



89 Hannah Höch, *Deutsches Mädchen* (German Girl), 1930, 20.5 × 10.5 cm., photomontage, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

portraits, dancers, & coquettes

the modern woman in höch's photomontages, 1923-35

4

One of Höch's most iconic yet most harrowing photomontages of the post-Dada years is the innocently titled *Deutsches Mädchen* (German Girl), 1930 (fig. 89). In standard portrait format, a young woman's face and neck are seen in three-quarter profile against a forest green background. She wears a string of pearls and a demure smile. Her nose turns up slightly. But she is missing a forehead, and her hair, tied in a bun, comes down to the middle of her nose. Disconcertingly, her eyes do not match; they are different sizes and gaze in different directions. The effect of this photomontage is the opposite of the standard mass media portrait in which the subject is exalted through a focus on the eyes. In portrait photography, female beauty is conventionally denoted by the subject's conformity to social standards of femininity and also through the photographer's compliance with photographic norms of pose and attention. In *Deutsches*

Mädchen, the "normal" representation of the eyes is disrupted and the sanctity of the subject is mocked: she looks idiotic.

The *Deutsches Mädchen*'s hair is cut out from a black-and-white photograph of a traditional Japanese model, and its effect here is to render the German woman also as traditional, or at least not a modern young woman in a Bubikopf. As art historian Annegret Jürgens-Kirchoff has noted, this montage can be seen as a caricature of the image of the traditional German woman.¹ During the Depression years, in fact, old-fashioned representations of German women were suddenly prevalent in the mass media, a revival that coincided with the rise of the political right.

If Höch's scrapbook illustrates the utopianism of her reception of mass media

representations of women, her photomontages of the same period demonstrate a more complex interpretation of public messages about feminine identity. During the 1920s, Höch created scores of photomontages whose compositions mimicked mass media formats, particularly newspaper portraits, photographs of dancers, and close-up reportage photographs. The figures in these photomontages are generally depicted in front of an abstract background, quite unlike the Dada montages filled with explicit references to Weimar society. The largest number of the mass media format photomontages are a part of an open-ended series called "Porträts" that Höch began in 1923 and continued working on until at least 1930.² In these "portraits," Höch focused on allegories of identity, creating composite figures representing a feminine characteristic or "type." In these works Höch used montage to defamiliarize conventional representations of femininity, looking instead for the ambiguities and contradictions of various feminine poses. Although Höch continued to address issues of women and modernity in these photomontages, her concerns were more behavioral and individual; in the portraits, she addressed such topics as flirtation and norms of beauty.

Almost all of Höch's Weimar photomontages included images of women, but she was selective in the aspects of New Women imagery she addressed. Ethnography and androgyny were two subjects she treated in depth (see chapters 5 and 6), but she also gave extensive attention to the uses of the photographic portrait in constructing female identity. Her mass media format photomontages of the 1920s explore an entire repertoire of feminine poses from the everyday to the ceremonial. She employed dolls, mannequins, dancers, and other staples of New Woman imagery to address issues and contexts of feminine behavior, particularly romantic subjects – love, coquetry, and marriage. Only occasionally did Höch set aside female imagery to caricature men.

As with Höch's Dada works, her later Weimar photomontages continued to employ pleasure in the aesthetic aspects of media photographs mixed with an angry critique of certain societal stereotypes. The ambiguous emotional responses elicited by this combination of pleasure and anger are only seemingly explained by irony. When Höch focuses on recomposing and distorting faces, for instance, the disruptions of scale, the lack of fit between disparate features, and the deliberate deformations seem to illustrate the interiorization of the critique, almost as if the disfigurements were actual signs of psychological stress. Yet the montage portraits are too discordant to be taken literally or even as symbols or reflections of particular psychological states, and must be seen in general as allegories of conflict and fragmentation.

In her book *Joyless Streets: Woman and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, film historian Patrice Petro argues persuasively that in popular films of the 1920s and in *Illustrierte* photography, female spectators were often addressed through standard conventions of melodramatic representation: images of excess, exaggeration, and unambiguous iconography. Such staple melodramatic symbols as the exhausted proletarian mother with a heart of gold were reiterated throughout the Weimar years with a deliberate inattention to psychological depth or complexity.

But Petro suggests that the exaggerations of melodrama could also have a positive or critical effect, rendering visible those elements of ordinary life most often ignored, trivialized, or treated as if invisible. The everyday emotions of a woman receiving a letter from her lover or of a mother caring for her child, for example, are typical fodder for melodrama. Thus, at various historical moments melodrama has had a particular appeal to less powerful segments of society, such as women. Not surprisingly, then, when the Weimar *Illustrierte* courted a female audience, they often employed a melodramatic style in the two forms that were their strongest selling points: one was the serialized novel and the other was photography.³

Certain of Höch's portraits refer directly to the melodramatic style in *Illustrierte* photography, particularly in its use of expressive and personalized close-ups of faces. But Höch did not merely appropriate the style. On the contrary, she deconstructed melodrama by magnifying and exaggerating features in her portraits, by introducing ambiguity into the conventional iconography of femininity, and by adding irony to the depiction of emotional states. It is significant that when Höch took up the melodramatic portrait in such works as *Der Melancholiker*, *Kinder*, and *Die Tragödin*, she chose to treat it with a modernist, defamiliarizing irony.

In her photomontages, Höch was similarly ambivalent about photographic reportage. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, serial reportage became prevalent in the *Illustrierte*, engaging stylistic elements of melodrama, narrative, and New Vision photography. Höch occasionally quoted from this reportage format, as in the montages from the "Liebe" (Love) series that focus on flirtations between two figures. These scenes seem excerpted from a narrative but are missing the overt conflicts between individual identity and societal conditions typical of contemporaneous photoessays (or, in a different way, Höch's own Dada photomontages). These later photomontages lack the utopianism typical of Höch's Dada works; many are commentaries rather than calls for change. Yet in other works, such as those that address androgyny, where feminine identity is radically restructured in a way that emphasizes flux and instability, the dialectical nature of montage once again serves utopian ends. This is a somewhat different utopianism, however; it questions the construction and fixity of gender and explores the fluctuant character of identity.

Still other montages, often those with ethnographic subjects, deal with spiritual themes, yet another type of utopianism. *Chinese Girl with Fan*, 1926 (fig. 90), for example, exhibits a sort of mandala over the joyful girl's forehead, like a third eye.⁴ (The circular form is not, in fact, a mandala but a fragment of a handiwork pattern cut to look like one.) The Chinese girl is flanked by two dainty, sepia-colored lace fans; one is held delicately between thumb and finger, emphasizing its tactility. Throughout the composition, various textures evoke touching, equating it with sensuality, the Far East, femininity, and spirituality.

In *Fröhliche Dame* (Happy Lady), c. 1923 (fig. 91), subtitled "'Porträts'" (Tänzerinnen)" ("Portraits" [female dancers]),⁵ Höch combines three photographs of beautiful women within one facial contour. The smooth outline implies a conventional portrait, whereas the smiling lips, made-up eyes, and bejeweled ear are of



90 Hannah Höch, *Chinese Girl with Fan*, 1926, 28 × 20.5 cm., photomontage, Louise R. Noun Collection

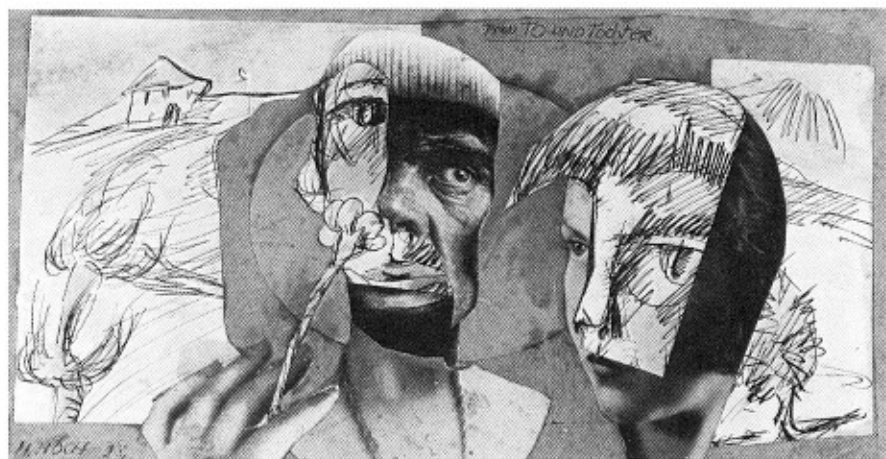


91 Hannah Höch, *Fröhliche Dame* (Happy Lady), 1923, 13 × 11.3 cm., photomontage, private collection

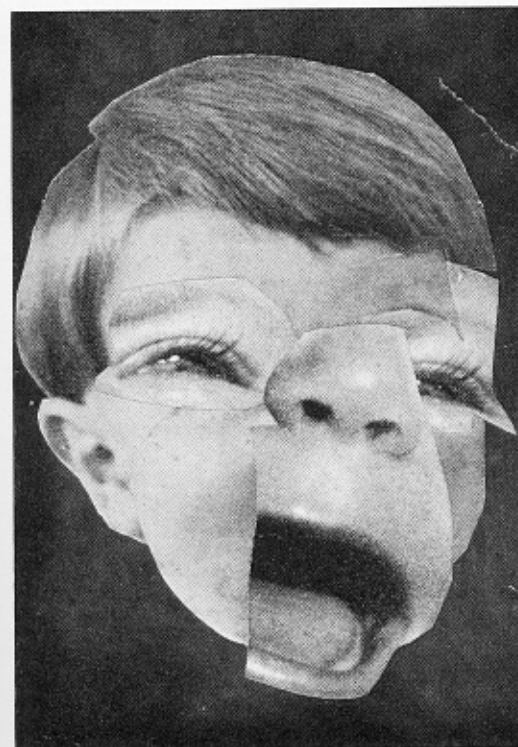
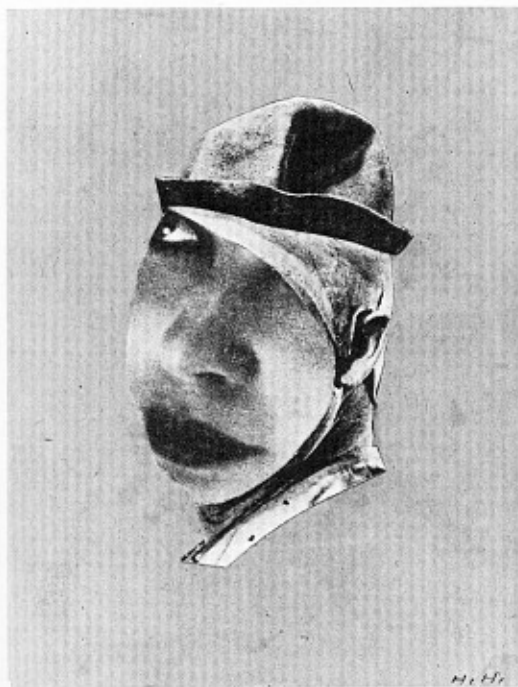
jarringly different scales, disrupting the sense of seamless, classically proportioned beauty. The makeup and large earring identify the subject as a New Woman – according to Höch, a dancer. The cheerfulness of the cut up and reassembled features is disturbing, if ironic.

But Höch was known to manipulate facial features even in works representing actual people she knew. In a portrait of two Parisian acquaintances, *Frau To und Tochter* (Mrs. To and Daughter), 1927 (fig. 92), Höch used drawings and photographs to compose different segments of the faces; curiously, the drawn sections seem calcified, less “real” than the photo fragments. Another caricature of an actual person is *The Clown*, c. 1926 (fig. 93), identified by Höch as a portrait of her companion Til Brugman. Although the composition does not resemble Brugman physically (the photograph it incorporates is not of Brugman), Höch used her well-known wit by putting a rumpled, mannish clown hat over a woman’s face.⁶ The figure looks somewhat pathetic with its tiny hat and oversized face, but the clown guise masks this pathos behind the role of the comedienne.

In *Der Melancholiker* (The Melancholic), 1925 (fig. 94) and *Kinder* (Children), 1925 (fig. 95), the dissection of the faces allegorically represents the fragmentation of personality in different stages of despair. Again, it is the reconfiguring of the eye and its gaze that is most disorienting for the viewer. The child crying is not simply a portrait of a youngster shedding tears but an image of hysteria. The child’s features are enlarged to the point of being grotesque, yet they still fit within the facial contour, suggesting the disfiguring capacity of emotional stress. This representation of deformity, then, contradicts and questions essentialist notions of the child in mass media imagery as merely cute or endearing.⁷ Höch used a similar technique to portray a melancholic male adult.⁸ One eye is cut out completely; the other seems to be partially enlarged (it is overlaid with a larger eye) and looks out at the viewer.



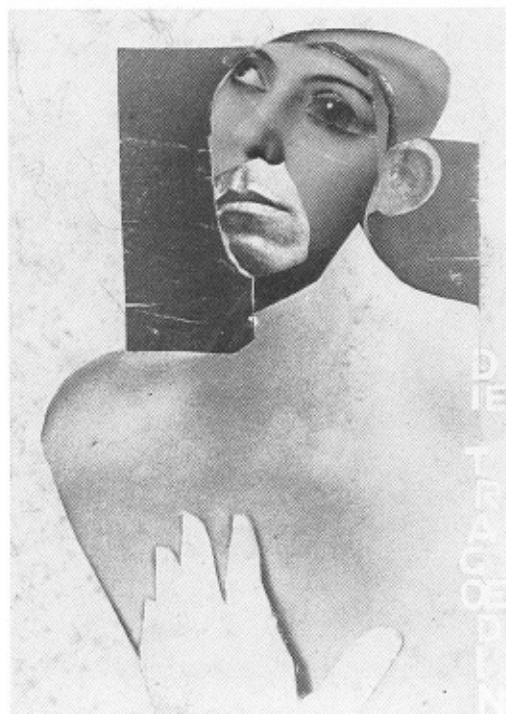
92 Hannah Höch, *Frau To und Tochter* (Mrs. To and Daughter), 1927, 10.3 × 20.1 cm., photomontage, Collection Grete König-Höch



93 Hannah Höch, *Clown*, c. 1926, 12.5 × 9.5 cm., photomontage, Fischer Fine Art, London (*top left*)

94 Hannah Höch, *Der Melancholiker* (The Melancholic), 1925, 16.8 × 13 cm., photomontage, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart (*top right*)

95 Hannah Höch, *Kinder* (Children), 1925, 19.5 × 13.3 cm., photomontage, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart (*bottom*)



96 Hannah Höch, *Die Tragödin* (The Tragedienne), 1924, 16.8 × 12.8 cm., photomontage, Sprengel Museum Hannover

The mouth seems shrunken, covered by a smaller mouth, implying timidity. These portraits reproduce and caricature various media conventions for representing extreme emotions. The melancholic pose is melodramatic in its excess, and Höch has exaggerated it here even further.

Although all the portraits borrow from the photographic portrait close-ups so prevalent in the *Illustrierte*, some are more explicit than others in their references to the media and its standards of attractive appearance. *Die Tragödin* (The Tragedienne), 1924 (fig. 96), is modeled after a modernist film poster; the off-center composition and rectangular background forms echo the Constructivist-influenced modernist poster design then in fashion. And along the right side Höch has placed the melodramatic title in block letters as part of the image. Though designated by the title as female, the tragic figure lacks hair and thus appears somewhat androgynous. She looks upward with one eye; the other eye has been partially replaced by an oversized one so that the white of the eye is almost completely filled in by the large, dark cornea and pupil. A downturned mouth is superimposed over the original. The figure's bust and hand are rendered as silhouettes. It is the darkened eye staring off obliquely, its pupil dilated and unfocused, that gives this portrait its tragic cast.

The proliferation of portraits in Weimar *Illustrierte*, coupled with a deep-seated cultural interest in physiognomy and what it suggested about individual character, tempted several clever photo editors of the time to mix and match facial parts to form different mass media stereotypes. In *Uhu* the assembly line of interchangeable features from "acceptable" faces was both utilized and mocked in a two-part



97 "500 Frauen nach Ihrer Wahl" (500 women of your choice), *Uhu* (May 1929): 76-85. Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin



98 "500 Männer nach Ihrer Wahl" (500 men of your choice), *Uhu* (Aug. 1929): 52-60. Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin

series called "500 Frauen/Männer nach Ihrer Wahl" (500 women/men according to your choice), May and August 1929 (figs. 97, 98). Nine pages of *Uhu* were devoted to full-page, frontal portraits of different male or female "types." The first installment, published in May 1929, was all women; the next, published in August 1929, was all men. These faces were die-cut width-wise into three horizontal strips so the reader could lift the strips and combine them to form his or her perfect mate.⁹ Thus, even in the photomagazines themselves, media stereotypes of gender formation were explored and, at times, parodied.

These mix and match games were echoed in several of Höch's photomontages of the mid-1920s. The cosmetically perfect smile of a man (again similar to what would be found in a contemporary advertisement) is caricatured in *und Schatten* (And Shadows), c. 1925 (fig. 99) by cutting it out of a face, isolating it in the frame, and echoing its outlines with shadows. The media conventions employed in making male athletes heroic are caricatured in *Der Sieger* (The Victor), 1927 (fig. 100), in which Höch montages two facial halves (top and bottom) and a male body to compose a bare-chested man looking into the sky, chin up, with a glint in his eye. *Zweigesichtig* (With Two Faces), c. 1928 (fig. 101) doubles a mannequinlike, artificial face (similar to that found in advertisements of the time – for example, Elizabeth Arden ads in late Weimar) so that they appear on two sides of the same head.¹⁰ One is shadowed, possibly to serve as an illustration of the expression *das zweite Gesicht* (second face) meaning prophetic seeing (as “second sight” does in English).

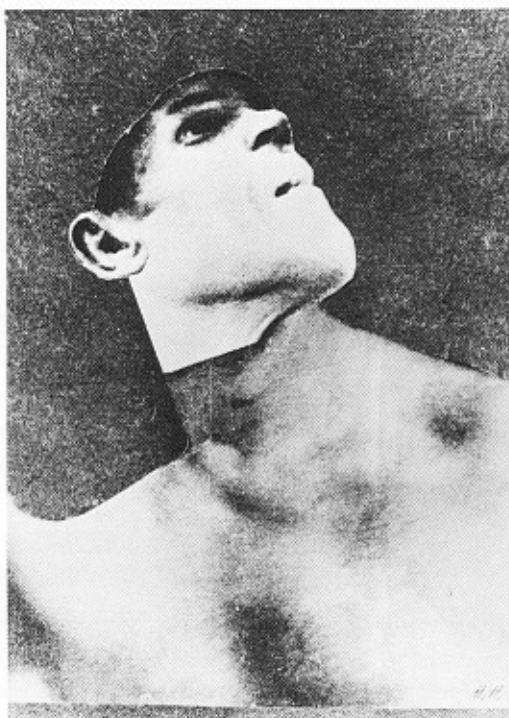
As the circulation of the *Illustrierte* grew (with as much as half of their income derived from advertising revenue), the representation of women – in ads and in feature photography – began to dovetail more and more smoothly with an image of women as rationalized consumers. Women as mannequins, a prominent trope for linking women to the world of mass-produced commodities, began to appear consistently in the *Illustrierte*, in photographs of shop windows in the advertising trade journal *Gebrauchsgraphik*, and in the work of avant-garde photographers.¹¹ Even the clothing fashions of the time tended to make women look like mannequins. In the 1927 film documentary *Berlin, die Symphonie einer Grossstadt* (Berlin, Symphony of a Metropolis), the streets are full of women wearing fashionable bell-shaped hats that cover the upper half of their faces and shade their eyes, effectively transforming these women into eyeless, and implicitly subjectless, automatons.

Within this framework, the representation of women in advertising was crucial and fraught with contradictions. Women were advertising's primary market; in 1932 the trade journal *Gebrauchsgraphik* estimated that 85 percent of all commodities were bought by women.¹² Statistics were similar in the United States, and historians of American advertising have demonstrated the pressures it brought to bear on women by encouraging them to regard themselves as rationalized consumers.¹³ But German advertisements, particularly during the Depression, often portrayed women as idealized mannequins or literally as machine-made commodities (fig. 102), leading one to question how these representations of women both promoted and restricted myths about Weimar Germany's New Woman and to consider what effect this might have had on female viewers.

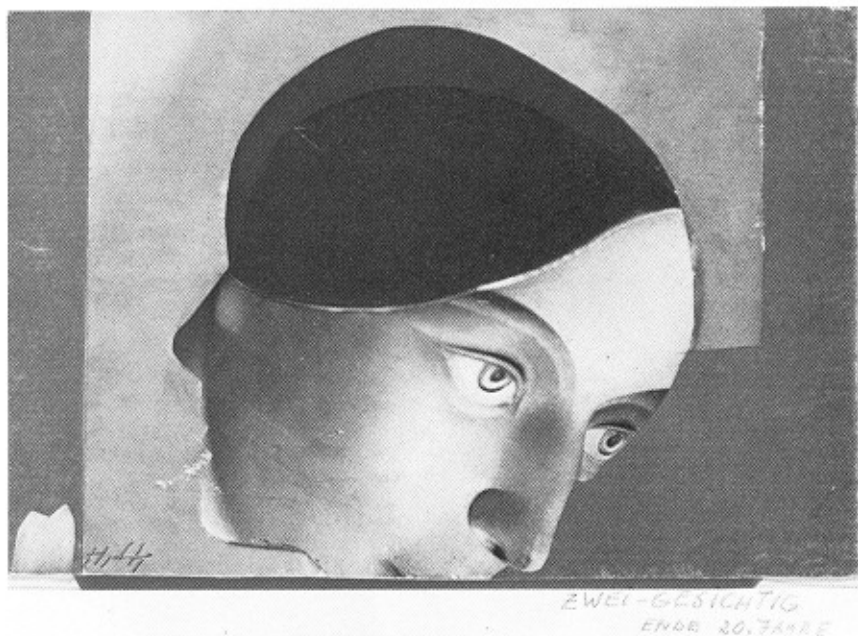
Although advertising sought to attract female consumers, it did not simply generate positive images of women. Rather, advertising images were complex representations of the anxieties and desires concerning new identities for women in Weimar Germany. In beauty product ads, for example, women often were addressed as “empowered” buyers, but only insofar as their consumer function was restricted to purchasing products that would enable them to construct themselves – through makeup, hair-care items, and clothes – as interchangeable products, commodities. The images look perfect, machine-made.



99 Hannah Höch, *Und Schatten* (And Shadows), c. 1925, 14 × 18 cm., photomontage, private collection



100 Hannah Höch, *Der Sieger* (The Victor), 1927, 22.5 × 18 cm., photomontage



101 Hannah Höch, *Zweigesichtig* (With Two Faces), 1927–30, 10.7 × 16.2 cm., photomontage, Collection Marianne Carlberg

Vorliebe für WEISS—
und welches Make-up?

Weiße Kleider sind diesen Sommer besonders in Mode. Sie sagen, daß Sie weiß nicht tragen können — Sie sind zu blaß!

Mit Arden hat Präzision geschaffen, die mit jedem Kleide harmonieren. Sie werden entzückt sein, wie eine kleine Schattierung hier — eine geschickte Bemalung da — Ihre ganze Erscheinung zu Ihrem Vorteil verändert. Weiß und die neuen, lebhaften Farben sind nicht schwer zu tragen, wenn Sie dank ein Make-up ausgeglichen sind, das zu Ihnen gehört, und diese besondere Beratung ist ein Teil jeder Behandlung in Mit Arden Salon.

Erhalten Sie Ihre Haut gesund und klar durch die Elizabeth Arden Toiletten-Präparate. Verlangen Sie unverbindlich die Broschüre „Das Meist der Schönheit“.

- SPEZIELL AUGENWASSER wirkt und erfrischt die Augen.
- KOSMÉTISCHES POUCE das duftende Gesichtsdüfte ergibt.
- PROTECTOR CREAM Ihre ausgeglichenen Gesichtsfarben für den Sommer und für den Abend.
- MAKE-UP ERFRISCHT Ihr Gesicht, erfrischt Ihre Haut, harmonisiert sich mit einem lebhaften Make-up.
- ARDENA POUCE Ihr offenes Gesicht, erfrischt Ihr Gesicht.

ELIZABETH ARDEN
BERLIN W. LENNÉSTRASSE 5
NEW YORK LONDON PARIS ROMA

102 "Vorliebe für Weiss – und welches Make-up?" (Predilection for white – and which makeup?), advertisement for Elizabeth Arden, *Die Dame*, June 1931

Stimmen Sie
Ihren Kopfputz
auf den neuesten
Stand der Mode
an.



Die Frau als Mutter –

Mit welcher Intensität wühlt das Kindes
spielendes Händchen in der Mutter seidenen
Haar. Seine ganze Zärtlichkeit liegt in den
rührend tippischen Bewegungen
Die Mutter von heute bezaubert ihren Kind
nicht zu wehren. Keine Sorge um den leicht
zerstörbaren Zauber einer kunstvollen Coif-
furegelei, die dem Spiel des Kindes Einhalt.
Von keinem modernen Schmuck, läßt sich das
Haar durch wenige Striche des Kammes in
eine korrekte Lage bringen. Es ist natürlich
mit Pixavon gepflegt, Woche um Woche wird
es sorgfältig mit Pixavon gewaschen. Deshalb
hat es nicht nur den herrlichen Fall,
den herrlichen Schimmer, sondern auch
eine leichte Frisierbarkeit. – Zärtliche
Mütter pflegen nicht nur das eigene, sondern
auch des Kindes Haar ständig mit Pixavon.



Erst das geübte Händchen
der Mutter kann die weichen
Locken des Kindes so
schön und leicht mit
Pixavon pflegen. Es ist
natürlich, daß die Mutter
auch ihr eigenes Haar
mit Pixavon pflegt.



PIXAVON
jetzt auch Pixavon-Shampoo!

103 "Die Frau als Mutter" (Woman as mother),
advertisement for Pixavon shampoo, *Berliner Illustrierte
Zeitung*, July 21, 1929

Advertising relied heavily on photography to promote idealization and fetishization.¹⁴ Advertising photography was often heavily retouched, allowing it to connote both art (in its idealization) and document (in its putative objectivity). The tension produced by this ambiguity was often emphasized in page layouts by using a photograph to bridge an artful "lifestyle" scene and a hard-edged image of the machine-made product. In a Pixavon shampoo ad from a 1929 issue of *BIZ* (fig. 103), for example, the photograph of a female consumer (a softly focused, retouched, signed portrait) is placed between the idealized art image (a drawing of the consumer as a mother with her child) and a precision-crafted drawing of the modern product (the shampoo bottle). The implied message to the consumer is that the product is the means to the woman's accession to the ideal.¹⁵ If a woman can achieve perfection by using a product, then according to a certain logic the commodity itself can be considered an ideal for the woman. Disruption of this process, and in particular fragmenting the woman-as-mannequin-as-commodity images, then, was an effective and critical use of photomontage.

Höch returned again and again to images of women as mannequins, dolls, and puppets.¹⁶ These mass-produced versions of the modern female (even of Höch herself) seemed to be the alter ego of the New Woman. During her Dada period, Höch had costumed herself as an avant-garde puppet and had created female Dada dolls (figs. 104, 105). On occasion, men also were parodied in this mechanized state, as in Höch's painting *Er und sein Milieu* (He and his Milieu), 1919. By the mid-twenties,