Hannah Hoch’s androgynous figure in her photomontage *Tamer*, 1930 challenges the Weimar media concept of the “New Woman” and addresses existing binary gender roles of “man” and “woman” both within the individual viewer and within the greater Weimar society. Hoch’s *Tamer* forces the viewer to address their own gender role biases through identification or rejection of the androgynous image confronting them. In this way, the viewer becomes the subject of the art work and the photomontage assumes the position of the catalyst. Hoch levels the distinction between all biases by identifying the viewer as the subject while creating a relatable space that surpasses gender roles or definition. In this space, discourse on all gender roles and subsequent sexuality becomes viable.

The Weimar concept of the “New Woman” appeared out of the newspaper and art exhibitions depicting women as androgynous, wearing suit coats, trousers, short mannish hairstyles and smoking cigarettes. Weimar’s visual culture highlighted the discrepancies between the myth and reality of “gender identity within the context of modernity and rationalization.”¹ The “New Woman” is portrayed as a sign of liberated modernity and conditions for women in Weimar Germany had changed drastically, women could hold the vote, had fewer children and worked for a wage. Women had increased autonomy and freedom to seek political, social and sexual

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self-definition. However despite the new possibilities the New Women's economic opportunities, legal rights and political participation continued to be limited.²

There is not a clear distinction between women’s life experiences and the fantasies depicted in the “New Woman” feminine imagery of Weimar. There is no denying the rapid cultural changes taking place for Weimar women socially however changes regarding money and power remained stagnant. Hoch explores through photomontage the ensuing confusion women felt differentiating between their real “self” and the “other” media projected images of the “New Woman.”³ Tamer is not the image of an “empowered New Woman” but rather a fragmented, dismembered and disjointed compilation of visual representations of various roles that are placed upon women in Weimar society.⁴

Hoch challenges the position of the “New Woman” by depicting Tamer as part man, part woman and part statue. The “New Woman” of Weimar is juggling work, politics and economic concerns previously held solely by men as well as all of the regularly assigned duties of women in the home. The fragmented pieces of Tamer include masculine muscled hair covered arms that jut outward from the image into the viewer’s space and are folded across the body in a position of dominant power presenting the message of a closed negotiation of authority. The feminine lower half is turned demurely to the side covered in a skirt that signifies not only ideals of feminine

2 Lavin. “Androgyny” 64.
beauty but feminine ideals of modesty and the right way to position the body as a woman. The androgynous chest cannot be attributed to female or male but the paisley printed cloth covering it is feminine. The head is feminine in stylistic attributes but also connotes a classical form of sculpture where men were depicted highly stylized thus portraying signification of the head being a negotiation between classical concepts of beauty that were male and female and modern concepts of gender.

The white statue head image is reminiscent of classical Greek and Roman statues with its stylized features of white stone, graceful curves and elegant features traditionally portrayed as idealized beauty. Hoch capitalizes on this systemized norm already created of beauty to expose and challenge our own identification and indoctrinated definition of beauty. The figures bent neck directs the gaze down toward the seal in a traditional stance of grace and compassion for the lower class or lower life forms and a reflection of attributes associated with the feminine. The seal's eyes mimic the eyes of the human figure but are looking directly out of the frame at the viewer creating a triangular connection between the androgynous figure, the seal and the viewer that brings the viewer into the composition.

Hoch’s composition and use of an androgynous figure in *Tamer* challenges the viewer to negotiate their own relation to the image. The viewer recognizes themselves in the spaces where “meanings line up tidily.” 5 In artwork the viewer has to recognize something of them in the work and this recognition takes place in the space where the meaning of the artwork is comfortable and does not challenge our base perceptions of ourselves. Hoch’s use of a simplified

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high impact androgynous image does not present a tidy meaning to the viewer but rather forces the viewer into ambiguity and oscillation between gender positions. A shifting in gaze is encouraged between masculine and feminine, between disavowal and recognition of bisexuality, placing both men and women in the feminine position of female spectatorship. In theory, oscillation between gender positions is different between women who socialized as feminine but also have had to identify with the masculine as the primary container of action and power. The fetishizing gaze shifts between masculine and feminine objects, causing the viewer’s gaze to destabilize and polarize the positions between masculine and feminine thus creating a bisexual relationship to the object which confronts the viewer with rejection or recognition of bisexuality within themselves.

The torso of Tamer in orange paisley print design has a long history of exclusive privileged use that crosses boundaries between economic classes and sexual norms. Hoch’s use of paisley in Tamer shines the light on all boundary lines separating anyone or any act and provides commentary on the division between gender, class and even love and sexuality. Jude Stewart writes in Patternalia that “it [paisley] signifies free love and forbidden love, belonging and exclusion- a seemingly impossible range of human experience.” Paisley print began as Boteh, meaning “flower” from the Kashmiri region of the Indian-Pakistani border where it was a privilege of powerful men to wear paisley print on Kashmiri shawls or “robes of honor” that were exchanged in political and religious ceremony to establish “pecking order.” The receiver of

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6 Lavin. “Androgyn”190.


the paisley printed robe was in the submissive role and subsequently inferior to the giver and the gift of the beautiful shawl was a consolation prize for the lower ranking position. A Kashmiri shawl was valuable and took years to produce because the wool was hand gathered from the rocks where sheep had brushed by leaving clumps of wool behind. Kashmiri princes began to include British East India Co. officers in their ritual of shawl giving and thus the introduction to the Western world of Paisley. As the demand increased the paisley motif changed and evolved into complex designs that reflected teardrops, flowers, vines, insects, snakes and birds. Hoch recognized that the paisley print appeal had not been historically restricted to feminine or masculine gender roles but was worn by brides on first outings to church as part of their trousseau as well as smoking jackets for men.9

Hoch’s work experienced a surge in popularity in the early twentieth-century due to its relevance to the Feminist and Gay movements and there was a resurgence of interest in Dada art that resulted in Neo-Dada art in the 1950’s then by early 1960’s pop art emerged and artists were taking art imagery from mainstream media, like Warhol’s renditions of Marilyn Monroe and representations of female beauty.10 Tamer was reworked from 1963-64 to become the image we see today. The gold studded and leather background with partial white window frame showing on the right side has been identified as a specific image cut from a 1959 Life magazine article.11

The article that contained the photo was titled; “Storehouse of Scholarship” and the image

9 Stewart. Patternalia: An Unconventional History of Polka Dots, Stripes, Plaid, Camouflage, & Other Graphic Patterns.


showed the leather studded door of Harvard’s Houghton Library with a window frame in the center and through the frame was a man seated at a table surrounded by books.

Hoch reworked the original instead of creating an entirely new image to reflect the continued struggle for women’s rights that took place in the 1930s and continued into the 1960s. In the late 1950-60’s artists confronted gender and sexuality roles as famous artists like Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Catherine Opie openly identified as gay and lesbian. New social and political movements surrounding sexual identity together with the feminist movement were challenging the very same issues of division that Hoch’s *Tamer* addressed in 1930 Weimar Germany.

Power differentials and economic equality were still as relevant decades later. The image of a prominent educational institution library door with the view through a window frame of a man seated at a table covered in books reflects the gender discussions happening during the time period as the feminist movement fought against gender roles excluding women from higher education and the work force.

Challenging the masculine as the primary container of action and power is the traditional frame peeking out from the right side of the *Tamer* figure surrounded by studs and the position of the figure over top of the original image, illustrating both a type of containment and breaking out that is further indicative upon learning that the original image that cannot be seen in *Tamer* is an image of a man sitting in an educational institution library.

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12 Doyle, "Queer Wallpaper." 393.

The image of *Tamer* upon first examination appears to be addressing issues about the Weimar concept of the “New Woman” but upon deeper investigation, evidence is found to support that Hoch is questioning and challenging a much larger issue in gender ideals, roles and most importantly the way the viewer is intimately involved in the creation of gender bias. The *Tamer* is a reflective mirror upon which the viewer, if brave enough can confront their own gender role and accept or reject said role. Hoch in addressing gender also raises the concept of non-gender and creates an entirely new space with which to negotiate identity, role, and even sexuality.
Bibliography


