile engines that have been flipped sideways to confuse the viewer's perception of the work.⁵¹ Leaning over this diagram is a male figure similarly placed sideways, and therefore appropriately positioned for examining the automobile engine diagrams. The image of this man appears to be from an advertisement in which he is posed with his arm pointing outward while smoking a pipe. In the context of the rest of the photomontage, Höch has positioned this male figure to be leaning across the diagram and pointing at the dancing girl or trying to tickle her.⁵² His hand is pointed directly towards her armpit, which does imply this sense of playfulness while also establishing himself in a position of viewing the dancing girl from a distance. This other notion of frivolousness further establishes the statue-like body of Pavlova to be that of a doll on display to be played with.⁵³

This male-female interaction within the work mimics the experience of the viewer, who gazes at the dancing girl just like her neighboring male cutout. Yet there is something that is much more uncomfortable about this multiple layers of viewing taking place, and that is the fact that as the viewer also witness the male in this work point at the dancer, she is looking directly at the viewer, creating a triangle of gazes. In effect, the viewer is forced to witness and acknowledge the discomfort and bleakness experienced by the woman as she is on display. The

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lora Rempel, "The Anti-Body in Photomontage: Hannah Höch's Woman without Wholeness," *Genders* 19 (June 30, 1994): 148.

dancer is vulnerable in her positioning on the photomontage as her entire figure is exposed to the public. The male body, on the other hand, is hunched over and his much less susceptible to public inspection. The way this male figure is pointing at the dancer as if she is one of the objects on display on his automobile engine diagram epitomizes the reality of gender disparity. With this visual dichotomy between man and woman, Höch represents the same dichotomy and inequality experienced in the modern Weimar Republic. Höch was skeptical of the popularized idea that women's suffrage and women's presence in the workforce would go hand in hand with gender equality. Makela states the extent to which Höch's everyday experiences as an artist contribute to her perspective on modernity in Weimar.

The artist Hannah Höch did not have a full-time job on an assembly line, nor did she have a husband or family at home to care for. Yet in the late 1910s and early 1920s she not only supported herself and her lover with her salary as a handiwork designer, she simultaneously produced prodigious amounts of artwork and maintained her own apartment in Berlin by adhering to a rigorous and exhausting schedule. The recipient of two abortions...she, too, was profoundly affected by Sex Reform and its scientific management of the body. Perhaps not surprisingly, Höch also appears to have been far more sensitive to the phenomena of technology and rationalization than her male colleagues in Berlin. By comparing a select few of Höch's photcollages to works by contemporaneous Berlin artists, I will argue that Höch became aware of the deleterious effects of technology sooner than did most of her male colleagues, and that she then uniquely inflected the debate on the issue in her artwork.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Makela, 106-7.

In discussing Höch's exhaustive work life alongside personal relationships, Makela clarifies how her experiences, as a sole female artist among male peers, largely impacted the artwork she produced. As Höch's work attempts to express her concern for the suffering woman, it is clear that Höch herself experienced suffering in the modern era. Her photomontages effectively expose this dual understanding of modernity as both technologically advanced yet still very behind politically, socially and economically with regard to women's rights.

There is a scientific aspect to the male-female interaction, where the man looks at the dancer as part of his series of automobile engine diagrams. The series of machine parts are spread in a manner that mimics looking at data or records, and the dancer is addressed by the man as if part of that series of data. After all, female engagement in the public sphere of society was new in the 1920s, especially after men were trying to re-insert themselves in positions occupied by women during World War I.⁵⁵ As Makela has argued, "the discursive obsession with female identity was prompted by the sexualization of the public sphere resulting from the entry of large numbers of women into the modern workplace...."⁵⁶ This photomontage presents a female body similarly being objectified as the man in this work is positioned as if he is looking downwards at the dancing figure, perhaps under a lense or microscope because the scale of this interaction is similarly disorienting as the rest of the work. While the female body is identified, the male identity is completely obscured despite the fact that his body is more complete than that of the dancer. His downward facing head and his lack of contact with the viewer establishes this male figure to be outside of the vulnerabilities of a gaze. Instead he is in his own world within the photomontage while smoking a pipe, a symbol of masculinity.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 112.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 3.

The placement of the three diagrams of car engines directly in the middle of the dancer and the male figure, creating a technological divide between the two genders. Makela states, “Höch was unusually aware of the downside of an overly technological society.”⁵⁷ Hannah Höch’s initial playful relationship with technology, as exhibited in *The Beautiful Girl*, is now expressed as deleterious to the modern woman in *Untitled*. The automobile engines are flipped sideways to satisfy the view of the male figure leaning over them while appearing completely upside down to his neighboring female figure. Different sections of the engine are highlighted in each circle of the diagram. These levels of the engine grow upwards to mark large sections of machine. The size of this diagram mimics the size of the dancing body as the two overlap one another side by side. In positioning the woman at a similar height with the engine diagrams, Höch is encouraging the viewer to question the relationship between technology and the modern woman. This intentional juxtaposition highlights Höch’s awareness of the “downside of an overly technological society” and presents the viewer with a visual competition, both in size and location, between the dancer and the diagrams.

Complementing the centrally placed diagrams are symbols of domesticity in the background and on the lower right of the photomontage. A cut out of household objects are pasted upside down on the bottom right of the work. When looking at this photomontage straight on, it is difficult to make sense of both this upside down image and the sideways diagrams. Yet if the viewer was able to observe the work aerially, then he or she could move around the image in order to see parts of it rightside up like this corner section of household objects. The items shown in this cut out include kitchen ware like a pepper mill, a meat grinder, a scale and perhaps a citrus squeezer.⁵⁸ These icons of domesticity are not nearly to the scale as that of its

⁵⁷ Ibid, 121.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 116.

technological counterparts. The inclusion of kitchenware in this work is subtle and almost is lost in the piece compared to the large scale of the female figure, munitions case, and the engine diagrams. Höch's places these household objects in a disorienting way that forces the viewer to move around the work in order to see the items right side up. The presence of these objects in the lower corner of the work serve as a reminder of traditional gender roles, especially with regard to conventional ideas of femininity associated with the household.

In acknowledging the presence of kitchen objects in this work, Mary Allen notes the conflicting identity of the Weimar woman as understood by Höch as both part of technology and modernity, and yet still very much connected to the already established gender norms of society. Even though the upside down placement of these objects is difficult for the viewer visually, it almost seems fitting for the dancer's line of vision. If she were to direct her gaze slightly downward, she would be confronted with these objects of domesticity, which serve as an immediate reminder of the reality of the female experience. The technological objects both supporting the dancing figure and framing her body are a threatening presence compared to that of the kitchen ware pushed aside to the corner. If the figure were instead surrounded by household objects the photomontage as a whole would appear much less precarious and tense. Yet the fact that these familiar household objects are minimized to the corner of the work highlights the home as a place of safety and comfort that is distant from the dangers of industry.

The juxtaposition of markers of domesticity with that of industry clash in this work. Allen situates Höch's conflicting photomontages with that of another artist, Hannah Maynard, in an effort to analyze Höch's subverted depiction of womanhood:

Höch's disenchantment with the contradiction between media representations of women that hailed the newly liberated female and the reality of most women's

constricted lives in Weimar society is palpable. While Maynard clipped portraits to memorialize her subjects in an attempt to prevail in the face of inexorable death, Höch also clipped her female figures out of a sense of loss. In Höch's work, loss was represented as the demise of illusion about the future for women in Weimar culture. Fragmentation of women and the commodification of their sexuality in contemporary society is a theme that reverberates throughout Höch's photomontage of the 1920s...⁵⁹

Allen makes sense of the disorienting combinations of technology and domesticity as representing "a sense of loss" in Höch's female figures. The "disenchantment with the contradiction between media representations of women" is apparent in Höch's severing of the ballerina's head in order to replace it with a disillusioned, androgynous face that counters all commercialized notions of the modern woman. Perhaps the inclusion of kitchenware below the female figure could be a way of resolving this sense of identity loss through presenting objects of familiarity. And in presenting a return to domesticity as a potential option, Höch further exposes the extent of gender inequality present in the modern Weimar Republic.

Just as the household take up the lower portion of the work, its background is made up of fabric designs, laying a literal foundation of domesticity behind the modern woman and behind symbols of technology and industry. The overlapping of images conventionally tied to domesticity with images associated with modernity creates a contradictory division of technologies. The kitchenware and the fabric and sewing patterns are representative of a feminine technology typically used in applied arts. This kind of domestic technology is countered by technology associated with modernity and masculinity, like the munitions case and the automobile engine diagram. As a result, Höch calls attention to media's distinct portrayal of

⁵⁹ Allen, 242-43.

items typically associated with men compared to those associated with women, thus criticizing the gendered nature of technology in the modern age.

Höch had easy access to fabric and sewing patterns because of her job at the *Ullstein Verlag* and she even created some of the fabric designs and sewing patterns displayed in this magazine.⁶⁰ Sewing one's own clothes became representative of the "thrifty" modern woman, especially with the post-war inflation in Germany. The inclusion of traditionally domestic practices of craft, like sewing, discredits the publicized belief that technology, modernity and gender equality go hand in hand with one another. In highlighting the differences of these technologies, Höch not only exposes the faults in modernity, but also expresses her disillusionment with the idea that increased industry will immediately bring gender equality to Weimar society.

The sewing patterns on the background of the work have a dizzying effect on the viewer. At first these lines, arrows, dots and dashes appear to be maps of streets or some landscape. The disorienting effect of the fabric resonates with the similarly disorienting display of sideways and upside down images in the photomontage. These artistic decisions make this untitled work all the more dynamic as a photomontage, and leave the viewer to question and think critically about how to look at the work as a whole. The presentation of this photomontage mimics looking through a window frame in its flat and central display of a single figure. Yet, this work also demands an aerial perspective in order to make visual sense of the twisted orientations of the engine diagram and the kitchenware cutouts. The photomontage would be most accessible if it were positioned on the ground, allowing space for a viewer to walk around all edges and see all visual angles crucial to the experience of the work as a whole.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 117.

In looking at the untitled work aerially, the beetle encroaching on the right edge of the photomontage begins to take on a realistic situation of a bug crawling on a flat surface. The presence of this beetle is perplexing given the themes of gender and technology framing the rest of the photomontage. This black beetle is disproportionately large given the scale of the male figure it is crawling on, making it difficult to discern if this bug is in fact a cut out or truly is photographed as it crawls across the photomontage. The bug contributes something natural and realistic to the overwhelmingly technological and abstract work. In placing this cutout of the beetle on the head of the male figure, Höch diminishes any sense of power or authority that can be associated with him. According to Hannah C. Waara, the beetle, a common motif in Höch's photomontages, represents of the new Weimar woman. "Whereas the majority of the imagery is contained within a consistent margin of the edges of the composition, the beetle's leg touches the very edge of the paper..here Höch challenges the very concept of the New Woman...[and her] conscious placement of the beetle on the outer edges of the composition reflects the New Woman's position on the fringes of society."⁶¹ Waara claims the placement of the beetle over the edges of the composition to be significant of a kind of infringement, both on the work and of the modern Weimar society. She acknowledges the beetle to be symbolic of the new modern woman under the notion that women are similarly infringing on the traditionally male-oriented public sphere of society.

The beetle's presence can also be interpreted as an element of reality literally crawling across all of these complicated, confusing and conflicting ideas of what it means to be a male or female in the modern Weimar world. The beetle contributes both a sense of humor and disgust to the photomontage. It's humorous from the perspective of the dancing girl because it is crawling

⁶¹ Hannah C. Waara, "The Neue Frau and the Significance of Beetle Imagery in the Photomontages of Hannah Höch," in *Discovery: Georgia State Honors College Undergraduate Research Journal 2*, article 6 (June 2014): 7.

on the head of man who is oblivious of its presence. And yet, it is also off-putting to the viewer because it is an invasive creature both in this artwork and in reality. According to Mary Allen, however, the photomontage is “pestered” by the presence of the beetle on the man’s head.⁶² In this sense, Allen understands the beetle to a symbol of reality disrupting the illusion of modernity as a whole. Just as Höch enacts pestering and disruption in the photomontage by severing the head of the female figure, the beetle also contributes to breaking the illusion of the happy modern man and woman. This harmless yet bold disturbance makes these images of familiar objects and figures all the more unfamiliar and complicated. In recognizing the beetle as a symbol of pestering reality, the presence of the beetle on the edges of this photomontage can be interpreted as the suffering Weimar woman lingering behind commercialized ideals of the modern female.

The overall effect of this untitled work is one of constant conflict and contradiction, leaving the viewer perpetually perplexed by the images at hand. As in *The Beautiful Girl*, circles are a motif in this photomontage and further contribute to the disorienting effect of viewing the work. Visually, there are many motions taking place. The munition gears are positioned to seem as if the dancing figure is moving in a circular motion. While this action is taking place, the central diagrams appear dynamic in its levels of progression. These two circular rotations are also working against the patterned backdrop of arrows, lines and dashes that also appear to move in both zigzags and circles. This untitled work is dynamic yet disorienting, and both are effective in encouraging the viewer to explore which images are in conflict with each other in order to make sense of the immediate confusion upon viewing the work. Höch consistently presents the viewer with images that are in conflict with each other. In doing so, she counters viewers’

⁶² Allen, 243.

expectations of the modern woman, and successfully exposes the duality of the female experience in Weimar society.

Chapter 3: The Androgynous Girl

Despite its prominence as an international art movement, Dada had a temporary existence. Höch's last year creating Dada photomontages was 1922, and by this time her work underwent some stylistic changes.⁶³ Höch's photomontages became visibly less chaotic and cluttered. Yet, these works remained equally complicated conceptually. In 1922 Höch created *Dada-Tanz* (Dada Dance), a work that presents two cut-and-pasted figures dancing against a solid yellow background (fig. 4).⁶⁴ These visibly uniform bodies appear as disjointed as the figures in both her untitled work from 1920 and *The Beautiful Girl*, yet the combination of images is new. Where the two previous works display male-female interactions that comment on gender dynamics in modern Weimar society, *Dada-Tanz* exposes the viewer to a male-female combination that fuses the sexes. In doing so, this work re-evaluates the relationship between commercialism and the ideal modern woman.⁶⁵

The practice of merging images together is inherent in the act of photomontage, yet the merging of the female and male body into a single, whole figure immediately disrupts the viewer's ability to interpret the work. *Dada-Tanz*, although relatively simple in composition, is extremely complex conceptually, where the two dancers are distorted in their figural parts and in their gender identities. The left figure wears a long white gown, while having the body of an African male. This dress reveals the man's genitals, exposing him as male despite his feminine attire. The figure on the right similarly wears a dress, but its style is comparatively dated in its decoration. This dancer takes on a more active pose, holding both ends of the dress up and

⁶³ Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), 41.

⁶⁴ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 5th ed. (New York, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 270.

⁶⁵ Chadwick, 271.

exposing large, even masculine looking, dancing legs underneath. The body of this figure appears feminine and yet is contrasted with a cutout of an androgynous face. Together these two figures of indeterminate sexes dance on top of a floor of metal strips. The work is contained in composition and has a simple, undetailed background. The bottom of the photomontage has a cutout of German text that is extremely Dada through its seemingly arbitrary and disorganized connection with the rest of the work.

Both dancers are presented as androgynous, and even grotesque in appearance. The two figures are grotesque because both bodies contain distorted figural parts that are manipulated, making them appear both disturbing and humorous in their unrealistic forms.⁶⁶ An androgynous body is of both genders, containing male parts and female parts. Whitney Chadwick identifies the left figure as that of black man, and yet this masculine body is contradicted by the fact that the figure wears an elegant and feminine gown.⁶⁷ The right figure is similarly complicated in gender, with androgynous body parts and a somewhat feminine face in comparison to the left figure. Together, these dancers of indeterminate sexes appear grotesque in their disjointed figural parts that do not properly match their bodies. As a result, *Dada-Tanz* appears absurd, and it is through such absurdity Höch forces the viewer to address questions of female identity and individuality in the sociopolitical sphere of Weimar society.

The distortions of these bodies are so bizarre that the dance between these figures becomes humorous, complicating the seemingly simple images at hand. Höch's inclusion of race in this androgynous and grotesque photomontage forces the viewer to question stereotypical means of identifying femininity while also stimulating a larger discussion around what it means

⁶⁶ Denise Toussaint, *Dem kolonialen blick begegnen: Identität, Alterität und Postkolonialität in den Fotomontagen von Hannah Höch* (Bielefeld: Kordula Röckenhaus, 2014), 249-250.

⁶⁷ Chadwick, 270.

to live in the modern Weimar as a woman and as a black man, two social groups at odds with the white male figure of authority. In this aspect *Dada-Tanz* is similar to *The Beautiful Girl*, which also had an image of a black man, American boxer Jack Johnson, engaging with a white German woman in the work. The interracial male-female interactions in both works convey a taboo of some sort as two figures containing very different societal stereotypes engage with one another in playful ways.

Höch uses photomontage to bring together two seemingly separate figures of society. Brett M. van Hoesen discusses a connection between these coexisting groups in Weimar society and acknowledges Höch for breaking societal norms in presenting a black man and a German woman in a dance together.

These characters sardonically perform the role of two archetypes associated with the conflict: the “good, German woman – a beacon of society” and the “sexualized, black male savage.” Their taboo dance plays to the day’s inflammatory news stories of willing fraternization between German women and black soldiers. Höch’s work appears to critique the hypocrisies inherent in the Rhineland conflict and pointedly exploits the ridiculousness of scripting fixed personae for Rhenish women and the occupying forces.⁶⁸

By including this political discussion, van Hoesen highlights the black soldier as an unwelcome inhabitant of Germany. In situating the black man with the modern Weimar woman as “two archetypes” of Weimar society, van Hoesen claims a shared experience

⁶⁸ Brett M. van Hoesen, “The Rhineland Controversy and Weimar Postcolonialism,” in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, ed. Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 366-7. In addressing the Rhineland conflict, van Hoesen refers to French colonial soldiers occupying Rhineland, Germany as a result of the Treaty of Versailles after Germany’s defeat in World War I.

in objectification and oppression in Germany. And yet, their interaction taking the form of a dance is “taboo” because it contradicts and threatens separate spheres not only tied to their gender identities as man and woman, but also tied to their race as an outsider and citizen. Höch’s decision to center this photomontage around a light-hearted dance between two social types at odds in Weimar society is a critique of stereotyped perceptions of the German woman as easily wooed and the black man as an uncivilized savage. In joining these identities together in a frivolous dance, Höch rids her photomontage from the conflict tied to these figures, creating a work that almost acts as political propaganda.

As noted by Michael North, Höch had access to mass-produced images through her work at the *Ullstein Verlag*, and thus used pictures and clippings from this popular publisher to re-contextualize them for a critical artistic purpose.⁶⁹ In doing so, Höch contradicts the actual propaganda disseminated in Weimar society through including interracial, and sexual, interactions between two stereotyped communities. Sally Marks discusses the content of these public posters especially with regard to German women and the French colonial soldiers occupying Germany.

As the propagandists deemed it inconceivable that any woman born into German *Kultur* would voluntarily associate with ‘black savages’, all liaisons between such troops and German women were automatically termed rape. There is much evidence to the contrary, however. American and German investigators, male and female respectively, reported that German women were chasing the non-European soldiers, who often complained to their officers of being pestered.... Clearly, some

⁶⁹ Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 137.

German women pursued indigenous troops. German officials admitted this fact privately, although never openly, and many cases of inciting to debauchery by ‘bad women’ were tried in German courts.⁷⁰

Marks reveals the realities behind German women and colonial soldier interactions despite the message promoted by propagandists in the Weimar Republic. Höch’s work acknowledges this willingness on the part of the German woman to engage with the “black savage,” resulting in a photomontage that contradicts gender and racial stereotypes as advertised in public media.

Höch recontextualizes the complex social and racial dynamics of Weimar society by presenting a scene of these two unlikely figures joined together in an image of dance. This dance minimizes the tension between the black man and the white German woman that was prominent in Weimar media. Elza Adamowicz also discusses Höch’s decision to incorporate dance as a means of deconstructing social norms:

Höch removes these images from their ritualistic or ethnographic context, as well from their popularized context (the illustrated journal), to reconfigure and revitalize them in jarring encounters where the ethnographic and the New Woman components, held in tension, cohabit uneasily, thus contrasting with the recuperation and integration of non-European objects within popular German culture (which journals such as *Der Querschnitt* enacted).⁷¹

The tension in this work is not only connected to the confusing display of gender identity, which, at the same time, is lightened through the display of a frivolous dance between two stereotyped

⁷⁰ Sally Marks, “Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience,” *European History Quarterly* 13, Issue 3 (July 1, 1983): 302.

⁷¹ Elza Adamowicz, “Between Museum and Fashion Journal: Hybrid Identities in the Photomontages of Hannah Höch,” in *Dada and Beyond, Volume 1*, ed. Elza Adamowicz and Eric Robertson (New York: Rodopi, 1994), 191.

characters. It is also connected to the concept of the ethnographic, according to Adamowicz, which establishes a power dynamic between western nations involved in colonization and those being colonized. In incorporating colonialism in a discussion of racial and gender identity, Höch uses *Dada-Tanz* to subvert these structures of power established by international politics. She undermines the societal barriers Weimar established between races, particularly white women and black men, through presenting them together in a scene of dance, and through delineating the two figures as similar in their bodily distortions and disfigurements.

Complicating the dancing duo even more is the fact that their androgynous bodies are made up of cut-and-pasted limbs of various sizes, making them grotesque in their bodily disjointedness. The figure on the left appears to be the most visually unsettling, as this identifiably African male body wears an extremely feminine dress with his genitals exposed under the deep cut of the gown. The varying scales in this figure make it appear as if the actual body of this female is not at all to scale of the black body inhabiting her gown. A nearly complete black man's body replaces the space of what would be the woman's head and chest. He is presented as nude despite the length of the gown that nearly matches the height of the photomontage. Höch's inclusion of the black man's genitals, in merging his body with that of a woman's, forces the viewer to address not only the gender, but also the sexuality of this figure.

Although the left figure has visibly male parts, the figure on the right is difficult to discern, as the head of this body is not explicitly feminine or masculine. This dancer contains especially distorted body parts, with two absurdly large legs in heels that become the most pronounced aspects of the whole figure. And yet, the grotesque largeness attributed to these legs appears monstrous and even masculine in comparison to the rest of this body that wears a

feathered hat and “*altmodisch* gown.”⁷² The confusing signs of gender identity in this body, according to Chadwick, serves as “a rejection of conventionalized femininity [that undermines] the commodification of the idealized female body.”⁷³ The overt nudity of the male body in this apparently female figure completely distracts the viewer’s interpretation. The viewer is unable to associate femininity with this body, despite the elegant gown that accentuates the folds and shadows of what he or she expects to be the curves of the female form. Instantly upon seeing this single figure of combined sexes, the viewer is unable to inflict the male gaze on the female parts of the body. As a result, this body is both complex and discomforting in its complete rejection of gender conventions.

This figure’s old-fashioned dress is out of place with the date of this work in the modern era of 1922. This is especially apparent next to the left figure, who wears a stylish, elegant, and revealing white gown, that contrasts the right dancer’s conservative and antiquated attire that further date this body to a different time period. Janet Ward has discussed women’s fashion of during the Weimar years as a symbol of modernity as follows:

The fashion of the 1920s, especially its stylization of the New Woman, was wholly part of the aspirations of Weimar German modernization in general, wherein form and function could be matched in a such a way to bring beauty (nature, sex appeal) and industry (efficiency, commercial profits) together.⁷⁴

Ward describes the fashion of the Weimar woman as modern in its incorporation of sex appeal and commercial success. The sleek and revealing dress worn by the black man is

⁷² van Hoeson, 365. The German word “*altmodisch*” translates to “old-fashioned” in English.

⁷³ Chadwick, 271.

⁷⁴ Janet Ward, “Functionalist Façades: The Reformation of Weimar Architecture,” in *Weimar Surfaces, Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 82.

much more representative of this modern fashion style than that of his dancing partner. In effect, the two figures represent the dress of a modern woman and non-modern woman standing side by side. Höch presents this discrepancy of dress between the two figures in a way that forces the viewer to acknowledge femininity as represented by material items like clothing. The female attire here visually assign a specific gender identity to the two dancers. Furthermore, the antiquated dress seems out of place with the slender and scandalous white gown next to it. The exaggerated flip of this heavily layered conservative dress has a presence in this work that is much more dynamic and lively than that of the other figure. In presenting the old-fashioned figure in this way, Höch is playfully critiquing modern Weimar beauty and fashion standards.

Although the white figure has an ambiguous gender identity, this body seems less masculine than that of the black figure. The white dancer has an androgynous face with features obscured by the black and white shadowing under the feather hat. And yet, because this figure is not blatantly masculine in the same way the left figure is, this body is presented as somewhat more accessible to the viewer through its androgyny. Höch manipulates gender identity in order to counter viewer expectations of womanhood.⁷⁵ By merging unfit body parts to create these two part-male, part-female, androgynous and grotesque figures, Höch prevents the viewer from using conventional means of gender symbols in order to make sense of the work.⁷⁶ The viewer is forced to address the gender ambiguity in these bodies and question the ways society often assigns identity based on an image. Höch expresses the ways material items, like dresses or heels, are arbitrary symbols of gender, and in particular womanhood.

⁷⁵ Chadwick, 270.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The two dancing figures, although similar in their bodily distortions, are presented with different skin colors, which emphasize a distinction between the black colonial soldier and the German woman in Weimar society. The arms and legs of the figure on the left are white and stone-like, while his head and torso are yellowish, almost embodying a more realistic skin tone. And yet, this yellowish skin blends into the similarly colored background of the work, as if his body is meant to be hidden, or should not be seen at all. The man's dancing partner on the right has only white, stone-colored limbs, presenting this androgynous figure as all the more statuesque and inanimate. Van Hoesen sees the figure on the right as clearly female and acknowledges the left figure to be clearly that of a black man, whose dark skin tone, which appears yellow in this work, distinguishes the two bodies as different in racial and perhaps gender identity. Van Hoesen further discusses the visual effect of these discrepancies between the two dancers in *Dada-Tanz*.

The montage plays with recognizable themes of Höch's Weimar vocabulary, including her fascination with dancers and hybrid characters. The scene, set against a backdrop of the French tricolor, stages a dance between two figures. The figure on the far right is a female; her white, mannequin-like face, plumed hat, and *altmodisch* gown ridicule the drama of a society dance, perhaps a waltz. Her partner is a composite: a statuesque female physique with the head, torso, and genitals of a black man. His pronounced blackness overly contrasts with her artificial whiteness; they are an uncanny pair.⁷⁷

This figure does not in fact have black or dark brown skin in the work. The figure's skin instead is yellow, and echoes the background of the photomontage. Without being presented as an

⁷⁷ van Hoesen, 365.

overtly black body, the figure's different skin tone stands out as inconsistent with the rest of his own body and with the other dancer's body. *Dada-Tanz* does not present the black body the same way *The Beautiful Girl* does, but, in a similar effect, the figure's yellow coloration is distinct from the white body. The fact that black figure blends in with the color of the work's background does not diminish the racial identity of the figure, but instead it compositionally complicates it within the context of the rest of the photomontage.

The cyclical forms of machinery is a motif also present in Höch's untitled work and in *The Beautiful Girl*, and yet in *Dada-Tanz* the figures interact with machinery in a way that is not present in the other two photomontages. Contributing to the complex subject matter in *Dada-Tanz* is the fact that both dancers are standing on pieces of metal and machinery, as Höch again includes industry in a discussion of gender identity in the Weimar Republic. The figures' positioning on this unstable ground of sliced metal strands creates a precarious effect. The dancers are fragile in their stances on specific pieces of machinery, placing them at risk of falling. The metal strips are cut in semi-circular strands and overlap each other and resemble gears shifting. Here there are levels of mediation, where the dancers are standing on top of the metal that covers the lower portion of the photomontage. This work, according to Chadwick, "juxtaposes machine parts with a female dancer," and although there is not a merging of machine and human form like in other works, there is some sort of relationship between the two.⁷⁸ The dancers are presented to be at the will of the machinery supporting them below. The metal pieces can control the direction of their movement, or dancing, and even look as if the two figures could be rotating in a circular motion with the curved shapes of metal. Höch incorporates circular machinery in this photomontage in a concentrated way that forces the viewer to understand this

⁷⁸ Chadwick 270

relationship between human and machine as dependent. The figures are in need of support by the metal pieces grounding their feet, and in presenting the viewer with this reliance on industry Höch satirizes the literal emphasis modern society places on industry and mass-production. This photomontage references the widespread use of propaganda to promote modernity that also disseminate stereotyped images of both the African soldier and the German woman.

Below the shards of metal is a line of text that is extremely Dada in it's seemingly arbitrary association with the rest of the the photomontage. Van Hoesen reads this text as, "Der Höllenüberschuß fällt in die Kasse des Pfarrers Klatt für unschuldige Berbrecherkinder [The profit falls into the cashbox of Minister Klatt for the innocent children of criminals]." ⁷⁹ Although seemingly unrelated to the dancing scene, this text is extremely relevant to the sociopolitical commentary Höch is making in *Dada-Tanz*. By including this statement about criminals, it is clear that Höch is ironically referring to the grotesque and androgynous dancers in her work. ⁸⁰ The text subtly shames the fraternization of these two figures representing the modern woman and the colonial black soldier. Höch's text satirizes the widespread propaganda during the Rhineland occupation that stereotyped these two social figures as an unfit, and even ungodly pair. ⁸¹ Once again, through including this text that labels their image as "criminal" Höch contradicts the lack of seriousness displayed in the two dancing figures. This contradiction complicates the subject matter and further forces the viewer to question the role of mass media in modern Weimar society.

Höch presents this photomontage as more than simply cut-and-pasted clippings taken from magazines; it is a performance, through which these two dancers contradict stereotypes

⁷⁹ van Hoesen,

⁸⁰ Toussaint, 250.

⁸¹ Ibid.

perpetuated by media at the time. Lavin acknowledges the theme of dance as an effective tool in Dada practice for re-contextualizing images: “The tribal entered into the equation at times, as in Höch’s *Dada-Tanz* (Dada-Dance), 1922, where an affinity is established between an African man and Dada dance by montaging the man’s head and chest with a dress and dancing legs.”⁸² Lavin attributes dance as a means of creating an “affinity” or a connection between seemingly unrelated images. In *Dada-Tanz*, dance is an effective means of conveying the literal absurdity of social norms, especially those perpetuated in Weimar society. This photomontage performs an unconventional dialogue about identity in the modern era. *Dada-Tanz* contains visual and textual content that is directed towards a sociopolitical agenda. Höch not only forces viewers to re-evaluate gender and racial stereotypes in modern Weimar society, but also asks them to consider such stereotypes as part of larger discussion of the problematic and powerful role of media in Weimar Germany, and its ability to define and confine individuals to a popularized stereotype.

⁸² Maud Lavin, “Hannah Höch’s *From an Ethnographic Museum*,” in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998), 350.

Conclusion

Höch's Dada years marked a revolutionary time in her life where, through photomontage, she could express her concerns for female identity and individuality during the politically, economically and socially unstable years of the Weimar Republic. Through Dada, Höch was introduced to the powerful effects of cut-and-pasting images together to create a new image with a completely different meaning. Höch's early years in photomontage reveal her own experimentation with the medium and its expressionistic qualities. The process of tearing apart published newspapers, magazines and advertisements is in itself an act of defiance against the content of Weimar media that Höch deemed problematic and controversial.

Through photomontages like *The Beautiful Girl*, her untitled work from 1920, and *Dada-Tanz*, Höch examines what it means to be a woman living in the tumultuous post-war years of Germany. Höch achieves this in each work by using media against itself, usurping the original contexts of the images used and transforming them to reveal another side of womanhood unaddressed in mainstream Weimar media. In *The Beautiful Girl* Höch incorporates multiple clippings of the popularized Weimar women and disfigures the female form by merging these bodies with machine parts. Through creating these part machine, part woman figures, Höch encourages the viewer to reevaluate the media's beautified image of the modern woman. Höch's untitled work from 1920 similarly denies celebration of the commercialized modern woman. Through beheading an image of famed ballerina Claudia Pavlova and replacing it with an androgynous face, Höch reveals the media's contradictory depictions of womanhood in an effort to expose the duality of the female experience in modern society. *Dada-Tanz*, in presenting an interracial dance between two androgynous figures, expands this conversation about gender identity to incorporate racial and sexual identity through her contradictory display of images

resembling Weimar propaganda. The inclusion of male-female interactions in each work encourages the viewer to question gender dynamics in Weimar society. Incorporating symbols of technology and domesticity contribute to conversations of gender stereotypes. As a result, it is through these photomontages that Höch reveals the arbitrary associations of gender identity as promoted through commercial media and material consumption.

The overall sensation of each of work is one of confusion, discomfort, and disorientation. It is through this effect that Höch's work powerfully conveys her concern for gender representation in the Weimar years. The viewer is constantly being forced to reevaluate his or her role in observing the work as expectations of femininity are continuously contradicted. Höch's exploration of female identity and individuality reveal the struggles of women living as a marginal member of society, an experience Höch could empathize with as the sole active female artist in Berlin Dada. Through re-contextualizing images of women in newspapers, magazines and advertisements, Höch proposed a duality to the female experience in Weimar society, highlighting the modern woman as still tied to an idealized stereotype and only considered modern through materialistic and commercial associations.

Despite often experiencing sexism by her male Dada peers, Höch substantially contributed to the development of photomontage as an art form both during her involvement with Dada and the years that followed. After the movement's decline in 1922, Höch continued to create photomontages throughout the 20th century, establishing herself as a prominent figure amongst the international network of avant-garde artists. She continued to work at the *Ullstein Verlag* through 1926, using images and texts from this publishing source in her post-Dada photomontages. Throughout the first half of the 20th century she was involved in the International Constructivist movement, associating with other revolutionaries like Kurt

Schwitters and László Moholy-Nagy. From 1926-29 she lived in Holland, increasing her international recognition as an avant-garde artist.⁸³ This was the same year Höch met Til Brugman, whom she was in a lesbian relationship with until 1935. In 1929 she had her first solo exhibition with many more that followed the years after. Supporting herself and Brugman became difficult without consistent work like her job at the Ullstein, resulting in Höch's return to Berlin in 1929. Photomontage post-Dada was no longer recognized as a revolutionary form of political art. Instead, the practice of photomontage was accepted and even commonplace in the international art world by the 1930s. Höch's design work in the '30s was featured worldwide in Germany, Belgium and even in the United states.⁸⁴ These later photomontages, however, were less politically inclined than that of her works from the late 1910s and 1920s. Biro categorizes Höch's post-dada work based on the stylistic changes that took places in her photomontages from 1923 through the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933, dividing her art into a "Portrait" series, an "ethnographic museum" series, and a "love series."⁸⁵

Throughout these later years of her career as an artist, Höch's work expanded to include including influences from international styles like constructivism and primitive art. Höch continued to use photomontage as a medium for commenting on social and political climates throughout these stylistic changes. In doing so, she proved the practice of photomontage to be an all-encompassing artistic medium; it is both a realistic and expressive form of art in its ability to present current events while re-inventing them to create new photomontages that appear otherworldly. Höch's work is powerful in her use of photomontage as a tool for re-imagining reality itself, which is certainly apparent in *The Beautiful Girl*, the untitled work from 1920, and

⁸³ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, 65-66.

⁸⁴ Lavin, 66.

⁸⁵ Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 222.

in *Dada-Tanz*, in which printed images and texts are recontextualized to delineate an unrepresented experience of gender identity.

Appendix: List of Figures

Figure 1. Hannah Höch, *Schnitt Mit Dem Kuchenmesser Dada Durch Die Letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch), 1919-20, Photomontage, 114x90 cm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Image source:



Figure 2. Hannah Höch, *Das Schöne Mädchen* (*The Beautiful Girl*), 1919-20, Photomontage, 35x29 cm. Private Collection. Image source: libraries.arstor.org.



Figure 3. Hannah Höch, *Untitled*, 1920, Photomontage, 14x12'. Morton G. Neumann Family Collection. Image source: libraries.arstor.org.



Figure 4. Hannah Höch, *Dada-Tanz*, 1922, Photomontage, 32x23 cm. Milan, Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection. Image source: libraries.arstor.org.



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