Dada, the Montage, and the Press: Catchphrase and Cliché as Basic Twentieth-Century principles

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Translated from the German by Roy F. Allen

1. The Shift in Perception

AS **PRACTITIONERS** of avant-garde simultaneity, the Dadas used the mass media of their time as a significant element in their artistic work and as a platform from which they sought to rupture the framework of traditional art (fig. 6.1 and fig. 6.2). The Dadas not only integrated actual material from the media into their montages, but also made the media itself, the material of the grotesque game they played with reality. They were reacting in this way to the new daily consumption of the mass media and the fragmented information offered by the latter.[1]

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1. Hanne Bergius, "The Ambiguous Aesthetic of Dada: Towards a Definition of its Categories," in *European Studies* 4 (1979); Karen Füllner, *Dada Berlin in Zeitungen: Gedächtnisfeiern und Skandale*, special issue of MuK 43 (Siegen: Gesamthochschule Siegen, 1986); Hanne Berguis, "Die Manifestationen," in *Das Lachen Dadas: Die Berliner Dadaisten und ihre Aktionen* (Giessen: Anabas, 1989); Richard Sheppard, *Dada Zürich in Zeitungen: Cabarets Ausstellungen, Berichte und Bluffs*, special issue of MuK 82/83 (Siegen: Gesamthochschule Siegen, 1992).

In magazines and newspapers, in industrial and fashion catalogues, we encountered a form of predetermined perception that had repercussions for the Dada montage—since the nature of the latter was defined not only by the original material, but also by the interpretation and readability of the media. The Dadas critically condensed the flood of pictures and fragments of information from illustrateds into the montage, which takes to task in particular, the leveling tendency of expression in the media. It opposes the effects of the media industry that has retained its unaltered validity.

Daily newspapers, in particular the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* (sic) (Berlin illustrated newspaper), and catalogues had an instrumental influence on the montage. The heterogeneity of the contents of the montage was the result of the news photograph as a form of the mechanical reproduction of reality, and the headline and the catchphrases as pre-prepared political- linguistic products. The Dadas were interested in the very capacity for influence and factuality of photographic reproduction in illustrateds and the headlines of daily newspapers because they took into account in equal measure, suppression, alienation, and distortion. Use of the material in creating montages thus also meant coming to terms with the resistance and intractability of the material (fig 6.3).[2]

1.1 The Press and Montage Material

In the creation of montages out of news photographs, the Dadas formed ties to a medium that, alongside the film, was the most modern of their time. In contrast to Max Ernst, who primarily used the anachronism of the engraving as a means of alienation and seldom resorted to the construction of montages out of photographs,[3] the Berlin Dadas began by consciously not distancing themselves from their metropolitan surroundings through the use of news photography and carried out their diagnosis of the times directly on the minds of their contemporaries.

Wieland Herzfelde programmatically declared in the introduction to the catalogue for the "Erste Internationale Dada-Messe": "The Dadaists acknowledge as their sole program the duty to use contemporary events in both time and space as the contents of their images. For this reason, they also do not use *Tausend und eine Nacht* (A thousand and one nights) or *Bilder aus Hinterindien* (Images from Indochina) as their sources but illustrated newspapers and the leading articles of the press."[4]

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2. Concerning the problem of the material's free usage, see Burkhardt Lindner and Hans Burkhard Schlichting, "Die Destruktion der Bilder: Differenzierungen im Montage-begriff," *Alternative, Montage/Avantgarde* (Berlin) 21, no. 122/123 (1978): 220.

3. See Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collagen: Inventar und Widerspruch* (Cologne: DuMont, 1974).

The photograph in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* developed into a journalistic form of communication that was to replace little-by-little, official news reporting,[5] since the authenticity of events for the reader seemed to lie first and foremost in the photograph as the reproduction of a current event: "Without pictures things which happened in the world were reproduced incompletely, seemed often to be unbelievable; it was only the photographic image that communicated the strongest and most lasting effect."[6] The foundation of an increasingly optical media industry was laid by the news photograph. The effect had to be so great that the reader would not miss it even "if he only glanced through the illustrated page by page."[7] Those were the initial criteria for news photography. As a photograph of the moment, it had to catch the situation at its climactic point. The here-and-now and its transitory ingredients conditioned the nature of news photography as a modern medium.

This tendency of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* went so far that "in the end only the *appeal of the image* itself rather the importance of the material decided the selection and acceptance of pictures."[8] The principle of the illustrated newspapers thus became the sensational, "the intention of offering something new over and over again,"[9] in order to insure their mass distribution.

In 1924, Walter Mehring wrote an "aria" to the obsession with the sensational and the seductive influence of the "great whore of the press":

Everyone
who can read
has succumbed to my charms.
Everyone who is concerned about his appearance pursues me.
I keep tabs on everyone when something happens,
whether a monster commits a criminal act of murder or of writing
    poetry.

Our country bumpkin learns to fear sin,
and the artist palely trembles before the critic,
even the statesman is afraid I'll find his weaknesses,
for I expose the underwear of politics.

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4. Wieland Herzfelde, "Zur Einführung," in *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (Exh. cat., Berlin: 1920), 2.

5. Kurt Korff, "Die Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung," in *50 Jahre Ullstein 1877-1927* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1927). See also *Zeitungsstadt Berlin: Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Berlin: Ullstein, 1959).

6. Korff, "Die Berliner," 291.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 294.

The spicy tale and naughty scandal want to be told,
till the news spreads throughout the world!
And thus each day, my child, the newspaper appears,
Dressed in black and white and with its innocent
make-up on.
A tumult in the streets:
and then it erupts
as though out of the blue,
the thunder of gossip:
EXTRA! EXTRA!
And the size of newstype grows
from the rotary presses,
an avalanche of paper!
And a whisper,
a lust of curiosity:
which I shall well conceal!
The veil is lifted sheet by sheet
from the abundance of sensation—
I, Madame Press, will bring it to the light of day!

All heroes
have yielded to my body.
Each man, who conspires, belongs to me!
I keep tabs on everyone, when something has happened,
and consummate the fate of what I cannot
understand!

In anarchist clubs and conclaves
my reporter slaves spy out
the secrets behind plotters' doors
And telegraph them boldly throughout the world!
And the scarcely spoken word is spread abroad,
before the news reaches the ears of all,
and thus struts with the times, my child, the newspaper
Dressed in black and white and with its bloodred
make-up on.
A tumult in the streets:
thus it erupts suddenly
as though from out of the blue,
the thunder of incitement:
EXTRA! EXTRA!

And the size of newstype grows
from the rotary presses
an avalanche of paper!
And a whispering voice
asks lewdly
where it can start a fire!
Till I can bare page by page
the indiscreet abundance!
I, Madame Press, will bring it to the light of day![10]

With the "whore of the press," Mehring vividly illustrated how naked facts serve more to lead the truth astray than to reveal it. He combined with this allegorizing of the press as whore its commercial aspect, using the principle of sensation and seduction, by which the press enticingly exposed life without really wanting to perceive its complexity or understand cause and effect.[11]

Alongside the film, the illustrated was promoted as an entertainment medium. Conceived as a tabloid, its sensationalist form of reporting aimed at optically distracting the masses and inducing them to think they were citizens of the world.

"It is not by accident," wrote the editor of the newspaper, "that the development of the cinema and the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* run rather parallel to one another."[12] The transformation of illustrated text to photographic reporting turned the photographer into the "journalist."[13] One contributor wrote in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* in 1919 about news photography: "News photography is the world citizen's microscope of contemporary history. It marks a development of a way of thinking away from abstract speculation toward a natural-scientific concreteness of observation."[14]

Direct empirical knowledge from concrete observation was taken away from the reader by the photojournalist. He or she became responsible for primary perception and preserved it for the reader in the photograph.

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10. Walter Mehring, "Europaische Nächte" (1924) in *Chronik der Lustbarkeiten; Die Gedichte Lieder und Chansons* 1918–1933 (Frankfurt/Berlin/Vienna: 1983), 209ff.

11. See Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962).

12. Korff, "Die Berliner," 290.

13. "Der Photograph als Journalist: Eine Lanze für den Illustriertenphotographen," in *BIZ* (Berlin) 28, no. 50 (14 December 1919): 522–523.

14. Ibid., 523.

While futurism identified with the conquest of the world through the media and glorified in this conquest its new "feeling for the world," Dada was led by this feeling to a new critical stance. As is precisely the case with the modern form of media reception, in the futurists' "new global feeling," sensual perception of the essence and appearance of reality were identical. Marinetti, fascinated by this phenomenon, wrote in 1913:

Whoever uses today the telegraph, the telephone, the gramophone, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the cinema, the great daily newspaper (a synthesis of a day in the world), does not realize that these various forms of communication, transportation, and information have a decisive influence on his psyche . . . people have acquired a feeling, in their turn, for the house, for the suburb, a feeling for the continent in which they live. Today they have the feeling of the world. It is of little meaning for them what their predecessors did; but they must know what their contemporaries in all parts of the world are doing. This results in the need of each individual to be connected to all peoples of the world. Thus each individual must have the feeling that he is the judge and engineer of the object of investigation and of the unexplored universe. Human feeling assumes gigantic proportions: the urgent necessity arises to determine each moment in our relationships with all of humankind.[15]

The Dadas, who were also fascinated by the potentials of the media, did not allow themselves to be taken in by its influence. They were aware that an abundance of sensational material and that the process of shifting perception involved a loss of reality.

The Dadas tendency to critique the media followed the direction taken by Franz Blei, who was already taking the city-dweller to task in 1915, charging that he:

must actually do what is reported in the newspapers in order to feel that he himself is "real." Everything happens that is reported in the newspaper, for nothing would happen in this bourgeois world if nothing appeared in the newspapers. Nothing that this decadent world engages in, does, feels, thinks, wants, or aspires to would exist without the press, for this individual is the press. What he thinks, he thinks from the start as public opinion: his views are at the outset the general public's views; he makes an inventory of himself as he quotes newspapers. Karl Kraus devoted thousands of pages to a description of this "modern individual" by doing nothing more than describing the press. But this "modern individual" is so completely the press that he believed that everthing is going according to the newspapers.[16]

15. F. T. Marinetti, "Introduction" to the Manifest "Distruzione della sintasi; Imaginazione senza Fili; parole in liberta," (11 May 1913), cited in *Der Futurismus*, ed. Umbro Apolliono (Cologne: DuMont, 1966), 119, 122.

16. Franz Blei, *Über Wedekind, Sternheim und das Theater* (Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1915), 10.

Simultaneous montages make this process of informationalizing people through the press and photography a conscious process and, additionally, make clear that from now on, reality is in the process of adjusting to the needs of news photography, of becoming photogenic. It is a process that reached a critical stage in the course of the 1920s.

Siegfried Kracauer was to be a particularly vocal critic in the twenties of the shift in perception brought on by the illustrateds. His insights elucidate in turn, the early Dada attempts at perceptual criticism: "The perception of the world the public sees in the illustrateds is prevented by the very same medium . . . Never before has a time known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the control of the illustrateds is one of the most powerful means of hindering knowledge. The confusing arrangement of images serves not at least as the successful obstruction of knowledge. Their juxtaposition systematically eliminates the context which is otherwise apparent to one's consciousness. The 'pictorial idea' dislodges other ideas, the snow flurry of photographs shows the indifference to what is meant by the content."[17]

The constant repetition of sensational appeal produced the modern form of reception: forgetting. Raoul Hausmann articulated this insight in his criticism of the linguistic and pictorial "watering-down" of the media and especially in his critique of the ineffectuality of the snapshot, which he compared to stenographic abbreviations of spoken language: "As a result of custom, comfort, and mindlessness, we must realize that we are surrounded, in our conventional lifestyle and its naturalistic grasp of things, only by fossilized and lifeless stereotypes, by clichés of real life."[18]

Reality—forced into the straightjacket of clichés of journalistic communication—was reduced to a matter of editorial competence, a fact made especially evident by the columns of illustrateds: technology, politics, sports, and editorials. The illustrateds and newspapers structured the composition of Dada montages by representing no more than a functional form of unity of contents, which was then broken down into individual areas.

This tendency to mix content areas was also to be seen in larger dimensions in the image of the city. The physiognomy of the city was characterized by a world of placards and symbols that were registered in the illustrateds by the signs of a world of language and things that had become autonomous. Otto Dix represented this physiognomy of the city, which had become dependent upon a system of symbols and signs, in his allegory entitled *Suleika das tätowierte Wunder* (Suleika the tattooed wonder; fig. 6.4). Her body, completely covered with symbols, became the externalized sign of a market commodity. The various thematic complexes presented in quotation form were condensed into a system of analogically corresponding, autonomous symbols and metaphors; the result was an indifference, heightened by the casual mixing of pictorial data, which also made manifest

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17. Sigfried Kracauer in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 28 October 1927.

18. Raoul Hausmann, "Die Neue Kunst: Betrachtungen (für Arbeiter)," in *Die Aktion* (Berlin) 11, no. 19/20 (1921): 282.

the metropolis. The Dadas aimed to use the montage to have a decisive influence on the inflationary status of perception and its transformation, and to illuminate the externalized language of symbols of metropolitan media in the multiplicity of phenomena and on the disparate, constantly fluctuating, simultaneous surface of the montage. The Dadas wanted, above all, to use the montage to reactivate the perceptive process in reception blocked by sensation. The Dadas used caricature of symbols, simultaneity, and heterogeneity to challenge radically the validity of the illustrateds' claim to authenticity in its role as communicative intermediary.

1.2   The Press as an Element of the Dada Movement

The press was not only a theme of Dada montages but also a material ingredient of the Dada movement, and to such an extent that it was made an object of Dada criticism. The Superdada (Johannes Baader) published, for example, his demands and ideas in the press, announced his Dada death, demanded the Nobel Prize for his eight global statements, searched for his 397 secret Dada files through the press, and declared the founding of his Intertellurian Academy in Potsdam. The Dadas Huelsenbeck, Hausmann, and Golycheff also published their Dada Manifesto "What is Dadaism and What does it Want in Germany" in many periodicals: it appeared in the *Kölnisches Tageblatt* (Cologne daily newspaper) on 16 June 1919, as well as in the *Ostpreussische Zeitung* (Eastprussian newspaper) in Königsberg on 22 February 1920. Dada performances were also announced in comical and provocative press releases.

A spectacular example of the game Dada played with the press are the falsified reports that Walter Serner issued in 1919; they involved a "sensational duel" reported in the *St. Galler Tagblatt* (St. Gall daily newspaper) on 5 July 1919. The *Prager Tagblatt* (Prague daily newspaper) reported the following on 10 July 1919 under the heading "The Gentlemen of Dada Are Making Publicity":

The following was sent to us from Zurich on July 1: Early yesterday morning a duel took place between Tristan Tzara, the well-known founder of Dada, and the Dada painter Hans Arp on an alpine meadow near Zurich. Four exchanges of fire took place. In the last exchange Arp was superficially grazed by a bullet on the left upper thigh, following which his opponent left the battlefield without making peace. The whole city of Zurich is currently talking about the duel whose cause is said to have been a dispute that took place in the editorial offices of *Movement Dada* at Schifflände 28, in the course of which Mr. Tzara, who is known to be of an athletic build, badly mistreated Mr. Arp. Dr. Walter Serner and J. C. Heer served as Tristan Tzara's witnesses, Messrs. Otto [sic] Kokoschka and Francis Picabia, who had come to Zurich from Paris for

this purpose, as Hans Arp's. As we have learned, the Zurich state's attorney has already begun an investigation of all those involved in this dueling affair. The public will no doubt anticipate the conclusion of this matter with great interest. (*Prager Tagblatt*, Vol. 10, 1919).

The announcement of the "Erste Internationale Dada-Messe" also appeared in several newspapers. We know of two such reports in the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* (Berlin local gazette; 26 June 1920; fig. 6.5) and *Vorwärts* (Forwards; 29 June 1920):

> Opening of the great Dada exhibition. All of the strands of international Dada will meet in the gigantic Dada exhibition which will be opened on Wednesday, June 30, by the Otto Burchard Gallery at Lützowufer 13. All Dadaists of the world have transferred through the media their psycho-technical elasticity to the Berlin representatives of immortal Dada. Everybody will want to have seen the wonders of this psychometalogy. Dada surpasses every form of occultism. Dada is the clear-sighted insight into the view of every opinion on politics and economics, art, medicine, sexuality, eroticism, perversion and anaesthetics. The works of George Gross [sic], John Heartfield, Baargeld, Max Ernst, Hanna Höch, Raoul Hausmann, and Baader defeat all work that came before. The Dada General: Otto Burchard . . . .

We can identify three different forms of reception of the exhibition by the press: the liberal, the conservative, and the communistic. Only the liberal press was receptive to Dada. Adolf Behne wrote in *Die Freiheit* (Freedom; 9 July 1920): "Dada aims to liberate us from all bourgeois fraud. It aims to decompose the catchphrases, the conventions, and the hypocrisies of the bourgeois mind. And it has been very successful in tracking down disguised manifestations of the bourgeois mentality."

Die rote Fahne (The red banner; 27 July 1920) was operating on the basis of conservative mentality when it criticized Dada's iconoclastic intent. The conservative press labeled the Dadas "wild maniacs" and "cultural Bolsheviks." At any rate, all leading newspapers of the Weimar Republic confronted the phenomenon of Dada—and this was one of the most successful strategies of the Dadas: to create publicity. But the latter also became in turn, an object of the press.

The reactions of the press to Dada evenings and scandalous exhibitions were part of the game the Dadas played with the public. It was not without outrage that a certain Dr. Frog commented in *Die Welt am Montag* (The world on Monday) on 20 September 1920, concerning Dada's publicity strategy:

> What is "Dada"? It is the art of becoming the talk of all philistines of culture and at more or less considerable *gain without any intellectual effort*. Blindly cut words and fragments of words out of a printed

source and schematically glue them next to each other—you now have a Dada poem. You will experience the joy of seeing it immediately *reprinted* in at least a *hundred newspapers*, with, of course, a sarcastic epilog or even a lament about the decadence of modern literature, but, at any rate, printed. And your name, as the process is repeated, will be known to everyone that reads printed matter of any sort. Nail a piece of bread to a cake pan, squirt some snot and a few blotches of color next to it, stick six burnt matches on it: there you have a *Dada painting*.

It might even be a "Merz Picture." And you will experience the joy of seeing distinguished critics, who otherwise only cast a fleeting glance at every hundredth painting, eyeing this work at length and getting excited about it in their columns, which carries the news of your existence to all corners of the globe. Bestow upon yourself the title of *Weltdada* (World Dada), *Oberdada* (Superdada), *Dideldumdada, or Washeisstmichdada* (Whoismedada) and your self-appellation will be published as far abroad as the German tongue reaches, with exactly the same kind of promptness that you would merit if you were named Chancellor of the Reich or awarded the Nobel Prize.

Dada's game with the public was ambivalent. It exploited and simultaneously critiqued the press's craving for sensation. The dispersion of traditional art in life could not take place for Dada without the press. "8590 articles on Dadaism had appeared in the press by October 15," wrote Tzara in the *Zurich Chronicle* in 1919. And in order to declare the international character of Dada, Huelsenbeck published in the Dada Almanach (1920) "critiques from all newspapers of the world," from Zurich, Berlin, Paris, New York. Public impact was, in great part, the driving force of the Dada movement. Dada itself became its own medium so that it was identical with its "message."

2. Chance and Alienation

In contrast to Zurich Dada, the Berlin Dadas did not aim to leave the sensational language and pictorial documentation of the press exclusively to artistic chance. An analysis of Tzara's concept of chance will explain the difference. The aim was, in the area of poetry, to rupture "the violated language of the press": "Take a newspaper. Take a pair of scissors. Choose an article in the newspaper of the length which you expect to give to your poem. Then cut out the article. Carefully cut out the words which make up the article and put them in a sack. Gently shake. Then take out each cutting, one after the other. Copy the words conscientiously in the order in which they were drawn from the sack. The resulting collection will be your poem."[19]

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19. Tristan Tzara, "Dada manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer (1921)," in *Lampisteries: Sept manifestes dada* (Paris: J.J. Pauvert, 1963), 64.

While in this case the principle of chance was to provide for freedom from the domination of language, in Berlin Dada it was also a question of revealing the nature of the press' manipulation of word and image.

A specifically literary, preliminary form of the Berlin montage principle was disseminated in the column "Ich schneide die Zeit aus" (I excerpt our times) of the journal *Die Aktion* (Action), 1915–18. With a montage of quotations assembled in contradictory fashion out of reports from war correspondents, war propaganda, and literary and official commentary, it was possible to criticize subliminally the propaganda spectacle and reveal its contradictions. Karl Kraus developed as documentation his great montage of quotations *Die Letzen Tage der Menschheit* (The last days of mankind),[20] which was created at the same time as the Berlin montage and published in 1922. He wrote: "My task was to put the times in quotation marks, to let it caricature itself in print and brackets, knowing that the most impossible statements could only be made by the times themselves. Not to declare but to echo the state of things. To imitate the appearance of things, to criticize and photograph. And to recognize that catchphrases and clichés are the basic principles of our century."[21]

The Dadas developed a "counterpropaganda" through parodical "imitation of deceptive appearances" and "echoing" pronouncements. Appearances themselves were to be represented in word and "picture." It was characteristic of Berlin Dada that quotations remained identifiable and readable (fig. 5.9). The vanishing point remained the tangibly detectable entity even when it was decomposed, deformed, or unqualified. Quotations were robbed of illusory force by cutting headlines out of their propagandistic context, advertisements from their commercial context, photographs from their conventional framework, and alienating them from their usual function, robbing them of their original meaning, juxtaposing them satirically, and confronting them with counterarguments. E. Siepmann noted in his study of Heartfield's montages: "By incorporating deceptive appearances in itself, the photo-montage very effectively destroys them."[22]

"The purpose of the alienation effect," wrote Brecht, who was also inspired by the techniques of the Dadas, "is to alienate the social behavior which underlies all events. I mean by social behavior the mimic and gestural expression of social relationships which people of a given epoch share with one another."[23]

The new alienating context was not to obliterate all recollection of the quotation in poetic and artistic "products" of Dada, but to create friction

20. Karl Kraus, *Die Letzen Tage der Menschheit* (Vienna: Die Fackel, 1919; Munich: Kosel, 1976).

21. Karl Kraus, "Die Einleitung zu den Lichtbildern," in *Die Fackel* (Vienna) no. 400 (10 July 1914): 46.

22. Cited by Annegret Jürgens-Kirchhoff, "Politische Fotomontage als Karikatur," in Eckhard Siepmann, *Montage-John Heartfield: Vom Club Dada zur Arbeiter-Illustrierten Zeitung* (Berlin: Elefanten-Press-Galerie, 1977).

23. Bertolt Brecht, cited in "Über den Verfremdungseffekt in den Photomontage John Heartfields," in *John Heartfield: Der Schnitt entlang der Zeit*, ed. Roland März (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1981), 503.

between its conventional meaning and the new contents. Texts and images quoted and assembled in the montages were inserted into a grid of allusions that impelled thought, raised doubts, activated judgments, that set the world in motion, and advanced into political spheres of action.

"Photographic alienation . . . and the free use of bits of reality for political critique was the new dimension in Berlin Dada," Hans Richter realized.[24] Alienation was necessary to "establish something," something "artistic," "something asserted," as Brecht circumscribed the alienation effect— something that would "restore reality" for his contemporaries who had traded their perception of reality for the commercialized media, and to reveal to them once more a consciousness of their actions and their responsibility.[25] The politically enlightening moment was not always foregrounded in all Dada montages, but the montage's combinatory power of irony formed the basis of all of them. In Schwitters's works it became a comprehensive, stratified composition of "relationships." The game Dada played with disguises of reality—stylistically, ideologically, visually—made it possible to penetrate into dimensions in which realities were finally perceived and the known taken note of for the first time.

Since the news photographer could no longer assign "guilt" to the "guilty," the Dada photomontage had first to activate, above all else, the detective's perception. The photomontages *Dada-Rundschau* (Dada review) and *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die Letzte weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (Cut with the kitchen knife Dada through the last Weimar beer-belly cultural epoch of Germany), for example, also resemble a detective's collection of evidence, considering each photograph a potential arrest warrant. Hannah Höch even detected the perpetrators, who otherwise would have remained hidden in the multitude of photographs in the illustrateds through the photographs selected for her montages; for the abundance of photographs is comparable to the masses of people who assume the role of an asylum for the fleeing perpetrator.[26] In accordance with this principle, does not Wilhelm II in the kitchen-knife montage become a pictorial puzzle who seems only to peer with one eye from a cumulative hiding place among the people?

Höch stands out among other Berlin Dadas as an especially avid collector of the little photographic arrest warrants that circulated in the illustrateds. She seemed to have compiled a file of numerous excerpts for her montages, almost an "encyclopedic compilation of the times," in particular from the

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24. Hans Richter, *Dada-Kunst und Antikunst* (Cologne: DuMont, 1964).

25. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 18: 162.

26. See Walter Benjamin, "Der Flaneur," in *Baudelaire* (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp, 1974), 33ff and 46. Benjamin compares Baudelaire's "Flaneur" with a detective, as he appears in Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd." Important is Benjamin's realization that photography allows for the first time the "capture of a person's traces," and for this reason leads to a new genre of literature, the detective story, which "developed at the moment when the most drastic of all conquests over human's 'assumed' identity was insured." On these grounds, George Grosz called one of his works "The Guilty Remains Unknown" (1919).

volumes of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* published between 1916 and 1920, with emphasis on quotations from the last two years. Raoul Hausmann shared her passion for collecting such material and, now and then, took from her store of images; this fact is evident in quotations from the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* in his photomontages *Dada Cino* (fig. 6.6) and *Fiat modes pereat ars* (Let there be fashion, down with art).

Grosz also had a collection of photographic portraits. Although they were seldom used in his montages, photographs mounted on the walls of his studio reveal that he also grappled with this medium and its fictional influence. Wieland Herzfelde described Grosz's studio:

> The walls were covered with pictures—if one can call beer and whiskey posters, circus monkeys and clowns, athletes and tattooed ladies, photographs and newspaper illustrations, pictures. Most of the photographs were portraits of international celebrities and had been signed with dedications. I remember one in particular: "To my dear old friend, Chinganchuk, in faithful memory, his old friend, Thomas A. Edison." He answered affirmatively my question of whether he had ever been in America. After examining the greater number of such dedications and a certain similarity of the signatures, I concluded that all of them had been signed by their owner, perhaps as a kind of satire on his own wishful thinking: a trip to America and friendships with famous people.[27]

It is thus clear why Grosz and Heartfield were challenged in their first photomontage *Jedermann sein eigner Fussball* (1919) by the commercialized effect of the "cult" of personality, first made possible by the wholesale circulation of photographs. They therefore alluded in their question "Who is the Most Beautiful Person of All?" to the frivolous marketing of political personalities, whose pictures were mounted on a lady's fan so as to associate political "upstarts" with the prostituted life of the demimonde of show business and honky-tonks. Politicians, film stars, and vaudeville girls seemed equally attractive alongside other sensations in the marketplace of the photographs of the illustrateds. "Fame" was the new criterion of such photographs, with which Dada played subversive "games." "The surface has a great future," wrote Brecht to characterize the beginning of the 1920s.[28]

3. The Static Film

By adopting linguistic elements—letters, syllables, words, sentences, texts—in a great variety of designs, sizes, and common forms of usage from ads, headlines, trademarks, captions, and newspaper articles, the

27. Wieland Herzfelde, *Immergrün: Merkwürdige Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen eines fröhlichen Waisenknaber* (Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1975), 141.

28. Bertolt Brecht, "Vergänglichkeit," in *Gesammelte Werke*, 20: 21.

montages incorporated a second semiological system that induced the observer to read and thereby combine seeing and thinking. Perception and intellectual processes were in this way linked to one another. The integration of language into image, in particular the many Dada signs and variants that were used, indicated at the same time that alongside works of art, manifestos, statements, pamphlets, journals, notes, essays, and poems were also necessary ingredients in the Dada movement.

Raoul Hausmann said in 1931 regarding the invention of the photomontage: "The form—the use—of the photograph in connection with texts, transformed into the static film—was just as revolutionary as the contents—the idea of the photomontage."[29] As a borderline area of the film, the photomontage involved a transcending of the limits of genre, which itself resulted from the language component: language in the montage discredited iconoclastically the puristic genre concept of pictorial image.

This dissolution of artistic genres, brought about by the integration of language and pictorial image, recalls cubist and futurist experiments with language and quotations, for the simultaneous montage with textual and pictorial quotations was part of a gradual lingualization and iconization of literature that had begun in 1910.[30] These processes of decomposition reflect the efforts of the avant-garde to create the total work of art in opposition to the tradition of a society based on division of labor. Boccioni formulated the position in this way: "There is no more stupid fear than that of exceeding the limits of an artistic genre in which we are working. There is no painting, sculpture, music, poetry. There is only creative activity."[31] Language had already been used in futurism as a pictorially alien element, as "material," and had been incorporated by the futurists in artistically neutral, tangible material by freeing it from its semantic meaning: "Wood, paper, cloth, leather, glass, string, oilcloth, majolica, metals, paint, putty, liberated words (consonants, vowels, numbers), etc., have their places in our artistic constructions as extremely legitimate materials."[32] Severini's integration of language and pictorial art, through "the use of onomatopoetic symbols, liberated words, and every possible kind of material . . . was intended to enhance realism."[33] Language was thus quoted by the futurists in a "desire to achieve absolute realism."[34]

29. Raoul Hausmann, "Eröffnungsrede zur Ausstellung 'Fotomontage,'" Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, 1931 in *Am Anfang war Dada*, ed. Günter Kampf and Karl Riha (Giessen: Anabas, 1972), 50.

30. See Wolfgang Max Faust, *Bilder werden Worte: Zum Verhältnis von bildender Kunst und Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert oder vom Anfang der Kunst im Ende der Künste* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1977).

31. Umberto Boccioni, "Die futuristische Bildhauerkunst," (1912) in *Der Futurismus*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (Cologne: Du Mont, 1966), 71.

32. Carlo Carrà, "Krieg-Malerei," (selection) 1915 and "Die Deformation der Malerei," in Apollonio, *Der Futurismus*, 244.

33. Guido Severini, "Bildnerische Analogie des Dynamismus," (1913) in Apollonio, *Der Futurismus*, 166.

34. Ibid., 167.

Carrà in particular introduced an appellative level of language usage, which is reminiscent of headlines, by integrating words into his *manifestazione interventista* (interventionist manifestation, 1914). His aim was to achieve a synthesis of reality and the futurist world view through the simultaneity of words. As in the principle applied in headlines of newspapers and ads, he used different fonts, type sizes, and colors of ink to enhance expressive power. The latter elements were dispersed by kinetic tensions; the resulting deformations, fragments, and clustering of vowels produced, additionally, an inflation of type, thereby pushing the energetic liberation of words as "free expressive orthography" to the limits of their readability.[35] The subtitle of the montage referred to the contents of the quotations: *Liberated words 'patriotic celebration'* (Dipinto parolibero 'festa patriottica'). The cubists also integrated language into their collages as a "tangible stimulus," as a "new world of beauty . . . which slept, unnoticed, in wall posters, show windows, business signs . . ."[36] The word most frequently glued to cubist simultaneous still-life images was probably "journal."

The Dadas' use of language in montages was multilayered. If the linguistic elements represented a way for art to reflect upon itself, the integration of language into pictorial image was in turn a way of reflecting on the surrounding world and on the functions of the media that were altering the nature of art. The mixture of text and picture mirrored the pictorial and textual structuring of the illustrateds and the modern experience of breaks and shocks, of terse and rapid changes in information and images and, simultaneously, also the increasing semioticization of metropolitan streets by ads, illuminated signs, traffic signs, postered walls, advertising pillars, newspaper stands, etc. Just as they did in the hustle and bustle of the metropolis, texts also appeared in montages directly as sound, as mixture of word and picture, including even complex sentence structures.

The Dada montage quoted elements of language, from individual letters or mixtures of word fragments to entire sentences. The large assemblage *Deutschlands Grösse und Untergang* (known as *Plasto Dio Dada Drama*; fig. 6.7) and the *HADO* (Handbuch des Oberdada [handbook of the Oberdada]) which was a compilation of newspaper materials, and in particular of the first pages of newspapers and their headlines, swelled into a comprehensive montage of literature, that offered, in its voluminous quotations, a cross-section of the times. Its aim was to expose the First World War as a "War of Newspapers," as Baader put it in the *Dada Almanach*. The signs and slogans peculiar to Dada appear most often, however, in its montages. The signs, which refer syntactically to what is illustrated and are to be interpreted in the context of the pictorial quotations, constitute a completely autonomous semantic plane. They encompass parodical variations of everyday speech, which relate to the postwar situation. They are ironic paraphrases of a profiteering society ("Invest your money in Dada") or of political slogans of the many would-be politicians ("Join Dada," "Dada will win").

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35. F. T. Marinetti, "Futuristische Sensibitität," (1913) in Apollonio, *Der Futurismus*, 129.
36. Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, *Der Weg zum Kubismus* (Stuttgart: G. Hatje, 1958), 52.

4. The Diverse Montage Techniques of Dada in its Confrontation with the Press: Höch—Heartfield—Schwitters—Ernst

Dadas commonly used alienation and distortion of the original material, the interplay and fusion of heterogeneous documents, which created a grotesque effect. How, on the other hand, was this grotesque effect achieved? What was stressed—a grotesque-satirical or a grotesque-absurd strain? How was the opposition of mechanical and organic elements introduced and how was the tension in the grotesque achieved between comical and gruesome components? Of what sort were the disillusionizing and the illuminating intentions of the collages? And—considering that the Dada artists made use of material that had already been published (documents and pictorial quotations saturated in varying degrees with the spirit of the times)—with which new illusions was the audience to be disillusioned again?

Dada Rundschau by Hannah Höch—Contemporary History as Political Farce

The aim of the montage in Berlin Dada was to create an image of the world in practical terms based on its happenings and to use all forms and techniques to destroy the morally self-righteous world of the bourgeoisie (Raoul Hausmann). This methodological starting point leads to the creation of montages based on quotations of texts, political slogans, and newspaper excerpts. The use of textual and photographic quotations reflects the industrialization of perception produced by mechanized life and work in the big cities, in particular by an industry of culture and the media that had been rapidly developing since 1918.

The powerful effect of Höch's montage *Dada Rundschau* of 1919 (fig. 6.8) is created by juxtaposing incoherently localized photographic quotations from illustrateds with an autonomous contextual framework of lines and planes. The work is dominated in form by the tension between the abstraction of the basic structure and the realism of the photographic quotations; in content, by the tension between the original divergent nexus of meanings and the new connotations.

The photomontage must be grasped in two different ways:
1) by associative recognition, in order to understand the process of alienation; 2) by dynamic perception, in order to interpret the total rhythmic constellation.

A dynamic polarity develops in the relationship of the abstract forms and the photographic quotations, which primarily depict people. The structure of the montage makes its interpreter aware of the breaks and shocks in the fragmentary and particularized perception of the urbanite and of his or her life in increasingly abstract interspaces. The spaces suggested by the

photographs are transformed into planes; the result is an undefined area of deep dimensions. Movements are impossible in the abstract, ambient field. This fact is made clear by the figures of the striding dancers (upper left) and the female jumper (center). Their movements, already frozen in time by the snapshot, seem even more strongly checked by schematic reduction. The jumper is placing her feet in the armpit of President Ebert (center) and her hands into the end of the telescope; the result is an abrupt switch from two- to three-dimensionality, the disruption of the dimensions by the "undefined space," the introduction of dynamic rhythms in the intervals, organic/abstract opposites (fig. 6.9). The formation of space is restricted, and the flow of time is broken down into intervals. Each photographic particle is characterized by its own moment in time. Quotations from issues of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* published between 1915 and 1919 are combined to represent a simultaneous totality of events. The desultory act of perception, which derives in any case from the structure of the illustrateds and their basis in an obsession with topicality, is analogous to the sense of the depletion of time in the simultaneity of the montage.

The simultaneity of pictorial moments disintegrates into archival scenery of transitory positions. This represents a conception of reality that is made up in each case of simultaneous material. This simultaneous perception of reality does not seek cause and effect in history, but reduces history to a play performed in quickly changed costumes. For Höch, contemporary history consisted of freely moveable sets which she made use of with "complete freedom."

The process of selecting reality, references to political reality, and the control of content in the process of creating the montage, condition its grotesque appearance. The process of identification with the photograph is disrupted by the alienation of the quotations. The Dadas were challenged by the cult of personality that had only been made possible by the mass-circulation of news photography; moreover, they also challenged in their turn, the personality cult. In the center of the photographic quotations are President Ebert and Defense Minister Noske. Höch selected, from the abundance of photographs in the 1919 volume of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, the title page of 24 August. It was not difficult for her to distort and expose the political authorities in this work since the photographs themselves already were grotesque in nature: They offended the expectations of the middle-class public that was still accustomed to the lavish dress of the empire and the uniforms worn for parades and other special occasions in the Wilhelminian era. The title page depicting these "self-made gents" (Mehring), was published around the same time that Ebert and his ministers were taking the oath of office in Weimar. "There was something hovering in the air above the frock coats" during this solemn ceremony, wrote Harry Graf Kessler in an entry for 21 August 1919, in his *Diaries*.[37]

37. Harry Graf Kessler, *Tagebücher 1918–1937*, ed. Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1961), 200.

The politicians are reduced to political fools of contemporary history by the little flowers on their bathing suits, while the military boots that Ebert is fitted with are a reference to the reactionary tendency of the ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its alliance with the General Headquarters of the military, which led to the bloody suppression of the Spartacus uprising. Höch trivialized the political tragedy with the textual quotation, "For relieving sweaty feet"; the reader of illustrateds easily recognized in these words the ad for Vasenol Powder (fig. 6.10). The quotation that appears just beneath that image, "Treasury of the German Soul," results in the grotesque contrast of two levels of content that are relativized by each other to the point of nonsense; the level of the desolate instability of the petty bourgeoisie after the lost war, with its inclination to embrace pseudoreligious doctrines of salvation, and the level of the advertisement. "Light rays" on Ebert's head countercaricature his role as savior, since the Dadas saw in him rather the personification of the German beer-bellied corporate executive. His demeanor stands in grotesque tensional relationship to the well-conditioned, elegant body of the jumper. According to Hausmann, "Women who are conscious of their figures, women who are physically active, who do physical exercises . . . [are] the only counterforce to German introspection, which finds its highest form of expression in clodhoppers and corporate beer-bellies."[38] Huelsenbeck also found himself deceived by "clever corporate executives, who suddenly appeared at the head of a [people's] organization, as though they also had been active in the revolution."[39]

Höch generally decomposes political statements into an ironically trivialized spectrum of associations, as in the case of the American President Wilson (top border) and Erzberger (middle). In the lower right quarter of the picture, one pictorial subject folds over into another, producing a heterogeneous, dissonant mixture: next to the clipping of a man in a nightcap (which, as reproduced in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* of 30 March 1919, showed the convalescent French Foreign Minister Clemenceau), we see, in rearview, a soldier lying in ambush with his rifle (a clipping taken from a well-known photograph showing a group of government soldiers shooting from their positions at the Brandenburg Gate during the Spartacus uprising, reproduced in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* of 19 January 1919, [fig. 6.11]). The picture next to it, which is covered by a hand holding a telescope, shows, in aerial view, a mass demonstration, of which isolated bits appear in the montage. This kind of mixture of small and large ingredients from divergent perspectives with no indication of scale, makes the viewer conscious of the grotesque image of the times. The pictorial ingredients of these montages are relativized to the point of being reduced to elements of equal value. Political reality is reduced to farce that,

38. Raoul Hausmann, "Mode," in *Sieg Triumph Tabak mit Bohnen*, vol. 2 of *Texte bis 1933*, ed. Michael Erlhoff (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1982), 104. See Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

39. Richard Huelsenbeck, *Deutschland muß untergehen: Erinnerungen eines alten dadaistischen Revolutionärs* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1920), 6.

at the same time, is conditioned by moments of horror, as connoted by the view through the barrel of a ship's gun and the masked figure who is approaching the viewer with his left arm raised (top border). In addition, the viewer senses that he is being watched at every moment by the bespectacled eyes next to the latter figure. The eyes refer directly to "Rundschau," which requires, in the Dada manner, looking in all directions.

The montage reveals the "vacuous absurdity" of the contemporary "Cabaret of Humanity" to be a grotesque game with both pessimistic and utopian qualities. Phenomena loses its meaning in the new media industry of consciousness, in which everything is readable, accessible, at one's disposal; and history, which is reduced to individual moments, resembles a chaotic, vacuous space. Höch revalued this kind of pessimism as utopian vision by means of irony. She used techniques of distortion and alienation to rid herself of all dogmatic, obsessive, limited attitudes of her time and provide a carefree view of contemporary events as manifestations of a transitory, provisional process. The line "Unlimited Freedom for HH" lays claim to the incompleteness, the openness, the ambiguity, the "lighthearted" relativity that is the central mission of Dada.

Brudergrüsse der SPD by John Heartfield: The Grotesque in the Service of the Revolutionary Cause

The montage *Brudergrüsse der SPD* (Fraternal greetings from the Social Democratic Party of Germany; fig. 6.12) by John Heartfield[40] comments on the same period as Höch's *Dada Rundschau*. It was executed, however, from the detached perspective of 1927 and its argument emanates from the point of view of the proletarian movement. Its political criticism is more focused than in Höch's work. It is not a depiction of a trivial political game of fools, nor a carnival-style degrading of political authorities, but of bloody reality!

The themes of this montage, which relate to the ideological misrepresentation of political goals of the workers' movement by the Social Democratic Party of Germany, are provided by quotations from the journal *Vorwärts*. The evident and intolerable contradiction, which the grotesque statement of this montage connotes, is the self-misrepresentational campaign in the press waged by *Vorwärts* itself, the "Central Organ of the Social Democratic Party of Germany."

The first shocking image that strikes the viewer's gaze is the photograph, in the center of the picture, of the slain figure of Karl Liebknecht, along with Rosa Luxemburg a leader of the Spartacus uprising in January 1919. The fatal site of the arrest of the two revolutionaries by the military is indicated by the Hotel Eden, whose gables appear as a photographic quotation in the top part of the montage. The photographs to the right and left of slain Spartacists recall the bloody suppression of numerous communist activities in the period from January to March 1919. The facade

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40. Image in *Der Knüppel*, 5, no. 13 (January 1927); another version in *Arbeiter-Illustrierten-Zeitung* 10, no. 13 (April 1931).

riddled with bullet holes in the top right portion of the picture are signs of violence. The soldiers firing their weapons are a visual representation of the threat of political force. By divesting it of its dimension of powerlessness, the horror that these photographs of violent deaths express is converted into the active perception of discernment. The photographs are alienated by newspaper quotations that bear witness to the smear campaign waged against the Spartacists from 1918 to 1923, to which the dates printed in red ink also refer.

Heartfield leaves no doubt in the mind of the viewer that *Vorwärts* is also stained with the blood that was shed, which drips onto the newspaper commentaries. The title of the montage seems to have been written symbolically in blood also: *Brudergrüsse der SPD*. The double meaning of the title seems cynical in view of the deaths depicted. The "fraternal greetings" thus turn out to be a campaign to discredit.

The Spartacists are reviled in the commentaries of the montage for being nothing but criminals, "burglars and looters," "murderers," "corrupt elements who engage in rowdiness and see their goal as the establishment of an Asian reign of terror and starvation, as has happened in Russia." Bolshevism is dismissed propagandistically in one commentary from Vorwärts as the "arbitrary rule by force of a clique," as the "dictatorship of the lazy and indolent." Heartfield added to this quotation from 24 December 1918, a commentary in red ink, identifying it thereby with the communist movement: "Direct Hit by the Counter-revolutionaries" and "Homicide Headquarters of Scheidemann's Boys." The pictorial plane of the photographs is rhetorically underscored by the commentary.

Heartfield apparently felt a longer commentary on this smear campaign was necessary and printed it in red letters on the lower right margin of the picture. It concludes: "And they [the workers] know whose fraternal greetings were those directed at the political life of the working class like a pestilential stench of slander, vileness, and lies. The murderers cry 'murder' in vain! The blood of the slain cries louder."

This commentary is propagandistic in tone and arouses a desire for revenge, which the montage itself does not induce in its position of distanced elucidation. This montage was published in "Der Knüppel" (The truncheon, 1927) and in the *Arbeiter-Illustrierten-Zeitung* (Worker's illustrated newspaper), 1931.

While Höch made playful use of the political reality in the allusions and associations of her montage in accordance with its grotesque principle, one can sense in *Brudergrüsse der SPD* the bewilderment of the political combatants. For Heartfield, the grotesque was to be found in the political "lies of the bourgeois press" as something gruesome and ridiculously distorted.

So as to be able to oppose the bourgeois press effectively and question the validity of its own statements, Heartfield was the only artist of all those discussed in this essay to make exclusive use of the montage of available photographs and texts for this purpose. In his opinion, the pencil was too slow an instrument: "the lies spread by the bourgeois press were too swift for it."[41]

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41. John Heartfield cited by Eckhard Siepmann, *Montage—John Heartfield*, 7.

It was only the montage, through its destruction of appearances and its confusion of apparent agreement and intentional discrepancy, that was capable of activating the perceptual response of its contemporaries and of placing in question the inherited, unified, and harmonious relationship of the totality of the picture and its parts. Thus the Dada montages, satires, and caricatures made evident the alienation that had developed between the bourgeoisie and the rest of society.

Merz: "Establish Connections . . . Between all Things of this World."[42]

Höch's work is a critique of the topical media with a focus on contemporary issues and their grotesque implications, a political cabaret of humanity; Heartfield offers an iconography of death in his use of new artistic, satirically alienating principles of the montage. In Schwitters, on the other hand, we encounter an expansion of the open montage principle into three-dimensionality, an architecture of great assemblages; a multimateriality in which the media assume a separate, fundamental dimension of their own, given defining shape by Baader's Dada monument *Deutschlands Grösse und Untergang* (Germany's greatness and decline). What seemed worthy of portrayal to him, reversing the classical categories, were the very things that were artless, banal, trivial, disposed of, and transitory in his modern, desolate, postwar society.

Schwitters used materials of the most diverse origins and quality to break through the limits of a picture, incorporated the walls and ceilings of his house in grottoes and niches that he made out of plaster and wood, and which eventually traversed his house from the cellar to the roof terrace, from the balcony down the winding staircase to the main floor, up to the surface level of the water in a cistern (fig. 6.13). Hans Arp recalls in his 1948 necrology for Schwitters:

> His house in Hannover was filled with mine shafts, with openings artificially cut into the floors, fissures which connected the attic and the main floor. The influence of the Sun King apparently was not supreme here. By working intensively the whole year, Schwitters had managed to "merz" his dwelling completely. The monumental "merz" columns rose up through the hollows, chasms, abysses, and fissures, artfully constructed out of lath, rusty pieces of scrap iron, mirrors, wheels, family portraits, springs, newspapers, cement, paint, plaster, and glue —a lot of glue, a lot of glue. This monument, unprecedented in the history of the old and new worlds, did not give one the impression that it was done for the amusement of a naive oddball. Quite to the contrary: its rhythmic beauty ranked it alongside the works of the great masters in the Louvre.[43]

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42. Kurt Schwitters, "Merz," in *Kurt Schwitters: Das Literarische Werk* ed. Friedhelm Lach (Cologne: DuMont, 1981), 5: 187.

43. Hans Arp, cited by Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (Munich: Prestel, 1984), 138.

Schwitters demonstrated that he had the courage to mirror the uncertainty of his era with this open, experimental conception of space. Just like life itself, the Merz structure was to be a volatile entity at all times—a "work in progress." He considered this a reflection in equal measure, no doubt, of the unpredictability and danger of modern postwar life; space for him —as for Carl Einstein—was "a portion and sample of human experience which could be modified endlessly."[44] The Merz structure gave the volatile theme its dynamic spatial substance. In addition, Schwitters made the apocalyptic dimension of desolate cultural decline evident in the grotesque, dadaistically colored contents of the "merz" structure. He walled in the fragments of a rotting culture ironically like the spoils of memory. Schwitters described his Merz structure in *Merz 21, Das erste Veilchenheft* (First violet issue; 1931):

> We know of the gleaming treasure of the Nibelungs, of the Kyffhaeuser with the table made of stone, Goethe's grotto with Goethe's bone as a relique and his pencils almost worn out from being used to write poetry, the sunken merged cities of Braunschweig-Lueneburg with their houses from Weimar by Feininger, an ad for Persil detergent . . . a sex murderer's den . . . an art exhibition with paintings and sculptures by Michelangelo and me, visited only by a dog on a leash . . . Monna Hausmann, consisting of a reproduction of the Mona Lisa with Raoul Hausmann's face glued over it, with the result that she has completely lost her stereotypical smile.[45]

He concocted these montages out of the materials thrown away in the city, such as notes, admission tickets, train tickets, receipts, etc.

In his *Merzbau*, Schwitters distilled continuities of life and time that established a link between subjective and collective experience, one that neither science, politics, nor religion was any longer capable of establishing. His *Merzbau* was to replace the significance that the cathedral and the rituals of cults had originally, in which the present, memory, and expectation were fused into one revelation. Thus, "the cathedral of erotic misery," (Die Kathedrale des erotischen Elends) with its constant mixing of levels of experience, was in every respect akin to mythical thought, which encompassed historical tradition, wishes, fears, dreams, and everyday existence. Schwitters wanted to build something new out of the shards. Thus he melted down the gold of art in his labyrinthine, alchemistical cave.

While the Berlin Dadas created their effects of disillusionment and illumination through breaks and cuts, Schwitters focused on the very connections that existed between things: "'Merz' meant establishing connections,

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44. Carl Einstein, cited by Heidemarie Oehm, *Die Kunsttheorie Carl Einsteins* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), 73.

45. Schwitters, "Ich und meine Ziele," in *Das literarische Werk*, 5: 344f.

preferably between all things in this world."[46] The material, the form, "the selection, distribution, deformation of the materials . . . reinforced by dividing, bending, covering, or painting over"[47] became the contents of Merz painting from 1919 on. The irony of his plan lay in the subjection of the materials to an unlimited relativity, thus also to an inscrutable disconnectedness. One of his poems is titled "Relativity":

> Since life is relative,
> And one heel is uneven,
> The other is all the
> Flatterer.
>
> Yet he is headed very clearly,
> And each day more and more,
> A fact that no one had noted before,
> Down the uneven path.
>
> Yet if he one day stands alone,
> Any dope will be able to tell,
> That this part is also uneven,
> Because life is relative.[48]

The Fanciful-Grotesque Montage Technique of Max Ernst

Max Ernst, like Picabia and Duchamp, used technical illustrations as his material for creating an alienating effect in the Dada period more often than material related to current affairs from newspapers and illustrateds. He incorporated this alienation of original materials into the exhibitions he participated in with Arp, Baargeld, and other Cologne friends. In 1919 and 1920, the Cologne Dadas introduced a diversity of works in levels and qualities that discarded traditional aesthetic categories: children's drawings, technical sketches, Negro sculpture, curves of polarization, works "by unknown masters of the twentieth century: cats, pigs, sacraments, a crucifix," as well as found objects such as pebbles, piano hammers, and umbrellas. It was this sort of staging of an exhibition that inspired not only in Schwitters, but also in Berlin Dada, the idea for the "First International Dada-Fair" of 1920. In contrast to these collage productions executed as constantly alterable forms, the final outcome of Ernst's collages was calculated.

The montage principle of Ernst's cliché prints followed the Dada principle of the "amalgamating fusions" of machines, as reflected in Schwitters's concept of the Merz stage.[49] However, destructive interests are not so much

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46. Schwitters, "Merz," 187.
47. Schwitters, "Die Merzmalerei," in *Das literarische Werk*, 5: 37.
48. Schwitters, "Relativität," in *Das literarische Werk*, 1: 97.
49. Schwitters, "An alle Bühnen der Welt," in *Das Literarische Werk*, 5: 39–41.

at work in Ernst's approach as in Schwitters's program of action but defunctionalizing mechano-morphotic forces instead; by disguising the structure, these plates emphasize the new creation, a playful appropriation, as it were, of heterogeneity so as to achieve new poetic dimensions. Hence, the quotations of materials taken from technical illustrations were used for forming combinations that could alienate and alter them endlessly up to an unrecognizable state—a procedure that stood diametrically opposed to that of the Berlin Dadas. Following his montage principle, Ernst created little dysfunctional "machines, constructed by the minimax dadamax himself"; machine forms were defined by the inventiveness and mechanism of inspiration.

Thus, a repertoire of related and recurrent forms was created: the composition for the title page of *Fiat modes pereat ars* (Let there be fashion, down with art), for example, reappears, rotated 180 degrees, in *Trophée hypertrophique* (Hypertrophic trophy; fig. 6.14), as anthropomorphizing element. The principle of reusing, using in a new or different way, is rediscovered also in the photomontages *Augustine Thomas et Otto Flake* (1920) and *La chanson de la chair* (Song of the flesh; 1920). What is involved here is the grotesque alienation of a photographic quotation of a skinned animal; it is used, in one case, in a middle-class room for its shock effect and as the linguistic analogy of "la chair" and "la chère"; in the other, as the fanciful-grotesque quotation of frozen movement in *La chanson de la chair*. Höch (e.g., in photographs of Ebert and Noske) and Grosz (e.g., in his social-critical caricatures) also applied the principle of reused quotations.

If we consider Ernst's figurative collages we can also see here that he applies a hermetic severity in the connecting of his pictorial quotations, whose alienation is not easily deciphered. While in Berlin Dada, the public significance of the material played a role and the task was to disillusionize its most immediately topical effect; in Ernst's work, the viewer is deprived of this topicality. Ernst never made use of the futurist alienating simultaneity of overlapping quotations. His approach was from the opposite side of simultaneity: the freezing, the restriction of the figure in apparatuses (*Glue Preparation from Bones*, 1921), and the adhering to an eternally self-perpetuating law of movement that is no longer perceivable (*La femme chancelante* [The tottering woman]; 1923).

His *Die Leimbereitung aus Knochen* (Glue preparation from bones) is based on an illustration that was only superficially reworked; as Werner Spies demonstrated in *Max Ernst—Collagen* (Max Ernst—Collages), it was taken from a therapeutic medicine publication.[50] Its alienation is provided by the title. Equally unsettling is another montage, *Enfant* (Child), the pictorial quotation of a child strapped into a machine in which it is to learn how to swim, it is a grotesque apparatus that could only have been thought up by the mechanical imagination of the nineteenth century because it has turned the child into a little "homme machine" in a middle-class room, who is to learn freedom of movement within the paradox of

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50. Spies, *Max Ernst Collagen*, 89.

restrictions. Does it represent, in a metaphorical sense, an obedient lamb of God?

La femme chancelante (fig. 6.15) also relates to the afflication of a figure by apparatuses. As he always does, Ernst uses, in this case, a central image as a starting point that relates different levels of meaning and diverse pictorial quotations to each other. Blindness and restriction are linked by a traditional interpretation: the allegorizing of fortune. According to Spies, the apparatus, which produces an anthropomorphic effect and to which the woman appears to be attached, is a mechanism that dumps oil into the sea; the pictorial quotation of the woman is an image that was rotated 180 degrees and depicts a circus balancing act using suction shoes (fig. 6.16). Ernst gives a new interpretation to the fascinating original material. The theatrical positioning of the polyhedral stone recalls a tradition that extends from de Chirico back to Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514). In contrast to the latter work, however, Ernst's allegory has lost its visionary power and metaphysical quality. Or does it concentrate on its inner vision and turn its back on reality? Why is her mouth frozen in a scream? Was she caught by surprise? Is it the expression of a mechanistic shock or the shock of inspiration? Or, is the woman one of those Dada mechano-brides created by their bachelor machines?

Ernst forged two additional Dada brides from topical material. The one was based on a photographic quotation of a bomb: he cynically transformed it into a lovely *Chinesische Nachtigall* (Chinese nightingale; 1920). Ernst was possibly referring here to the traditional significance of the nightingale as summoner of the dying but also as the soul of the damned; the fan, the eye, and the quotations of the twisted puppet's arm move to the rhythm of the nightingale's melody of the dance of death, which turns out to be the howling of projectile bombs.

The second one—*Die Anatomie als Braut* of 1921 (The bride as anatomy)—uses the mutilated, one-armed puppet body, which is forced into a mechanical apparatus: in its foreshortening of perspective it has an effect like that of the *Dead Christ* (1480) by Mantegna.

How is Ernst to be distinguished from Höch, Heartfield, and Schwitters?: 1) by his hermetic encoding of the pictorial and documentary quotations; 2) by a form of alienation that inclines toward the grostesque-fanciful; 3) by the assimilation of the pictorial cuttings for the sake of a new, fictive, poetic homogeneity; 4) by his focus on an initial image; 5) by using pictorial situations that have mainly a theatrical effect; 6) by removing the temporal-topical elements; 7) by stressing the pictorial legend for the sake of a pictorial breadth without text.

Ernst's aim was to disassociate himself consciously from Berlin and Hanover Dada by following this grotesque-fanciful tendency. In a letter to Tzara, he criticized Berlin Dada as neo-expressionism: "It is truly German. German intellectuals can do neither doodoo nor peepee without ideology."[51]

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51. Ibid., 236.

Ernst only included Huelsenbeck's poem "391" in *Die Schammade*; and Höch's name was not listed in the simultaneous triptych *Die dadaisten und dadaistinnen Dr Aisen . . . verwandeln sich in Blumen* (The Dada men and women Dr. Aisen . . . are transformed into flowers) which was printed in the catalogue *Dada-Vorfrühling* (Dada early spring). Schwitters, on the other hand, was omitted altogether; to Ernst he seemed, in analogy to the Majority Socialists who had betrayed the Revolution of 1918, to be a "Majority Dada."

A Summary Comparison

In Höch's Berlin Dada montage *Dada Rundschau*, the "vacuous nonsense" of the contemporary "cabaret of humanity" was portrayed as a grotesque game with both pessimistic and utopian features. In the new consciousness industry of the media, in which everything was readable, available, and accessible—phenomena lost its meaning, and history, reduced to isolated moments, resembled a chaotic vacuity. By dint of irony, Höch's grotesque creative techniques offered, however, a carefree, utopian perspective in which contemporary events represented a transitory, transitional process. In form and content, the textual and photographic materials used retain signs of fragmentation. The original coherence of the source material as contrasting background highlighted the new meaning. Space and time lost their traditional referential values. Spatial multiperspectivity and temporal simultaneity created a confusing, distorted, endless play of meanings.

The Berlin Dada montages of Heartfield are dominated by a moralizing, politicized iconography of the death of grotesque appearances and by motifs of political fatality. The threatening tension between horror and laughter is produced by the unmasking of the contemporary world, whose reliability turns out to be political deception. The formal innovations of cliché, commercial, and photomontages make use of elements of the traditional pictorial iconography of the dance of death and the *civitas diaboli*. The destruction of illusions simultaneously produces forces of resistance.

The plan "to establish connections among all things of this world" in Schwitters's Hanover *Merzbau* produces an open "work in progress" whose diverse levels of meaning of quotations, retouchings, maskings, repaintings, deformations, and dispersions result in a solipsistic spatial framework that fuses relationships among past, present, and future into one grotesque revelation. The Cologne Dada Ernst stands in striking contrast to the other Dadas in his use of clear, initial images against a largely empty collage background. Pictorial quotations scarcely overlap and they are mounted without revealing the interplay of elements. The message is expressed in a resulting image without resorting to Schwitters's relativity of relativities. Ernst's work with quotations is, in contrast, characterized by reinsertions, reuse in new and different ways of the same pictorial quotation and by a constant, even though hermetic, repertoire of forms. By omit-

ting temporally topical factors, assimilating the intersections of clippings, and the omission of text in his montages, Ernst achieves a new poetic homogeneity whose montage character can reactivate the complicated pictorial legends. The "blindness" into which figures and viewers are transported is evident also in perceptual dimensions, which simultaneously disillusionize with new illusions of a grotesque-fanciful sort.

5. The Press: A Dada Medium

The relationship of the Dadas to the press was as ambivalent as was their relationship to the world. On the one hand, they attacked the working methods and techniques, the political programs, and social principles of the newspapers and journals; on the other, they adopted all of these practices and even exaggerated them.

The Dadas' techniques, in particular, were influenced by the press. Its layout, its mixing of text and image, its dynamic changes in point of view, its customs of reading and understanding, caricaturing, quoting, use of chance and alienation, its tempo, and its themes and subject matter—the current social situation, criticism of the bourgeois, politics, and the military, the church, and commerce. With the aim of returning art to life, the Dadas used, as does the press, everyday language, photographs, and reporting of current events, sensational events, and deeds.

The main complaints of the Dadas against the press was its mere claim to the perception of the truth, its pretense to the investigation of reality, its rehearsed exploration of reality. The exposure of attempts to conceal actual conditions and insight into the true connections among things were, therefore, Dada's tasks, its precise mission in its time. If the press engaged in the creation of illusions, then Dada engaged in the destruction of illusions; if the press engaged in the leveling of language, then Dada engaged in its disintegration; if the press engaged in pictorial documentation, then Dada engaged in pictorial destruction for the purpose of exposing the essence of things.

The relationship of Dada to the press was one of love and hate. Life as a daily work of art required departing from the private circles of the soirées and venturing into the streets. This venture into the public sphere could only succeed with the help of the press. By means of a clever cat-and-mouse game, they wrested from the bourgeoisie its medium. The press became a Dada medium; the Dadas attracted the attention they needed for publishing their program through false announcements and reports, detailed descriptions of their travels and performances, and sensational advertisements, through poems, graphics, and montages. On the other hand, Dada became a press medium in particular through its adoption, in its artistic work, of techniques used often by the press: photographs as political quotations, the function of cutting, the parodical montage which destroys illusions through caricatures.