Introduction

The Editors

Dada invented and dispersed photomontage techniques across geographic borders and across media, high and low. This special issue of *New German Critique* is dedicated to practices of photomontage in the era between the world wars. Not surprisingly, John Heartfield is a key figure whose work was influential far beyond the Weimar Republic, in the Soviet Union as well as in republican Spain, central Europe, and France.

Several of the following essays were first presented as papers at a small conference in May 2006, "Radical Politics/Radical Aesthetics," organized by the Getty and accompanied by Andrés Mario Zervigón's exhibition Agitated Images: John Heartfield and German Photomontage, 1920–1938. We owe thanks to the Getty for facilitating this exchange of ideas. We expanded it with other essays that reassess early avant-garde photomontage work. While several authors in this issue take Heartfield's work and impact as their subject, it is really photomontage as a practice linking art history, politics, mass media, and media history studies that moved us to develop this special issue.

Renewed interest in the various sites of Dada activities was recently also documented in the comprehensive Dada exhibition curated by Leah Dickerman and shown at the National Gallery in Washington, DC; the Centre Pompidou in Paris; and the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2005–6. This exhibition focused on the various sites of Dada activities, from Zürich (Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara) via Berlin (Heartfield, George Grosz, Hannah Höch), Hannover (Kurt Schwitters), and Cologne (Max Ernst), to New York and Paris

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(Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray). Dada, of course, has often been interpreted as a not quite successful movement whose main claim to fame was that it led to surrealism. The National Gallery show instead focused on the achievements of Dada itself in various European and American cities and on its building of a transnational network of artists of different nationalities, thus freeing Dada from such a Franco-centric teleological scheme. This special issue continues in that spirit. It discusses the achievements of Dada and photomontage in particular in relation to mass media photography, to film, and to propaganda and Left politics in the Soviet Union, Weimar Germany, and western Europe of the 1920s and 1930s.

The essays are rich in new archive-based knowledge and novel conceptualizations. Thus we learn from Zervigón that Heartfield's little-known early wartime work with cinema for the German High Command deliberately shuns live-action film sequences of the war, which were subject to heavy censorship, and instead draws on American-style cinematic animation to get across a subversive message about the violence and horror of the war. He avoided the photographic basis of film, which lent itself all too easily to war propaganda. His work, together with that of Grosz, attempted to reinsert somatic terror into representations of the war to counter the visually sedative aspect of contemporary German war photography. His use of animation seems close to Walter Benjamin's later reflections on the subversive dimension of Disney's early shorts. Benjamin, after all, knew that the Dadaists appealed to all somatic dimensions of perception—the aural, the visual, and the tactile.

While Sabine Kriebel deals with Heartfield's photomontage practice of the late 1920s rather than with his earlier cinematic explorations, she looks to film theory for a model of interpreting the politics of photographic illusionism in Heartfield's photomontages published in the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*AIZ*). She shows that Heartfield's photomontages, manufactured for a mass-circulation photographic magazine and invented against the pictorial strategies of photojournalism, redeploy the organic language of photographic seamlessness while using cognitive dissonance, parody, and satire to produce an active viewer. Although Heartfield's later pictorial strategies insistently reject the ruptured, disjunctive montage aesthetic that he was so instrumental in developing during Dada, they continue to pursue the Dadaist tactic of provocation through the language of mass culture.

Focusing on different phases of Heartfield's work, these first two essays show how Heartfield mobilizes an allegedly unpolitical cinematic animation and the principle of illusionistic suture for subversive purposes, mass-cultural

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strategies that gained him the opprobrium of some during his later visit in the Soviet Union.

No discussion of photomontage in the 1920s can ignore the work done at the Bauhaus under the directorship of László Moholy-Nagy. Elizabeth Otto, curator of a cutting-edge show of the little-known work by Marianne Brandt titled Tempo, Tempo! (Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Busch Reisinger Museum at Harvard University, International Center of Photography in New York, also in 2005–6), meets the challenge with an indispensable account of Brandt's photomontages in their relations of proximity and distance to the work of Moholy-Nagy, her mentor at the Bauhaus. The move from Dada to constructivism takes shape in their work by the mid-1920s. The relation between Dada and constructivism was central here, just as it became a bone of contention in a very different way during Heartfield's 1931–32 visit to Moscow, treated in the next essay by Maria Gough. But unlike Heartfield, whose work during and after the 1920s remained focused on the politics of social class, both Brandt and Moholy-Nagy used photomontage to reflect critically on gender relations and on the so-called New Woman, thus continuing in a more constructivist vein what Höch had begun in the context of Berlin Dada a few years earlier. The "rediscovery" of Brandt's work, which had almost been forgotten during her years in the German Democratic Republic, thus expands our knowledge of women artists of Weimar who often remain in the shadow of their male counterparts.

Gough, in comparing the Soviet photomonteur Gustavs Klucis with Heartfield, moves beyond the false polarity of constructivism and realism, which Klucis upheld in his critique of Heartfield, a critique marred by Klucis's originality claims regarding the invention of photomontage. Gough lays out a complex Soviet controversy on photomontage that emerged during Heartfield's visit to Moscow. Her readings of specific works by Klucis and Heartfield do not corroborate substantive antagonism between the two. Klucis's practice was not fundamentally different from Heartfield's, and in the end Heartfield seems to have adopted certain pictorial and political strategies from Klucis in his propagandistic work during the early 1930s.

That period is also the subject of Cristina Cuevas-Wolf's essay. She focuses on the relationship of Heartfield to Willi Münzenberg, publisher of the *AIZ* and transnational media entrepreneur of the Communist International (Comintern). She documents the influence of the *AIZ* and its use of photomontage in France, Czechoslovakia, and Spain, which led there to similar kinds of publications and photomontage practices. She traces the cooperation between

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Heartfield and Münzenberg in their attempt to project an image of a united political front for the Comintern through the mass media. Indeed, Münzenberg provided the organizational base in disseminating Heartfield's photomontages and propaganda work across Europe. It was the precondition for Heartfield's influence on work done by artists in France, republican Spain, and elsewhere.

The issue concludes with two non-Dada-related essays, both of which, however, deal with artists who cross the boundaries of their primary medium. Karin L. Crawford examines Gerhard Richter's journey from painting to photography and back, while Bernhard Malkmus discusses Alexander Kluge's progression from literature to film and photography. Not coincidentally, in both post-1960s artists the issues of memory and cultural archaeology have become central, and their work urges us to reflect further on the kinds of intermediality and creative media contaminations that first emerged so forcefully in Dada and constructivism.

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