

A “Schooling of the Senses”: Post-Dada Visual Experiments in the Bauhaus Photomontages of László Moholy-Nagy and Marianne Brandt

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As Lucia Moholy told the story, at some point during the mid-1920s she asked her husband, László Moholy-Nagy, if he had noticed that his Bauhaus student Marianne Brandt was in love with him. He replied simply—and surely with an unrecorded note of irony in his voice—“whoever loves me must work for me.”¹ In this essay I analyze the confluence of ideas in the visually provocative photomontages of Moholy-Nagy and Brandt. Photomontage has been extensively investigated as a medium of choice of Berlin Dadaists and Russian constructivists, but its use among the artists and designers of the Bauhaus has received almost no scholarly attention; to rectify this, I explore the work of two of the boldest practitioners of photomontage at the Bauhaus. In so doing, I establish their links to earlier montage movements—Dadaism in particular—as well as to the pictorial concerns addressed in Moholy-Nagy’s theories of the New Vision and to issues of gender identity relevant to both artists’ works. I also offer in-depth interpretations of key examples of Moholy-Nagy’s and

My gratitude goes to Matthew Biro, Oliver Botar, Andreas Huyssen, Hattula Moholy-Nagy, Anson Rabinbach, Lisa Silverman, and Tobias Westermann for valuable feedback on earlier versions of this essay and to the Gender Institute at the State University of New York at Buffalo for supporting this project. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

1. Lucia Moholy, noted ca. 1978 on an index card (collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Museum of Design, Berlin).

Brandt's photomontages. While Moholy-Nagy's methodologies, theoretical writings, approach to design, and use of a wide variety of media and materials profoundly influenced Brandt, she clearly did much more than simply work for him or merely illustrate his ideas. Brandt, like many photomonteurs after World War I, was absorbing and synthesizing both experimental trends among the avant-garde and the wide array and massive quantity of photographic imagery suddenly available in the Weimar Republic's illustrated press.²

Famed for her work in metal, Brandt's sleek designs are today among the most easily recognizable Bauhaus objects.³ But her photomontages, largely unknown until recently, break new ground in their compositional form and content. Brandt left almost no theoretical writings of her own, and most of her letters to Moholy-Nagy, in which she might have written of the ideas behind specific works or projects, do not survive. However, many of her forty-five known photomontages come more clearly into focus when examined through the interpretive lenses provided by the ideas in Moholy-Nagy's essays on photography and montage. Close analysis of Brandt's montage work reveals that she adopted these ideas, which Moholy-Nagy developed for his classes and in communication with his students at the Bauhaus, for her own. In so doing, Brandt re-created photomontage as a dynamic balance between formal visual experimentation and an intervention in the pictorial field of the Weimar Republic. Brandt focused her montages on the modern city, the gendered role of the artist in the postwar era, and the popular press's obsession with the New Woman. In addition to examining Brandt's works in relation to Moholy-Nagy's montages and theoretical writings, I explore the evidence of mutual influence and collaboration. Moholy-Nagy was Brandt's mentor, but he was also two years her junior and clearly respected her artistic ability and extensive experience. His later montages incorporate elements of Brandt's unique approach and thus make visible their conversation on montage theory.

Arguably the most influential practitioner and advocate of international constructivism, Hungarian Moholy-Nagy was also an art theorist and teacher of

2. For a complete catalog of her photomontage works, see Elizabeth Otto, *Tempo, Tempo! The Bauhaus Photomontages of Marianne Brandt* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag and the Bauhaus-Archiv, 2005).

3. The 2007 sale at Sotheby's of Brandt's *Tea Infuser* (MT 49), designed in 1924 and, in this case, probably executed in 1927, set a record for the highest price ever paid for a Bauhaus design. (During the school's Weimar period, Bauhaus designs received MT numbers, akin to the ME numbers given in the Dessau Metal Workshop.) See Alice Rawsthorn, "The Tale of a Teapot and Its Creator," *International Herald Tribune*, December 16, 2007. For more on Brandt's metal designs, see Klaus Weber, ed., *Die Metallwerkstatt am Bauhaus* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1992), 138–83. A number of Brandt's metal designs are available from such companies as Alessi, Italy.

art and design who worked in a number of countries, particularly Germany and the United States. During his relatively short life, he wrote extensively on the role of art in contemporary society, the possibilities for expanding human vision through such new media as film and photography, and the Bauhaus itself.⁴ Moholy-Nagy was invited by Bauhaus director Walter Gropius to become a professor at the school in 1923 at twenty-seven—he was the youngest professor ever to work there—and his arrival coincided with a general turn away from the influences of expressionism and toward constructivism at the school.⁵

Moholy-Nagy's best-known photomontages use larger, more complete photographic elements than was typical of Berlin Dada montages; this and his strong compositional aesthetic evidence his links to Soviet and international constructivism as opposed to the more fragmentary approach of Berlin Dadaists in the early 1920s.⁶ In these works Moholy-Nagy often seems preoccupied with the visual play of found photographic images that he uses to create fragmentary pictorial illusions. While his works focus on issues of form, they often reveal a surprising emotional engagement and probing of a troubled masculinity, strong contrasts to the more formal abstract paintings and photograms for which he is better known. Both Moholy-Nagy and Brandt were working with complex pictorial theories that were interwoven with more personal responses to gender dynamics and the rise of modernism in the interwar period. Photomontage was an ideal medium for the meeting of problems of form and interwar content, and multiple layers of meaning are often embedded in these cut and combined images.

While Moholy-Nagy is known for his constructivist-influenced photomontages, this work was in fact rooted in Berlin Dada. Moholy-Nagy recorded having made his first montage experiments about two years after his 1920 move from Budapest to Berlin, a city in which he had quickly become connected with Dadaists and other members of the international avant-garde. Initially he was skeptical of and even put off by the forms of montage that he encountered there. In a letter of April 1920 he wrote that “in the latest exhibition of *Der Sturm*, a man called Kurt Schwitters is exhibiting pictures made from

4. Moholy-Nagy died at the age of fifty-one in 1946. Many of his books are still in print in both German and English. The best collection of his articles and essays available in English is Krsztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy*, trans. Eva Grusz et al. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

5. For more on the changes that Moholy-Nagy instituted at the Bauhaus and the profound effects that the school had on him, see Krsztina Passuth, “The Youngest Professor at the Bauhaus,” in *Moholy-Nagy*, 39–42.

6. For more on international constructivism, see Kai-Uwe Hemken and Rainer Stommer, eds., *Konstruktivistische Internationale, 1922–1927: Utopien für eine europäische Kultur* (Stuttgart: Hatje; Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1992).

newspaper articles, luggage labels, hair, and hoops. What's the point? Are these painterly problems?"⁷ It was while sharing a "nearly unheatable" studio with Schwitters during the financial crisis of the winter of 1922–23 that Moholy-Nagy produced his own first-known Dadaistic, fragmentary montage titled *25 Bankruptcy Vultures* (*25 Pleitegeier*; fig. 1).⁸ Moholy-Nagy later talked about this turn to montage as coming out of intense financial hardship: "In the meantime the German Mark had fallen to twenty five million per dollar. We had no money to buy paint or canvas. So Kurt inspired me to follow his example and use the 'currency' [*Währung*] of the day as a material for collage."⁹ In a footnote to his later biographical essay, "Abstract of an Artist," Moholy-Nagy expands on these origins: "Under the influence of cubist collages, Schwitters's 'Merz' painting, and Dadaism's brazen courage, I started out with my photomontages, too."¹⁰

This first work in montage uses halftone text and image fragments, none of which are photographic reproductions. Disjointed in nature, *25 Bankruptcy Vultures* clearly evidences Dadaism's influence. It includes reversed black-and-white silhouettes of the same figure and the pink head, neck, and claws of a vulture. Prominently featured are fragments of high-denomination mark bills and colorful 25s clustered around the two shadowy silhouettes who seem to be lurking like vultures to profit from those who cannot withstand the ongoing financial hardship of the times. These figures are also linked to recent European history and politics. On the hat of the upper figure snippets of text mark him as "a handsome Otto," and Otto von Bismarck's last name appears on the head of the lower silhouette. This evocation of Bismarck can be linked to a medal on the black figure's chest and, on the right side of this work, the image of a medieval knight with an eagle—Germany's national bird—on his shield; together these elements form a jibe at the type of predatory militarism for which Bismarck had been famous in the nineteenth century. The legacy of this militarism was blamed by many for World War I and subsequent financial instabilities. These figures are also linked to a playful mocking of profiteering bankers. Across the lower figure's brow is *Reichsba*, clearly a fragment of the

7. Moholy-Nagy to Iván Hevesy, April 5, 1920 (collection of the Documentation Center of the Art History Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, reproduced in Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy*, 388).

8. This work has also been reproduced under the title *Pleitegeier* (see, e.g., Irene-Charlotte Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue: László Moholy-Nagy, Fotomontagen und -collagen, 1922–1943* [Gießen: Anabas, 1980], 68–69). However, the original, now located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, is clearly titled *25 Pleitegeier* in Moholy-Nagy's hand.

9. László Moholy-Nagy, quoted in Otto Friedrich, *Weltstadt Berlin: Größe und Untergang, 1918–1933* (Munich: Desch, 1973), 130.

10. László Moholy-Nagy, "Abstract of an Artist" (1944), in Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy*, 362.



Figure 1. László Moholy-Nagy, *25 Bankruptcy Vultures (25 Pleitegeier)*, 1922–23, collage of printed paper with ink on paper, 30 × 23 cm. The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photograph © The Israel Museum. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

word *Reichsbank* (National Bank). But the end of the fragment also sounds like “bah!” an expression of disgust often used in German with children, making this national institution seem silly.

The destruction and chaos of the war are evident not only in the torn bits of paper glued at random on this work but in additional text and imagery found in it. At the top right, text extracts spell out “the City Treasury of the city pays / money / WITHOUT / marks.” In the middle left a German eagle crashes headfirst into the word *Million*—whether this is a count of people or marks is unclear—and the eagle’s blood is spattered on the pure white chest of the lower male silhouette. *25 Bankruptcy Vultures*, made by a veteran whose war wounds

led to his release from service and who was now living through this financial crisis, is a trenchant critique of incompetent and nonsensical military and financial systems.

But *25 Bankruptcy Vultures* is also a reflection on the theme of transformation, and it performs its own forms of alchemy. Symbolic animals appear in a relationship of replacement or even ouster, for amid the fragmentary evidence of a tanking economy, a vulture replaces the dying national eagle. A short text incorporated in this work foregrounds this theme. On the black-silhouetted figure's medal is a poem in which one thing is replaced with another for nationalistic and military reasons: "I gave gold to the military for the honor of iron" (Gold gab ich zur Wehr, Eisen nahm ich zur Ehr). Above all else, the bits of bills directly emphasize the theme of exchange. The large fragment in the middle of the montage, which at first appears to be a portion of a thousand-mark bill, is in fact a mere placeholder: "The Central Treasury of the National Bank in Berlin will pay the presenter of this banknote one thousand marks." This note is dated September 15, 1922, and the unstable financial situation is emphasized by another date and further text: "Beginning January 1, 1923, this banknote may be recalled for exchange with other legal means of payment." Therefore, this bill held value only as a form of exchange for other kinds of money; on its own it was worthless. Even in the moment of its printing, its flimsy authority was revealed when it was given only the shortest of life spans. Lastly, the work itself is transformed through all of its talk of money. Not only is it marked as a "thousand marks" in the central fragment, it is made into a "voucher" (*Gutschein*) across the neck of the black figure, labeled "25" in multiple positions, and, most prominently, neatly designated as "100 billion marks" at the lower right.¹¹ In a piece on the theme of bankruptcy and greed, Moholy-Nagy transforms the worthless paper ground of this montage with the worthless paper money of the day. In so doing, he makes the work itself into a mocking monetary instrument, one that, like all the other forms of bank notes created on an ad hoc basis at this time, was useless for actually purchasing anything.

In performing these transformations—eagle into vulture, gold into iron, paper into money, and money into paper—Moholy-Nagy plays on the wider *Ersatzkultur* of the time, in which seemingly everything could be replaced with some cheaper version of itself. Maria Makela has skillfully explored this aspect of World War I and early Weimar culture and linked it to her analysis of

11. This hundred-billion-mark bill is part of the wider trend to create local money, in this case from the central German city of Wetzlar.

Schwitters's montages.¹² In his first engagement with this medium, Moholy-Nagy has created a montage heavily influenced both by Schwitters's garbage-picking aesthetic and by the trenchant critiques made by members of Berlin Dada, for example, when they called for viewers to “invest in Dada!”¹³ Using mass-produced text and disposable imagery cut from everyday life, *25 Bankruptcy Vultures* ridicules politics and military culture, calls attention to the abstract nature of financial systems, and posits the transformational power of montage's mediations.

When he began teaching at the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy developed sophisticated and experimental approaches to montage, and his works quickly took on the sleekness of constructivism. These subsequent montages relate to his ideas on modern photography and make connections to advertising, cinema, and design. Through their content, they address personal, narrative, and political issues. Already a published visual theorist, it was also at this time that Moholy-Nagy began to write longer essays on aspects of post-World War I art. Among his most cogent and influential treatises on visual representation is *Painting Photography Film (Malerei Fotografie Film)*, first published in 1925 as the eighth in the Bauhaus Books series. A number of the volume's ideas clearly apply to his photomontage practice of the 1920s, and they also became central to Brandt's photomontage methods. In the introduction, Moholy-Nagy posits the usefulness of both photography and painting for “present-day optical creation,” but he designates the purview of the former as representation (*Gestaltung der Darstellung*) and that of the latter as color (*Gestaltung der Farbe*).¹⁴ At the time that Moholy-Nagy was embracing a constructivist idiom,

12. Maria Makela, “Cloth Culture: On Ersatz and Merz” (lecture, German Studies Association Annual Conference, St. Paul, MN, October 4, 2008). Makela points out that seemingly everything had its own *Ersatz* during and after the war, including even cloth curtains, which were requisitioned by the government and could be replaced with curtains made of washable paper.

13. The phrase “Legen Sie Ihr Geld in dada an!” was used by a number of Berlin Dadaists. See, e.g., Raoul Hausmann, *L'inconnu Raoul Hausmann* (1919), and Hausmann and Johannes Baader, *Angekarte* (1919), two interrelated postcard montages that use fragments of this phrase (Eva Züchner et al., *Der deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich: Raoul Hausmann, 1886–1971* [Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1994], 165–66).

14. László Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei Fotografie Film* (1925, 1927), ed. Hans Wingler (Berlin: Mann, 1986), 5–6. The English version is László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1969), 7–8. Painting was one of Moholy-Nagy's most important media for experimentation, but it seems to have troubled him at times that he still needed this traditional form. In 1934 he blamed industry and mass media for blocking experimentation and concluded that “since it is impossible at present to realize our dreams of the fullest development of optical techniques (light architecture), we are forced to retain the medium of easel painting” (Moholy-Nagy to Frantisek Kalivoda, June 1934, in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy et al., *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy* [Berlin: Hartmann; Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1969], 15).

he championed abstraction and a new approach to painting, but he also saw an ongoing need for representation, a role that could be fully transferred to photography.

Moholy-Nagy addresses photomontage techniques directly at a few points in *Painting Photography Film*. In fact, this 1925 book is likely the first printed use of the word *photomontage*, which Moholy-Nagy applies to works by Hannah Höch and Paul Citroen.¹⁵ To differentiate his own montages from those of other artists, Moholy-Nagy referred to them as *Fotoplastiken* or “photo sculptures.”¹⁶ In these works, the photomontages were maquettes for the actual final products, the “photo sculptures,” which were photographs of the montages. Where montages are unique, *Fotoplastiken* are infinitely reproducible. Still, Moholy-Nagy also kept the original montages, and it is these that I discuss. Significantly, in the chapter “The Future of the Photographic Process,” Moholy-Nagy groups together newer modes of creating photomontages by defining photo sculptures and the montage of his day as “a more advanced form than the early glued photographic compositions (photomontage) of the Dadaists.” The photo sculptures attend more carefully to composition: “They are pieced together from various photographs and are an experimental method of simultaneous representation; compressed interpenetration of visual and verbal wit; weird combinations of the most realistic, imitative means which pass into imaginary spheres. They can, however, also be forthright, tell a story; more veristic ‘than life itself.’”¹⁷ For Moholy-Nagy, combining photographic materials with constructivist composition allowed for a new vision that might transcend the stopped time of the single frame by creating humor, jarring the spectator, or revealing new truths. Ultimately, constructivist methods—including precise composition, filmic scope, and visual rhyming—became central to the montages of both Moholy-Nagy and Brandt. Like her mentor, Brandt also briefly engaged a Dadaistic form of montage, then quickly moved to a more constructivist form of composite image.

Prior to contact with the Bauhaus, Brandt was already an established artist. She began studying painting and sculpture in 1912 at Saxony’s Grand Ducal School of Fine Art in Weimar—the building that would become the

15. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 37, 106–7. Of course, claims to have been the first to use the word *montage* in discussions held in 1919 or earlier abound. See Brigid Doherty, “Berlin Dada: Montage and the Embodiment of Modernity, 1916–1920” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996), for more on the Berlin Dadaists’ narratives of origin.

16. “Photoplastics” has been the common translation of *Fotoplastiken*, but this translation misses the sense of Moholy-Nagy’s term.

17. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 36, 37.

Bauhaus. After some time spent in Munich, she received her degree in 1918. She then worked another five years as a painter, spending time in Oslo, Paris, and southern France and participating in several exhibitions. In 1923 she returned to Weimar and attended the first Bauhaus exhibition, which included abstract constructivist paintings and sculptures by Moholy-Nagy. Shortly thereafter Brandt dramatically rejected the primary medium in which she had already established herself. She piled up her expressionistic, representative paintings and burned them.

A few months later, at the start of 1924, Brandt began her studies at the Bauhaus, where she soon found her new medium, the one that would make her reputation as one of the best Bauhaus designers: metal. Female students in the Bauhaus were generally streamed into the weaving workshop, but, at the suggestion of Moholy-Nagy, as head of the Metal Workshop with whom Brandt had studied in the preliminary course (*Vorkurs*), Brandt chose metal and started as an apprentice in the summer of 1924. She later wrote about the difficulties she had had as one of the few women in this male-dominated workshop.¹⁸ Despite initially being tested by her male colleagues, Brandt secured more contracts for industrial production of her designs than anyone else in the workshop.¹⁹ Already during her first year at the Bauhaus she made some of her best-known works, including the silver and ebony *Tea Infuser and Strainer*, which, with its use of stark modernist forms and banishing of almost all ornament, epitomizes the streamlined design that made the Bauhaus's reputation.²⁰ Brandt quickly rose through the shop's ranks to hold positions of chief assistant

18. Marianne Brandt, "Letter to the Younger Generation," in *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*, ed. Eckard Neuman, trans. Eva Richter and Alba Lorman (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), 106. For more on the topic of gender relations and the divisions of labor at the Bauhaus, see Sigrid Wortmann Weltge, *Women's Work: Textile Art from the Bauhaus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993); Anja Baumhoff, *The Gendered World of the Bauhaus: The Politics of Power at the Weimar Republic's Premier Art Institute, 1919–1932* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2001); and Katrina Rüedi Ray, "Bauhaus Hausfrau: Gender Formation in Design Education," *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 2 (2001): 73–80.

19. According to her 1928 certificate of competence (*Befähigungszeugnis*), issued by the Bauhaus and signed by Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, "her completed projects and designs may be considered among the best Bauhaus works; the majority of metal workshop models that have been selected for industrial mass production are by her" (ihre ausgeführten arbeiten und entwürfe können zu den besten bauhausarbeiten gerechnet werden; die meisten von der industrie zur serienmässigen herstellung übernommenen modelle der metallwerkstatt stamen von ihr) (Befähigungszeugnis, Marianne Brandt, 1928, collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin; portions reproduced in Karsten Kruppa, "Marianne Brandt: Annäherung an ein Leben," in Weber, *Die Metallwerkstatt am Bauhaus*, 48).

20. Images of Brandt's metalwork are readily available on the Web. See the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Tea Infuser and Strainer* by Brandt at www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dsgn2/ho_2000.63a-c.htm.

(*Mitarbeiter*) and, when Moholy-Nagy left the Bauhaus in 1928, of acting director (*stellvertretende Leiterin*) of the Metal Workshop. When she herself left in 1929, she became the only woman—out of eleven who had apprenticed there—to receive her diploma from that workshop.²¹

Brandt's initial foray into photomontage occurred in 1924, her first year of study with Moholy-Nagy, in two works simply titled *Montage I* and *Montage II*.²² These are Brandt's only montages that do not contain images made with a camera; instead, they are made from photograms, a medium that Moholy-Nagy considered a more direct form of photography and of which he was a pioneer. In *Painting Photography Film* he exclaimed that the making of photograms "leads to possibilities of *light-composition*, in which light must be sovereignly handled as a new creative means, like color in painting and sound in music."²³ For Brandt, formerly a well-established painter, these experiments with photogram montage allowed her to make forms of—albeit largely abstract—representation without returning to figurative painting. In place of traditional materials, Brandt's first two montages used reflective objects made of metal, her new medium of choice, placed on photosensitive paper to tame light.

Sometime around 1925, Brandt began culling from the wide variety of photographic reproductions made available in the Weimar Republic's burgeoning illustrated press. She drew on such periodicals as the fashion-conscious *Die Dame*, the literary magazine *Uhu*, various film journals, and, more than anything else, Germany's most popular illustrated paper, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. In the summer of 1926 Brandt traveled to Paris for a nine-month stay with her husband, the Norwegian painter Erik Brandt.²⁴ It was during this period on leave from the Bauhaus and away from the Metal Workshop that she began to work intensely with photomontage in a fierce return to figuration and pictorial composition. The images that she had been collecting and those that she found in the French press and in German papers presumably sent from home became raw material, modifiable readymades, from which she began to create images and explore pictorial theories she would have known

21. Baumhoff, *Gendered World*, 143.

22. Reproductions of both of these photogram montages are in Michael Siebenbrodt, ed., *Bauhaus Weimar: Entwürfe für die Zukunft* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 2000), 73; and Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 14–17.

23. László Moholy-Nagy, "Photography without a Camera: The 'Photogram,'" in *Painting Photography Film*, 32. See also Ute Eskildsen and Robert Knodt, eds., *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Fotogramme, 1922–1943* (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1995).

24. Brandt met her husband while in art school in Weimar. They married in 1919 but, starting with her time at the Bauhaus, often lived apart. This seems to have given her a particular freedom and unusual status; Brandt was legally married but lived as a single woman for most of her time at the school.

through Moholy-Nagy's teachings and writings and from more informal conversations during her work with him.

Through these representational photomontages, Brandt found a complement to the abstract and streamlined forms of her metal work. Montage allowed her both to image the dynamism of interwar culture and to focus an analytic gaze on contemporary society and politics and on the dangerous side of modern technology that had become so apparent in World War I.²⁵ These works hover between the chaos of Dada's influence and constructivism's more controlled approach. In fact, as was the case with Moholy-Nagy's *25 Bankruptcy Vultures*, among Brandt's earliest photomontages are two that are stylistically closer to Dadaism. In these works, both from 1926, fragments of text mixed with gelatin silver-print photographs of Brandt and members of her family create grotesques spread over the picture plane.²⁶ But these highly personal works differ sharply from Brandt's main experiments in montage, which use found images from the popular press to make works with a much broader reach. Hanne Bergius has argued that, in contrast to Höch's photomontages, the majority of Brandt's works were intended not to create Dadaistic shock effects but to enable viewers to develop their abilities to observe and perceive their environment—which, through technical innovation and rationalization, had rapidly changed—in a cool and distanced manner.²⁷ In many examples of Brandt's work, Bergius's view is correct, but her assertion of these works' coldness underestimates the dynamism of Brandt's photomontaged visual landscapes and the emotional pull that she creates with images of human figures. Using photomontage to build on favorite Dadaist themes—including politics, the artist's role in the wake of the war, and issues of gender construction—Brandt also embraces constructivism's preoccupation with order and Moholy-Nagy's plays with space to expand the medium's power.

The dizzying constructions in her first major group of photomontaged works from 1926—her most productive year in this medium—develop out

25. For more on this last aspect, a critique of militarism, see Elizabeth Otto, "The Secret History of Photomontage: On the Origins of the Composite Form and the Weimar Photomontages of Marianne Brandt," in *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects*, ed. Kerstin Barndt, Kathleen Canning, and Kristin McGuire (New York: Berghahn, forthcoming).

26. These two works, which evidence the formal influence of Schwitters and Höch, are *Kann der Mensch sein Schicksal . . .* and the two-sided *Bulle—Esel—Affe/Idoles Modernes* of 1926 (see Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 18–23). Brandt made about fifteen montages in 1926, all of which can be seen in *Tempo, Tempo!* 18–58.

27. Hanne Bergius, "Fotomontage im Vergleich: Hannah Höch, Marianne Brandt, Alice Lex-Nerlinger," in *Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Ute Eskildsen (Düsseldorf: Richter, 1994), 43.

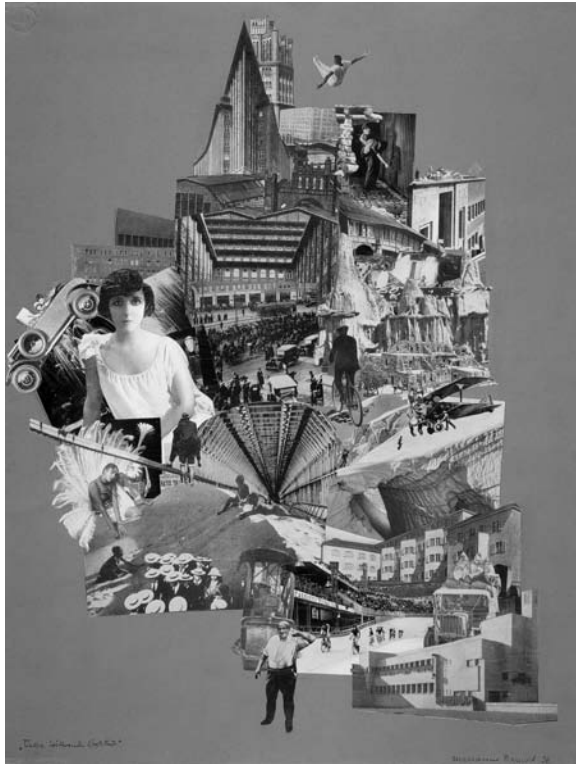


Figure 2. Marianne Brandt, *Our Unnerving City* (*Unsere irritierende Großstadt*), 1926, montage of newspaper clippings on heavy gray paper, 63 × 50 cm. Collection Galerie Berinson, Berlin/UBU Gallery, New York. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

of Brandt's skillful and intuitive cropping and arranging of architectural and figurative photographs. Typical of her work at this time is *Our Unnerving City* (*Unsere irritierende Großstadt*, 1926; fig. 2), which combines Dadaistic vertigo—we might think of the flurry of figures and the pull of spinning wheels in Höch's famous *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* (1919–20)—with constructivism's control. Balancing between these two, *Our Unnerving City* explores issues of gender and the dynamics of postwar metropolitan life.

On a ground of heavy gray paper, Brandt shows the undulating and cavernous forms of a cityscape that recedes sharply to the vortex of its own center.

This work is premised on a vacuum effect that pulls at the montage's elements. From the left, several small figures and a horse teeter in toward the abyss on the thin ribbon of a hanging bridge. Others are also drawn in from the left: one grown man carrying another, a dancer in a skirt of white feathers who appears bowed by the center's pull, and two African children who strain to reach across the crest of a sand dune to be pulled to safety by a third child. From the right, an airplane seems poised to take off into this magnetic center. From above, a skydiver falls spectacularly toward this same abyss. The work is elaborately built up through this visual vacuum effect, which unifies the montage elements but threatens to swallow them whole.

Creating structure around these figures seemingly in motion are naturally formed caves, ancient stone dwellings, and slumping medieval buildings tucked into the sharper and more angular forms of the latest modern architecture. This structuring through architecture and the work's title of *Our Unnerving City* recall Citroën's claustrophobic *City*, one of the two photomontages that Moholy-Nagy reproduced in *Painting Photography Film*.²⁸ But whereas Citroën's city appears as an undulating and unrelenting wall of facades, Brandt combines recently built architectural monuments to suggest an eerie instability to the new pillars of modernism. Fritz Höger's Chilehaus in Hamburg, completed only two years earlier, forms a dramatic point at the top of Brandt's composition. It is paired with an evocation of another of Germany's burgeoning cities: Berlin is brought to mind by a recent addition to its outskirts—the new office tower for the locomotive manufacturer Borsig.²⁹ At the lower right are two other images of the latest architecture: a Stuttgart apartment building by Richard Döcker—who became a leader in the Weissenhofsiedlung project the following year—and, at the bottom of the composition, a new school in Holland.³⁰ In the montage's upper middle, below the paired towers, a dramatic but unstable depth is suggested by the Chilehaus's inner courtyard, whose ground has been replaced by a confusing array of modes of transportation, including a streetcar and tracks, lines of rickshaw cabs, and a few automobiles that appear ready to drive off the page.

28. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 107.

29. Designed and built during 1922–24, the Chilehaus quickly became a signature feature of the Hamburg cityscape. The major elements of this part of Brandt's composition all come from three large photographs in "Das Gesicht des neuen Deutschlands," *Uhu* 2, no. 5 (1926): 39–41. These include the Chilehaus facade (39); the Borsig tower and the buildings below it in Berlin-Tegel (40); and the Chilehaus's courtyard (41).

30. Both buildings were reproduced on the same page of Adolf Behne's essay "Neues Bauen," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, April 30, 1926, 573.

As with the rickshaws and streetcar, several other portions of *Our Unnerving City* pair historical elements with those suggesting modernity. But rather than create only flat comparisons of old and new, in some of the pairs Brandt evokes the dynamic hybridity of colonialist and postcolonial spaces. At the lower right, sandwiched between images of the modern apartment building and the school, is a photograph of a truck piled high with bags of grain; four veiled men are perched on top to suggest a meeting of new technology with a traditional culture.³¹ Brandt also visualizes the awkwardness of European encroachment into non-European spaces. Inserted between the three African children at the lower left, a tight-knit gaggle of straw-hatted tourists appear overdressed and out of place among the dunes. A few stray hats from this group crop up again in the montage's upper right, suggesting the ubiquity of this crowd as its members explore this strange city. Such imagery was not uncommon in Weimar's illustrated papers, which so often strove to keep Germany's recently lost colonies present in readers' minds. In Brandt's hands, these elements seem to suggest an ever more connected world in which varied histories and experiences collide.

Visual perusing of the sharply receding architecture in *Our Unnerving City* is arrested by the work's largest figure, a feminine New Woman with a *Bubikopf* or bob hairstyle who is clad in a diaphanous frock and bathed in moody light. While she appears as an example of the modern women who increasingly peopled such bustling modern cities—Brandt herself among them during this time in Paris—the earnestness with which this New Woman meets our gaze also seems to ask viewers to consider their own relationships to the uncertain future of postwar cities that were bursting with new people, architecture, automobiles, and traffic jams.³² The pensive nature of her look poses a strong counterexample to the nearby female motorists in their stylish car, who are oblivious as they drive over fireworks to zoom into nothingness. By contrast, this New Woman appears to understand that hers is a world on the edge of an abyss.

While almost all of the figures except the New Woman appear to be in motion, one man at the bottom of the work resists being pulled into this city.

31. The truck with the men on top is from a photograph bearing the caption "Die Erschließung Marokkos: Landstraßenbau für den Autoverkehr," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, June 13, 1926, 739.

32. Detlev Peukert discusses the interwar city as "the quintessential modern habitat" and states that "the urban and metropolitan spirit was fuelled by the sense of liberation from convention and the reins of community which the city offered, with its anonymity, its multiplicity of activities, and its great arrays of goods and entertainments, newspapers, and magazines" (*The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson [New York: Hill and Wang, 1989], 181–82).

He looks out at us wryly as he scratches his head. Yet he too is in danger, apparently unaware that he is in the path of charging bicycles and, directly behind him, a steamroller. Brandt's use of architecture to structure *Our Unnerving City*, her creation of strong illusions of depth in a fragmented visual field, and, above all, the presence of a New Woman figure who engages the viewer's wandering gaze are essential characteristics of her montage method. In this 1926 work Brandt reshapes the established traditions of fragmentary Dadaist montage through a constructivist ordering and structuring initiated by Moholy-Nagy, among others. Yet, even as she works with these techniques, Brandt makes them her own by building a thrilling and dangerous cityscape as seen through a contemporary New Woman's eyes.

After her return to the Bauhaus in 1927, Brandt seems to have worked in parallel in montage, metal, and photography.³³ Metal was the medium in which Brandt received public recognition; photomontage and photography seem always to have been more private affairs, leading to contemplative works that she may have shown to her Bauhaus friends and colleagues. Of the large number of photomontages that Brandt completed during the later years of the Weimar Republic, only one is known for certain to have been exhibited before the 1970s.³⁴

A comparative look at Moholy-Nagy's and Brandt's works shows how both artists use the dynamism of modernist design to create images of stunning—even ironic—optimism about modernity's possibilities for altering the post-World War I world. In *Painting Photography Film* Moholy-Nagy referred to his own *Pneumatik* (1923; fig. 3) as an "advertising poster" (*Reklameplakat*). It uses imagery and typography to convey the driving speeds possible with modern tires, without focusing directly on the tires that are the advertisement's subject.³⁵ Oversized text is upended across the picture plane and recedes dramatically into the distance to form a road for a speeding car, and the letter *n*

33. A cache of Brandt's negatives surfaced in the 1980s to reveal the extensive nature of her photographic practice. For more on Brandt's photography, see Elisabeth Wynhoff, ed., *Marianne Brandt: Fotografien am Bauhaus* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 2003).

34. The one work by Brandt that clearly was seen by a larger audience was *ME*, part of a portfolio given to Gropius on his departure from the Bauhaus in 1928; I discuss this work later in this essay. Eckhard Neumann, one of the first Bauhaus historians, was essential in discovering the existence of other Brandt photomontages through his correspondence with her in the late 1960s. He obtained two works from her, and Brandt then allowed others to be shown in a series of sale exhibitions in the late 1970s at the Galerie am Sachsenplatz in Leipzig.

35. While Moholy-Nagy and subsequent authors refer to this as an advertisement, there seems to be no documentation of its use in that capacity. It may have been a proposal for an unrealized project or simply a model made for teaching at the Bauhaus.



Figure 3. László Moholy-Nagy, *Pneumatik: Advertising Poster (Pneumatik: Reklameplakat)*, 1923. Reproduced in Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei Photographie Film*, 100. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

of *Pneumatik* does double duty as text and as the car's shadow. With its curving lines and strong design, *Pneumatik* is partly abstracted to suggest open roads and infinite possibilities. While this image is still, the movement of our eyes across the letters gives a filmic temporality to it; the tiny car appears propelled forward in the opposite direction to our reading. Like his car, the driver is shown to be very small, and only the abstracted circle of his head is visible. But in the narrative world of this poster, it is through his skill and brainpower that this dynamic image of speed unfolds before us.

Four years later, in 1927, Brandt created a work that responds to *Pneumatik* with her own dizzying vision in *Tempo-Tempo, Progress, Culture (Tempo-Tempo, Fortschritt, Kultur)*, in which text swirls around the figure of a construc-



Figure 4. Marianne Brandt, *Tempo-Tempo, Progress, Culture* (*Tempo-Tempo, Fortschritt, Kultur*), 1927, montage of newspaper clippings, black, red, and white ink, 52.0 × 39.8 cm. Collection of the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photograph by Herbert Boswank. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

tivist engineer as he mans an incomprehensible mass of machinery (fig. 4). To create this oversized engine, Brandt has montaged seven photorealistic technical drawings and thus formed a machine full of gears and levers that pump out text and optimistic drive. Though the large machine is the heart of this work, its function is unclear; this allows it to serve as a generalization for the machinery of culture and the work of rebuilding and re-creating society after the war.

While Moholy-Nagy called *Pneumatik* an advertising image, the purpose of *Tempo-Tempo, Progress, Culture* was, until recently, unclear. *Tempo*:

Magazin für Fortschritt und Kultur (*Tempo: Magazine for Progress and Culture*), a lesser-known publication of the popular Ullstein publishing house, was a lifestyle illustrated produced between 1927 and 1933. Brandt's *Tempo-Tempo, Progress, Culture* appears to have been a prospective design for its first cover; the work is accompanied by a sheet of tracing paper with additional markings giving the issue number and price.³⁶ In Brandt's execution, the words *tempo*, *progress*, and *culture*, key elements of the magazine's name, are rendered in a sleek modernist typography that quickly shifts scale and becomes a design element. The lone engineer and the mammoth machine embody the interwar dynamism of the magazine's name.

Like Moholy-Nagy's *Pneumatik* in its clean, futuristic vision of technology, this photomontage has links to commercial culture. It likewise appears filmic, set in motion by the black, gray, white, and red text that arcs and weaves through it. With simple lines, strong shapes, and an empty background, Brandt directs viewers' gazes and puts the work's various elements into play with one another. Two thin lines form a clear ring around the machine and focus our attention on it; Brandt has lightened the text with gouache wherever the ring touches it to suggest that the ring is made of glass and positioned it between the text and the viewer. This illusion of space is furthered by the engineer who straddles this ring and thus pops out from the page, propelled into our space by the simplest of compositional means.

In *Tempo-Tempo* this small figure in belted coveralls is dwarfed by his complex machine, yet he mans it with smiling aplomb. Brandt has used a skillful montage to alter his stance and arm position and give him an expansive pose that suggests his power and competence. Magician-like, the engineer controls the giant metallic gears through the mere shifting of the thin lever that he holds. With one touch from him, the gears spring into action to spit out abstract concepts: progress, culture, and, above all, the speed of tempo. Like *Pneumatik*'s helmeted driver, Brandt's engineer is tiny but glorified as an ideal New Man. As he appears in this work, at the helm of a machine producing design and colorful and idealistic text, the engineer figures as an artist-constructor who can help remake art and society in this postwar world. The rise of such figures—types that I refer to as the “artist-constructor” or “engineer”—is a

36. Sabine Hartmann of the Bauhaus-Archiv kindly alerted me to the fact that Ullstein published a journal called *Tempo* during the Weimar Republic, and suggested the connection to Brandt's work. As with Moholy-Nagy's *Pneumatik*, there is no evidence that Brandt's design was put to use. The markings on the tracing paper sheet fill an oblong box at the lower right with text, indicating that this is the first volume of 1927 and that the cost is one mark. A few pages of the first issue of *Tempo: Magazin für Fortschritt und Kultur* (issue 1, 1927) are reproduced in Patrick Rössler, *Die neue Linie, 1929–1943: Das Bauhaus am Kiosk* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2007), 47.

defining aspect of the international avant-garde's attempts to rethink the role of artists in society.³⁷ Modernist engineers or operators of machinery fascinated many international constructivists and members of the Bauhaus—particularly after 1923 when Moholy-Nagy joined the school and there was a general turn away from expressionism—were often particularly interested in blending the ideal of the artist with that of the skilled technician. While she images a male figure in *Tempo-Tempo* Brandt's development of the artist-constructor is significant to her thinking about the role of artistic production and of her self-conception as an artist.

One of Brandt's few published essays suggests that she identified with this figure. Two years after making *Tempo-Tempo* Brandt wrote a short piece, ironically titled "Bauhaus Style," in the journal *Bauhaus*. Brandt's essay—printed using the overtly modernist Bauhaus method of omitting capitals for efficiency—is a response to critiques made by the constructivist sculptor Naum Gabo. In it she emphasizes the technical, even scientific, nature of the Metal Workshop's design processes:

[gabo] hardly knows us if he believes that we are trying to create a style and that the spherical lamp, for example, was made simply out of a pleasure in the forms sphere and cylinder. . . . in general we must now be content with the quantity of the ideas that have arisen from our experience and with the experiments and charts with which we check by tests and calculations. a certain amount of intuition and a sense of one's own equilibrium at the outset are still indispensable. mistakes are inevitable, but, in this aspect too, from day to day we are doing better and better.³⁸

Brandt counters the accusation of superficiality—the mere creation of a style—by describing herself and the other members of the Bauhaus as constructivist engineers engaged in extremely practical work. This scientific approach to form and design is, for Brandt, a way to completely rethink the mode of making objects and images, and the imperative of that need to rethink is clearly a given for her.

37. Many authors have traced the figure of the artist-constructor in the interwar period. See, e.g., Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). The rise of this new type of hybrid artist figure can be linked to a search for a New Man more generally and to changes in productivist labor practices. See Anson Rabinbach, "The Science of Work between the Wars," in *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 271–88.

38. Marianne Brandt, "Bauhausstil," *Bauhaus*, 1929, no. 1: 21. This text was a response to Naum Gabo's claim, taking a light designed by Brandt as an example, that the Bauhaus was engaged only superficially in new design rather than any fundamental rethinking of it ("Gestaltung?" *Bauhaus*, 1928, no. 4: 3). Brandt's essay takes the form of a letter to Ernst Kállai, a Hungarian art theorist and Bauhaus supporter.



Figure 5. Marianne Brandt, *Untitled (Self-Portrait, Double Exposure)*, ca. 1930/1931, modern photograph from vintage negative, 6 × 6 cm. Collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Not only did Brandt represent the artist-constructor in photomontage and write of experiments made in the Metal Workshop, but she also created a photographic self-portrait of herself in this role. Akin to the small but powerful engineer in *Tempo-Tempo*, her *Self-Portrait, Double Exposure (Selbstporträt, Doppelbelichtung)*, ca. 1930 or 1931; fig. 5) shows Brandt as an engineer figure in a white lab coat whose technical know-how is suggested by the drafting tools at hand. The photograph shows beads at her neck to feminize her image, but it also makes clear that she is in control of her self-presentation, for she holds the shutter release in her hand. This double exposed self-portrait evidences Brandt's skills as a photographer and, more broadly, an engineer and technician through the extreme high angle from which the photograph was taken and her skillful repetition of her own face through double exposing the negative. Like Brandt's sleek new designs created in the Metal Workshop, a remaking of the artist into the constructor was part of a broader attempt to change society through a radical break with the past.

Moholy-Nagy also represented himself several times as an artist constructor. In *Jealousy (Eifersucht)*, 1925; fig. 6) he makes multiple use of varia-



Figure 6. László Moholy-Nagy, *Jealousy (Eifersucht)*, 1925, montage of newspaper clippings and original photographs with ink, 63.8 × 56.1 cm. Collection of the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

tions on his own silhouette from a photograph made by Lucia Moholy, which shows him in a machinist's suit (*Monteuranzug*). Moholy-Nagy seems to have felt a particular connection to this photograph, for he used it as the basis for several photomontages.³⁹ Because of the suit's name, each work marks him as a *Monteur*, a term first linked to visual production by members of Berlin Dada

39. These include two distinct versions of *Jealousy*, the second made two years later in 1927, and his 1925/1926 *Der Trottler*, in which the silhouette of this figure is repeated three times (see Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue*, 100–101, 108–9).

and, by the mid-1920s, also linked to the ideal of the artist-constructor.⁴⁰ In fact, the word *Montage* began to be understood by a broader public as referring to a form of art making only in the mid- to late 1920s. In the context of the German language, montage historically bore traces of the machine. As Hanno Möbius has pointed out, *Montage* originally came into German through French industrial terminology.⁴¹ In early-twentieth-century German the word *Monteur* generally designated a machinist or laborer. Only in the avant-garde context did it also come to refer to one who made photomontages. Likewise, since *Montage* came from the realm of industry and large machinery, it marked the objects thus designated as separate from traditional representational forms. Montages were intended less as art than as functioning tools or machines that might be useful to or disruptive of society. Therefore Dadaist or Bauhaus makers of montages were situating themselves more as mechanics or laborers than as traditional artists. As one such *Monteur*, Moholy-Nagy must have been a striking figure in the machinist's suit shown in his wife's photograph, for its original color was orange.⁴² In the black-and-white photograph, it appears as light gray and is nearly identical to the suit worn by the machinist in Brandt's *Tempo-Tempo*.

In *Jealousy* Moholy-Nagy's multiple representations of his own image emphasize his status as a *Monteur*, both as a productivist engineer and as a maker of montages. In addition to being a montage, this image evokes another important visual technology of the day, one in which Moholy-Nagy himself worked, the cinema. *Jealousy* evokes this medium through its inclusion of two rectangular forms with the dimensions of upended film screens, its use of elements that give a sense of temporality, such as the repetition of figures and the diagonal line that traces a bullet's path over time, and its suggestion of a melodramatic narrative.⁴³ *Jealousy* is very much a self-portrait as an artist-

40. E.g., John Heartfield's nickname among the Berlin Dadaists was "Monteur-Dada," and George Grosz made a portrait of him titled *Der Monteur John Heartfield* (1920). See also Richard Huelsenbeck's text in Eckhard Siepmann, *Montage: John Heartfield, vom Club Dada zur Arbeiter-Illustrierten-Zeitung* (Berlin: Elefanten, 1992), 24.

41. In the mid-eighteenth century, *montage* was defined in French as "opération par laquelle on assemble les pièces d'un mécanisme, d'un dispositif, d'un objet plus ou moins complexe pour le mettre en état de servir, de fonctionner" (operation through which one assembles the pieces of a mechanism, device, or a more or less complex object to make it ready to serve or function) (Hanno Möbius, *Montage und Collage: Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933* [Munich: Fink, 2000], 16. Möbius takes this citation from Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert's encyclopedia of 1765).

42. Lusk notes the color of the suit (*Montagen ins Blaue*, 2).

43. In the late 1930s Moholy-Nagy himself linked this montage to film, by subtitling it *do not disturb* (a film poem on the theme of "jealousy") in class with a group of students in Chicago at the New Bauhaus (Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue*, 101). This text was also subsequently printed in Moholy-

constructor: both Moholy-Nagy's image and the work's technique demonstrate his skills as a film- and photomonteur.

At the same time, *Jealousy* undoes itself by showing us this constructor as fragmented, undermined, and dominated by his emotions. It allows us to see into his jealous heart. Images based on Lucia Moholy's photograph are repeatedly montaged in *Jealousy* to create a work that proposes a new form of fragmented postwar masculinity. In this mocking self-portrait Moholy-Nagy shows himself threefold: as a blank figure cut off at the knees and given women's shoes, as a productive modernist engineer printed in photographic negative, and as a squat, empty, black silhouette made in an ink wash. In the version of him at the left, a boyish modern woman situated in his heart expresses his jealousy by taking aim and shooting at the carefree New Woman in a bathing suit on the work's right. But despite the powerful shot that emanates from his body to perforate the montage as it passes over another figure's genitals, the shooting Moholy-Nagy is emasculated by the dainty feminine feet beneath him.

Not only is this montage self-mocking, aspects of it render its male figures as sinister, for all three of his incarnations are fixated on the bathing-suit-clad young woman. They seem to leer at her and make him appear obsessive. But while his self-representation is based in part on traditional gender tropes including the association of manliness with lust and aggression, the sinister nature of these figures is undermined by Moholy-Nagy's mixing of masculine and feminine characteristics in two of the figures. While the middle figure is a dark, manly, and full-bodied constructor, the empty silhouette farthest to the left is female not only from the knees down but in his heart. And his silhouette lurking at the right also doubles as the New Woman figure's shadow.

In addition to creating photomontages that convey an optimism about modernity and pose questions about gender more broadly, both Moholy-Nagy and Brandt seem to have used photomontage to reflect on personal experiences of gender relations. Eleanor Hight has read Moholy-Nagy's *Jealousy* as linked to a period of emotional turmoil toward the end of his marriage to Lucia. Hight interprets the image as being about one woman's jealousy—presumably Lucia's—of another, possibly a new love interest on Moholy-Nagy's part. Given the work's title, this interpretation illuminates the composition of *Jealousy* and allows us to understand it as a representation of layered and conflicting emotions and to see, as Hight does, "Moholy's use of photomontage, of arranging

Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Theobald, 1947), 290–91. *Painting Photography Film* includes a "sketch of a manuscript for a film" that, Moholy-Nagy notes, he had written in 1920–21 (*Painting Photography Film*, 124–37). In 1926, the year after he made *Jealousy*, Moholy-Nagy created his first film, *Berliner Stilleben*.

and constructing images, as a way of dealing with psychological stress.”⁴⁴ However, *Jealousy* is not limited to this personal interpretation. It is also a meditation on such diverse topics as the role of the constructivist engineer, modern masculinity, and gender ambiguity, themes that are closer to those of Brandt’s *Tempo-Tempo* and that help explain the work’s broader appeal.

One of the most significant aspects of much interwar photomontage—with work by Moholy-Nagy and Brandt prominent in this group—is its ability to function allegorically and thus to communicate multiple levels of meaning. In his 1925 study of historical baroque theater, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Walter Benjamin writes of allegory in a manner that seems to speak directly to the turn to photomontage on the part of his contemporaries. Benjamin describes allegory as a complex form of expression, which he likens to speech and writing in that it can communicate multiple levels of information to a receptive reader or viewer.⁴⁵ Therefore the significance of fragments in allegorical works is not immediately apparent and always remains ambiguous. Avant-garde photomontage, with its visible seams and unexpected juxtapositions, excels at showing itself as pieced together. Such works thus remain open-ended and invite viewers to interpret them as simultaneously conveying several potentially contradictory meanings. Many of both Moholy-Nagy’s and Brandt’s photomontages function in this manner. Moholy-Nagy’s *Jealousy*, for example, speaks to his modernist machismo as an artist-constructor while exploring his potential emasculation through emotional struggle and identification with his female contemporaries.

Ambiguous and contradictory images of modern women dominate Brandt’s photomontages. These figures are often the stars of her works, and they function allegorically to signify in a range of ways. On the one hand, such New Women appear to be on display for their modern good looks. On the other, because they are shown amid scenes of dynamism and chaos, they move beyond a superficial interpretation of New Womanhood as merely an updated fashion or style of femininity. Created from pictures extracted from the Weimar press, Brandt’s montages quote and counter conventional imaging that emphasizes the appearance of New Women as harbingers of change

44. Eleanor Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 169. Brandt also turned to photomontage while in distress about her marriage. In two Dadaist-influenced images from 1926 mentioned previously, she uses photographic portraits and an explosion of French and German text to reflect on problems with her husband and an apparent love triangle involving her sister.

45. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), 159–67. Allegory comes from the Greek *allēgoría*, which means literally to speak otherwise than one seems to speak (Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964], 2).

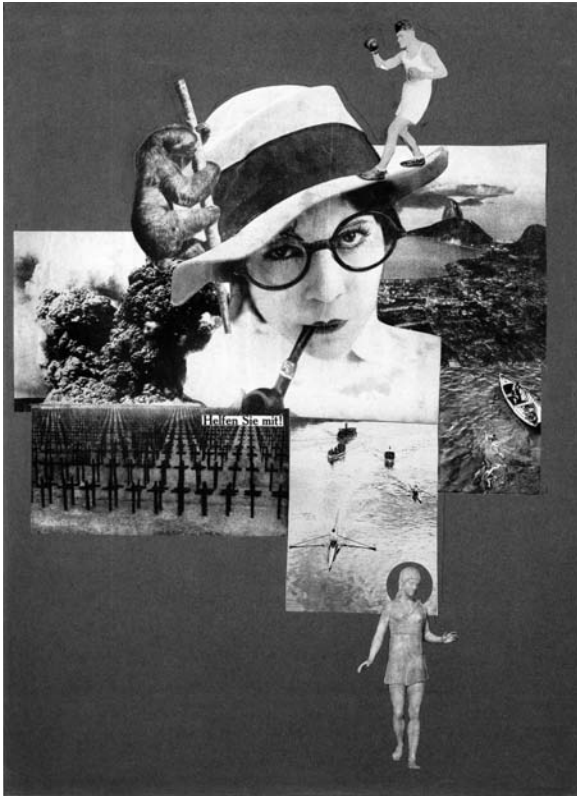


Figure 7. Marianne Brandt, *Help Out! (The Liberated Woman)* (*Helfen Sie mit! [Die Frauenbewegte]*), 1926, montage of newspaper clippings with pencil on heavy gray paper, 68 × 50 cm. Collection of the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Photograph by Herbert Boswank. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

rather than active creators of the new, postwar culture. By prominently featuring New Women who often make eye contact with viewers and form the heart of these works, and by situating these figures in broader historical and political perspective, Brandt creates characters who reach out to female viewers of the time and seem to evoke the presence of the artist, herself a New Woman. Still, true to her allegorical methodology, Brandt always includes elements that undermine and problematize any singular, direct reading of these works.

In *Help Out! (Helfen Sie mit! 1926; fig. 7)*, for example, a series of bold montage elements cluster around the figure of a stylish and boyish New Woman

who smokes a manly pipe and wears lipstick, a floppy hat, and the horn-rimmed spectacles associated with American daredevil actor Harold Lloyd.⁴⁶ Contrasts and composition make her head appear to pop out against the work's warm gray background, and her crisp shirt collar bleeds into clouds, making her appear superhuman and almost godlike as she floats disembodied over a dynamic montage of landscapes. This New Woman appears amid a world full of promise—including the beautiful scene of Rio de Janeiro by the sea—and danger, in images of a mass graveyard or the explosion of a massive bomb. She gives viewers a knowing look that, like the New Woman in *Our Unnerving City*, asks them to question their own stances in relation to these dramatic scenes taken from modern life.⁴⁷

Help Out! is full of conflicting scenes and includes a textual call for engaged political or cultural action. On the brim of the New Woman's hat, discord is parodied through the pairing off of a boxer in a sparring stance against a three-toed sloth who likewise appears to have put his dukes up.⁴⁸ The work has a clear call to arms; the snippet telling us to "Help Out!" emanates from the central female figure's mouth and is expelled through her pipe. As one of Brandt's prominent New Women who engages viewers' gazes, it is easy to read this figure as a stand-in for the artist herself; thus this battle cry initially seems to be Brandt's. Yet other elements of this montage promptly dispel any illusions that this is a propagandistic work of art along the lines of, for example, Käthe Kollwitz's textually focused *Never Again War! (Nie wieder Krieg!)* (1924). Situated over the military graveyard and next to the explosion, Brandt's call to "Help Out!" prompts viewers to ask a number of questions. Who is this call intended for, the large field of dead men? And would they be helping with something for the postwar society, or just another destructive war? In an ironic textual mode that we now associate with John Heartfield's later Weimar works, this photomontage's text initially seems directive but in fact reveals only contradiction and unanswerable questions. Calling for change with the utmost irony, this New Woman seems caught between action and passivity like the fighter and sloth perched at her brow.

46. Lloyd was the subject of his own photomontage by Brandt: *Er, Harold Lloyd* (1930) (see Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 124–26).

47. The photograph of the crosses is from "Zum Volks-Trauertag: Die Fürsorge für die deutschen Kriegergräber," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, February 28, 1926, 261. The explosion may be a photograph of Mount Vesuvius, which became active again in January 1926.

48. The boxer is probably the American heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey, who held the title from 1919 to 1926. Thanks to David Bathrick for confirming this figure's identification, which was originally suggested to me by the historical boxing aficionado Bob Winkler. The photo of the sloth appeared in "Urwelt im Urwald: Am Amazonas: Ein neuer Interessanter Expeditions-Film," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, October 4, 1925, 1300.

In addition to the two boxers, there is a third medium-sized figure at the bottom of *Help Out!* With one breast exposed by her asymmetrical tunic, this image of an ancient statue depicting a young woman evokes a much older model of strong femininity, one that had recently become new again: the Amazon. Known for her warrior ways and independence from men, the Amazon became an ideal of New Womanhood that offered early-twentieth-century female writers and artists an example of female freedom, woman-centered community, and, for some, lesbianism.⁴⁹ Brandt gives this Amazon a halo in reverse by cutting away the photograph around her head. This blessed denizen of both ancient and contemporary worlds seems to model the most logical response to the work's contradictory call for participation: she turns her back on the disjointed landscape and walks away.

In *Help Out!* as in other works, Brandt renders New Women as active and critical figures and creates a view of the world through their eyes. At the same time, these works evince Brandt's own status as a cultural agent through her technical skill in using found photographs to create dynamic "New Vision" views. The New Vision is here evoked by aerial photography, an unusual point of view that, according to Moholy-Nagy's writings in *Painting Photography Film*, the technologies of modern photography could offer.⁵⁰ In *Help Out!* Brandt uses New Vision imagery to reveal the instability of the contemporaneous natural and cultural landscape while problematizing the notion that organized political or cultural movements could effect lasting change.

Other of Brandt's works focus on her New Woman contemporaries while seeming to form an even closer connection to the artist's own situation, but these works still do so without presenting links to her life in a singular or direct manner. One of Brandt's starkest compositions, *With All Ten Fingers* (*Mit allen zehn Fingern*, ca. 1930; fig. 8), presents us with a dramatically posed woman in fashionable clothes. She is on her knees with her head thrown back, arms spread wide, as if she were a supplicant before a deity. Situated in the distance above her and in place of a god is a well-dressed businessman. He ignores her pleas and tugs pensively at the marionette strings attached to the young woman's fingers. The composition's strength comes from its use of only these two photographic elements, which embody a chain of opposing categories:

49. The Paris-based American writer Natalie Barney was nicknamed "L'Amazone" and was often memorialized as such by her partner, Romaine Brooks. See Whitney Chadwick, *Amazons in the Drawing Room: The Art of Romaine Brooks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 28–35; and Elizabeth Otto, "Memories of Bilitis: Marie Laurencin beyond the Cubist Context," *Genders* 36 (2002), www.genders.org.

50. Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, 28 (illustrations on 61, 93).



Figure 8. Marianne Brandt, *With All Ten Fingers (Mit allen zehn Fingern)*, ca. 1930, montage of newspaper clippings and pencil on cardboard, 65 × 50 cm. Collection of the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. Photograph by Kelley Kellerhoff and Uwe Jacobshagen. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

her apparent closeness to the viewer, youth, physically open pose, and more revealing clothing are set as opposites to his distance, staid middle-aged, closed pose, and fully clothed body in a suit and long coat. This mismatched pair is connected only by straight pencil lines that form strings and emphasize the tension between them. These lines stretch out across the broad field of empty paper that surrounds these figures and provides a sterile ground for us to observe this strained interaction between contrasts in gender, age, location in space, and agency. As is the case in many of Moholy-Nagy's montages,

Brandt's *With All Ten Fingers* is sparse. Instead of encouraging a coldly investigative gaze, the composition engages viewers' sympathy as they look on the young woman at the heart of this image, a victim of the distant man who holds the strings.

This work, thematizing the emotional ties and power relationships to which the distant man subjugates this young woman, had previously been misdated to 1927 based on a note by Brandt on its verso written many years after it was made.⁵¹ However, at least one element of the montage was only published in 1930, and the style conforms to the starker compositions characteristic of many of her montages from 1929 on. The fact that *With All Ten Fingers* was made in 1930 or shortly thereafter helps us better understand it in light of the bleak economic and social conditions of that time and in direct relation to Brandt's experiences then, a period during which, through her correspondence with him, Moholy-Nagy proved a source of great support. Brandt picks up on his manner of creating pictorial space and on his sparse compositional mode to problematize the predicament of working women during the unstable final years of the Weimar Republic.

The halftone print of the young woman in *With All Ten Fingers* comes from a *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* cover whose caption tells readers that she has only a few moments to prove herself to a casting agent, and clearly she is doing all that she can to win him over.⁵² The accompanying article describes the hardships of theater life, in which so many compete for so few jobs, often traveling from afar to wait hours for a couple of moments to audition. Presented as a humorous look into the lives of potential actresses and actors, the photograph and essay would have evoked for readers a much larger crisis in the workforce, particularly among the fashion-conscious female *Angestellten* or white-collar workers who were central to the cultural landscape of interwar Germany.⁵³ The global economic depression had begun with the 1929 Wall Street crash; by 1930, many workers in all sectors had lost their jobs. In extricating this young woman from the casting agent's office, Brandt's composition allows her to stand in more generally for the independent women of the

51. Brandt noted this and some of the other dates forty or more years after the photomontages were made when, during the later 1970s, she decided to sell them. My research for the original sources for Brandt's clippings has helped establish a *terminus post quem* for each work. Where the date noted later by Brandt and clippings' publication dates conflict, I designate the work's year as "circa."

52. *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, May 25, 1930, 905, rpt. in Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 117.

53. For a careful study of these white-collar workers, see Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Verso, 1998). Kracauer's original 1929 essay series was titled *Die Angestellten*.

Weimar Republic who, like Brandt, now saw their lifestyles and livelihoods in peril.

Like many *Angestellten*, Brandt experienced the international financial crisis on a deeply personal level. Having left the Bauhaus in July 1929 to work for Gropius in Berlin, she moved to Gotha in December to become the head of design at the Ruppelwerk metal factory. Her letters show that she hated the factory's hierarchical structure and outdated design aesthetic. In one of her few surviving letters to Moholy-Nagy, written in 1930, she expresses nostalgia for the Bauhaus and laments her present difficult situation. Brandt describes the strict limitations placed on her attempts to modernize the Ruppelwerk's products and how she feels trapped between a domineering boss for whom she has no respect and her concern for the factory workers, whom she wants to support by producing good designs that might help keep the factory running. But besides her loyalty to the workers, her salary was also essential, since she was using it to help support family members and friends who were out of work.⁵⁴

The ten fingers of this work's title function as a synecdoche: a task performed with all ten fingers would be one in which the young woman was completely involved and for which she used all of her ability. But in Brandt's visual execution of the phrase, the female figure's hands and fingers become the instruments of her subordination. She is trapped with all ten fingers and has become a marionette. *With All Ten Fingers* picks up the montage idiom that Moholy-Nagy was developing at the time to express frustration with the fetters placed on her creativity outside the Bauhaus's modernist crucible. Not merely reflective of her personal experience, the very acts of working in this avant-garde medium and using the least number of pictorial elements possible were also a rebellion against and an antidote to the kitschy ornamentation of Ruppel's metal designs.

Moholy-Nagy's *City Lights* (*Die Lichter der Stadt*, ca. 1928; fig. 9) is similar to *With All Ten Fingers* in its upright format, limited number of pictorial elements, and use of a strong diagonal. Here Charlie Chaplin, unmistak-

54. Brandt to Moholy-Nagy, July 17, 1930 (collection of the Foundation Bauhaus-Dessau; portions quoted in Olaf Thormann and Katrin Heise, "Bauhaus—Kandem," in *Bauhausleuchten? Kandemlicht! Die Zusammenarbeit des Bauhauses mit der Leipziger Firma Kandem*, ed. Justus Binroth [Leipzig: Grassi Museum, Museum für Kunsthandwerk Leipzig, 2002], 181). See also excerpts from Brandt's letter to former Bauhaus colleague Hin Bredendeck at this time, one of those whom she was helping financially (Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 143). A letter to Gropius from the mid-1930s, written after Brandt too was unemployed, testifies to her conflicted feelings about having worked for a firm that, despite her best attempts to introduce Bauhaus-inspired design principles, continued to produce kitsch (Brandt to Gropius, July 26, 1935, collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin).

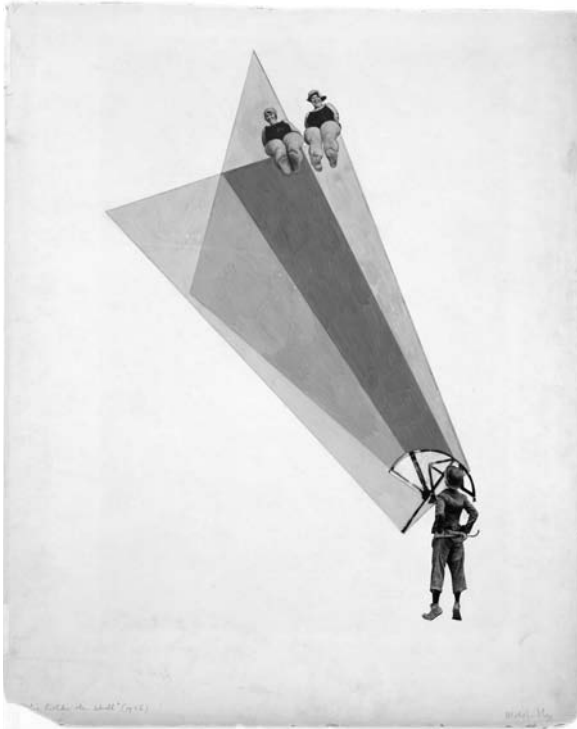


Figure 9. László Moholy-Nagy, *City Lights (Die Lichter der Stadt)*, ca. 1928, montage of newspaper clippings, graphite, and tempera on heavy gray paper, 61 × 50 cm. Collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. Photograph by Markus Hawlik. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

able in his bowler hat as his famous Little Tramp character, gazes up at two laughing women in bathing suits. Their scant clothing emphasizes their modernity, as was the case with one of the New Women in Moholy-Nagy's *Jealousy* and, subsequently, in Brandt's *With All Ten Fingers*. In *City Lights* the women's lower bodies are radically and comically foreshortened, so that their thighs and feet are disproportionately large compared with their heads. While the Little Tramp's back is to us and his face is hidden, his posture suggests an intense yearning for these carefree contemporary women, who, riding high on architectonic beams of light projected from a contraption by Chaplin's face, appear to be the real lights of the city evoked by the work's title.

When *With All Ten Fingers* and *City Lights* are paired, they seem to feature men and women who are overtly modern yet engaged in extremely conventional gender relations. In Moholy-Nagy's work, the angular rectangles of gouache and watercolor light beams run parallel to the illuminating power of the male figure's gaze, which falls on the two women's partly nude bodies. *City Lights* is thus predicated on conventions of male heterosexual looking that have structured the traditional genre of the nude.⁵⁵ It plays out this delight in viewing the female body, but it also denies us the ability to take part in that delight; whereas the Little Tramp's gaze appears to hit these women squarely in their delectable backsides, we are offered prime views of only the soles of their feet. *City Lights*, an image about viewership, thus also encourages a meta-critical engagement with this image on the theme of looking.

In other works Brandt takes up specific issues of composition that appear in Moholy-Nagy's published texts and that were fundamental elements of his Bauhaus teachings in the preliminary course, Brandt's first class as a student at the school. Despite the dearth of extant writings by Brandt on the ideas behind her photomontages, a work from 1928 makes apparent some of the formal issues that preoccupied her. *Contrasts—Structure, Texture, Facture* (*Kontraste—Struktur, Textur, Faktur*; fig. 10) experiments with the formal impact of montage composition on viewers and draws overtly on Moholy-Nagy's pictorial theories.

In *Contrasts* there is no New Woman figure to focus viewers' attention or to meet and arrest their gazes. Instead, an unsettling collection of images suggests photography's power to capture an array of sights and textures. The disturbing form of a giant horned beetle standing on a dried-out stump dominates the picture. Its hard shell shines in the sunlight, making it at once beautiful and grotesque. In the distance, behind this creature, undulating piles of prickly-looking pineapples buoy up an ancient temple. The only path to this mysterious temple is along the train tracks that enter the composition's dynamic depths from the right. The ground is collapsing underneath, but despite this danger two lone figures make their tenuous way along the rails. In a composition intensely crowded in the center and right portions of the picture plane, the viewer is left to visually roam this surreal landscape that is, by turns, inviting and repulsive.

Handwritten words in pencil throughout the work indicate ideas with which Brandt was experimenting. *Structure* is at the lower right under the

55. The complex history of the genre of the female nude is richly investigated in Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992).



Figure 10. Marianne Brandt, *Contrasts—Structure, Texture, Facture (Kontraste—Struktur, Textur, Faktur)*, 1928, montage of newspaper clippings and pencil on heavy paper, 26 × 32 cm. Collection of the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau. Photograph by Kelley Kellerhoff and Uwe Jacobs-hagen. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

collapsing train bed. *Texture* also appears under the train bed, written next to the beetle's horned head, and above the pineapples on the right. *Facture* is centered at the top of the temple. These terms were essential to Moholy-Nagy's teachings and writings from this time and formed the basis of his 1929 book *Von Material zu Architektur*, translated and expanded in English in 1938 as *The New Vision*.⁵⁶ As Norbert Schmitz has pointed out, Moholy-Nagy's preliminary course at the Bauhaus was focused not only on artistic skills and

56. László Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur* (Berlin: Kupferberg, 1968); Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005).

visual training but also on creating “sensory competence” (*Sinneskompetenz*).⁵⁷ One of his methods for building these sensory skills was to have students combine contrasting materials to understand their properties on both tactile and visual levels.⁵⁸ According to Moholy-Nagy, the term *structure* should be thought of as raw material, the solid architecture of a composition. He illustrates this concept with a found photograph from the magazine *Haus und Garten* of a cross section of a tree showing the “structure of wood.”⁵⁹ “Texture” is the organic surface, the skin of an object. “Facture,” for Moholy-Nagy, is the material trace of the working process, so that an image of a pile of old tires shows doubly the traces of having been worked, since the tires are manufactured and, once they have been cast off, they are heaped, another process of working the material.⁶⁰ In *Von Material zu Architektur* Moholy-Nagy illustrates all of these concepts with photographs, most of which are taken from other publications. In *Contrasts* Brandt appears to do this as well, as she orchestrates the elements of her montage into a composition and labels them with these terms.

Included in *Von Material zu Architektur* is a list of “facture exercises” that Moholy-Nagy used to help students train their senses. One resonates with Brandt’s work in the *Contrasts* montage: “visual presentation (translation) of structure, texture, and facture values from the optical illusion through to complete abstraction (drawing, painting, photography).”⁶¹ *Contrasts* was made four years after Brandt completed Moholy-Nagy’s preliminary course at the Bauhaus, but in this work she returns to experiments from that course, seeming to contemplate them anew. She marks elements of *Contrasts* with these terms to facilitate her experimentation with formal properties. Indeed, the beetle’s massive horns and the crumbling earth beneath the train tracks do give a sense of complex structures, and the intricate temple facade is an ideal evocation of facture, the material trace of this surface having been worked. Brandt has selected photographic elements that clash to communicate a dramatic range of visual sensations.

The fragments in *Contrasts* create pictorial illusions that are constantly interrupted by the breaks between these elements. This push-pull dynamic is

57. Norbert Schmitz, “The Preliminary Course under László Moholy-Nagy: Sensory Competence,” in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler, trans. Kristin Zeier et al. (Königswinter: Könemann, 2006), 369–70.

58. Stefan Kraus, “Vorkurs Moholy-Nagy,” in *Bauhaus Utopien: Arbeiten auf Papier*, ed. Wulf Herzogenrath (Stuttgart: Cantz, 1988), 65.

59. These terms are described in Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur*, 33–59. Similar concepts appear in Moholy-Nagy, *New Vision*, 35–59, but *Faktur* is translated as “surface aspect.”

60. Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur*, 48.

61. Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur*, 59, quoted in Schmitz, “Preliminary Course,” 370.

also essential to a subtitle some scholars have applied to the work: *On Haptical and Optical Schooling of the Senses* (*zur haptischen und optischen Sinnesschulung*).⁶² At the turn of the last century the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl developed a complex analysis of haptical and optical perception.⁶³ Drawing on Riegl's 1901 *Late Roman Art Industry*, Antonia Lant explains that Riegl's notions of haptical or tactile perception and their opposite, optical perception, can be understood as being the difference between "knowledge of artistic space through the senses of touch and vision."⁶⁴ In haptical perception, the eye perceives a work's surface as a collection of flat, abstract shapes; in optical perception, by contrast, the eye sees illusion and depth. A photograph activates both modes of looking as viewers apprehend the interplay of the flat pictorial surface and the image's illusory space. A surface with the obvious jarring breaks of a photomontage will always interrupt optical perception with the haptic because of the broken surface's constant intrusion into any illusion created. According to Riegl's approach, visually engaging such a pictorial surface could also make viewers more actively engaged in perceiving as they mentally move into the depicted space of the montage and are then repelled back to the haptical surface. Such a picture would be capable of schooling the senses of receptive viewers and thus potentially of teaching new ways to see in the modern world.

However, the content of the pictorial fragments in *Contrasts* must be interpreted beyond the formal problems indicated by this work's textual framing, for the subjects of the images themselves are also attractive and repulsive to viewers. While *Contrasts* is a visual experiment in the formal properties of found photographs, it uses almost exclusively imagery imported from the colonial tropics and then presented in illustrated papers. The work proposes an exotic yet unspecific non-European space where viewers might encounter examples of structure, texture, and facture in the context of bountiful fruit, decaying ancient buildings and the forgotten religions formerly celebrated in

62. This subtitle was first published in the German version of Norbert Schmitz's essay, "Der Vorkurs unter László Moholy-Nagy," in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 368. This text does not appear on the front or back of the montage itself, where Brandt noted titles of works.

63. A number of Riegl's texts explore these problems of surface and depth. See in particular his *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. Rolf Winkes (Rome: Bretschneider, 1985). The term *haptic* comes from the Greek *haptos*, referring to the sense of touch; it also implies taking hold of an object, grasping, fastening, or binding it.

64. Antonia Lant, "Haptical Cinema," *October*, no. 74 (1995): 50. Margaret Iversen traces Riegl's own explanation of his shift in terminology from "tactile" to "haptic" as coming from his wish that "tactile" not be taken too literally as "touch" (*Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993], 170n8).

them, and miscalculated colonial transportation projects. The image of the pineapples, for example, comes from an essay in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* on how such South Sea Islands as Fiji, where this photograph was taken, have lost their magic and authenticity. The author mourns the replacement of cannibalism with football among the Fijians, the use of Ford automobiles in Tonga, and other Western influences.⁶⁵ While such direct references do not necessarily carry over, it is clear to any viewer that *Contrasts* is set in a hybrid, postcolonial world where European technology is left to decay as the landscape returns to a more “primitive” state.⁶⁶

A consistent tension in this and other examples of Brandt’s photomontages derives from a formally powerful design that raises significant historical and political questions for the German context. In the Metal Workshop and the Bauhaus at large, there was a general belief in the power of newly designed forms to spread the experience of modernity and to create a positive future; Brandt’s sleek metal works partook of this optimism. In her parallel work in montage Brandt was also clearly interested in formal problems and design issues, but, in addition, these works critique European political projects, gender relations, colonialism, and militarism. And while some of Brandt’s montages celebrate modern machines, others show technologies as failing or used in a misguided fashion. Through the salvaged photographic representations of these montages, Brandt’s modernism takes on a complexity lacking in the austere and useful designs of her metal work.

Many of my analyses of these works have examined how Brandt may have drawn on Moholy-Nagy’s writings and ideas to structure her works, but I have also suggested how we might see Brandt’s and Moholy-Nagy’s work in photomontage as having been mutually informed and informing. In addition, a few of his photomontages appear to be directly indebted to her works. While Brandt is not generally known to have exhibited her photomontages during the interwar period, she would surely have shown them to the friends and colleagues who had frequent access to her Bauhaus studio, for she was one of the privileged students to have a one-room living/studio space in the “Prellerhaus” wing of the Bauhaus Dessau. As Moholy-Nagy’s protégée, she

65. The two images of pineapples are cut from the same photograph from R. Katz, “Die entzauberte Südsee: Bericht unseres auf eine Weltreise entsandten Mitarbeiters Dr. R. Katz,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, January 24, 1926, 98–99.

66. A significant body of work on European primitivism in representation has developed over the past two decades. For a cogent exploration of this topic and relevant bibliography, see Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170–84. Peter Nisbet critiques the notion that montage elements’ original contexts inhere in them in “A Cut-up at the Dada Fair,” *Boston Book Review*, April 1997, 8–9.

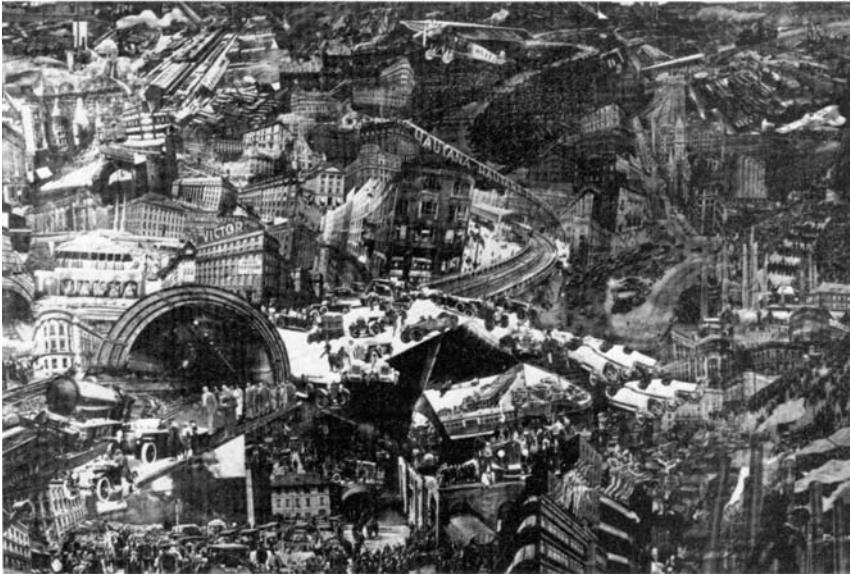


Figure 11. László Moholy-Nagy, *Stage Set Element for “The Merchant of Berlin”* (*Bühnenbildelement für “Der Kaufmann von Berlin”*), directed by Erwin Piscator, 1929. Niessen Collection, Institut für Theaterwissenschaften der Universität Köln. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

would have shown him some or all of the photomontages, and Moholy-Nagy—ever eager to explore new ideas—could easily have borrowed some of her methods for his own work. Moholy-Nagy was an incredibly flexible artist who drew influence from countless sources; it would be unthinkable that he did not also learn from Brandt, arguably his most prized student.

One photomontage that seems to show Brandt’s influence is Moholy-Nagy’s 1929 *Stage Set Element for “The Merchant of Berlin”* (*Bühnenbildelement für “Der Kaufmann von Berlin”*; fig. 11), which was projected in the director Erwin Piscator’s Berlin theater, where this play was performed. This image also served as the jacket for Piscator’s book of the same year, *The Political Theater* (*Das politische Theater*).⁶⁷ Moholy-Nagy’s *Stage Set Element* has been linked to Citroen’s *City*.⁶⁸ But in addition to Citroen’s influence,

67. *The Merchant of Berlin* was directed by Piscator for the Theater am Nollendorfplatz (Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue*, 160). See Erwin Piscator, *Das politische Theater* (Berlin: Schultz, 1929).

68. Citroen created several works on this theme, starting even before he began at the Bauhaus; see Flip Bool, ed., *Paul Citroen* (Amsterdam: Focus, 1998), 55–58. The comparison between Moholy-Nagy’s *Stage Set Element* and Citroen’s *Die Stadt* appears in Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue*, 160–61.

Brandt's approach to the cityscape, evident in such works as *Our Unnerving City*, is apparent in Moholy-Nagy's *Stage Set Element*.⁶⁹ He uses found photographs that rhyme visually and play with notions of scale, something that occurs in *Our Unnerving City* and other works by Brandt much more than in Citroen's montages.⁷⁰ Both *Our Unnerving City* and Moholy-Nagy's *Stage Set Element* present a cacophony of contemporary urban architecture and include figures, cars, and crowds. Whereas Citroen's montage undulates with a variety of buildings, Brandt's work grows organically from the center; Moholy-Nagy seems to have relied on this method as well by creating a large central square devoid of architecture but filled with cars and people. Flows of buildings, cars, train tracks, and rivers emerge organically from this middle point to rush out toward the viewer, as at the lower left, or recede into the distance, as in the montage's upper portions. Having started with an unruly, Dadaistic, anti-art approach to montage with *25 Bankruptcy Vultures*, and quickly moved to a clean, sparse, constructivist approach by the following year, Moholy-Nagy here turns to a form of montage that is new for him, the controlled chaos so common in Brandt's work.⁷¹

In addition to the evidence of shared ideas in their works, the close relationship between the photomontages of Moholy-Nagy and Brandt is made crystal clear by the misattribution of one of her works to him. One of two versions of a work known as *ME (Metal Workshop)* (*ME [Metallwerkstatt]*, 1928; fig. 12), unsigned and now extant only in reproductions, was attributed to Moholy-Nagy and published in a memoir on his work in the 1950s, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality*, written by his second wife, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy. I refer to this as *ME II* to differentiate it from the other version of this work. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy interprets *ME II* as Moholy-Nagy's self-portrait with some of his students, as have some subsequent scholars.⁷² An almost identical work from

69. Brandt used this approach to representing cityscapes in several montages, including *Ihre wirksame Mithilfe* (1926) and *o.T. (Luftschiffe und Dietrich)* (1930) (Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 40–41, 127–29).

70. Brandt's *Es wird marschiert* (1928), another good example of this, shows crowds holding up their hands and hats echoed in the patterns of boats and buildings with which they are juxtaposed (see Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 96–99).

71. For examples of Moholy-Nagy's quick turn to constructivist montage in his works from 1924 and 1925, see Lusk, *Montagen ins Blaue*, 70–83.

72. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), 38, 40. Lusk also attributes this montage to Moholy-Nagy (*Montagen ins Blaue*, 106–7). Louis Kaplan states that *ME II* may never be securely attributed. He cites a quotation from Sibyl Moholy-Nagy in which she says that the letters *me* refer to Moholy-Nagy himself, surely an incorrect assertion (*Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995], 111).



Figure 12. Marianne Brandt, *ME (Metal Workshop) (ME [Metallwerkstatt])*, 1928, here referred to as *ME II*, montage of original photographs; missing, presumed lost. Photograph in the collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

the same year—also titled *ME* but here referred to as *ME I* for clarity’s sake—is very securely attributed to Brandt. *ME I* was part of a portfolio that was a going-away gift for Gropius on the occasion of his 1928 departure from the school after nine years as its only director; in this portfolio each workshop was represented by its two-letter in-house abbreviation. *ME* or *me* was placed before any product number for an item designed in the Dessau Metal Workshop.⁷³

73. The other version of this photomontage is reproduced in Magdalena Droste and Jeannine Fiedler, eds., *Experiment Bauhaus* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1988), 227; and Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 81. Fiedler was the first scholar to definitively ascribe both versions to Brandt, though she points out

Given that many of the gelatin silver-print photographs used in both montages were made by Brandt, and in light of the secure attribution of *ME I* to her, it is much less likely that *ME II* was by Moholy-Nagy than that, on the eve of the departure of her mentor and colleague Moholy-Nagy, who left when Gropius did, Brandt made a second photomontage as a going-away present for him. It is in this light that I interpret *ME II*.

ME II uses fragmentary images of Bauhaus buildings and products of the Metal Workshop to create a sort of metal planet that tilts sharply on its axis; other images of buildings and figures are placed in orbit around it. The version of *ME* made for Gropius (*ME I*) includes two photographs of the entire Dessau Bauhaus building, which Gropius himself had designed. *ME I* thus presents the Metal Workshop in the context of the school. The version made for Moholy-Nagy, *ME II*, focuses specifically on the workshop itself. At the right, a photograph shows the glass wall of the Bauhaus, the windows where the Metal Workshop was; at the lower left is a photograph by Lucia Moholy that shows one of the Dessau Master's Houses (*Meisterhäuser*), most likely the one in which she lived with Moholy-Nagy. *ME II*'s more narrow focus differentiates it markedly from *ME I* and makes it a more suitable parting gift for Moholy-Nagy at the end of his time as the Metal Workshop's director.

ME II is peopled with the most important members of the Metal Workshop. At the top of the montage Moholy-Nagy appears comically stern. He poses stiffly upright but appears as if, like the metal planet, his axis has been tilted, perhaps by a kick from the seated figure laughing down at him from the right. In another significant departure from the version made for Gropius, the *ME II* montage includes a large abstract element, a black trapezoid placed directly under Moholy-Nagy's torso as an homage to his extensive experiments with abstraction in painting, photography, and sculpture. To the left and below Moholy-Nagy, leaning against a bright metal lampshade of her own design, is Brandt herself, Moholy-Nagy's right hand in the Metal Workshop.⁷⁴

that it is impossible to resolve this matter definitively (Droste and Fiedler, *Experiment Bauhaus*, 226). The portfolio *Neun Jahre Bauhaus: Eine Chronik* (1928) is reproduced in Klaus Weber, ed., *Happy Birthday! Bauhaus-Geschenke* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 2005), 134–53.

74. Other important Metal Workshop figures appear in *ME II* as well. These include, in a dark suit to the right of Moholy-Nagy, Hin Bredendieck, who would soon become the new chief assistant after Brandt stepped into the directorship, and the workshop's foreman, Alfred Schäfer, who appears at the bottom of the composition in a photograph by Brandt.

In its representation of the connections between Brandt and Moholy-Nagy, one of the most significant aspects of *ME II* is its marking of a turning point in the history of the Bauhaus and in Brandt's oeuvre as a whole. Gropius and Moholy-Nagy were presumably given their versions of *ME*, and, at the start of April 1928, they both officially left the school. At this time Brandt became the acting director of the Metal Workshop, a position she held for more than a year until she too left the Bauhaus for Gropius's firm in Berlin. In their photomontaged pairing in *ME II* Moholy-Nagy and Brandt thus represent the innovative workshop's most influential head on the eve of his departure alongside the woman who would succeed him and hold the workshop on course in the future, a fitting way to memorialize their working relationship in a montage that represents Moholy-Nagy's living and working spaces in the Bauhaus and commemorates his abstract art and the metalwork produced under his five years of leadership at the school.

For both artists, the end of the Weimar Republic marked the close of their intense engagements with experimental photomontage. Moholy-Nagy would continue to use montage techniques in advertising, a field in which he increasingly worked during the later 1920s and 1930s, when he was often on the move and without an institutional affiliation to give him the full creative freedom he had enjoyed as a Bauhaus professor.⁷⁵ Even as his interest in creating his own avant-garde photomontages waned—or he simply lacked the time to make them—he still continued to include examples of this technique in his teaching after he left Germany for London and, in 1937, went to Chicago to help found the New Bauhaus and later the School of Design in Chicago.

Brandt made photomontages up until the last years of the Weimar period. Some of these, like an untitled work that includes an image of Marlene Dietrich on a sinking ship and a young Jewish girl engulfed in smoke, now in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington, DC, seem eerily prophetic of the horrors to come in Germany.⁷⁶ After the rise of the National Socialist regime

75. On this period in Moholy-Nagy's life, see Passuth's chapter "Years of Travel: Between Two Bauhauses and Two Continents," in *Moholy-Nagy*, 60–69.

76. For an illustration and discussion of this work, see Matthew Witkovsky, *Foto: Photography in Central Europe, 1918–1945* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 186–88; and Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 127–29. The identification of the girl as specifically Jewish comes from Matthew Witkovsky of the National Gallery of Art. This fragment was cut from a photograph by the Russian photojournalist Arkady Shaikhet and was recently identified by his granddaughter when she saw Brandt's photomontage. According to correspondence that Witkovsky generously shared with me, the photograph was taken in the Jewish commune Buharindorf near Krivoi Rog in 1929 and was commissioned for the Russian illustrated magazine *Ogonyok*.

in 1933, Brandt is not known to have completed any significant photomontages.⁷⁷ Directly after the 1933 elections Brandt attempted to use her Norwegian citizenship—which had come to her through her marriage—to leave Germany for good, but her family called her home to help care for her ailing father. In 1935 Moholy-Nagy wrote to offer her assistance in finding work in England, an opportunity that Brandt was unable to take up, probably because of family duties. His letter conveys the deep respect that both he and Gropius continued to hold for Brandt's work:

i spoke with gropius in london recently about what a shame it is that we haven't been able to use your wonderful designing skills enough. he was of the same opinion as me, and so i would advise you urgently to study english in the near future. it isn't impossible that, when i am in england again, i might be able to find you a good position. do not take this as a firm promise. but learn english; this will be good for you either way. i experience that myself now every day.⁷⁸

The strong connection between these two artists clearly went beyond a mere student and mentor relationship. Until recently, the interrelated nature of their work in photomontage had been obscured by history, largely because after World War II Brandt lived in the German Democratic Republic, which actively suppressed study of the Bauhaus for failing to conform to socialist-realist ideals. The diversity and dynamism of Brandt's work in multiple media began to be uncovered only in the 1970s and to be acknowledged and studied in the 1990s. But the record of Brandt and Moholy-Nagy's correspondence, writings, and above all their work shows an exchange of ideas on a wide array of topics. These include how the lessons of Dada and constructivism might be absorbed into a dynamic new form of Bauhaus photomontage, how artists and designers could help reshape society in the wake of World War I by embracing new technologies of vision, and how gender and the experience of modernity had become crucial themes to engage and problematize through this new kind of visual representation.

77. She did, however, return to the medium on occasion in the post-World War II period, making two small advertising montages as a proposal for a city guide to Chemnitz in the early 1950s and a self-portrait montage in 1962 (see Otto, *Tempo, Tempo!* 147, 148), and she included montaged elements in a letter to Gropius for his birthday in 1968 (collection Bauhaus-Archiv). An album by Brandt from the 1960s that includes montage elements appeared at an auction in May 2009.

78. Moholy-Nagy to Brandt, February 20, 1935, in *Bauhaus 2*, ed. Gisela Schulz and Hans-Peter Schulz (Leipzig: Galerie am Sachsenplatz, 1977), 13.

In a 1929 letter of recommendation to Ernst Bruckmann, the director of the Werkbund at the time, Moholy-Nagy writes of Brandt in glowing terms. He calls her “my best and most ingenious student” and states that “90 percent of all Bauhaus designs are by her.”⁷⁹ While letters of recommendation may tend to foster hyperbole, Moholy-Nagy’s praise rings true, and we can understand this as an honest assessment of a fellow artist-constructor whom he deeply respected. Moholy-Nagy’s works and writings are an obvious influence on all aspects of Brandt’s work once she joined the Bauhaus, not the least of which is her photomontage. But, above all, we should see the images discussed in this essay as extracts of a conversation between Brandt and Moholy-Nagy, one that explored the potentials for the radical new medium of photomontage to refine viewers’ senses for engaging the inherent ambiguities of the post–World War I period and for helping reinvent sight as a powerful modernist experience.

79. Moholy-Nagy to Ernst Bruckmann, June 26, 1929, collection of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation. While Moholy-Nagy writes of “Bauhaus designs,” we can understand that he means those produced in the Metal Workshop. Moholy-Nagy writes to Brandt the same day to tell her of his attempt to help her find work (letter collection of Bernd Freese, Frankfurt am Main).

