



104 Hannah Höch with one of her Dada dolls around 1925 (left)

105 Hannah Höch with her Dada dolls in the courtyard of Otto Burchard's art dealership, 1920 (right)

Höch was regularly using doll or mannequin images to comment ironically on the cultural construction of femininity.

One of the most popular dolls marketed during Weimar had a child's face and large, half-moon eyes – an expression filled with innocence, humor, and wonderment (fig. 106).¹⁷ In *Der Meister* (The Master), 1925 (fig. 107), Höch cut out a photograph of this doll's face in such a way as to make its outline smaller and added it to a bust covered with rough clothing. Here the eyes loom too large and the polite smile is missing a corner, creating an ironic and somewhat sinister caricature of the doll's otherwise cheerful and girlish mask. The same doll's face reappears in *Liebe* (Love), c. 1926 (fig. 108), again cut inside its contours, here missing an eye as it looks toward, but not directly at, a male face, which is also glancing outward obliquely. In *Liebe*, Höch mocks the conventional representation of the enraptured state of love with a man and a woman gazing into one another's eyes. This work is from a series that Höch entitled "Liebe"; it also includes *Liebe im Busch* (Love in the Bush), *Kokette I* (Coquette I, fig. 109), *Kokette II* (fig. 110), and possibly related works (fig. 111).

The *Kokette* montages are heavily ironic in the way they dramatize flirtations. But the figures, instead of matinee idol and leading lady types of contemporary films, are weird composites of men, women, and animals. Arranged in dramatic tableaux, *Kokette I*, 1923–25, and *Kokette II*, c. 1925, show figures that are mainly female flirting with figures that are part man, part animal. In *Kokette I*, a woman wearing a



106 "Vier Puppen unserer Zeit" (Four dolls of our times), *Die Woche* 32, no. 49 (Dec. 6, 1930): 1459

mask sits, gesticulating. She is looking down at a figure – part tribal man, part dog's head – that holds out to her some kind of gift. Behind him is a dog with a man's head and scarf. Each of the figures is on its own base or pedestal. Above them crawls a beetle familiar from Höch's Dada works. The man-dog figures seem to be waiting in line for the woman's attention, but each also seems to be on display as a type of mammal as in an ethnographic museum. *Kokette II* shows a laughing child's head on top of the torso of a woman dressed to play sports, hand on hip in a conventional flirting pose. Below, a monkey-faced figure looks up at her. Their gazes do not meet. The monkey's head sits atop the trousered legs that match the woman's torso. Each of these weird tableaux could be a scene from a narrative of coquetry, exaggerating a moment of flirtation, an already overstated pose of femininity.¹⁸

One of Höch's most effective critiques of the woman-as-mannequin representation is *Zerbrochen* (Broken), 1925 (fig. 112), in which she cuts up identical images of a doll's face, and repeats and overlaps the various fragments (each with only one eye) six times within the montage.¹⁹ The face is childlike, chubby-cheeked, large-eyed, and hairless. All the eyes are wide open and lidless, producing the kaleidoscopic effect of six startled eyes. The emphasis on repetition, in addition to its obvious allusion to mass-produced identity, is particularly eerie. The multiple eyes seem to stare out at the viewer, exaggerating the subjectivity of what is, after all, a toy, and transforming the doll into something more human, even vulnerable.

A female spectator of the 1920s might well have read Höch's photomontages of dolls and mannequins as an indictment of the many Weimar media representations of



110 Hannah Höch, *Die Kokette II* (The Coquette II), c. 1925, 13 × 13.4 cm., photomontage, Collection Marianne Carlberg (left)

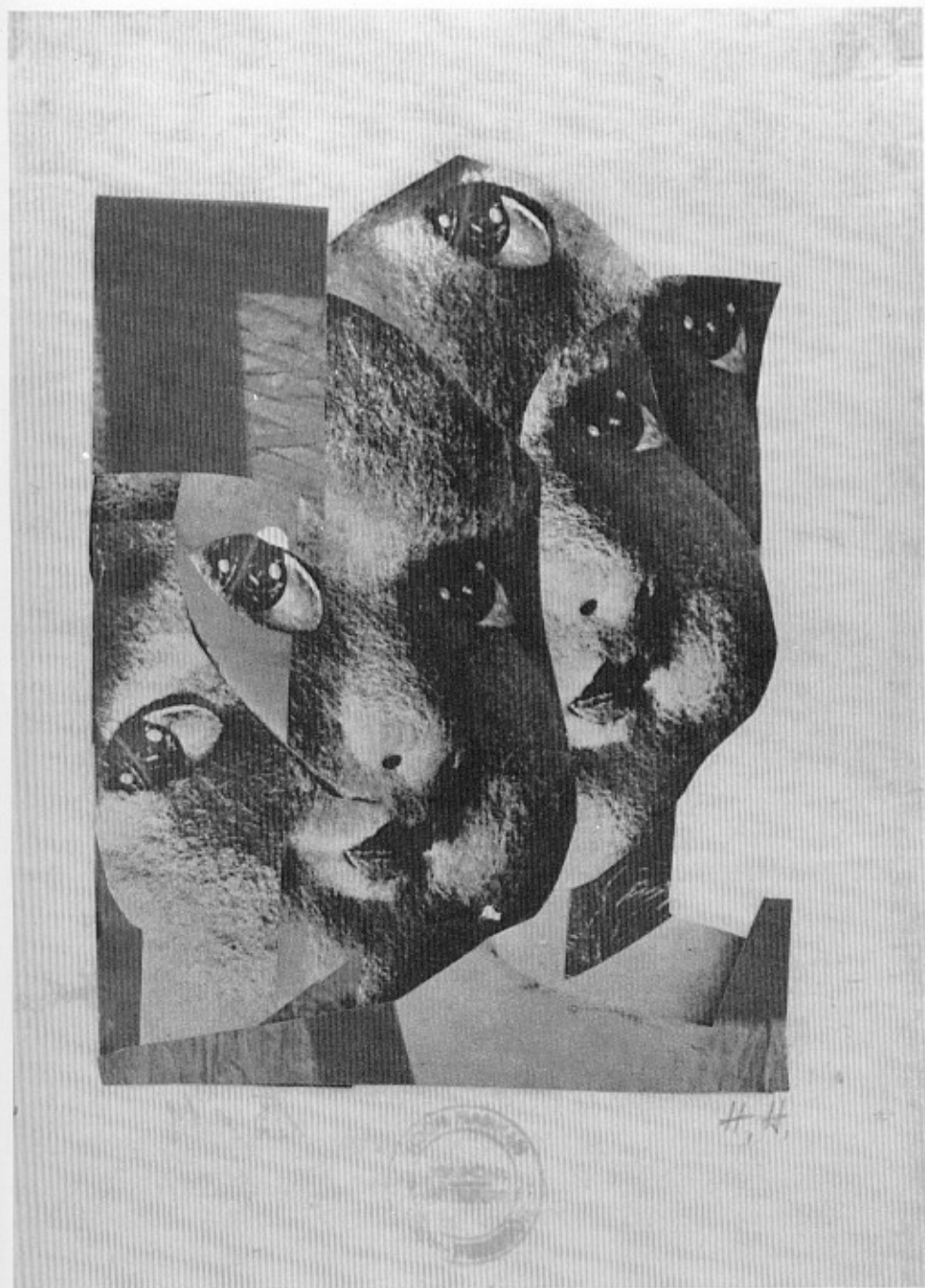


111 Hannah Höch, *Der grosse Schritt* (The Big Step), 1931, 23 × 25 cm., photomontage (right)

women as metaphors for rationalization and mass production.²⁰ Such advertisements were ubiquitous in the Weimar press. A particularly chilling example was published in *BIZ* in 1930, near the height of the Depression, when 14 percent of all German workers (3,076,000 individuals) were unemployed.²¹ This particular ad (fig. 113) is for a facial cream called *Creme Mouson*, and it shows a seemingly infinite progression of almost identical female secretaries, cast in the same pose, bent to the same task, receding into space. Using unsubtle scare tactics, the ad warns that, in order to stand out from the masses and to succeed at her job, the reader must use *Creme Mouson*.²²

But typically, Höch's work mixed humor with her critique of the mannequin status of femininity. In a slightly later work called *Der Schuss* (The Kick), 1935 (fig. 114), a woman's truncated legs appear upended, one a pedestal and one on steps in an ironic treatment of both shoes and body parts as commodities. *Modenschau* (Fashion Show), 1925–35, depicts three identical antique dresses with a different composite face above each. And in *Mit Schleife* (With Bow), also c. 1935 (fig. 115), Höch adorns a mannequin with a large bow, again a parody of fashion.

Both Höch and Brugman shared a sophisticated critique of commodity culture, mixing explicit humor and implicit irony with an anger at its manipulations. Brugman's short story "Schaufensterhypnose" (Shop Window Hypnosis), published in Höch's and Brugman's collaborative book, *Scheingehacktes*, parodies a man afflicted with "commodity sickness." He compulsively buys everything he sees displayed in mass quantities in shop windows. The story is written as his confession: "Oh yes, I bought, I had to buy; instead of being stricken by yellow fever, I had an Americanism for quantity! I could not resist a well-designed shop window! The total weight



112 Hannah Höch, *Zerbrochen* (Broken), 1925, 15.2 × 11.4 cm., photomontage, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Das Land ohne Gummiknüppel

Von Dr. Friedrich Karl Weyer

Mitte des Jahres wird die bei Tübingen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert lebende Dichterin in zwei separate Editionen, die Kultur des eigenen Wortes, wie bereits Einleitungs- und Vorwörter, sowie Gedichte und Übersetzungen, in der ersten Ausgabe erscheint – die zweite soll Mitte des Jahres 2000 bei Tübingen erscheinen. Die beiden sind verbunden mit den Briefwechseln (1900-1910) und dem Nachlass.

[illegible]

Die haben mit zwei hochgeladener Musik Systeme
ganz. Wenn die aus den Musikinstrumenten kommen,
die haben die ganze Musik und ihre Wille die Natur
bringen und geben Menschen mit neuen in Klang
des Lebens ... die die Natur

„Ich frage dich (er) Follies gibt es gar nicht als kleine Mädchen! Ich glaube, ich habe es nicht (er)“

Er ist so. In die kleine Kasse am Theater laufen, hat eine Frau kein Augen für die kleinen, kleinen Mädchen. In die Kasse.

[illegible]

The latter has delivered four sets of Chinese lectures, and at the University here. Guest in Frankfurt, and past in Hamburg, author of the book *Chinese West-Asian Notes*. The last time Chinese lecture, and here at the University of Bonn. His second wife, Mrs. The scholar, Mrs. Hilde.

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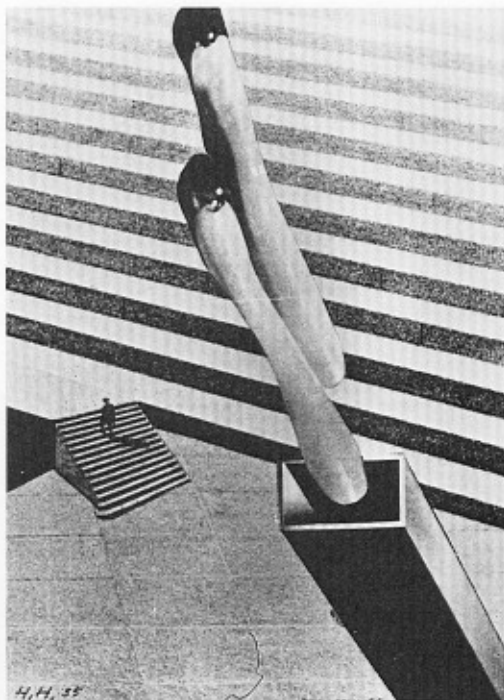
CREME MOUSON

113 "Berufstätige Frauen!" (Working women!), advertisement for Creme Mouson, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 39, no. 2 (1930): 55

of all those ads overwhelmed me!"²³ Finally he runs out of credit, and the stores repossess the merchandise. But he is still overcome with *Schaufensterhypnose*. All the windows seem to scream to him, Buy! Buy!, and he succumbs to kleptomania. The story ends with his incarceration in an insane asylum. Höch's line drawing accompanying the story shows a man surrounded by stacks and towers of mass-produced commodities – mugs, bowls, pots, and vases. His back is to the viewer, hands clasped behind him, as if he is completely absorbed in staring at and longing for the objects.

Höch did not stand outside commodity culture, though, as its critic. Her criticism (and possibly Brugman's) was more self-implicating. Höch's sister Grete König reports that Höch loved fashion magazines, and the scrapbook also shows the pleasure she found in a mass media saturated with commodity culture.²⁴ This ambivalence is in keeping with Höch's use of irony – not merely as a distancing strategy, but instead one that oscillated between distance and self-implication. This shifting is possible because the exercise of irony – saying one thing and meaning another – can keep both positions alive. For the Weimar avant-garde, a simultaneous distance and closeness to mass culture meant to both critique and enjoy it, resist and accommodate it. Cultural historian Peter Sloterdijk has written at length of a type of irony particular to Weimar – an irony based on a sense of one's own full, if rueful, participation in the culture:

In this irony, it is not a subject that has “stayed clean” that reveals itself, who, distanced, above the fronts, the melee, and the tumult, tries to save its integrity. It is rather the irony of a bashed ego who has got caught up in the clockwork (rather like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*)



114 *Der Schuss* (The Kick), 1935, 18 × 23 cm., photomontage (top left)

115 Hannah Höch, *Mit Schleife* (With Bow), 1930–35, 27.5 × 17 cm., Collection Grete König-Höch (top right)

116 Hannah Höch, *Die Sängerin* (Female Singer), 1926, 28.5 × 29 cm., photomontage, Galerie Berinson, Berlin (bottom)

who makes its hands as dirty as the circumstances are and who, in the midst of the goings-on, only takes care to observe alertly what it encounters.²⁵

Thus the light irony applied to the female performer in *Die Sängerin* (The Female Singer), 1926 (fig. 116), (who wears ballet shoes on point, her head bald, and who appears on stage next to a piano with human legs), becomes a more complex and possibly self-directed irony in the pair of portraits from 1928 called *Englische Tänzerin* (English Female Dancer, fig. 117) and *Russische Tänzerin* (Russian Female Dancer, fig. 118).

Many observers have recognized *Englische Tänzerin* as a montage self-portrait,²⁶ and it seems likely (as some have speculated) that *Russische Tänzerin* was meant to represent Brugman. Höch was lithe and wiry, and the English dancer has this aspect of lightness with an elongated face, exotic flowers springing from her head, and feet clad in satin shoes. The Russian dancer appears more stout, with a slightly fuller face, her legs coming out from directly under her head; these characteristics suggest Brugman's general appearance. But the Russian dancer sports a monocle, a sign often associated in Höch's work with Dada, implying that this dancer could be considered as an alternate self-portrait.

The dancing figure in *Englische Tänzerin* is poised on one foot and lists slightly, as if running across stage. Her head is decked with flowers and silhouettes of flowers that seem to be their shadows. Beneath the huge head is a swath of satiny dress material and feet clad in satin high-heeled shoes. Portraying the self as a dancer elicits issues of identity – tensions of movement and control, the balancing of a fragmented self. And, of course, in Höch's iconography the dancer frequently stands for the New Woman, female liberation, and Dada. But the two figures of the English and Russian dancers are almost all head with small dancer's legs, like accoutrements – as if the dancer identity adds fantasy and pleasure to otherwise more staid portraits.²⁷ The Russian dancer is more exotic. Her background is sepia and orange as compared to the blue-green behind the the English dancer. In addition to the monocle, the Russian is decorated with feathers, gauzy material, and flowers. She wears ballet shoes and stands on point. Interestingly, the work was subtitled by Höch *Mein Double* (My Double). Characteristically ambiguous, this "double" could refer either to her lover (Brugman) or to another side of herself.

Whether or not these two montages are intended as portraits of Höch and Brugman, they take up the themes of doubling (the couple, the other as self) in their complementary subjects and poses – the English dancer balances on one foot, the Russian dancer on the other, mirroring her. Allegorically, they reflect each other and they share one identity, the dancer, as if they are two sides of one coin. Tensions existing between individual identity and that of a couple, and between the self and the other, are magically resolved in the shared identity of the dancer. The English dancer photomontage addresses doubling on several formal levels. Her face is composed of two different faces, one laid over the other like a mask, the eyes and mouth of the original showing through. The formal treatment of the flowers on her head also addresses the theme of doubling; at least one silhouette form functions as a shadow, echoing the form of one of the flowers, and the other, a double flower, functions as a double mirror image in that it faces the opposite direction of the flower it seems to reflect. The theme of doubling in dance is also related to the mass ornament where rationalized women replicate each other and share a group identity.

Höch's portrayal of herself and her lover as dancers, each balancing delicately on one foot, suggests a desire for equilibrium. A recurrent theme in Höch's photomontages, equilibrium could imply a harmonious relationship between disparate parts – grace in the midst of instability. In Höch's work, equilibrium is depicted both

metaphorically, as balancing dancers, and literally, as a balancing of fragments. This is especially evident in her photomontage *Equilibre*, 1925 (fig. 119), where a child-dancer balances on the hand of an androgynous man-woman, with a bright and abstract ground of red, yellow, and purple.²⁸ Indeed, this composition may be another allegorical double self-portrait; the dancer could represent Höch, and the androgynous figure, wearing a monocle (the left eye is enlarged as if seen through a monocle) and an earring, could be read as a reference to Höch in her female Dada dandy persona. Yet, the question of the gender of this figure cannot be clearly resolved. In fact, the parted and slicked-back hair could also refer to Hausmann balancing the child-dancer Höch on his hand. But the monocled figure is too audaciously androgynous to be reduced to simply a portrait of Hausmann. The two figures cannot be easily identified – even their genders and ages are ambiguous – and the couple's identity is mysterious, fragile, fragmented, and precariously balanced. Both figures are posed on one end of an inclined plane, one that improbably supports their weight and their complicated balancing system.

For Höch, dance was about equilibrium, the metaphorical implication being that any stability was a fragile and temporary one. As much as Höch derived pleasure from *Illustrierte* images of leaping dancers, in her photomontages she never represented a whole image of a dancer. Thus, even the liberatory myths associated with modern dance were unstable in Höch's representations. Fragmented, ungainly, and unfamiliar, Höch's dancers confounded any identification female viewers might have had with photographs of dancers as ideals.

Related to *Equilibre* is *Ertüchtigung* (Training), also 1925 (fig. 120). The film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (Ways to Strength and Beauty) was also released in 1925, and it was the highpoint of the German craze for gymnastics and *Körperkultur*. Although Höch's scrapbook shows some interest in the nature-loving side of *Körperkultur*, in *Ertüchtigung* the emphasis is on a metaphorical equilibrium more than muscles. Two composite figures are situated on a delicate wooden structure (echoed twice in the background); one has a child's head, the other that of an old man. Instead of the wholeness of the body-as-well-oiled-machine, Höch depicts the body as composed of ill-fitting parts stuck together with a humorous awkwardness.

Even more directly related to the faddish *Körperkultur* is *Die Gymnastiklehrerin* (The Female Gymnastics Teacher), c. 1924 or 1925, now missing. As in the fitness manuals that often included before-and-after images, *Die Gymnastiklehrerin* contrasts two dramatically different images of women. On the left is a silhouette of the ideal, an athletic woman with perfect posture, her chin up, hair in a modern Bubi-kopf, barbells at her feet. Beside her is a stubby figure in an apron (possibly a rural Hausfrau) whose head is that of a male tribal figure. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as a racist allegory of the "progress" of modern woman: the stumpy, neckless woman of premodern culture is contrasted with the heroic female athlete of modern Germany. On the other hand, the two figures could represent an ironic confrontation between the old and the New Woman, with the old as a grotesque caricature and the New Woman a sleek, commodified profile.²⁹



121 Hannah Höch, *Gigolo*, 1931, 38 × 26 cm., photo-montage

In striking such contrasts regarding the changing role of women, Höch criticized conventional standards of gender and courtship (fig. 121). Höch's commentary on marriage, for example, was acerbic throughout the Weimar years. In *Der Traum seines Lebens* (The Dream of his Life), c. 1925 (fig. 122), Höch cut up a series of fashion photographs of a bride and arrayed them throughout a sort of grid composed of overlapping frames. The bride is shown wearing a gorgeous all-white outfit with an elaborate and oversized floral headdress, many layers of sumptuous fabrics, a short hemline, and shoes resembling dancing slippers. A heavy wooden frame, as would be found in a bourgeois home, is repeated across the composition. From within these frames, the figures look out coquettishly at the viewer, performing for the male gaze, constructing his "dream." At times the frames separate body parts – a head from a torso, feet from legs. The bridal outfit becomes a costume, transforming the woman into an object for display within the frames. And the ironic title suggests the anger behind Höch's repetition and emphasis of this masquerade of the overly flower-decked bride. *The Dream of his Life*, his bride, is defined by fashion, photography, and domestic display, her behavioral response reduced to that of the coquette. Typical of Höch's work, even in this sharp and explicit critique the woman (and correspondingly the female viewer) seems to be enjoying herself, playing with her image, her pose, her gaze, the camera's point of view, the frame, her clothing, and her body.³⁰

In late Weimar, Höch created a companion piece to her earlier Dada parody of an urban bourgeois bridal couple, *Bürgerliche Brautpaar*, 1919. This was *Bäuerliches Brautpaar* (Peasant Wedding Couple), 1931 (fig. 123).³¹ At the top of the composition is a schematized farm landscape of cows and a barn; two disembodied arms hold

a large milk canister. In the foreground is the couple: the man consists solely of a black man's face with his eyes half-closed, a hat, and leather boots; the woman is composed of blond hair in braids draped over a wild boar's face, and a child's socks and shoes. This broad caricature carries racist overtones. Whereas in other works Höch incorporates African faces and bodies in respectful, if somewhat voyeuristic ways, here the man's sleepy face paired with the unattractive animal face suggests a racist lampooning of the couple. The rural characters are also presented as buffoons in Höch's *Die ewigen Schuhplattler* (The Eternal Schuhplattler [a Bavarian folk dance]), c. 1927 (fig. 124), but here the humor is milder and the figures are merely infantilized. This montage gives a playful jab to New Vision photography as well: one figure kicks out so that his shoe looms extremely large in the foreground, the sole parallel to the picture plane; the other thrusts his hands forward, and these too are magnified. Both dancers are constructed as if photographed from below to emphasize their legs.

In other works Höch explores race more sensitively. In yet another bridal allusion, the photomontage *Die Braut* (The Bride), c. 1933 (fig. 125), she combines a white woman's neck and shoulders with another white woman's large lips, and a non-Caucasian, possibly Polynesian, face. Lace seems to stream from the figure's head, like a bridal veil. The pattern is echoed in the background. The facial features are tightly fit together so that the viewer oscillates between the two parts, unable to define the woman's race clearly. And in *Der Mischling* (Half-Breed), 1924 (fig. 126), Höch took a black-and-white photograph of a beautiful and dignified African woman's head (that was also included on page 58 of the scrapbook), cut off her hair, and replaced her mouth with a white woman's small, red-lipsticked, Cupid's bow mouth. The result is a somewhat androgynous African figure intruded upon by what appears in this context to be silly and less mature. Again this creates an oscillating effect: the viewer cannot reconcile the features associated with the different races and cultures in one face.

Two slightly later works, *Priesterin* (Priestess), 1930–34 (fig. 127), and *Platonische Liebe* (Platonic Love), c. 1930 (fig. 128), use montage to establish homologies between primitivism, sensual landscapes, and the female body, together forming an intricate allegory of feminine spirituality. In *Priesterin*, a curling motif repeats in shadows, in the headdress, and in the curves of the female priest's arms and hands. She sits with eyes closed and arms held out expressively. Her fingertips reach out and only one thumb and one finger touch. It is as if she is tracing the alternations of light and dark patterned throughout the scene. The foreground is dominated by two burning candles and curvaceous shadows. In this moving and sensual montage, there is a subtle interplay between touch and sight.

In *Platonic Love*, a nude, headless female figure, which Höch made thin by cutting inside its contours, drifts above a nocturnal, dunelike landscape. The dark sky is filled with stars. A disembodied female head shoots upward across the sky like a comet. An arm, related by skintone to the bodiless head, holds hands with the headless body. Despite this strange and ethereal joining of the two women, there is a



125 Hannah Höch, *Die Braut* (The Bride), c. 1933, 20 × 19.7 cm., photomontage, Thomas Walther, New York

palpable sensuality established between the female form and a smooth, earthly landscape. Part of the landscape even resembles the curve of the body. And the parts of the two female figures taken together would form one whole body. This again raises questions of dividing or doubling the self and of viewing the self as other. Perhaps it is significant that both *Platonische Liebe* and *Priesterin* were created during Höch's lesbian affair with Brugman, a relationship that Höch chose to characterize to her sister in spiritual terms, using a rhetorical convention common to lesbian writing in early twentieth-century Germany.³²

In her allegorical portraits of femininity, Höch often created ambiguous combinations of genders, races, ages, and poses. Although at times Höch used her photomontages to create harsh critiques of such culturally based gender constructions as the woman-as-mannequin or woman-as-bride, she was sharply critical of the way these conventions of femininity were perpetuated in the mass media. Höch used

what Sloterdijk has described as a particular Weimar form of irony, to deconstruct the mass media's conscriptive definitions of femininity – the bride, the coquette – particularly as these stereotypes were reinforced through new photographic mass culture forms. Yet, in her witty repetition and recomposition of media imagery, Höch also conveys her own pleasure in the mass media, combining affirmation with negative critique.

Despite Höch's evident enjoyment of the media's expansion of the visual menu and her own control over and recomposition of these new possibilities, she demonstrated great ambivalence in her photomontages when representing the female gaze. By interrupting the unified gaze of her female figures and reconfiguring the eyes, she both drew attention to vision and problematized its representation.³³ Instead of identifying the female viewer with a focused and controlling gaze, Höch developed a subjective position that is frustrated and disoriented. Through the dismantling of modernist, "objective" vision, with its associations of subjecthood and intelligence, Höch gives a sense of the female viewer as a disrupted self. Yet even Höch's most disconcerting portraits are treated with ironic wit, both eliciting and disrupting empathy. For female viewers, Höch's ironic and disturbing portraits serve as a reminder that humor is often a mask for anger.