

Jonathan Lam  
Prof. Fink  
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## Woman and Machine: The Changing Face of Industrialization

Replace a worker with a machine -- what does it look like? In a new surge of industry fostered by a wartime need and a postwar consumer demand, Hoch presents a colorful image of the contemporary worker in her painting, *Study for Man and Machine*. A worker, but mechanical, but with a face. Her artwork is an acceptance of the degrading changes to the German workforce; a similar view (albeit with an altogether different presentation) is presented in a very human photograph around the same era.

Take away the worker, and there's still a machine, a brass- and silver-colored tool with screws and edges and knobs. This is the conventional tool. The background is grey, the mechanical tool is faded. Put back the worker, and there is a spring for an arm and shutters for eyes, the yellow and rust-colors of the machine's facade resemble human skin and blood, and even the background behind the worker is a lighter shade than that surrounding it. It's a little difficult to tell what is morphing. Is the worker becoming a machine, or is the machine becoming more human?

Both are certainly plausible, given the massive increase in industrialization during and after the Great War, which wreaked an immense toll on the German industrial workforce. Some of the major outcomes included the following general outcomes:

- the highest throughput of German industrial machines to feed the war industry;
- a great reduction of the workforce both during and after the war, as many young men left to fight during the war and many never returned;
- terrible conditions for German workers, who were miserable and dying from overwork, starvation, Spanish flu, and some of course to the wartime violence.

The latter two consequences culminated in larger effects directly after the war. Women played a more important role in society and the workforce during the war due to the lack of male workers, and after the war they were indignant to return to their previous state. Hoch was one such outspoken feminist (Gallagher). Similarly, workers fought for better working conditions after the war, which led to the foundation of the Weimar Republic by a social revolution only a few months after the war. While not directly a champion of worker's rights and not an industrial worker herself, Hoch's work is associated with the Dadaist art movement, which strongly opposed the capitalistic exploitation of the working force. Both led to substantial leftist movements following the war, namely women's suffrage in 1919 and dramatic labor reform shortly following the foundation of the Weimar Republic.

Perhaps what is most important and striking about the mechanical robot is that it has a face. With Hoch's involvement in the feminist movement, and with the sharp, colorful contrasts like makeup, the mechanical worker has some semblance of a female face. It doesn't fit into the surroundings, into the traditionally-male role of the breadwinner, but in a particularly vibrant way.

However, the placard brings up the unnaturalness of this machine: "How functional is this machine after all?" Throw in the unconventional painting media – gouache, pencil, and watercolor – and you have quite the absurd being, of which placing in an industrial setting is both machine-ly un-human and human-ly inefficient. Thus the feminist interpretation is an optimistic one, hoping instead to combine the advantages of the human and machine parts; its colors are breaking out of the mundaneness of the background, a representation of the victories of liberal movements for workers and women that accompanied the end of the terrible war and its working conditions. While the worker is certainly not entirely human, she remains vivacious.

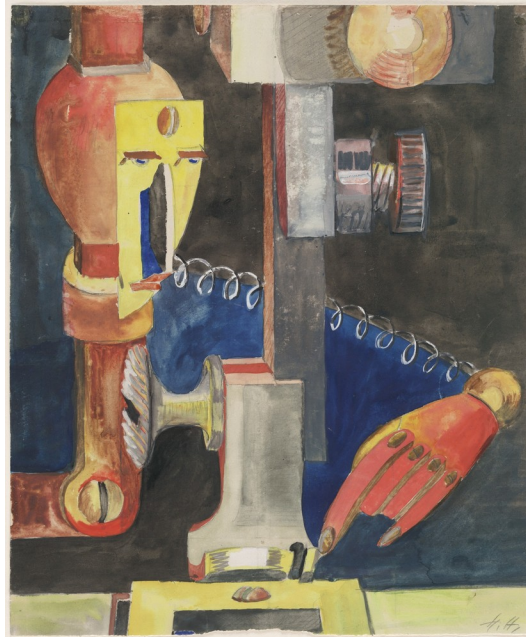
Contrast this to the photograph of the carpenter from the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. Clearly there is no color photography by this time, but the lack of color and the very ordinary setting of the work set a tone opposite to the whimsical nature of the awkward mechanical worker. There is no more human mask, no silly colors. There is still the man and the machine, however, and now the machine may be removed from the man: as the handwritten note suggests, the man uses his arm as a tool chuck. The view of this image is, expectedly, somewhat different than Hoch's; rather than provoke a sense of absurdity in the changing workforce, this is more illustrative of the poor state of the working class that survived the war: injured and incomplete, but hopeful. The hand may be the most important tool to the carpenter or the worker of another trade, and yet even in its absence the worker survives. As the caption also notes, "on Sundays he has an arm made in careful imitation of the one he has lost" – even his most mechanical aspect still has a human character, a character that persists outside of his work (on Sundays).

Hoch was a Red Cross volunteer briefly during the war (Gallagher). It's likely that she met many women and men like the carpenter both during and after the war, finding hope in their successful struggles in the workplace that continued after the war.

References: Works from MoMA, Room 510, "Man and Machine"

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Hannah Hoch: *Study for Man and Machine (Skizze zu Mensch und Maschine)*. 1921.  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/33945>.



Placard text: "An ideal worker might be entirely mechanical. This idea inspired advocates and worried critics of mechanization since the advent of the Industrial Age. This watercolor renders the merging of human and machine in a cacophonous, colorful modernity, depicting a laborer composed of springs, gears, and assembled parts not so different from the apparatus at which they toil. Still, the design is hardly streamlined, both body and tool feature awkward knobs and extraneous corners. How functional is this thing after all?"

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Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. *French War Veteran* c. 1919.  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/58679>



Handwritten text: "For a working man, this carpenter wears a chuck into which he inserts any tools he may need. On Sundays he has an arm made in careful imitation of the one he has lost."

## Works Cited

- Hoch, Hannah. *Study for Man and Machine*. Artists Rights Society (ARS), Germany, 1921, MoMA, New York.
- Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men. *French War Veteran*. New York, 1919.
- Gallagher, Paul. "The Mama & the Dadas: The Pioneering Feminist Artwork of Hannah Höch." *Dangerous Minds*, Dangerous Minds, 13 Nov. 2018, [https://www.dangerousminds.net/comments/the\\_mama\\_the\\_dadas\\_the\\_pioneering\\_feminist\\_artwork\\_of\\_hannah\\_hoech](https://www.dangerousminds.net/comments/the_mama_the_dadas_the_pioneering_feminist_artwork_of_hannah_hoech).