



# The Photograph Manipulated

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'Pure' photography postulated an ideal image which transcended the everyday world. It questioned the view of photography as a literal act of recording, seeing this as limited, but nevertheless insisted on the photograph being based in the thing seen, not imagined. In this sense it is different from the terms of modernist aesthetics that, when Stieglitz was establishing *291* and *Camera Work* in New York, rejected the very world that the photographer took as a subject. What place did photography have in an aesthetic climate dominated by Cubism and abstraction, where the new terms of reference were to relativity and the subconscious rather than the recording of a surface literal reality?

From the 1900s onwards we can chart a series of photographic responses that seek to recast the photographic act in the new language of modernism. Such photography sought to manipulate the image; abandoning any commitment to a literal recording of the world as perceived by the eye, it sought a visual code suggestive of the new awareness implied by abstraction, Surrealism, Dadaism, and Futurism. Taken together, these responses form a significant tradition in their own right, and further complicate the terms by which we seek to understand the photograph's significance as a means of representation in the twentieth century.

In 1913, for example, the American-born Alvin Langdon Coburn asked 'why should not the camera artist break away from the worn-out conventions . . . and claim the freedom of expression which any art must have to be alive?'<sup>11</sup> The question was well put and underscores the need for a new visual vocabulary that many photographers sought to take account of in relation to the developments in other media at the time. Yet how was the camera to equate itself with these new ways of seeing? Part of Coburn's attempt had been to establish new perspectives and a new point of view, so that his images of New York are either in soft focus or reduced to a semi-abstract pattern from the vantage-point of the top of a building. But such effects hardly matched the terms of reference suggested by Cubism and the radical portraits by Picasso and Braque, as they broke up the surface of the canvas into a series of multiple planes and perspectives, reconstituting the image in relation to a new awareness of time and space. Part of Coburn's

**107 Alvin Langdon Coburn**

*Vortograph*, 1917

An example of the 'vortograph', which was made by using 'three mirrors clamped together in a triangle, into which the lens of the camera was projected . . .' (Coburn).



response was what his friend Ezra Pound called the *Vortograph* (1917) [107]. Based on a series of mirrors, Coburn photographed the subject (a person or object) cast amidst the possibility of an infinite number of reflections. The result was akin to Cubist portraiture, and broke the surface literalness of earlier photography. His portrait of Pound, in particular, seemed to speak to precisely the spirit of the modern for which Pound, with his own interest in Vorticism, was calling. For once the most modern medium of the arts could reflect the most modern of aesthetics.

In many ways, of course, the photograph had been manipulated from its inception, and certainly the combination prints of Rejlander, single prints built up from the use of several negatives, points towards the later developments of photographic collage and montage. We can find examples of both forms in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Louis Ducos du Hauron's use of what he called 'transformism' in 1889 established the use of distortion as a basic method to alter the literal appearance of the subject. Even the much-vaunted Rayographs 'discovered' by Man Ray are effectively reruns of the photogenic drawings of Talbot. We can point to other examples in the period, but perhaps what distinguishes them from their twentieth-century counterparts is precisely that they lack a radical philosophy, a persistent questioning of the means of representation that was to be basic to the modern period.

Beginning in the 1900s we see a series of photographers who began to both question photographic practice and relate their concerns to the modernist aesthetic beginning to make itself felt in painting and literature. In this view the photograph is not concerned with mirroring

a literal world, for that is merely a surface appearance, and feeds into a larger mythology of verisimilitude. The photograph is to be seen as the site of a radical aesthetic, as much psychological as political: a critique of the dominant ideology and thus a crucial form of representation. Drawing on the same sources as Eisenstein's radical theories on cinema and film, a new view of the photograph emerged. Much of this development, as we might expect, took place in Revolutionary Russia and in 1920s Germany, where the assumptions of representational art were aligned with a discredited and corrupt bourgeois ideology. Rejecting the idea of a coherent and unified social space, such photographers sought to disrupt general assumptions as to how we structure an assumed 'natural' world, and in the photography of Constructivism and the philosophy of *ostranenie* (or 'making strange') we see some of its most dynamic and radical results.

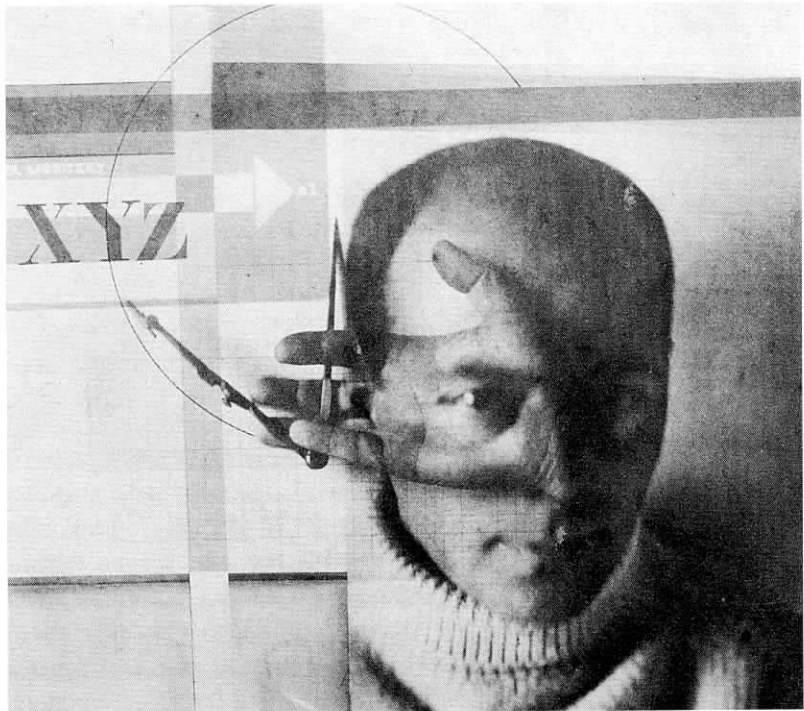
Although international in significance, the roots of Constructivism lay in the 1917 Russian Revolution. It sought an art appropriate to the social and political ideals of the new order and, by implication, questioned realism as a mode of representation. El Lissitzky (Eliezer Markowich, 1890–1941), a Russian photographer, is central to its approach. A qualified architect, his career in Russia and Germany reflects the major concerns and achievement of the movement in the period, especially in the photograph. He knew Malevich and Tatlin, and in Berlin met Kurt Schwitters and Herbert Bayer. In 1929 he created the cover for the radical *Foto-Auge* and had examples of his

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#### 108 El Lissitzky

The Constructor, 1924

An image remarkably 'modern' in both its approach and layout. An abrasive self-portrait which, in a programmatic sense, sets out the idea of the artist-photographer within both a dynamic sense of social and individual change. We are, so to speak, the architects of our own selves.





109 Alexandr Mikhailovich Rodchenko

Pioneer with a Horn, 1930

A horn-player blatantly announces the contemporary nature of the photograph's subject. This is a celebration of the modern and emphasizes its affinity with both the new and the political as part of a modern age. The distorted angle of vision adds to the radical approach and meaning.

work included in the climactic photographic exhibition *Film und Foto*, which reflected many of the 'new' photographic concerns associated with the manipulated image.

*The Constructor* (1924) [108] (a self-portrait) is a central image for an understanding of the Constructivist manifesto. The image recalls Lissitzky's knowledge of architecture (as a constructor), but equally equates the photographer with the figure of the engineer. Both figures build and design the basic structures of a new social order. But the title has larger reverberations, for this is literally a manifesto on the way we do not interpret our world so much as construct it (or have it constructed for us). It thus seeks a radical revision of our own terms of reference and, like a political poster, visually speaks out to a radical point of view. The multiple image interacts with the viewer on a number of levels and deliberately asks us to read it in an active context. Like much constructivist work, it is informed by a brash, almost aggressive, energy, appropriate to the revolutionary spirit of change it seeks to reflect and tap. The head in the image has a dominant presence; calculated and knowing, it looks directly at both the viewer and the world it seeks to construct. Equally, the eye is placed at the centre of the hand, emphasizing the relation between the intellectual and the physical and once again underlying the potent significance of the title. The unity is further suggested by the circle, the compass, and the examples of modern typology. The photograph is a superb example of a revolutionary spirit instilled into a programmatic image which reflects a multiple subject-matter. Its economy of meaning, very much a matter of design, is as much constructed as the social and political worlds at which it directs its attention.

Lissitzky's images are full of such dynamic relationships and meanings, just as they often suggest a sense of building. The emphasis is on an awareness of the terms of representation, much as we find in the theatre of Brecht. Figures fill the frame, often with a low angle which suggests the figure as dominant and in control of its environment rather than passive and receptive. Lissitzky's world is one of action, and his images establish a visual typology to reflect his philosophy.

A friend and associate of Lissitzky's was the painter and photographer Alexandr Mikhailovich Rodchenko (1891-1956). Also a Constructivist, he abandoned photography in the 1940s for abstract painting. Like his friend, however, Rodchenko made an equally radical photography capable of reflecting the social change he sought. His images have a bold and abrasive effect, and the camera distorts the angle in order to emphasize the presence of the figure. Once again the focus is on a self-conscious picturing, so that the reader is aware of the image's strategies and learns accordingly. Figures fill the frame, angle shots are distorted, with the result that the perspective on things is

seen as both radical and challenging. In Rodchenko Constructivist principles merge with Futurist values, casting human figures amidst a geometry of surrounding structures (grids, lines, patterns) as part of the larger dynamic that is the modern. *Pioneer with a Horn* (1930) [109] has a typical radical point of view. The pose is dominant and reflects the extent to which the title is reflected in the image. Like the photographer, the musician is seen as a 'pioneer', another example of a Constructivist making his world. But this is also about need for any revolutionary ideal to make itself heard. As much a poster as a photograph this takes its place within a radical public rendering of political philosophy.

Constructivism established a strident and highly radical style. It sought to confront rather than reassure the spectator, and its brash and bold configurations still have about them a freshness which denies their period context. Like Rodchenko, the work of Gustav Klutis, Sergey Senkin, and Varvara Stepanova reflects an aesthetic wholly distinct from that of any nineteenth-century precursors. Their work is a vibrant and knowing manipulation of the image based on a declared political and social perspective.

Although not a communist nor a Russian, the Hungarian-born László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) reflects a similar concern with the photograph as part of a new means of perception.<sup>2</sup> His work in Berlin in the 1920s and his association with the Bauhaus are suggestive of his pedigree as a mentor for the period. An abstract painter before he became interested in photography, his book *Painting Photography Film* (1925) reflects his understanding of the image. Moholy-Nagy sought what he termed the 'creative utilization of new perceptions and principles' in which photography was to be a 'presentational art' rather than 'a copy of nature'. Whereas most people 'have a view of the world dating from the period of the most primitive steam-engine', what he wanted was a photography (and a painting) based upon 'changed compositional principles' free from traditional values. An essay from 1932 entitled 'A New Instrument of Vision' lists 'eight varieties of photographic vision' which perfectly encapsulate the conflict between a passive and active use of photographic space. For Moholy-Nagy, 'All interpretations of photography have hitherto been influenced by the aesthetic-philosophic concept that circumscribed painting'—a position reflected in the varying claims of 'abstract seeing', 'exact seeing, as well as 'slow', 'intensified', 'penetrative', 'simultaneous', and 'distorted' seeing. The act of looking is made problematic, and the act of photographing active in its power to change the terms of perception. As a 'new instrument of vision', the camera allows access to a new awareness and programmatic of seeing. Thus Moholy-Nagy seeks a 'resolutely modern graphic structure', part of the general and radical approach which characterized Constructivism.

110 László Moholy-Nagy

Jealousy, 1928

An image which confirms Moholy-Nagy's seminal influence on a number of later photographers (for example, Callahan and Burgin).

This represents a self-conscious plotting of how meaning and knowing are constructed. Thus the play of enigmatic opposites.

The photograph is used as a conceptual space in which both the philosophical and perceptual are investigated.



Moholy-Nagy's style is, however, emblematic of his wider concerns. A mixture of the radical and the questioning, his images have an enigmatic quality which resists any attempt to simplify them to a message or statement of belief. *Above the Shooting Gallery* (1925) is almost postmodern in the procedures and meanings it suggests, as is *Jealousy* [110], which even now seems difficult to recognize as belonging to 1928. Both these establish a series of perspectives and hint at a narrative structure which confounds our attempt to read them literally and linearly. The effect is to achieve a sense of *ostranenie*, an expulsion from the text in which the image is not only made strange, but insists on its difference from an 'everyday' world and the expected conventions of photographic representation. The images work through the juxtaposition of the obvious and the unexpected, the



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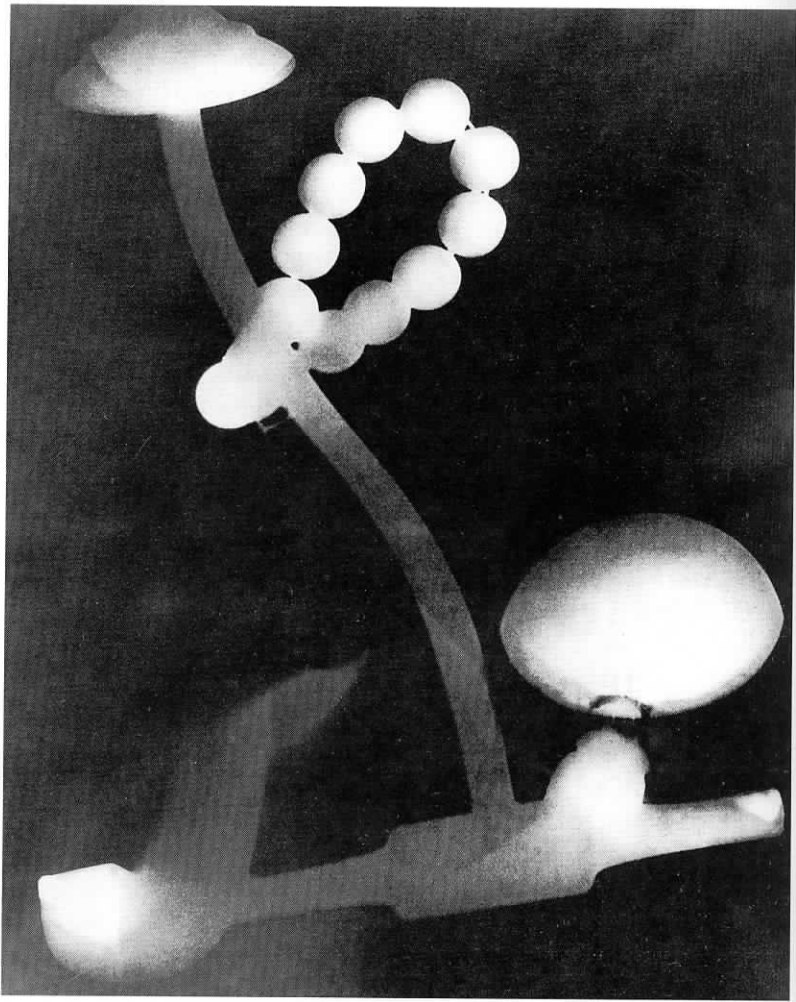
**111 Man Ray**

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**Rayogram, 1923**

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One of Man Ray's 'Rayograms', which link the modernism of the 1920s to the original process by Fox Talbot in the 1830s. Whereas Talbot produced literal representations of static objects, Ray creates a distant world which has a mysterious otherness about it.



clichéd and the radical, to produce a series of vibrant and dynamic relationships.

Moholy-Nagy experimented with the process of picture-making as well as with picture-taking. His 'photoplastiks' of collages are one example, but his photograms—camera-lens images based on Talbot's calotype process, raise issues distinct from the socially based investigations of Constructivism. Indeed, the photograms establish a bridge between the two other dominant artistic movements of the period, Surrealism and Dada. Both had an influence on his work and were instrumental in opening up the notion of *ostranenie* to a form of photography which makes use of an imagery 'that is psychologically charged'.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the photographer concerned with a psychological perspective sought an imagery which pictured the subconscious. The image was to be given over to an area of free association and multiple suggestion, not the careful plotting of psychological states of mind as we saw in the work of, for example,

Diane Arbus and Robert Frank. As the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara announced (in 1922), 'The photographer has invented a new method; he presents in space an image that goes beyond it . . .'<sup>4</sup>

Tzara wrote this for an introduction to the Russian-American Man Ray's (1890-1976) *Rayograms*, a version of the photogram and the calotype which continued the attempt to create an element of strangeness in the most common of objects. A Ray *Rayogram* [111] has about it a deeply enigmatic presence. It creates a discrete and enclosed space with little reference to the world of everyday sight, suggesting fragments of a dream-like interior photographed by chance. Man Ray's work in photography and painting in New York and Paris through to the 1940s is central to the 'tradition' of the manipulated image.

In many ways his work crystallizes the problematic of 'making strange'. In some of his images the concept is reduced to nothing more than a playful attempt to surprise; in others the use of the female is itself problematic in relation to his underlying attitudes and approach, the images existing as little more than the realization of Ray's sexual fantasies. Similarly the *Rayograms*, like the 'solarisations', suggest an element of trickery. They relate to very basic processes, but they claim for themselves enormous significance. In the end the strength of Ray's work is its humour, as in the well-known *Le Violon d'Ingres* (1924), in which a female model ('Kiki') has two 'f' curlicues superimposed upon her back. This is both a comment on the French painter Ingres (a keen amateur violinist), and on the academic tradition and values Ray attacks. However, although the intent is on the 'play' on the shape of the violin, that very aspect underlies the way Ray approaches the female form (as it does the view of women in much Surrealist photography). Like *Glass Tears* (1930) [112], the meaning of the image is based on a visual pun—the unexpected juxtaposition of disparate elements—but beneath the humour remains a woman's face, and it is this that is the object of Man's playfulness. His chosen name (i.e. Man Ray) was an appropriate choice for the kind of photography he produced.

Other images by Ray reveal how many of his preoccupations involve everyday objects. *Man* (1918), for example, is a hand-whisk. He takes common things and transforms them to the level of myth or icons of a larger human condition. The photograph assumes a metamorphosis of meaning. Ray is thus the photographer as both Dadaist and Surrealist, as much aligned with Tristan Tzara as he is with his friend Marcel Duchamp. His most radical images play into a larger vocabulary of the surreal in which the psychological is basic to their effect. Surrealist photography, in that sense, is based on an entirely different index of meaning from its literal equivalent. Its imagery is given over to an alternative inner world in which all is



## 112 Man Ray

Glass Tears (*Larmes*), 1930

A famous image by Man Ray which depends upon a basic visual pun for its effect.

The tears, of course, are glass beads. It is a photograph very much in the spirit of New York Dada.

infinitely expandable and changing. And yet Surrealism, as such, has an ambivalent relationship to the photograph. To make something 'surreal' demands the attempt to find that condition, so that one literally constructs an image for its effect rather than its substance. Man Ray, like Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Moholy-Nagy openly manipulates the image and the photographic space: constructing, deconstructing, cutting-up, and fragmenting the primary terms of the photographic space in order to suggest other levels of meaning and significance. Others will merely distort in order to make their point. Bill Brandt's nude series, for example, while raising other questions about the depiction of the female body, elongates and distorts the body as if in a fairground mirror. In other contexts the surreal is established in terms of what has been directly photographed. Thus Cartier-Bresson and Atget (much celebrated by the Surrealists at the time) can be seen as surrealists, even though they do not manipulate their images; rather, they find the condition in the scene itself.

Part of the difference in their approach is the extent to which the photograph suggests a larger philosophical questioning of its subject's terms of reference. The photographs of the Italian Futurist, Anton Giulio Bragaglia (begun in 1911) of figures moving have something of this quality about them. Indeed, to compare them with the images of Muybridge is to sense how radical they are. They are close in spirit and approach to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1911) which, like Fernand Léger's contemporary painting, signalled a new awareness of the figure in motion and space. Étienne Marey's chronophotographs of figures moving—blurred and semi-abstract patterns—reverse the viewpoint of much nineteenth-century photography, yet they were made in the 1880s and are akin, not to Muybridge's carefully calibrated visual studies of human movement, but to the modernism of Duchamp and Ray.

The nineteenth century saw a number of deliberate manipulations of the image, but it is the twentieth century which sees the rise of the manipulated image proper as part of a sustained aesthetic, often involving an active, even aggressive approach to the image. Like painters working with the techniques of montage and collage, photographers have cut up and rearranged basic imagery to construct a pattern of meaning. The 'invention' of photo-montage is disputed (between Raoul Hausmann and John Heartfield), but it is its effect which is significant. Hannah Hoch's *Cut with the Cake Knife* (1919) [113] is an early example.<sup>5</sup> A collage of disparate material, this presents a series of photographic images in a series of different perspectives bound by common themes. However, it cannot be read in literal or narrative terms; nor can it be reduced to the sum of its parts. The word DADA dominates, of course, and the mix of typeface and image increases the impression of fragmentation. Although individual



### 113 Hannah Hoch

Cut with the Cake Knife, 1919

A collage by Hannah Hoch which speaks very much to the metropolitan ethos of the period. The juxtaposition of disparate images creates a field of possible connections and meanings.

images stand out, they cannot be made to yield their meaning. We cannot, as it were, cut the image. With its fragmented structure and underlying cynicism, it reflects the mood in Europe one year after the end of the First World War.

Emerging from the extremism of Dada, John Heartfield (1891-1968) produced one of the most sustained and richest body of visual montages this century. Working from a declared left-wing position, he used his images to offer increasingly satirical critiques of Nazi Germany. Whereas Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann sought to undermine meaning through the use of the irrational, Heartfield uses the absurd and the juxtaposing of different elements in order to deflate and expose. His perspective turns the photograph into a blend of the

### 114 John Heartfield

Hurrah, the Butter's Finished!  
1935

A photo-montage by John Heartfield which, in characteristic manner, offers an incisive satire on 1930s Nazi Germany. Its absurd play on iron and butter creates a vivid and dynamic comic effect which deflates as it exposes the absurdity of the regime. Note the swastika wallpaper, the cushion on the sofa, and the dog under the table.



Bayer's title in one sense says it all. This is as much a visual reflection of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as it is of Kafka's *The Trial*. Very much an image in the European tradition, the hands and eyes suggest an emotional intensity in which aspects of the self are 'held' within the urban environment.

political essay and the political cartoon or caricature. As much in the tradition of Hogarth and Gillray as in that of his Dadaist contemporaries, Heartfield creates a wonderfully potent visual rhetoric which always seems aware of its calculated strategies in terms of its chosen target. Like the photographer Erwin Blumenfeld and the artist George Grosz, he uses the images not just to criticize but to ridicule falsehoods and political power. But although the political message dominates it cannot be reduced to a single effect.

*Hurrah, the Butter's Finished!*, for example (1935) [114] is archetypal Heartfield. The title (and the text at the bottom of the image) refers to a speech by Herman Goering and quotes him as saying that: 'Iron always makes a country strong, butter and lard only make people fat.' Against the absurdity of this claim Heartfield constructs a withering satire on its implications if believed. The montage creates its effect through the use of exaggeration, juxtaposition, the use of the unexpected, and visual hyperbole, but also through a wonderful attention to detail which gives the message a rich visual density. In the absence of any butter the patriotic family sits at the table embarking on a feast of old iron objects: chains, bike frames, nuts, bolts. The baby chews on part of an old axe; the dog, instead of a bone, has a bolt. The acute attention to detail, without reducing the essential message, is basic to Heartfield's approach. Here, for example, he compounds the effect of the meal in relation to the wallpaper (with its pattern of swastikas) and the portrait of Hitler on the wall, matched by the brilliant addition of the embroidered cushion cover which reveals none other than Hindenberg. This is a family of patriots indeed. At once blatant and subtle, this quintessential Heartfield image retains its effect. Its extreme viewpoint moves beyond rhetoric to a density which places it in a social and moral context of the kind we would associate with Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope.

Heartfield's approach has established an important tradition of the photographic montage used as political satire. The density and economy of his approach has been followed by the British-born Peter Kennard. A consistently trenchant reader of the British scene, his *Cruise Missiles*, made in 1980, turns the wagon in Constable's *The Hay Wain* into a missile-launcher, as part of a protest to keep cruise missiles out of England. Equally, his *Defended to Death* (1982) shows the excesses of the (then) arms race between the USA and the USSR. Kennard has an incisive style, and is very much a confrontational artist, as his recent *Brittania* work reveals: a study of the myth of England and establishment power.

If the strength of such montages is their immediacy, so their weakness is the limited context in which they establish their meaning and effect. Other uses of the montage (and collage) however, move away from the overtly political and satirical in order to suggest a





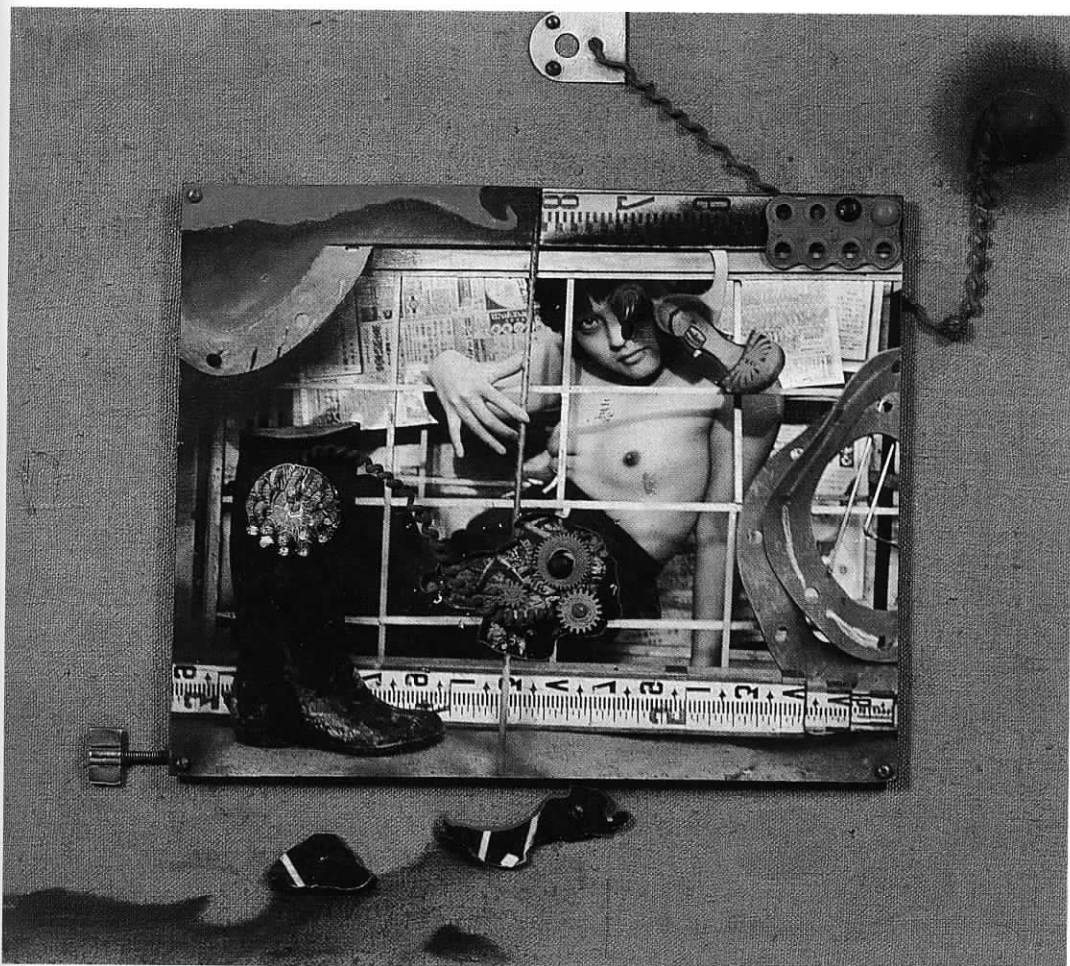
philosophical underpinning to their vision, and offer definitive images of a pervasive condition associated with twentieth-century life. In Europe much of this has been influenced by such philosophical movements as Existentialism, and by the work of Kafka and Freud. Herbert Bayer's (1900–85) *Lonely Metropolitan* (1932) [115] is such an image. Through its play of the unexpected and the absurd this achieves a poetic density, in which dark humour gives way to a visual equivalent of a larger condition: ennui, alienation, and loneliness within an urban reality. Thus it plays upon a larger symbolic significance to create a haunting and disquieting atmosphere.

In a similar manner, although to very different ends, Richard Hamilton (1922– ) in his 1956 *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* [116] poses the question in the title as basic to the meaning of the image. An obvious satire on suburbia, this extends the irony of the American photographer Bill Owens on middle-class lifestyles. Hamilton exhausts the signifiers, taking them to the limit of their effect; an effect so over-the-top as to reinvest them with cultural significance. There is a rich play of the banal and the blatant, but all as part of a critique of a way of life, of mental attitudes, not of a political subject as such. The humour belies the concern with lonely and empty

116 Richard Hamilton

Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?, 1956  
 Hamilton's images have a playfulness about them which belies their serious intention. This is a cultural montage which offers a critique of consumer society through the juxtaposition of illogical components. The image, in the end, is cluttered with consumer items, just as it is full of the language and motifs of the advert.





**117 Gingo Hanawa**

Object (or Complicated Imagination), 1938

A strange and at first diffident image which offers the reader no easy access to its meanings. However, look at its separate elements and a series of patterns emerges based upon an underlying critique of the modern age.

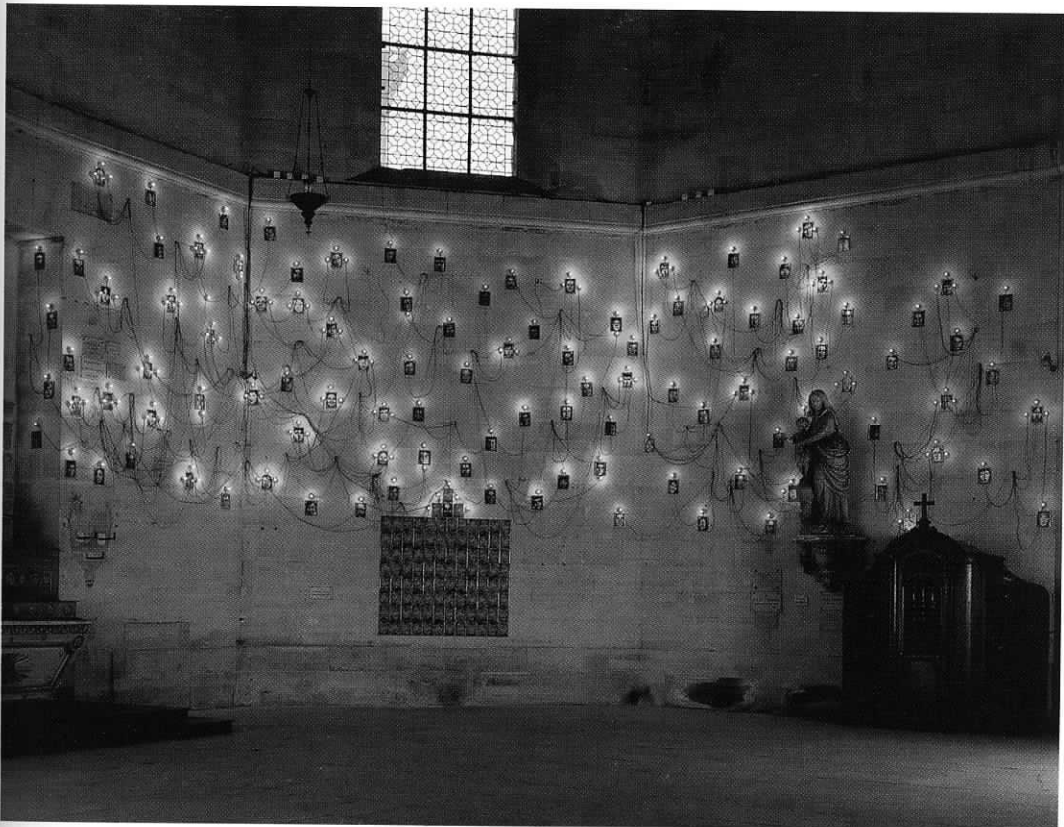
lives of the kind we would associate with the work of Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus, for example.

Heartfield, Kennard, Bayer, and Hamilton offer examples of the photograph used to make a specific critique. The visual space is made the basis of a series of strategies devoted to putting across a satirical message. Other montages (and collages) however, create their effect from the unexpected coming together of different elements without any obvious message or reading of the image. Gingo Hanawa's *Object* [117], for example, an image much ahead of its time, is at once ambivalent and complex. It baffles the reader in search of any narrative meaning. Unconnected elements, some photographic, some not, have been assembled in a random geometry and present themselves as a *fait-accompli*; an object, both in their own terms (for they constitute, however strange, an object), and as the object of our gaze. And this is the point, for merely placing two objects or images together (as with any two words) creates the potential for meaning and a new relationship between reader and image. *Object* is thus a play on the

nature of the object and meaning, for everything, in an individual state, can be recognized, and yet in the pattern in which they are presented they demand a new form of recognition and a new kind of attention. *Object* moves us back into a three-dimensional world and recalls us to the play between image and object which is the basis of the photograph. All is calculated, echoing El Lissitzky's *The Constructor* while equally looking towards the collages of the American artist Robert Rauschenberg in the 1950s, and to the conceptual games of Jasper Johns in the same decade. Ironically, the more we look at this object, the more it gains in meaning and significance.

Victor Burgin, a British-born photographer, has played a central role in the contemporary development of this tradition. As much a critic as a photographer, his *Thinking Photography* (1981) which he edited, underscores the theoretical awareness which informs his work: the implications of linguistic theory, psychoanalysis, and semiotics for the way the image must be understood, in all its contexts. He consciously manipulates the image according to a declared critical relationship to the reader which is characteristic of the postmodern period. His references to Brecht and Benjamin suggest his frame of reference. He denounced the notion of 'moments of truth' as as 'great a mystification as the notion of autonomous creativity'. *Office at Night, No. 1* (1986) [5] reflects his critical position. This is a devious image which speaks to a postmodernist self-conscious awareness of its multiple terms of reference. The right-hand side of the photograph features the image of a female office-worker at a filing cabinet. Behind is a second figure, which we recognize as taken from Edward Hopper's painting *Office at Night*. The stylized pastiche of Hopper's painting establishes both a point of contrast and a historical and social perspective on the nature and convention of the office as a place of work and cultural institution. It also raises significant questions concerning the nature of technology and communication. The left-hand side of the image offers examples of an anonymous typology associated with the computer. The 'file', like the figure, is, in its traditional sense, now redundant; new signifiers have replaced the old, to create a new reality. And yet, the image asks, how can we represent such realities in a visual form? The image is, in short, a Brechtian essay on photographic meaning and its relation to a larger signifying process. Although Burgin has abandoned any pretence of realism, his image exposes as much about the structures and relationships of the contemporary world as any 'documentary' photograph could.

Burgin's approach is characteristic of much postmodern imagery which, in manipulating the photograph, moves beyond the strategies of political satire and caricature and uses the medium to assert its validity whilst questioning its terms of reference. Christian Boltanski (1944-) is another worker in this area. Acutely aware of the practice of



**118 Christian Boltanski**

Monuments (*Les Enfants de Dijon*), 1985

A complex installation of a series of single images which, in their accumulative effect, create an almost religious sense of individual worth and being. A memorial as much as a celebration, the use of lighting here transforms snapshots into something akin to a religious icon.

the photograph, Boltanski, like Burgin, establishes a distinct critical space between the reader and his images. *Monuments (Les Enfants de Dijon)* (1985) [118] is characteristic of his approach. This installation charges the image with a new and heightened significance. A number of photographs of children have been arranged next to lights so that they resemble icons; indeed, the effect suggests a cathedral, and a series of candles celebrating (and remembering) the individuals photographed. Boltanski thus creates a sense of ritual, belief, and the need to record and celebrate, whilst at the same time questioning the structures within which the very act of photography accrues status and meaning. This installation extends the critical concern of contemporary photography to a new seriousness, whilst alerting us to the presence of the image in its anthropological as well as psychological contexts. Rather than suggesting the end of the photograph as a means of representation, Burgin and Boltanski give it a new significance. The manipulation of the photograph thus continues to instruct us in the strengths of the photograph and its relation to the world in which we live. As the American Surrealist photographer, Clarence John Laughlin (1905–85) proclaimed: ‘The physical object, to me, is merely a stepping stone to an inner world ... of subconscious drives ...’ So much, then, for the mirror image.