

Glamor and Gloom:
The Female-White Collar Worker
in Mainstream Cinema and Popular Fiction
of the Late Weimar Republic

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Germanic
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Abstract

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This dissertation is a study of the female white-collar worker and her representation in mainstream cinema and popular fiction during the late Weimar Republic. At the center of my analysis lie the questions of how cinematic and literary texts inform on the material world, and whether female employees turned to secretary films and *weibliche Angestelltenromane* to negotiate their identities. In particular, I focus on the films Die Privatsekretärin (1931) and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus (1931) as well as the novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (1930) by Christa Anita Brück, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat (1930) by Rudolf Braune and Das kunstseidene Mädchen (1932) by Irmgard Keun. Together, these texts reflect both the emancipatory as well as the regressive aspects that shaped the lives of women in white-collar professions at the time. They echo the ambivalence that was a key factor in working women's experience of the Weimar period.

Conservative contemporaries were quick to dismiss female commercial employees as unfair competitors in the workplace or unwomanly creatures, and

critics like Siegfried Kracauer, Max Horkheimer or Theodor Adorno saw them as passive consumers. I set out to challenge these perspectives. First, by identifying the reasons underlying women's entry into white-collar employment as well as their actual living and working conditions. And further by exploring the cultural phenomenon of the New Woman, created by the media for female clerks to identify with. Germany's mass media satisfied women's desire for entertainment: movies and *Unterhaltungsliteratur* addressed female audiences more directly than traditional culture and allowed them to draw on the popular for their subjectivity formation, turning their objectification into an opportunity.

The resemblances and differences between films and novels, between fiction and reality, rendered visible in this dissertation point to the emancipatory potential inherent in the figure of the female white-collar worker. They also explain why the tensions of modernity were never successfully synthesized for these women and resulted in disillusionment. By investigating popular and gendered aspects of modernity I hope to broaden the understanding of the Weimar Republic as a whole and contribute to the process of (re)constructing women's history.

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Introduction

Do literary and cinematic texts inform on the material world in addition to being artifacts and if so what insights can readers gain from them? More specifically, to what extent did the female white-collar workers of the late Weimar Republic turn to mainstream cinema and popular fiction to negotiate their realities and their identities? These are the questions I propose to explore in my thesis, and to answer them I analyze five fictional texts that address the working and living conditions of this social group. I choose to focus on two films, Die Privatsekretärin (1931) and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus (1931), as well as on the three novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (1930), Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin (1930) and Das kunstseidene Mädchen (1932) for a number of reasons. All texts 'star' female employees and they were produced or written during the final phase of the Weimar Republic between 1929 and 1933. This implies that their producers or authors were likely to have been familiar with the figure of the female commercial employee, and could rely as much on their own observations or experience as of their contemporaries sources to depict these women. The texts, which are not part of the filmic or literary canon because they are works of popular art, enjoyed tremendous popularity especially among women at the time, not least because they offered intriguing portrayals of the female white-collar worker.¹ They

¹ Josef Witsch, a contemporary, pointed to the popularity of such works: "Schreibmaschinen, Ladenpoesie, Flirt und Liebesverhältnisse zwischen Chef und Angestellter [...] ergeben ein 'mixtum compositum,' das viel verkauft und gelesen wird." Josef Witsch, Berufs- und

incorporate, to varying degrees, the freedoms but also the restrictions that determined these women's lives.

In what manner were the conditions under which female employees lived and worked depicted? Are the accounts clichés or do they – if only partially – reflect women's realities? I will show that a discrepancy existed between their representation in mainstream cinema and popular fiction on the one hand. On the other hand, this discrepancy echoes the ambivalence that was a key factor in working women's experience of German modernity. Furthermore, what was the effect of this discrepancy on contemporary audiences and readers? It is well known that the Weimar Republic was a period characterized by radical economic, social and cultural change during which many established beliefs and practices were called into question. It is also a critical commonplace that times of volatility and upheaval inspire people to seek new sources of meaning, and my study shows that popular culture constituted a significant factor in the subjectivity formation of female white-collar workers. Therefore, it is my contention that this selection of mainstream films and popular novels represents what might be called "a forceful archeology": they are powerful documents that help broaden our understanding of women's experience of Weimar modernity.²

Lebensschicksale weiblicher Angestellter in der schönen Literatur (Köln: Verlag des Forschungsinstituts für Sozialwissenschaften, 1932) 51. See also Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 213.

² Marsha Meskimmon, We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999) 15.

In my inquiry I focus on the textual analysis of films and novels about female white-collar workers because these women developed into a veritable phenomenon during the 1920s. The myth of the New Woman, a fiercely independent person that earned her own keep, defied conventions and social norms, participated in political discussions and wore fashionable clothes, continues to linger to this day. My ultimate interest is the representation of the figure by mainstream cinema and popular fiction, and much of my thesis is devoted to textual analysis. However, it is vital to create a historical context and lay out the climate of the late Weimar years because, in addition to contrasting the different media, I compare the fictional accounts of the New Woman with her counterpart in 'real' life. Providing a socio-historical setting for the discussion of the films and fictional texts is therefore essential. In the opening chapter, I create a profile of the typical Weimar female employee. Since economists, sociologists and cultural critics all made the female white-collar worker a subject of their investigations I draw on numerous empirical studies and surveys from the period as well as more recent critical writings. In order to better understand the issue of female employment I first explain why women entered commercial employment. Focusing on the 1920s and early 1930s, I then explore specific white-collar professions as well as factors such as class, education and age. My discussion of female office workers, the smallest group within the larger group of women employees, is not definitive but key aspects that shaped women crystallize and the emerging fabric provides a backdrop against which to discuss the fictional representations. In the second chapter I flesh out the figure outside the office

environment because the Weimar employee was also a cultural phenomenon. I thereby explore the question posed by Weimar contemporary Aleksandra Kollantaj: “Wer ist das, die Neue Frau?”³ Office workers attracted much attention in particular from the burgeoning mass media, which contributed significantly to shaping the figure. Stenotypists and secretaries were soon considered the embodiment of a new type of woman and this so-called New Woman was believed to be embracing a radically new lifestyle. For the first time in history women became “Konsumierende” as well as “Produzierende.”⁴ I illustrate how the appearance of a select group of women as well as their behavior changed and how the period seemed to produce an entirely new gender role. To conclude the chapter, I also focus on the challenges that modern women faced – traditional economic, social and cultural patterns – and explore the reasons why the potential inherent in the figure of the New Woman, the opportunity for women to become fully integrated and equal members of modern society, was never fully realized.

Popular culture played an important role in the lives of young working women and in particular the office workers of Berlin went to the cinema or read books to derive pleasure. Both mainstream cinema and popular fiction satisfied women’s desire for entertainment and in Chapter Three I discuss how they also provided women with a sphere to encounter their lives on a fictional level. The focus of the chapter will be on mainstream cinema, and though the films Die

³ Aleksandra Kollantaj, Die neue Moral und die Arbeiterklasse (Berlin: Seehof, 1920) 5.

⁴ Atina Grossman, “Eine ‘neue’ Frau im Deutschland der Weimarer Republik?,” Das Fräulein vom Amt, eds. Helmut Gold and Annette Koch (München: Prestel, 1993) 136.

Privatsekretärin and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus are at the core of my analysis, I also address issues that deal as much with the medium itself as with these particular films. A combination of aspects pertaining to cinema and mass culture will provide the framework for the textual analysis of the films. In particular, I elaborate on the movie-going experience and, paying specific attention to gender, investigate the relationship of the urban female audience to cinema. Neither of the two films I discuss has received much scholarly attention. Irmgard Keun referred to Die Privatsekretärin in a conversation with a friend, which explains why the film receives occasional mentioning in scholarly works but to my knowledge, like Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus, it has not been analyzed in detail.⁵ I believe these working-girl films deserve attention: both were box-office hits *and* they presented elements considered characteristic for the female white-collar worker. Yet, did these films serve as a site for women to negotiate their personal identities and modernity on the whole or were they dazzling yet superficial spectacles? My analysis renders the resemblances as well as the discrepancies between fiction and reality visible, and, by looking at the audience reaction to select films, explores to what extent mainstream cinema contributed to female subjectivity formation.

Prior to turning to the discussion of the novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen by Christa Anita Brück, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat by Rudolf Braune and Das kunstseidene Mädchen by Irmgard Keun in Chapter

⁵ Irmgard Keun in conversation with Johannes Tralow cited in Gabriele Kreis, "Was man glaubt, gibt es": Das Leben der Irmgard Keun (Zürich: Arche, 1991) 91. See also Annette Koch, "Die weiblichen Angestellten in der Weimarer Republik," Das Fräulein vom Amt 175.

Four, the final chapter of my thesis, I lay out various aspects of popular fiction during the Weimar period. Literature and the book trade experienced substantial changes during the 1920s, not least because *Unterhaltungsliteratur* became a commercially viable genre and attracted a mass readership. I draw on various surveys to establish the reading habits and preferences of commercial employees: did they purchase books or did they use lending libraries, did they read novels or did they prefer non-fiction? The *weiblichen Angestelltenromane* selected for my thesis deserve attention because of the way they represent the working and living conditions of this social group. By discussing episodes from the novels a complex albeit fictional image of the historical figure emerges. In addition I explore what popular women's novels had to offer readers and the question whether these novels successfully synthesized the tensions of modernity and whether they assisted female white-collar workers in navigating their challenging and multi-faceted reality.

The Weimar female white-collar worker has become a figure of interest in various disciplines and scholarly studies. Early examinations of popular culture, most prominently perhaps Siegfried Kracauer's, generally failed to see the Weimar period as either one of unprecedented opportunity or disillusionment for women and saw women mostly as passive consumers.⁶ This relegated female commercial employees as well as the films or novels they consumed to a place outside modernist high culture. Stigmatized the inferior 'Other,' women were

⁶ See Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*; and Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* (1930; Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985).

excluded from society and received but scant scholarly attention.⁷ It was not until the sixties that this trend was reversed.⁸ During the 1960s and 1970s material criticism introduced class as a category for critical inquiry.⁹ By challenging the concept of homogeneity – or a unified audience or reading public – it paved the way for the rise of fields such as cultural studies.¹⁰ These introduced gender as a crucial concept in scholarly discourse, set out to claim a space for women in history and found, as Vibeke Rützou Petersen puts it, “the lost women of the modern period.”¹¹ Prior to the 1980s feminist literary critics focused primarily on women’s exclusion from masculine-normative culture and society as well as the

⁷ Simone De Beauvoir first introduced the term, which she derived from Hegelian notions of ‘Other’ and which has become a key concept of gender studies, in her seminal study Le deuxième sexe (1949). According to Beauvoir, woman is a social construct – one not born a woman but becomes one – and she established that patriarchal society treats women as abnormalities or ‘Other’ in relation to men. Judith Butler is among those who have built on this concept and argues that the categories ‘female’ and ‘male’ are artificial constructs. According to Butler neither gender nor sex are nature-given but socially or socio-culturally determined. See Simone De Beauvoir, Le deuxième sexe (1949; Gallimard: Paris, 1993); Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’ (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁸ Second-wave Feminism gained momentum in the early 1960s and was keen on overcoming *de jure* inequalities. These had first been brought to the attention by suffragettes during the late 19th and early 20th century and were inextricably linked to *de facto* ones, ranging from economic to sexual ones. See, for example, Jutta Menschik, Feminismus: Geschichte, Theorie, Praxis (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1977).

⁹ Marxist literary criticism interprets literature as both a reflection of class struggle and materialism, “not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as ‘products’ of the economic and ideological determinants specific to [an] era.” M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 7th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1999) 149. See also Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (London: Methuen, 1976).

¹⁰ Cultural studies theorists such as Stuart Hall of the Birmingham School introduced an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture. Most notably, Hall challenged the division between producers and consumers of culture, arguing that readers or audiences do not passively accept texts – as implied by the cultural theorists of the Frankfurt School – but negotiate their meanings. See Stuart Hall, Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973).

¹¹ Vibeke Rützou Petersen, Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany (New York: Berghahn, 2001) xvii.

politics of female authorship, but have since taken new routes, not least because third-wave feminists have been deconstructing existing relations of power and recognized the intersection of salient categories of difference such as race, class, sexuality, religion and nationality.¹² Since then feminist film and cultural scholars, as I will outline below, have been exploring women's relationship to the period and popular culture. Yet, to my knowledge no full-length study has focused on the fictional representation of the female white-collar worker in mainstream Weimar cinema *and* popular fiction, and the role of these in the lives of this social group. It is my aim to contribute to filling this gap.

In order to obtain a more complete picture of a gendered modernity, it is vital to put aside the distinctions between low and high culture. Traditionally, women were by and large excluded from high culture, and the cultural artifacts that were typically associated with women were considered inferior. As a result of this marginalization, women were also excluded from historiography, as were novels written or read by women. Publications such as When Biology Became Destiny (1984) by Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann and Marian Kaplan or Ute Frevert's monograph Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation (1989) call for our attention because they provide comprehensive insights into periods of specifically female German

¹² See, for example, Ursula Krechel, Selbsterfahrung und Fremdbestimmung: Bericht aus der Neuen Frauenbewegung (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1975); Ann Brooks, Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Forms (London: Routledge, 1997); Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, eds., Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration (New York: Palgrave, 2004); and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1997).

history.¹³ By focusing on female employment, the studies Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? Arbeit, Alltag und Organisation weiblicher Angestellter in der Kaiserzeit und Weimarer Republik (1988) by Ellen Lorentz as well as “Die weiblichen Angestellten in der Weimarer Republik” (1993) by Annette Koch similarly challenge patriarchal historiography and further contribute to the effort of carving out a space for women in history.¹⁴ By providing background information studies like these also paved the way for the discourse on gendered modernity. In this context, the anthology Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture (1997) edited by Katharina von Ankum deserves particular mention.¹⁵ A collection of essays by women scholars, this volume helps to recognize the extent to which women from various social strata were embedded in the process of modernization and culture, and it reflects on women’s multifaceted participation in and experience of this historical period. The essays focus specifically on popular culture – an approach that echoes that of Siegfried Kracauer and Georg Simmel before him – and by investigating issues such as fashion they show that social and cultural developments relating to female realities may be explained by exploring the ephemeral.

My own concerns are in part addressed in two of the essays: “In the Mirror of Fashion” by Sabine Hake and “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science

¹³ Renate Briendenthal, Atina Grossmann and Marian Kaplan, eds., When Biology Became Destiny (New York: Monthly Review, 1984); and Ute Frevert, Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation (New York: Berg, 1989).

¹⁴ Ellen Lorentz, Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? Arbeit, Alltag und Organisation weiblicher Angestellter in der Kaiserzeit und Weimarer Republik (Bielefeld: Kleine, 1988).

¹⁵ Katharina von Ankum, ed., Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997).

and Popular Culture in Search for the Ideal New Woman” by Lynne Frame.¹⁶ Hake’s and Frame’s texts explore specific elements that characterized the modern woman and elucidate the dynamics surrounding these elements. As Hake points out, during the 1920s, fashion became one of the chief markers for the changes female gender roles underwent. The change in their appearance symbolized women's desire for new identities and new societal roles, and consumer products and the act of shopping offered the means to construct these. Short hair and high hemlines not only gained popularity as women entered into office- and service-related professions and preferred practical clothing but also signified the attempt to realize “personal and social ambitions.”¹⁷ Lynne Frame comes to a similar conclusion in her article on female typologies by positioning popular magazines and a novel by the bestselling author Vicki Baum in the scientific discourse of the time. As much as the different models of femininity enabled women to determine their appearance and identity, they also objectified them and imposed regulations on them. The similarity between Frame and Hake in terms of approach and findings indicates that an interdisciplinary investigation of women’s conditions during Weimar years is essential to gain a more complete historiography of the period.

In her influential study Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Cinema (1989) on gendered spectatorship film scholar

¹⁶ Sabine Hake, “In the Mirror of Fashion,” Women in the Metropolis 185-201; and Lynne Frame, “Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search for the Ideal New Woman,” Women in the Metropolis 12-40.

¹⁷ Hake, “In the Mirror of Fashion” 191.

Patrice Petro uses the same approach.¹⁸ By exploring fashion and lifestyle magazines as well as critically acclaimed films, Petro establishes that Weimar popular culture did not exclude female audiences and raises questions about women's role as consumers as well as the function of popular culture in the process of female subjectivity formation. She points to models of spectatorship that reflect women's conflicting experience with modernity and recognizes cinema in addition to print media as a source of identity. Cinema's role in shaping modernity as a whole, and specifically modern femininity, was addressed as early as 1914. Based on the observation that many women went to the cinema and did so frequently, Emilie Altenloh first introduced the idea of female spectatorship and though Zur Soziologie des Kinos: die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher (1914) remains problematic because her results are based on relatively little data it remains a key document on gendered spectatorship.¹⁹ It is particularly important in light of modernist essays such as Siegfried Kracauer's "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehn ins Kino" (1928).²⁰ Kracauer failed to recognize at least the possibility of an emancipated female

¹⁸ Patrice Petro, Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Cinema (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989). Another noteworthy contribution to the discourse on gendered spectatorship is Sabine Hake's "Girls and Crisis – The Other Side of Diversion," New German Critique 40 (1987): 147-64, which also perceives cinema as a space for women and the feminine, and argues that the pejorative attitude toward the cinema by male intellectuals symbolized an underlying anxiety about women's emancipation at the time.

¹⁹ Emilie Altenloh, Zur Soziologie des Kinos: die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher (Jena: Diederichs, 1914).

²⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehn ins Kino," 1928, Das Ornament der Masse, ed. Karsten Witte (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963) 279-94.

cinematic experience, and his insinuation of women's lack of intellectual capacity reveals the bias of an exclusively male perspective of modernity.

My quest of reconstructing women's history as well as the discourse of gendered experiences of modernity has also been informed by Leo Lensing's article "Cinema, Society, and Literature in Irmgard Keun's Das kunstseidene Mädchen" (1985) because it provides a specific example of how films and actresses influenced young women at the time.²¹ Although his succinct analysis pertains to the behavior and awareness of a fictional character, it implies that the medium and its ambivalent images were similarly important for real-life women. A number of studies from the period substantiate Lensing's claim. According to Freizeitleben der Großstadtjugend: 5000 Jungen und Mädchen berichten (1932) by Robert Dinse and the article "Was liest unsere heranwachsende weibliche Jugend?" (1920) by Mechthilde Berchem, Weimar women did not read fictional texts for pleasure alone but, as the many interviews conducted by the editors demonstrate, they also used them as a source of education and advice.²² Lensing's article proves especially important because it also illustrates what is *absent* from the debates of female identity, female spectatorship, and the concept of a specifically female experience of modernity. Though he is right in pointing out that secretary films became very popular in the republic's final years, he mentions the genre's pinnacle, Die Privatsekretärin, only in passing. Secretary

²¹ Leo A. Lensing, "Cinema, Society, and Literature in Irmgard Keun's Das kunstseidene Mädchen," The Germanic Review 9 (1985): 129-34.

²² Robert Dinse, Freizeitleben der Großstadtjugend: 5000 Jungen und Mädchen berichten (Berlin: R. Müller, 1932); and Mechthilde Berchem, "Was liest unsere heranwachsende weibliche Jugend?," Die Bücherwelt 17 (1920): 106-7.

films are not the focus of Lensing's inquiry, however, his text nevertheless renders visible a lack: while the female white-collar worker as movie-watching subject has been addressed, her position as object of cinematic representation has been neglected.

Unlike in film, the Weimar white-collar worker as represented in literature has been a subject of critical inquiry. Christa Jordan's Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung: Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik (1988) presents one of the most comprehensive studies on *Angestelltenromane* from the period.²³ Jordan's approach intrigues, as she combines sociology with literary criticism and investigates how sociological or historical aspects are represented on a fictional level. Though Jordan analyzes works that are not part of the literary canon she does not focus exclusively on popular *Frauenromane*. Josef Witsch's Berufs- und Lebensschicksale weiblicher Angestellter in der schönen Literatur (1932) is a good source from the period, especially since he touches on the contemporary reception of fiction on female white-collar workers. The small volume is part of a socio-political series and, situating the figure in this context, presupposes that literature creates "aus dem Leben herausgegriffene Gestalten und Begebenheiten auf dem Hintergrund tatsächlicher Begebenheiten."²⁴ Though insightful, Witsch's study remains incomplete because he merely provides lengthy quotations from individual novels at the expense of detailed analysis.

²³ Christa Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung: Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1988).

²⁴ Josef Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 10.

In contrast, Heide Soltau's Trennungs-Spuren: Frauenliteratur der zwanziger Jahre (1984) and more recently Vibeke Rützou Petersen's study Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany (2001) provide in-depth investigations of *Unterhaltungsromane* about and for women.²⁵ Both scholars seek to contribute to reconstructing the social and cultural history of women during the Weimar Republic. Unlike my own study, Heide Soltau's focuses entirely on novels written by women authors. She investigates *Frauenromane* that address acts of physical or intellectual emancipation in order to explore, from a feminist vantage point, women's albeit fictionalized striving for personal freedom. Soltau also includes more traditional female types such as *höhere Töchter*, housewives or teachers in her study. The same applies to Vibeke Rützou Petersen's monograph, an analysis of a spectrum of novels featuring modern and more traditional women written by female as well as male authors. Petersen investigates the life praxis of women during the Weimar Republic, and in addition to gender she examines issues such as nationhood and race. By showing how Weimar women used popular literature to fashion their identity, Rützou Petersen establishes novels as social productions of female subjectivity. In addition to pointing to the importance of popular culture in the lives of women she also succeeds in drawing attention to a genre that, due to its alleged inferior literary quality, had been largely ignored by scholarship.

The novel about a female white-collar worker from the late Weimar period that has drawn and continues to draw the most scholarly attention is Irmgard

²⁵ Heide Soltau, Trennungs-Spuren: Frauenliteratur der zwanziger Jahre (Frankfurt a.M.: extrabuch, 1984); and Petersen, Women and Modernity in Weimar Germany.

Keun's Das kunstseidene Mädchen. Though the novel was widely discussed by critics at the time of its publication, Keun's second bestseller drifted into oblivion because, as Gerhard Roloff points out in his essay "Irmgard Keun: Vorläufiges zu Leben und Werk," (1977) the novel's "sozialkritische Neusachlichkeit" went out of fashion after 1933.²⁶ It was not until the 1970s, when, as part of a wider feminist movement that challenged prevailing social structures and cultural values, women scholars and intellectuals began to question men's dominant position within culture and literature that Keun's novel was rediscovered. Ursula Krechel's article "Irmgard Keun: Zerstörung der kalten Ordnung. Auch ein Versuch über das Vergessen weiblicher Kulturleistungen" (1979) and Elfriede Jelinek's encomium to the novelist, "Weil sie heimlich weinen muß, lacht sie über Zeitgenossen" (1980), are two examples that attempt to draw attention to the cultural and literary contributions by women like Keun.²⁷ Since the 1980s the interest has shifted and scholars have been exploring the novel in terms of themes and narrative style. The essays "Forcierte Prosa: Stilbeobachtungen an Bildern und Romanen der Neuen Sachlichkeit" (1973) by Volker Klotz and "Das kunstseidene Mädchen von Irmgard Keun: Skizze einer Frauensprache" (1985) by Gerd Schank, for example, focus on the novel's language, and by analyzing the protagonist's usage of language they not only establish Irmgard Keun as an

²⁶ Gerhard Roloff, "Irmgard Keun: Vorläufiges zu Leben und Werk," Zur deutschen Exilliteratur in den Niederlanden, ed. Hans Würzner (Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1977) 45.

²⁷ Ursula Krechel, "Irmgard Keun: Die Zerstörung der kalten Ordnung. Auch ein Versuch über das Vergessen weiblicher Kulturleistungen," Literaturmagazin 10, ed. Nicolas Born (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979) 103-28; and Elfriede Jelinek, "Weil sie heimlich weinen muß, lacht sie über Zeitgenossen," die horen 4 (1980): 221-5.

accomplished, modern writer but also point to issues such as gender and class that determined the realities of Weimar female white-collar workers.²⁸ Similarly, studies like Irmgard Keun: Das Erzählwerk der dreißiger Jahre (1991) by Doris Rosenstein or Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns (2000) by Stephanie Bender contribute to the discourse of gendered modernity by exploring the protagonist's experience of modernity.²⁹ Especially Doris Rosenstein understands the novel as a *Zeitroman* and both works see the artificial silk girl as an embodiment of Weimar women's hopes as well as their disillusionment. While acknowledging the profession of the protagonist, these studies do not investigate specificities of female white-collar workers, that is their working and living conditions, in detail. However, the interest in Das kunstseidene Mädchen continues to be strong and a variety of topics await scholarship.³⁰

²⁸ Volker Klotz, "Forcierte Prosa: Stilbeobachtungen an Bildern und Romanen der Neuen Sachlichkeit," Dialog: Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft im Zeichen deutsch-französischer Begegnung, ed. Rainer Schönhaar (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1973) 260-71; and Gerd Schank, "Das kunstseidene Mädchen von Irmgard Keun: Skizze einer Frauensprache," Annäherungen: Studien zur deutschen Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert, eds. Hans Ester and Guillaume van Germet (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1985) 35-64.

²⁹ Doris Rosenstein, Irmgard Keun: Das Erzählwerk der dreißiger Jahre (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1991); and Stephanie Bender, Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns (Taurusstein: Driesen, 2000).

³⁰ That Irmgard Keun and especially her Weimar novels continue to be of interest to scholars and, significantly, the general reader is suggested by a number of publications. Three biographies were published in the recent past, Keun's first novel was newly translated into English and, commemorating the author's 100th birthday, the first edition from 1932 was published again, as was a premium, illustrated edition. Finally, the dramatic adaptation, which has been made into a CD is currently playing in theaters across Germany. Gabriele Kreis, "Was man glaubt, gibt es"; Ingrid Marchlewitz, Irmgard Keun: Leben und Werk (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999); Häntzschel, Irmgard Keun; Irmgard Keun, The Artificial Silkgirl, trans. Katharina von Ankum (New York: Other, 2002); Irmgard Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen (Berlin: Claassen, 2005); Irmgard Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen (Frankfurt a.M.: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 2006); and Irmgard Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen, read by Fritzi Haberlandt, CD (Random House, 2005).

The Weimar Republic continues to draw the interest of scholars and to fascinate the educated public. Significantly, myths about the period – “die Goldenen Zwanziger” and “die wilden Zwanziger” – linger to this day. It is important to clarify these and especially the myths regarding women’s alleged emancipation. While the 1920s and early 1930s were a time of tumultuous change many economic and social structures as well as beliefs and traditions remained the same. Most importantly, women were neither fully integrated into modern society nor Germany’s historiography. In particular traditional high culture granted women – as producers and consumers – little space. In contrast, low or popular culture addressed female audiences much more directly, which is why I propose to widen the parameters. I hope to provide insights into the lives of a specific social group but it is not my intention to create what might be called an alternative female history. This would imply a sense of separateness that positions women as ‘Other’ yet again, a status that feminists have been wanting to see overcome since Simone De Beauvoir first introduced the term. By investigating specifically popular and female aspects of modernity we may broaden our understanding of the period as a whole, and this marks a step towards a more inclusive or holistic culture and history. Making use of mainstream cinema and popular fiction in this way allows us to find answers to questions regarding the working and living conditions of female white-collar workers and it allows us to overcome restrictive categorization and strive towards an equality that, in fact, only became a possibility with the founding of Germany’s first republic.

Chapter One

Büromädel and Tippfräulein: Weimar Germany's Female White-Collar Worker

The female white-collar worker is generally considered a key figure of the Weimar period. Contemporary scholars of various disciplines, journalists and critics had their eyes on her, and she became a hugely popular subject of representation in the republic's burgeoning mass media. One reason why the young clerical workers attracted more attention than any other female social group at the time was their number.³¹ The 1925 census showed that 4 out of 12 million women worked outside the home and counted a total of 1.2 million women working as clerks, secretaries, stenotypists and typists or in sales.³² In Berlin, the political and cultural capital of the republic, the number of women in employment was even higher. It far exceeded the national average: of the 40% of women who worked outside the home in 1927 more than 30% were employed, compared to the nationwide average of 35% and 12% respectively.³³ Berlin was, as Weimar's most prominent cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer pointed out, "der Ort, an dem

³¹ I will not discuss the fictional representation of sales girls and will therefore refrain from examining their working and living conditions. It should be stressed, however, that sales associates made up the single largest group of female white-collar workers: of the 5,625 women who participated in Susanne Suhr's seminal study, for example, 46% worked in sales. This figure compares to 1,300 clerks and 911 stenotypists and correspondents. See Susanne Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten: Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse. Eine Umfrage des Zentralverbands der Angestellten (Berlin: Zentralverband der Angestellten, 1930) 7.

³² Compared to 2.3 million men in white-collar employment. Frevert, Women in German History 157. See also Alice Rühle-Gerstel, Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart: Eine psychologische Bilanz (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1932) 254f.

³³ Berliner Wirtschaftsberichte (Berlin: Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, 1929) 313. See also Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 7.

sich [...] die Angestelltenschaft am extremsten darstellt[e]” and female white-collar workers were soon considered the embodiment of the modern working woman.³⁴ Fascinated by what seemed like a drastic increase of women in commercial employment and the public sphere, scholars and critics explored in particular these women’s working and living conditions.

The changed structure of the labor market alone did not account for the interest in these women. Especially the mass media was less interested in the professional realities of predominantly young and single female employees but turned white-collar workers into a subject of representation because they were more publicly visible than any other group of women. Around the turn of the century a visitor to any larger German city might have noticed the unfamiliar sight of a few neatly dressed young women on their way to offices and stores each morning. By the late 1920s female office and sales clerks had become a fixture in the urban landscape and without them cities would have been significantly less colorful.³⁵ This gave Weimar contemporaries the impression that these women dominated the urban landscape:

Wer morgens kurz vor 8 Uhr oder abends nach Büro- und Geschäftsschluß durch das Geschäftsviertel einer Großstadt geht, dem begegnet als charakteristischer Eindruck ein Heer von jungen Mädchen und Frauen, die eilig zur Arbeit in die großen Geschäftshäuser streben oder müde von der Arbeit kommen – es

³⁴ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 7.

³⁵ In contrast, female blue-collar workers, who formed similar streams when going to or leaving their workplace, went largely unnoticed even though they actually outnumbered commercial employees. Factories were located outside the city center and, more importantly, proletarian women typically did not participate in urban life.

sind die Massen der weiblichen Angestellten. Sie geben der Großstadt das beherrschende Bild.³⁶

It seemed as if especially Berlin was made up entirely of secretaries and typists: “Überall im alltäglichen Dasein stoßen wir fortwährend auf die [sie].”³⁷ More importantly, it appeared as if everything from appearance to lifestyle set Weimar female white-collar workers apart from women of previous generations. These women worked outside the home, sometimes they lived by themselves and they frequently spent their free time shopping, in cafés or the cinema. This led contemporaries to herald the advent of a new type of woman and particularly the emerging mass media was keen on labeling her. It was not before long that the term New Woman, originally coined to address a relatively small group of upper middle-class women, was used to speak about the young professional urbanites, who seemingly participated in modern life with ease.

The so-called New Woman was much more ambiguous than the media and entertainment industry tried to make audiences and consumers believe. To better understand fictional representations of female members of the new middle or clerical class but also women’s reaction to their objectification and fictionalization, it is therefore vital to situate the figure historically. What were the key aspects that defined the Weimar female white-collar worker, the embodiment of the New Woman? How was her life shaped by employment and in what way did she differ from women of previous generations? And what were the benefits

³⁶ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 3.

³⁷ Axel Eggebrecht, “Machen wir uns nichts vor,” Die Frau von Morgen: Wie wir sie wünschen, ed. Friedrich M. Huebner (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1929) 112.

and what were the drawbacks of gainful employment? To answer these questions I propose to look at the historical development of the figure, and especially the working and living conditions of commercial female employees, more specifically stenotypists and secretaries, during the 1920s. Contemporary sources but also more recent writings will provide some answers, and the findings of this and the following chapter will create a backdrop against which I will discuss fictional works and characters as well as explore the question whether fiction resembled reality or not.

Prior to discussing the figure of the female white-collar worker I will briefly situate the term *weibliche Angestellte* because during the Weimar Republic a number of terms were used to describe commercially employed women. Job descriptions were not always clear cut and some professions have been re-named or no longer exist today. Typically female white-collar workers were simply referred to as female employees. What strikes one as imprecision was, in fact, a continuation of a practice dating back to the nineteenth century when the term *Angestellter* served to differentiate between civil servants or *Privatbeamten* and *öffentlichen Angestellten* or *Bediensteten* “denen der Beamtenstatus [...] versagt blieb.”³⁸ With the onset of industrialization in the late 1840s the term was increasingly used to differentiate between workers receiving a salary and those

³⁸ Jürgen Kocka, Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte 1850-1890: Vom Privatbeamten zum angestellten Arbeitnehmer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 116-26. See also Stephanie Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen weiblichen Angestellten, diss., Friedrich Wilhelms U zu Berlin, 1931 (Berlin: Druckerei des Studentenwerks, 1931) 7.

drawing a wage, and during the Weimar years it described anyone who was not a manual worker or self-employed.³⁹

During the 1920s and early 1930s female white-collar workers worked most commonly as *Kontoristinnen*, *Stenotypistinnen* or *Privatsekretärinnen*. According to surveys but also informative literature from the period, the position of *Kontoristin* was the most popular of the three jobs.⁴⁰ Women working in a *Kontor* or office typically carried out simple *Rechen-* and *Schreibarbeiten*, which required a limited set of skills such as the ability to take dictation and write correctly, legibly and fast.⁴¹ Depending on the size of the company clerks sometimes also operated office machinery. The second most popular job was that of *Stenotypistin* and, following the rise of the typewriter after World War One and the omnipresence of images of women operating office machinery, it was not uncommon for contemporaries to refer to all female white-collar workers as typists.⁴² A typist almost exclusively took and transcribed dictations, which meant that she had to have typewriting skills in addition to sound stenography, language

³⁹ During the nineteenth century employees were paid on a monthly rather than on a weekly basis and also enjoyed greater benefits than workers. From the 1870s onwards the privileges became fewer and the economic gap between them and workers shrank, however, the term *Angestellter* (but also *Privatbeamter*) remained in use. Not least because the term – more so than the English ‘salaried worker’ or ‘white-collar worker’ – had implied affluence and a respected social status in the past.

⁴⁰ Of the 5,615 survey participants 1,133 (23%) were *Kontoristinnen* and 911 (16%) were *Stenotypistinnen* or *Korrespondentinnen*. Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten* 7. See also Marianne Hörbrand, *Die weibliche Handels- und Bureau-Angestellte* (Berlin: Hermann Paetel, 1926).

⁴¹ Herz, *Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen weiblichen Angestellten* 50-1.

⁴² According to Friedrich Kittler the generalization was fuelled by the rise of the profession after World War One. Indeed, the visual imagery attached to it, namely the typewriter, and the many photographs of women sitting at the typewriter made it seem as if more women worked as typists than was actually the case. Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986) 273.

and grammar skills. According to Weimar contemporary Emma Walther it was also important for *Stenotypistinnen* to understand what they typed because “wer sich nicht in die Materie, die diktiert wird, hineinfinden kann, wird niemals einen richtigen Brief liefern.”⁴³ However, most typists were essentially reduced to *Maschineschreiberinnen*, who did little but copy documents or complete forms, and *Korrespondentinnen*, typically better trained, were responsible for composing letters.

Finally, a considerable number of women worked as *Privatsekretärinnen*.⁴⁴ The position did not differ significantly from that of a clerk or typist in terms of salary, however, the private secretary worked directly for someone in management and therefore stood out from the rank and file. Because a private secretary frequently had to handle confidential documents and, more importantly, represent the company to the outside, the position required above average soft-skills.⁴⁵ As first-wave feminist Mary Kathleen Bénet argues, “wurden viele Büroroutinen den viktorianischen Haushaltsroutinen nachgeahmt”: the private secretary assumed the responsibilities of the middle-class wife, female servant and social secretary, and aspects of traditional femininity, such as diary management, keeping unwanted interruptions or visitors away and creating a

⁴³ Emma Walther, Die Handels- und Büroangestellte (Berlin: Reimar Hobbing, 1928) 12.

⁴⁴ As Jürgen Kocka remarks, the terms *Privatbeamter* and *Privatangestellter* went out of fashion after World War One and it was only banks that continued to use the suffix. Kocka, Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte 1850-1890 161.

⁴⁵ Helgard Kramer, “Weibliche Büroangestellte während der Weltwirtschaftskrise,” Grenzen der Frauenlohnarbeit: Frauenstrategien in Lohn- und Hausarbeit seit der Jahrhundertwende, eds. Helgard Kramer, Christel Eckart, Ilka Riemann and Karin Walser (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1986) 148.

comfortable environment, were integrated into the job.⁴⁶ The private secretary also served representative functions, which is why, as Emma Walther explained, employers were keen on recruiting middle-class women for this job because they tended to be better educated and well mannered.⁴⁷

A number of colloquialisms were also in circulation during the Weimar Republic and *Büromädel*, *Tippfräulein* or *Tippmamsell* were just three words used by popular culture but also intellectuals and scholars to talk about female white-collar workers.⁴⁸ Sounding more like nicknames than actual job titles, these words point to people's fascination with the figure. More importantly, they provide a first insight into society's attitude towards female employees. Significantly, all bear derogatory connotations. *Büromädel*, for example, implies that female office workers were not respected but instead, not least because many *weibliche Angestellte* were young, perceived and treated like children. Similarly, referring to them as *Tippmamsells* – *Mamsell* being an old-fashioned, tongue in cheek word for young lady – suggests that, regardless of women's age, they were all reduced to typists and not taken seriously as professionals.

The Weimar period is often portrayed as one that granted women unprecedented personal and financial freedom. Regardless of whether they made use of the changes that took place during the 1920s, young female white-

⁴⁶ Mary Kathleen Bénet, Die Sekretärinnen: Frauen im goldenen Käfig (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1975) 108.

⁴⁷ Walther, Die Handels- und Büroangestellte 16.

⁴⁸ Similarly, retail employees were frequently referred to as *Ladenmädchen*.

collar workers were indeed able to enjoy more privileges than their mothers. They were, for example, entitled to vote and because they earned money they could participate in consumer activities. Yet the female white-collar workers of the Weimar Republic had not fought for these privileges. Emancipatory endeavors, that is the desire for self-determination and independence, had not been the driving force behind the entry of women into white-collar professions and the urban public sphere. Instead, the vast majority of women worked in offices as a result of economic necessity. That women had to earn money was not an entirely new development. As Detlev Peukert comments, from the 1880s onwards increasingly larger numbers of middle-class women had been forced to take white-collar jobs in the modern sectors of industry, commerce and public employment.⁴⁹ In a sense, the female white-collar workers of the 1920s were a late consequence of the developments that had set in with the Industrial Revolution in the 1840s.

During the second half of the nineteenth century white-collar employment underwent drastic changes and women's history is inextricably linked to these. As Germany made the transition from pre-industrial to industrial production corporations began to replace small, privately owned companies and white-collar occupations were progressively structured according to the same principles as industrialized production: the work process was ever more divided and the specialized jobs that emerged were increasingly more akin to blue-collar work. The qualitative decrease of jobs in combination with their quantitative increase

⁴⁹ Detlev Peukert, The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993) 156-8.

caused office hierarchies to solidify and barred most employees from advancing professionally. As a result, employment lost its traditional function as a stepping-stone for social mobility and financial independence. It transformed into a warranty for life-long dependency and increasing numbers of individuals and families struggled financially. The salaries of men no longer sufficed to provide for a family and women's contribution to the family income gained in importance.

As historian Angelika Willms emphasizes, families had always relied on female labor but up until the late nineteenth century middle-class women had mostly worked within the privacy of the home.⁵⁰ They had worked unpaid in the family business, nursed relatives, managed the household and in some cases even taken on poorly paid homework to supplement the family income. Yet confined to the domestic sphere women had remained invisible for society, which had enabled families to maintain a middle-class standard of living and to pretend they were adhering to the class-specific custom that women were exempt from working. Progressing modernization, however, forced customs to give way and particularly the tradition of supporting daughters until they married became unsustainable. As the financial potency of middle-class men eroded, women, who ironically had been confined by men to the domestic sphere and passivity, were perceived as unwanted financial burdens and, to cite historian Viola Klein, "there was no longer a useful place in the family for [daughters] to fill."⁵¹ An 1892 survey by the *Berliner kaufmännischer und gewerblicher Hilfsverein für weibliche*

⁵⁰ Angelika Willms, *Die Entwicklung der Frauenerwerbstätigkeit im Deutschen Reich* (Nürnberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung der Bundesanstalt für Arbeit, 1980) 27.

⁵¹ Viola Klein, "Industrialization and the Changing Role of Women," *Current Sociology* 12 (1963): 29.

Angestellte demonstrates that young women were increasingly pressured to earn money: most participants stated they had to seek work because their parents were unable to support them.⁵² Claims such as the following were simply wrong:

Aus wirklicher Not braucht heute kein Mädchen Handlungsgehilfin zu werden. [...] Es kann daher auch keinem Mädchen das Recht zugestanden werden, ihre Tätigkeit gerade im Handelsgewerbe mit dem notwendigen Erwerb und der unsicheren Aussicht auf die Ehe zu begründen.⁵³

Economic need combined with the diminishing prospects to marry young forced middle-class women onto the labor market.⁵⁴ Since white-collar work enjoyed the obvious advantage of being clean, seemed to be better compensated and was considered more prestigious than any other kind of paid work, the female offspring of Germany's middle class entered commercial employment.

A key factor accelerating the move of increasing numbers of women into the office was World War One.⁵⁵ The necessity for middle-class women to earn money became even more urgent as demonstrated by the two million single,

⁵² Cited by Ursula Nienhaus, Berufsstand weiblich: Die ersten weiblichen Angestellten (Berlin: Transit, 1982) 35-6.

⁵³ Zur Frauenarbeit im Handelsgewerbe (Hamburg: Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen Verband, 1904) 9.

⁵⁴ This view challenges the beliefs of Ricarda Huch or Alice Salomon, two of Wilhelmine Germany's most prominent women's rights activists. They believed that young women entered employment because they were striving for emancipation. Agnes Herrman, the chair of the *Berliner Verband der weiblichen Angestellten* in 1901, exemplified this attitude: "Was sonst bestimmt denn die Geheimrattochter, die Tochter des Kaufmanns oder Handwerkers [...] den Beruf der Buchhalterin oder Verkäuferin dem [...] der Hausfrau vorzuziehen, als eben der Wunsch, als freie Persönlichkeit zu leben." However, these women came from affluent bourgeois families and the privilege of financial independence allowed them to focus entirely on their personal wish to break out of the stifling idleness of their homes as well as to explore their abilities. Agnes Herrman, "Arbeitsnachweis: Gemeinnütziger Stellennachweis für minderjährige Mädchen in Berlin," Soziale Praxis: Centralblatt für Sozialpolitik 10.22 (1901): 545-6.

⁵⁵ Peukert, The Weimar Republic 156-8.

widowed or divorced women between the age of 20 and 40 who flooded onto the labor market. Women of the old middle class, who had lost their husbands during the war, were typically unable to live off their widow's pension, and they entered the labor market to avoid slipping into poverty or becoming dependent on welfare services. As a publication by the *Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Bureauangestellten* (VWA) revealed, many families lost all their savings during the hyper-inflation in 1922/1923 or their mid-sized businesses were driven into bankruptcy by industrial conglomerates.⁵⁶ This had the effect that even fewer middle-class families could afford to support their children. At the same time, women's chances to marry and gain financial security further diminished by the shortfall of young men created by the war. Even if they did get married, Ursula Nienhaus points out, they did so at a later age than their mothers or grandmothers because the young men of the new clerical class drew modest salaries and could not afford to support a family until much later than had been traditionally the case.⁵⁷ The combination of these developments forced many young middle-class women to earn their own and frequently also their family's keep.

At the same time, increasing numbers of working-class women began to enter white-collar professions. Before World War One, the social profile of most clerical staff had been distinctly middle-class, but as a result of mechanization

⁵⁶ Almost 45% of female employees cited the loss of savings during the inflation or the closure of a family enterprise as the cause for seeking employment. *Arbeitsbericht 1924-1926* (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Angestellten, 1927) 65.

⁵⁷ According to a survey cited by Ursula Nienhaus almost 62% of all women would not get married before the age of thirty. Nienhaus, *Berufsstand weiblich* 36-41.

the demand for semi-qualified female commercial staff grew to be immense after 1918 and could no longer be met by impoverished middle-class women. Working-class women, Ellen Lorentz insists, never outnumbered their middle-class colleagues, but by 1930 almost as many female employees came from a working-class background as from a middle-class one.⁵⁸ Typically, young working-class women embraced commercial employment because it presented them with an opportunity to escape the fate of their mothers and grandmothers, who had been exploited as domestic servants or had toiled in factories. They tried to avoid becoming domestic servants because these had to live with their employers and, in addition to being paid poorly, were expected to attend to their every whim at all times. It appealed to women that working in an office would allow them to separate their private and their professional lives and they hoped they would be able to enjoy greater personal freedom. Working in a factory would have allowed these women to differentiate between work and leisure as well but they nonetheless preferred white-collar to blue-collar work. While the latter was frequently paid better, the former continued to be considered much more prestigious. Commercial employment brought working-class women into contact with people from higher social strata and, opening the door to “der feineren Welt,” white-collar employment seemed to bear the promise of upward social mobility.⁵⁹ In consequence of working-class women’s attraction to commercial employment as well as changed middle-class family economics, white-collar

⁵⁸ Lorentz, Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? 71-2 and 354.

⁵⁹ Anna Geyer, Die Frauenerwerbsarbeit in Deutschland (Jena: Thüringer Verlangsanstalt, 1930) 37. See also Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, Die arbeitende Frau (Breslau: Hirt, 1924) 59.

professions became the gathering place especially for young women during the Weimar years.

Regardless of the fact that financial need rather than personal ambitions fuelled women's entry into white-collar occupations, employment could have turned into a vehicle facilitating the emancipation of young women from the late nineteenth century onwards. Working in an office gave these women a chance to explore life outside the domestic sphere and their income provided them with an opportunity to at least explore a more independent identity. Yet white-collar employment developed in a way that made it impossible for young women to fully realize either possibility. The key reasons being that Wilhelmine society, and more specifically male white-collar workers, objected to their full integration into the field and employers, keen on keeping labor costs low, seized the opportunity presented to them by men's resistance and readily exploited the newcomers. Women's entry into white-collar occupations occurred at a rather unfortunate moment in history and the structural changes affecting male employees had an impact on the perception of female employment and women in salaried professions. As a result of modernization during the second half of the nineteenth century, the working and living conditions of large sections of male white-collar workers had worsened and women's increasing presence in the office became a symbol for the changes that threatened men's financial existence as well as their traditional roles as *pater familias*. The economic developments were beyond

women's control but they were blamed for them nevertheless and became the target of fierce attacks and defamatory campaigns.

Society's attitude towards female employment was characterized by hostility and antagonism from the very beginning. In fact, as feminist scholar Ursula Nienhaus calls attention to, the first historical mentioning of female white-collar workers was in a letter of complaint: in 1848 a group of aggravated young clerks sent a complaint to the Prussian State Ministry asking that something be done against the increasing competition allegedly posed by "Ladendemoiselles."⁶⁰ The men also claimed that the office is no place for women because they belong in the home. Similarly, in 1875 – when less than 20% of employees were female – the threat of female competition provoked hostility at the base level. The following experience of a woman around the turn of the century, cited in a study of female commercial employees by Marianne Hörbrand from 1926, is evidence of men's widespread resistance against women during the pre-war years.

Wenn ich an die ersten Eindrücke in dieser Stellung zurückdenke, muß ich gestehen, daß sie wenig schön und ermutigend war. Zwei junge Männer schimpften fortwährend auf die im Bureau tätigen Mädchen und erklärten Tag für Tag, es sei besser, zu Hause zu bleiben und Strümpfe zu stricken. Sie erschwerten uns die Arbeit, wo sie nur konnten. Der Oberbuchhalter war ein pedantischer, vergrämter Junggeselle, ein grimmiger Frauenhasser.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Ursula Nienhaus, "Von Töchtern und Schwestern: Zur vergessenen Geschichte der weiblichen Angestellten im deutschen Kaiserreich," Angestellte im europäischen Vergleich, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 309.

⁶¹ A middle-aged woman cited in Hörbrand, Die weibliche Handels- und Bureau-Angestellte 81.

The resentment also carried over into professional associations, which refused to accept women as members until after World War One. What is more, these organizations encouraged the behavior of their members by running defamation and harassment campaigns. In 1900, for example, the *Hamburger Verein für Handlungscomis von 1858* fought for the ban of female employment, arguing that women are thoughtless and vain as well as physically and intellectually unsuited for the profession.⁶²

The efforts to ban female employees categorically were fruitless because modernization created not only more but also different jobs and industry's demand for commercial staff grew to be enormous. Regardless, male white-collar workers continued to campaign against working women and, accusing them of taking away jobs, called for the limitation of female employment during the pre-war years. The *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband*, for example, vowed shortly before the outbreak of World War One that it would do its utmost to prevent a further increase of female employees.⁶³ Similarly, a prominent trade journal released a statement in 1918 that would prove to be programmatic for the decade to follow:

Wir betrachten die Frauenarbeit auf den Bureaus der Rechtsanwälte und Notare aus ethischen Gründen für schädlich und bekämpfen sie deshalb. Wir sind aber überzeugt, daß wir unter den heutigen Verhältnissen die Frauenarbeit in den Bureaus dulden müssen, aber nur insoweit, als sie sich auf die Bedienung

⁶² Nienhaus, Berufsstand weiblich 30-1.

⁶³ Hermann Schuon, Der Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband zu Hamburg: Sein Werdegang und seine Arbeit (Jena: Fischer, 1914) 83.

der Schreibmaschine und Aufnahme von Stenogrammen beschränkt.⁶⁴

While the attempts to halt women's entry into the workforce failed, the ill will prevailed and ultimately the efforts paid off: during the Weimar years the "Schmutzkonzurrenz," who was seen as resisting traditional gender roles including marriage and motherhood, was essentially barred from "solchen Berufen, die von Alters her den Männern zukommen."⁶⁵

The discrimination against female employees continued after 1918 even though, as Ute Frevert points out, the percentage of women in the paid labor force changed little, having remained constant at about 35% since 1882.⁶⁶ What is more, the majority (87.4%) of women continued to work in traditional female domains of farming or domestic service or was part of the industrial labor force.⁶⁷ Significantly, the Weimar government, backed by contemporaries from all political camps, as well as courts were also responsible for initiatives against

⁶⁴ Deutsche Bureaubeamten Zeitung (1 Jul. 1918): 12.

⁶⁵ The president of the *Hamburger Verein für Handlungscomis von 1858* cited in Georg Hiller, Die Lage der Handlungsgehülfen (Leipzig: Duncker, 1890) 74.

⁶⁶ Frevert, Women in German History 177 and 333-4.

⁶⁷ Angelika Willms furthermore calls attention to the fact that the increase of women in the white-collar labor force was in part a statistical delusion. The number of gainfully employed women did increase steadily and white-collar employment was the fastest growing area of female labor. Yet the data critics as well as advocates of female employment drew on was inconclusive because the makeup of occupational censuses was altered frequently. Prior to 1900, for example, women working in family businesses were excluded from statistics and their inclusion in the 1907 census alone accounted for a considerable increase. As Angelika Willms stresses, it is therefore more appropriate to speak of a shift within the female labor force rather than a rapid increase. Angelika Willms, "Grundzüge der Entwicklung der Frauenarbeit von 1880-1980," Strukturwandel der Frauenarbeit 1880-1980, eds. Walter Müller, Angelika Willms and Johann Handl (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1983) 35. See also Renate Bridenthal, "Class Struggle Around the Hearth: Women and Domestic Service in the Weimar Republic," Toward the Holocaust: The Social and Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic, eds. Michael Dobkowski and Isidor Walleman (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983) 243-65.

female employees. Weimar Germany's notoriously conservative judges, for example, provided models of anti-feminist behavior by continually ruling against female plaintiffs or defendants, and this attitude was readily copied by businesses.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Reichstag passed a Demobilization Decree in 1919, which ordered the dismissal of all female white-collar workers hired during the war in order to make room for the returning men. Regardless of financial need or qualification all female public servants who happened to be on sick leave at the time were laid off without a period of notice or severance pay.⁶⁹ From the mid-twenties onwards the government changed its course slightly. Aware of the changed economic structures and the demand of the labor market for inexpensive commercial staff, it discontinued to promote the dismissal of female white-collar workers per se but instead appealed to *Arbeitgeberverbände* to let go of so-called double earners instead. In a 1927 article women's rights activist Frieda Glaß stressed the unfairness of this particular campaign:

Doppelverdiener [sind] Personen, die sich im Genuß einer
auskömmlichen Pension oder Rente befinden und zugleich einer

⁶⁸ Carl Dreyfuß mentions such a case in his study and it is just one example of the many rulings against women employees: the judges agreed with the defendant, the owner of a shoe store, that he was entitled to dismiss a female sales assistant "weil sie sich nicht dem Wunsch des Geschäftsinhabers gefügt hatte, duftige Wäsche zu tragen. Der Unternehmer führte vor Gericht aus, daß bei dem ununterbrochenen Hinaufsteigen auf Leitern zum Herabholen der Schuhe den männlichen Besuchern ein möglichst angenehmer Anblick verschafft werden müsse." Weimar judges, many of them monarchists, were as much at war with the republic as they were with modernity – and therefore also female professionals. According to Paul Bookbinder "many Weimar judges were convinced that they were following a concept of *recht* (right or justice) rather than *gesetz* (law) [and] this concept of justice provided them with a rationale to serve their own political orientation." Carl Dreyfuß, *Beruf und Ideologie* (München: Duncker & Humblot, 1933) 126; and Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996) 117.

⁶⁹ Lorentz, *Aufbruch oder Rückschritt?* 186.

bezahlten Beschäftigung nachgehen, ferner andere Personen, die an sich nicht auf Erwerb angewiesen sind.⁷⁰

The government was not genuinely concerned about *Doppelverdiener* as the sexist campaign only aimed at married women, who constituted a minority. The campaign was bound to have little effect on employment figures yet its symbolic value was significant: it signaled that nearly a decade after the birth of Germany's first republic women were still unwanted in the office. On a more subliminal level, as feminist scholar Hertha Däubler-Gmelin remarks, it also discouraged women to pursue the idea of a white-collar career and instead encouraged them to return into the home and traditional gender roles.

Durch die [empfohlene] Kündigung schickte man ja nicht nur einfach die Frauen in die Familien zurück, falls sie welche hatten, man demonstrierte vielmehr dadurch gleichzeitig, welchen geringen Stellenwert die Frauenarbeit auch in der Zukunft haben sollte und wo man die Rolle der Frau im Zweifelsfall sah: in der Familie.⁷¹

The government's intervention was a sign of the contemporary socio-economic difficulties but clearly these did not justify the discrimination of women.

Campaigns against *Doppelverdienerinnen* or the Law on the Legal Position of Female Public Servants passed in 1932, which banned the employment of, for example, married women in the public sector, blatantly contradicted the Weimar constitution, which granted men and women equality. The Weimar Republic failed to advance the integration of women into the modern labor market but

⁷⁰ Frieda Glaß, "Der weibliche 'Doppelverdiener' in der Wirtschaft," *Jahrbuch für Frauenarbeit*, ed. Josef Silbermann, vol. 3 (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten e.V., 1927) 24-33, rpt. in *Frauenarbeit und Beruf*, ed. Gisela Brinker-Gabler (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1979) 345-8.

⁷¹ Hertha Däubler-Gmelin, *Frauenarbeitslosigkeit oder Reserve zurück an den Herd!* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977) 30.

contributed to the institutionalization of the irrational resentment harbored against women. This produced a climax in the fifty years of discrimination of female white-collar workers and implies that underlying social currents are potentially more powerful than a constitution.

The wide-ranging political and social efforts to ban female employment did not, at least until the Depression of 1929, trigger a decrease in the number of commercially employed women. On the contrary, their number increased steadily as a result of the radical economic transformations that followed World War One. In particular the Dawes Plan from 1924, which introduced a series of financial reforms, including the backing of the Mark with gold reserves as a means to stabilize the German currency, massive loans from the United States, the reworking of the reparation payment schedule, and government sponsored investment programs gave a boost to the domestic economy. This facilitated the implementation of thoroughly rationalized production methods, which were supposed to bring about an increase in productivity and a reduction in costs.⁷² Adopting time and motion work methods as laid out by the U.S. American economist Frederick Taylor, that is analyzing work processes scientifically and dividing them into separate operations, allowed Weimar businesses to cut costs as it enabled them to calculate wages by reference to the most efficient

⁷² The term 'rationalization' was widely used in 1920s Germany to describe a vast range of work processes. See Mary Nolan, "Imagining America, Modernizing Germany," [Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic](#), eds. Thomas Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994) 71-84; or Charles Maier, "Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s," [Journal of Contemporary History](#) 5.2 (April 1970): 27-61.

performance of standardized tasks. Similarly, as Detlev Peukert stresses, assembly-line mass production methods, the subdivision of work processes into separate tasks performed at a determined speed and the replacement of manual operations by machines and tools, as developed by Henry Ford, gained popularity.⁷³ Thanks to these methods many manufacturers were able to increase their profitability and this triggered the increasing reorganization of administrative processes. While this streamlining process dated back to the Industrial Revolution it was not until after World War One that the technology to modernize offices on a mass scale became available or rather affordable. As a result of the progressive rationalization of offices, routinized clerking emerged and the majority of jobs that were newly created during the Weimar Republic required few skills and strong specialization.

In the eyes of employers women were ideal for the positions created by modernization and they were hired to work at the typewriter but also other machines such as *Rechenmaschinen*, *Rechenschieber*, *Buchhaltungs-* and *Sortiermaschinen*, *Adressier-* and *Frankaturmaschinen* that were introduced into offices during the 1920s. The mechanical typewriter had first been introduced to the German market during the pre-war years but it was not until after World War One that it became fully established. Responding to the post-war market and the cost-consciousness of the German industry most companies began to sell machines on a trial-basis, which considerably lowered the risk to invest in the new technology. According to Ellen Lorentz, the ultimate advancement of the

⁷³ Peukert, The Weimar Republic 113.

technology was largely due to an ingenious marketing strategy by the leading manufacturer Remington.⁷⁴ The company supplied clients not only with a machine but also provided them with a trained and certified typist. Remington and other manufacturers – the practice was soon copied – calculatingly used women to establish their product and their marketing tactic proved highly successful. Clients more readily embraced the new technology not least because their female operators gave them a human touch. Ironically, the introduction of office machinery and in particular the typewriter, which had accelerated women's entry into commercial employment from the turn of the century onwards, contributed to their marginalization. White-collar occupations were increasingly categorized as typically 'male' or 'female' and, as Joan Wallach Scott points out, "[es] wurde ein neuer Berufszweig geschaffen, der geringe Aufstiegschancen bot – ein typisches Merkmal für einen Frauenberuf."⁷⁵ The latter required few skills and, located at the bottom end of the hierarchical ladder, bore few possibilities for career advancement. Many commercial employees were frustrated by this reality: "Ich finde es bedauerlich, daß man in meinem Beruf für gewöhnlich keine Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten hat. Man bleibt dadurch nicht nur im Gehalt stecken, man sieht auch, daß dieser Beruf zuletzt in einer Sackgasse endet."⁷⁶ As Frieda Glaß

⁷⁴ Manufacturers like Remington, Smith Premier or Sholes Gilden set up or endorsed training schools where women could learn how to type. In addition, they held typing competitions to market the new technology and poorly paid *Tippräuleins* keenly participated because they could win as much as half of their monthly salary and were likely to advance professionally as many companies were interested in hiring proficient typists. Lorentz, Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? 60 and 43-4.

⁷⁵ Joan Wallach Scott, "Arbeitsplatz der Frau" Spektrum der Wissenschaft 11 (1982): 132.

⁷⁶ Cited in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 28.

and Dorothea Kische observed, it was nearly impossible for women to move into more senior positions. This explains why in 1930 71% of female employees in Berlin worked either as clerks or stenotypists and a mere 2% held qualified, higher ranking positions.⁷⁷ At the same time 90% of all typists were female and men, who “saw it as an affront to their dignity if they had to stoop so low as to become typists,” were predominantly employed in qualified accounting or management positions.⁷⁸

An important factor that restricted women’s access to more senior positions was their poor education. Low-level clerical and typing positions required few skills, which made it superfluous for women to undergo extensive training. In the late nineteenth century the average female white-collar worker, though not trained, had still been reasonably educated as about 69% had been graduates of *höhere Töchterschulen* due to their middle-class background.⁷⁹ During the pre-war years a substantial percentage of women still had possessed skills such as languages or math, which they could have used professionally but employers, while placing emphasis on the social background of their female staff, did not give them the opportunity to apply their skills. After World War One and the rise of new technologies the educational background of women clerks became increasingly irrelevant as employers were looking to hire great numbers

⁷⁷ ‘Higher ranking’ positions typically encompassed procurement. See Dorothea Kische and Frieda Glaß, Die wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Verhältnisse der berufstätigen Frauen (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1930) 8-12.

⁷⁸ Frevert, Women in Germany History 178.

⁷⁹ Käthe Mende, Münchner jugendliche Ladnerinnen zu Hause und im Beruf (Stuttgart: Union, 1912) 53.

of semi-skilled workers. As a result, the educational profile of most women was modest and in 1930 as much as 84% of female employees had merely an eight-grade education – which explains why the vast majority was under the age of thirty and unmarried.⁸⁰ If they did undergo further education they typically enrolled in a short trainee program or visited a commercial school for less than one year.⁸¹ At commercial schools students learned the basics of typing and office organization but since these qualifications were, in contrast to accounting, for example, unspecific the benefit of visiting such a school was limited. Ultimately, the vocational schools, many of which had been set up by female white-collar occupational associations in an effort to improve young women's prospects on the labor market, perpetuated rather than challenged the status quo because they merely instructed women in typing or stenography. Comprehensive vocational training (*Berufsausbildung*), which would have lasted several years, would have introduced them to all aspects of a business and would have furnished them with knowledge and a range of qualifications, remained unavailable for women and this contributed to them remaining stuck in unqualified and low-paid 'female' professions.

One reason why women were less educated than men was that society's expectations of working women differed substantially from those of men. The latter were expected to pursue a life-long career that would allow them to support

⁸⁰ Four out of five female white-collar workers were under the age of thirty, 32% were under the age of twenty-five and 37% were less than twenty years old. Similarly, 93% were not married. Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten* 8-12.

⁸¹ Max Rössiger, *Der Angestellte von 1930* (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1930) 18.

a family, and in the eyes of parents this warranted a lengthy and costly education or training period. In contrast women both from working-class or middle-class backgrounds were expected to eventually marry and families were reluctant to invest time and money in their daughters. As a result, they typically entered employment to earn money that would allow them to support themselves as well as boost the family income immediately. Sometimes young women even had to leave school prematurely because families could only afford to pay for the education of their male children. As women's activist Agnes von Zahn-Harnack remarked, female offspring were frequently obliged to seek a position in an office because the long training periods their brothers underwent raised financial difficulties for their families.⁸² In the eyes of most parents the benefits of a daughter's immediate salary outweighed those of her lengthy and costly education. They almost always looked upon a daughter's work activity as a temporary period following school and preceding marriage, and investing in her education was considered unprofitable. The conservative attitude of parents and society on the whole played a crucial role in shaping the lives of women: without skills and support their chances on the labor market were diminished.

Even those who advocated more extensive commercial training for young women remained trapped in the stereotype that women should eventually marry and leave their salaried positions. By arguing that such an investment would pay off because a commercially trained woman would be able to become "ihres Gatten Mitarbeiterin," Elly Freiin von Rössing exemplified this conservative

⁸² Zahn-Harnack, Die arbeitende Frau 28.

attitude.⁸³ Implied is the widespread understanding that women drop out of salaried positions after marriage and work for free in the family business. Similarly traditional is the proposition that skills such as discipline and time management that were acquired while in employment would enable women to better run a household and rear children. Clearly, Rössing's intent was to promote women's education, however, she failed to address the actual reason for women's difficulties and offered neither progressive insights nor solutions to the problem. Ultimately, women's chances to succeed professionally remained poor. They lacked the commercial training or *Ausbildung* that was of interest to employers as it was reserved for men, and – the factor that far outweighed the issue of women's qualifications – male white-collar workers and patriarchal society as a whole resisted women's full integration into the labor market. The possibility of emancipation that had arisen with the necessity to earn money in the late nineteenth century did therefore not materialize – then or during the Weimar Republic.

Gender specific recruiting practices further determined women's participation in the modern labor market. They contributed to their subordination in the office, prevented the blurring of gender differences and thwarted the possibility of equality. Significantly, the sexual division of labor was not only fuelled by industry's interest to modernize and save cost. Employers were keen

⁸³ Elly Freiin von Rössing, "Die Bedeutung kaufmännischer Ausbildung und Tätigkeit für den Hausfrauen- und Mutterberuf," *Jahrbuch der Frauenarbeit*, ed. Josef Silbermann, vol. 6 (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten, 1930) 55-62.

on keeping their overhead low, especially during times of economic crisis, but their recruitment strategies were also a response to men's continuing anxiety to be replaced by women as well as their valid fear of devaluation caused by rationalization.⁸⁴ Aligning women with new technology and segmenting the office allowed even lower ranking male clerks to delegate work to someone below and the ability to exert authority based on superiority as well as on gender provided men with a *Proletarisierungspolster*. Questionable studies were among the means enlisted to justify the discrimination of women. Some claimed that all women were particularly suited to operate office machinery such as the typewriter because some middle-class women had allegedly acquired digital suppleness through playing the piano. Similarly, pseudo-scientific studies based women's aptitude for the keyboard on their anatomy. Unions such as the *Gewerkschaftsbund der Angestellten* (GdA) were very receptive to these studies because the majority of their members were men. In a 1931 publication, for example, the GdA entered the debate by claiming that the high percentage of women among typists was not the result of gender specific recruiting practices but due to the fact that "sie im allgemeinen größere natürliche Fähigkeiten dafür aufbringen als ihre männlichen Mitbewerber."⁸⁵

The institutionalized discrimination against female employees was also reflected in women's salaries. Even if women and men held the same type of job

⁸⁴ Kramer, "Weibliche Büroangestellte während der Weltwirtschaftskrise" 143.

⁸⁵ Zeitung des Gewerkschaftsbundes der Angestellten (Berlin: Gewerkschaftsbund der Angestellten, 1931) 81.

and were in the same wage group women's salaries were typically 10% lower. And though white-collar associations officially supported the idea that men and women receive the same pay for the same work, additional benefits for male employees, which were unjustifiable as salaries already figured for families and increased with age, often widened the gap by another 10%.⁸⁶ The average monthly income of female white-collar workers in 1930 was 146 Marks, from which about 17 Marks were deducted for taxes, insurance fees and social security.⁸⁷ According to A. Kasten the average income was slightly higher in Berlin at 157 Marks, but he also pointed out that at 142 Marks the income of some women was even lower, for example those working in legal practices.⁸⁸ What is more, 33.6% of women were paid below tariff and earned less than the established subsistence level of 120 Marks. In contrast, only 9.5% of men received such low salaries and while 7.4% of female commercial employees made more than 250 Marks nearly 60% of their male colleagues took home between 200 and 300 Marks per month.⁸⁹ Hourly rates decreased further especially for young employees as they were expected to work long hours as

⁸⁶ This number applies to organized female white-collar workers only and the situation was probably even worse for women who were not members of a union. Geschäftsbericht für die Zeit vom 1.1.1924 bis 31.12.1925 (Berlin: Zentralverband der Angestellten, 1926) 48.

⁸⁷ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 35ff.

⁸⁸ Very young women earned even less: on average twenty year olds took home 126 Marks per month, nineteen year olds 111 Marks and eighteen year olds as little as 87 Marks. A. Kasten, ed., Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten: Ergebnisse und Erkenntnisse aus der großen sozialen Erhebung des Gewerkschaftsbundes der Angestellten (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1931) 193 and 141.

⁸⁹ Kasten, Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten 104-9 and 193.

well as on weekends: the majority worked more than 48 hours a week but few were compensated for the additional work they did.⁹⁰

Women who objected to their exploitation and as much as enquired about the possibility of a pay raise, for example, were easily dismissed: “Als ich bei einem Monatsgehalt von 155 Mark um eine Erhöhung meiner Bezüge bat, wurde mir meine Stellung gekündigt mit der Begründung, daß für dieses Geld massenhaft pensionierte Rechnungsräte zu haben seien.”⁹¹ As the economic crisis intensified, even women who endured their exploitation silently were laid off because they were considered too old. The mechanized, fast-paced office demanded a steady supply of workers and the inexpensiveness of female labor made women attractive employees. Very young women were even more attractive. For one, as Stephanie Herz observed, it was even easier for employers and superiors to coerce very young women into a sexual relationship: “Die durch das geringe Einkommen bewirkte wirtschaftliche Abhängigkeit dient den Unternehmern und Chefs sehr oft dazu, sich gerade jüngere Angestellte in sexueller Beziehung gefügig zu machen.”⁹² Relationships between men and women working in the same office were not always, as Carl Dreyfuß claimed, consensual: “[Ist] der Vorgesetzte ein noch junger Mensch, der dem von Filmen und Magazinen propagierten Zeittypus entspricht, so sind zumindest die

⁹⁰ Maren Dörner and Katrin Völkner, “Lebenswelten der weiblichen Angestellten: Kontor, Kino und Konsum?,” Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten, eds. Petra Bock and Katja Koblitz (Berlin: Hinrich, 1995) 89.

⁹¹ Cited in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 34.

⁹² Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen Angestellten 24.

jüngeren weiblichen Angestellten ausnahmslos [...] an ihn fixiert.”⁹³ As the case of Weimar stenotypist Gertrud Loppach illustrates, women who objected to being sexually harassed had little to gain. The twenty-one year old woman slapped a male superior on the cheek after he “wurde anders handgreiflich” but as a result of her action she was forced to give notice and experienced great difficulties finding employment elsewhere.⁹⁴ An eighteen year old stenotypist was even cheaper and cost half as much as a twenty-eight year old one. Furthermore, companies had to grant them fewer benefits and rights because of their junior status. As a result, some women were given notice or pressured into resigning when they were about to move into the next higher wage group. The case of a twenty-seven year old woman, who had to give up her career as typist because she was unable to find work, is a further example of the ways women were discriminated against because of their age.⁹⁵ It became customary to speak of ‘old’ employees if they were above the age of forty but actually female white-collar workers were already considered old when they turned thirty. Considered both too old and too expensive, they were treated accordingly: “Dreißigjährige, ja fünfundzwanzigjährige und noch jüngere weibliche Arbeitslose [konnten] wegen *‘fortgeschrittenen Alters’* nicht mehr vermittelt werden.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 14.

⁹⁴ Gertrud Loppach in an interview with Ilona Leipold and Thomas Schuhbauer on March 11, 1995 cited in Dörner and Völkner, “Lebenswelten der weiblichen Angestellten: Kontor, Kino und Konsum?” 108-11.

⁹⁵ Referred to in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 18.

⁹⁶ Käthe Leichter, “Die Frauenarbeit der Gegenwart,” Frauenarbeit und Beruf 341.

As Marianne Schiller rightly pointed out, to discriminate against women this way had no legitimate reasons: “Die heute noch in allen Tarifverträgen durchgeführte Schlechterstellung der Frau hat keinerlei rationelle sondern nur noch traditionelle Ursachen.”⁹⁷ The tradition dated back to the turn of the century, when daughters of the impoverished bourgeoisie had offered their reliable work cheaply because they lacked experience. This group of women had never worked for money before and, as Alice Salomon emphasized in a 1906 study, consequently they had been unable to assess their own worth:

Ein Lohnverhältnis, das in Geld ausgedrückt wurde, [war] ihnen fremd. Wohl waren sie gewohnt, oft schwere und aufreibende Arbeiten zu tun, aber sie taten es aus Liebe zu ihren Angehörigen oder aus Pflichtgefühl; vielleicht auch, weil sich ihnen keine andere Existenzmöglichkeit bot. Aber sie taten es niemals für Geld.⁹⁸

In addition, working-class women had agreed to working for small salaries and their primary motivation for doing so was a desire to escape the fate of having to work in a factory or domestic service. While undercutting men’s salaries had initially helped women to enter employment the practice contributed to women’s marginalization and confinement to low-level positions.

Hiring women at a fraction of the cost of men allowed employees to minimize their operating costs. The reasons brought forward to justify women’s lower salaries were untenable, not unlike the pseudo-scientific theories that were exploited to align women with office mechanization. Politicians, unionists and the

⁹⁷ Marianne Schiller, “Frauentlohnung und Tarifvertrag in der Industrie,” Frauenarbeit und Beruf 325-6.

⁹⁸ Alice Salomon, Die Ursachen der ungleichen Entlohnung von Männer- und Frauenarbeit (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1906) 197.

industry agreed, for example, that the cost of living of female white-collar workers was considerably lower than that of their male colleagues because women eat less, do not smoke and can make or maintain their clothing in their spare time. Men, in contrast, have to buy clothes that require professional caretaking, they eat more and must allocate a certain amount of their salary for tobacco.⁹⁹

Attesting all female employees the virtue of frugality a committee concluded:

Die Gehälter der weiblichen Angestellten denjenigen der männlichen anzugleichen, hält der Schlichtungsausschuss aus den tatsächlichen Lebensverhältnissen nicht begründet. Daß der Aufwand an Kleidung wie überhaupt die Gesamtkosten der Haushaltung bei männlichen Angestellten überwiegen, bedarf keiner Ausführung.¹⁰⁰

In fact the opposite was the case: female clerks had to invest more money in their clothing and general appearance because employers expected them to look 'nice.' Silk stockings and well-coiffed hair were expenses women had to incur that were as costly and more vital for their employment than men's alleged need for tobacco. As a result, according to journalist Hilde Walter, female white-collar workers had to maintain a standard of living corresponding to 250 Marks a month while they rarely earned more than 150 Marks.¹⁰¹

The higher salaries of male clerical workers were further justified by the claim that men had to provide for a family or had the intention to start one. As if

⁹⁹ Lorentz, Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? 194.

¹⁰⁰ Geschäftsbericht (Berlin: Gewerkschaftsbund der Angestellten, 1929) 148.

¹⁰¹ Similarly, Susanne Suhr calculated that women's expenses (rent, food, transport, clothing and personal maintenance) added up to 175 Marks. Hilde Walter, "Frauendämmerung?," Die Weltbühne 27 (July 1931): 24-6, rpt. in The Weimar Republic Sourcebook, eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimenberk (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 210-1; and Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 45.

the allegations that female employees were not fully dependent on their income but that it presented a form of pocket money to many of them and that they did not have to support a family had been true. Female clerks of all ages had to support their families – though these families consisted of parents or siblings rather than wife and children. Statements by a thirty year old secretary and a twenty-four year old stenotypist demonstrate, that female commercial employees were frequently the family's sole breadwinner and that their salaries were equally exhausted as those of fathers: "Meine Mutter ist seit siebenundzwanzig Jahren Witwe, und ich muß als einzige Ernährerin für alles aufkommen;" and: "Da meine Mutter krank und ohne Einkommen ist, habe ich für den ganzen Haushalt (Miete, Feuer, Licht usw.) voll aufzukommen."¹⁰² Similarly, Susanne Suhr cited the case of a twenty-one year old typist, whose monthly salary of 122 Marks had to suffice to make an entire family's ends meet.¹⁰³ The situation of this young woman was no exception: for many female white-collar workers their impoverished, unemployed or frail parents, siblings or other family members presented "eine bedrückende Last von Unterstützungsverpflichtungen."¹⁰⁴ A comment by the journalist Hanns Kropff demonstrates that many contemporaries not only underestimated the overall obligations of *weibliche Angestellte* but also severely misjudged their economic situation: "The woman with a profession [is]

¹⁰² Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 38.

¹⁰³ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 39.

¹⁰⁴ Frieda Glaß, "Einkommen und Lebensbedingungen berufstätiger Frauen," Jahrbuch der Frauenarbeit, ed. Josef Silbermann, vol. 7 (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten e.V., 1931) 29.

unburdened by crude household worries and in possession of more money than she can dispose of freely.”¹⁰⁵ Most struggled to live off their extremely low salaries, which explains why it rarely occurred to the young women of the Weimar Republic to consider employment as a vehicle for emancipation.

Because the working conditions of female white-collar workers were typically appalling, their attitude towards employment grew increasingly resentful. The overall attitude towards commercially employed women had a bearing on their working conditions. *Büromädels* and low-level stenotypists possessed little value in the eyes of employers and a key factor that contributed to their modest worth and poor treatment was their interchangeability. Given the sheer number of young women that could type and flooded onto the labor market during the Weimar Republic, anyone could be hired and fired easily, and employers were not shy to waste human resources. In fact, female clerks could not only be dismissed easily, they *had* to be replaced periodically. They engaged exclusively in repetitive work, were “mit mechanischem Schreiben beschäftigt an ihren Stuhl gebannt, ohne ausreichende Bewegung in frischer Luft,” the rate of human attrition was extremely high.¹⁰⁶ The management of many companies demanded of women to type fast and productivity improving principles developed by the

¹⁰⁵ Hanns Kropff, “Frauen als Käuferinnen,” Reklame: Zeitschrift des Verbandes deutscher Reklamefachleute (July 1926): 649-50, rpt. in The Weimar Republic Sourcebook 661.

¹⁰⁶ Jenny Schwabe’s description of the female white-collar worker’s workday dates to 1899 and demonstrates that women’s position in the office, apart from the fact that they increasingly operated machinery, had changed little during the thirty year period: They must “von früh 8 bis abends 8, oft auch 9 Uhr und länger, auf dem Kontorstuhl sitzen und schreiben, unendliche Reihen von Adressen, Etiketten [und] Zetteln.” Jenny Schwabe, Kontoristin – Forderungen, Leistungen, Aussichten in diesem Beruf (Leipzig: Kempe, 1899) 5.

U.S. American Frank Gilbreth made it possible to establish exact quotas.¹⁰⁷

According to an article published in Die Handels- und Büroangestellte, an arbitrarily set quota of 75,000 strokes per day was not uncommon.¹⁰⁸ As historian Harry Bravemann points out, employers made use of this technology to determine an employee's performance: "Einige Schreibmaschinengesellschaften rüsteten ihre Maschinen mit einer mechanischen Einrichtung aus, welche die auf der Maschine getätigten Anschläge automatisch zählte und auf ein Blatt registrierte."¹⁰⁹ Most typists could only perform at this speed for a short time and according to estimates the "technische Leistungsfähigkeit" of female white-collar workers operating office machinery was limited to a maximum of ten to fifteen years.¹¹⁰ Most women were 'used up' by the time they reached thirty and a young woman, referring to her exhausting work at a Hollerith computing machine, explains why this was the case.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See Frank B. Gilbreth, Motion Study: A Method for Increasing the Efficiency of the Workman (London: Constable, 1911).

¹⁰⁸ "Die Stenotypistin," Die Handels- und Büroangestellte 36.7 (1930): 18.

¹⁰⁹ Braverman also points out that clever typists undermined the control system: "Es dauerte einige Zeit, bis Managementexperten herausfanden, daß die Schreibkräfte unter einem solchen System niemals den Tabulator, sondern immer die Leertaste benutzten, um ihr Meßergebnis zu verbessern." Harry Braverman, Die Arbeit im modernen Produktionsprozeß (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1977) 237.

¹¹⁰ Max Rössiger, "Hinter Schreibmaschinen: Rezension von C.A. Brück, Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen," GdA Zeitschrift 6 (1930): 61.

¹¹¹ Hollerith machines were used to compile and render statistical data. Any information that could be expressed in figures was recorded by a system of cutting holes in certain parts of specially prepared cards. As a result, bookkeeping tasks, for example, which used to take several days could be done in a few minutes. Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 57. See also Ellen Lorentz, Büro 1880-1930: Frauenarbeit und Rationalisierung (Frankfurt a.M.: Union, 1984) 94-7; and Wilfried de Beauclair, Rechnen mit Maschinen (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1968) 3f.

Nach einhalbjähriger [sic] Tätigkeit mußte ich die bereits auftretenden Folgen, wie äußerste Müdigkeit, Kopfschmerzen, stets Schwindel- und Ohnmachtsanfälle, Nachlassen der Gedächtnis- und Auffassungskraft, nicht mehr als Einbildung oder vorübergehend, sondern als Wirklichkeit ansehen. Nach Arbeitsschluß hatte ich keinen festen Gang mehr, denn ich torkelte wie ein Betrunkener nach Hause. Am anderen Morgen, als ich meine Arbeit beginnen will, merke ich zu meinem Schrecken, daß ich nicht fähig bin, an der Maschine zu schreiben.¹¹²

Operating office machines was highly monotonous and intellectually unchallenging yet it required the ability to take things in quickly, combined with the capacity to concentrate for hours on end. Exhaustion, acute hearing loss and swollen hands were among the many ailments that plagued female employees. Since the white-collar labor market was not structured as broadly as traditional women's industries and could not absorb women of all ages, the majority of women had few options but, as the comment by a young woman implies, to leave their office positions after a relatively short time: "Eine derartige nervenaufreibende Tätigkeit [kann] keine 8 1/2 Stunden täglich ausgehalten werden, noch dazu in [...] unzulänglichen Räumen."¹¹³

Manufacturers and employers were well aware of the physically but also mentally exhausting nature of the work assigned to women. They knew that their working conditions were unbearable:

Das Geklapper der Maschinen, von denen manchmal bis zu zwanzig in einem Raum dicht beieinander stehen, das Geräusch der Motoren an elektrischen Maschinen und das intensive

¹¹² Cited in Hans Funkschott, "Die Rückwirkung der Verwendung der Büromaschinen," Mitteilungen des internationalen Bundes christlicher Angestelltengewerkschaften (1929): 139.

¹¹³ The crowding of employees and their machines in big office halls also had the effect that the air was sticky, which further contributed to creating an intolerable atmosphere. Cited in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 23.

Arbeitstempo, das gerade von den an diesen Maschinen Arbeitenden verlangt wird, Publikumsverkehr in den Arbeitsräumen, das störende und ablenkende Diktieren an benachbarten Maschinen, das Rasseln im gleichen Arbeitsraum aufgestellter Buchungsmaschinen und das Arbeiten an diesen Maschinen selbst verursachen einen großen Verschleiß der Nervenkräfte der Stenotypistinnen. [Es] steht jedoch fest, daß in keinem anderen Berufe die *Beschwerden durch Überreizung des Nervensystems* so häufig sind wie in dem Beruf der Stenotypistin. Allgemeine Nervosität ist das Charakteristikum dieses Berufes.¹¹⁴

Claiming that the monotony would allow women to think of something else while operating office machinery could not distract from the fact “daß die Arbeit am Locher körperlich anstrengend ist und an die Nerven beachtliche Ansprüche stellt.”¹¹⁵ Regardless, the necessity to earn money among middle-class women combined with the desire for upward mobility among working-class women ensured that a large pool of women was available to fill these essentially unattractive and unhealthy positions nonetheless.

With salaries being low, these women could not even compensate for the monotony and exhaustion suffered at the workplace during their spare time. Due to the drastic changes German society underwent, especially the emergence of a new gender role that I will discuss in the following chapter, it became possible for women to participate in a life outside the home after work. At least in larger cities and certainly the capital Berlin it even became socially acceptable for women to rent a furnished room or live all by themselves. To break out of the confines of

¹¹⁴ The mentioning of “Nervenkräfte” and “Nervosität” indicates that the *Großstadt*, as written about by Georg Simmel in “Die Großstadt und das Geistesleben,” remained a popular subject of enquiry during the Weimar period. “Frauenstimme,” *Vorwärts* 48.14 (1931): 10; and Georg Simmel, “Die Großstadt und das Geistesleben,” *Die Großstadt: Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung*, ed. T. Petermann, vol. 9 (Dresden: Gehe-Stiftung, 1903) 187.

¹¹⁵ Quoted from a 1933 issue of *Hollerith-Nachrichten* cited in Lorentz, *Aufbruch oder Rückschritt?* 211.

the domestic realm in this way constituted a historically unrivaled opportunity of freedom. However, for the majority of commercial employees living alone or away from home remained a fantasy because their salaries did not permit financial and therefore spatial independence. Working in an office set middle-class and working-class women apart from their previous generations of women. At the same time, statistics show that the living conditions for most young women were the same as they had been for their mothers: 84% – in Berlin the figure was notably lower at 70% – of female employees lived with their parents or relatives until they married.¹¹⁶ With salaries commonly ranging between 87 and 126 Marks, it was impossible for them to spare the average rent for a room of 20 Marks, let alone rent an apartment for 60 Marks: “Wenn ich nicht bei meinen Eltern wohnen würde, könnte ich mit meinem Gehalt nicht auskommen.”¹¹⁷

Financially dependent on or responsible for parents and relatives, the living conditions of most female employees were bleak. They were typically expected to pay for their room and board, according to Frieda Glaß and Dorothea Kische, they contributed between 40% and 50% sometimes up to 100% of their salaries to the household.¹¹⁸ Living with parents or relative therefore neither allowed women to save up their money so they could eventually afford their own living quarters nor could they spend much of it in ways that might have compensated for their restricted living conditions. Whatever money they did have

¹¹⁶ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 38

¹¹⁷ Cited in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 39.

¹¹⁸ Kische and Glaß, Die wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Verhältnisse der berufstätigen Frauen 35 and 49.

left they used to finance their personal expenses: according to a certain Dr. Bertold women spent on average 25% of their income on clothing.¹¹⁹ In addition, Otto Suhr found, 36% of the salaries of white-collar workers went towards paying “für den Kulturbedarf,” which included cinema tickets, membership dues, magazines, books and cosmetics but also insurance dues, medical expenses and public transport.¹²⁰ Especially younger women would have had less money to spend on consumer goods or entertainment, and they frequently jeopardized their health by eating less in order to be able to buy a new dress or go to the movies.¹²¹

Despite paying *Kostgeld* and having almost no disposable income, few women had a room to call their own, which meant they had no place to retreat to or relax in after their strenuous workday. Gainfully employed daughters were furthermore expected to help in the household and women of all social backgrounds were required to do a minimum of two and sometimes up to six

¹¹⁹ Statistics referred to by Otto Suhr demonstrate that while men spent between 5-15% more on food, living quarters and their *Kulturbedarf* (included union dues) they spent almost 50% less on clothing than women. Dr. Bertold, Volkswirtschaft in Zahlen und Bildern: Eine Erinnerung an die Ausstellung im Herbst 1929 “Was, wie, wo kauft die Hausfrau?” (Berlin: Reichsverband Deutscher Hausfrauenvereine, 1930) 1 and 4; and Otto Suhr, Die Lebenshaltung der Angestellten: Untersuchung auf Grund tariflicher Erhebungen des Allgemeinen freien Angestelltenbundes (Berlin: Freier Volksverlag, 1928) 27. See also Josef Silbermann, “Die Lebenshaltung der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten,” Jahrbuch der Frauenarbeit, ed. Josef Silbermann, vol. 5 (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten e.V., 1929) 65-107.

¹²⁰ Suhr, Die Lebenshaltung der Angestellten 27.

¹²¹ This marked the continuation of a trend that had set in during the pre-war years when, in an effort to compensate for their lower salaries, women had started to cut back on their grocery expenses. See Emil Lederer, Die Privatangestellten in der modernen Wirtschaftsentwicklung (Tübingen: J. Mohr, 1912) 123.

hours of housework after they had spent a day at the office.¹²² Their exploitation at home, and what Joan Wallach Scott and Louise Tilly establish equally applied to Weimar Germany, was due to the fact that their financial contribution to the household was barely recognized but continued to be valued according to the cliché of the non-employed daughter.¹²³ Similarly, working women, physically exhausted by their jobs as well as household chores, were responsible for caring for ill relatives, which drained them emotionally.¹²⁴ Finally, living with family entailed that women were under constant supervision and therefore their personal freedom tended to be restricted: “Noch immer wird versucht, die erwerbstätige Tochter in ihrer eigenen Lebensgestaltung so weitgehend einzuschränken, wie das früher gegenüber den Haustöchtern üblich war.”¹²⁵ In many cases, this proved problematic because the life-style and attitudes of young professionals clashed with those of their parents.

The combination of women’s deplorable working and miserable living conditions had the effect that female white-collar workers of the late Weimar period were increasingly less keen on commercial employment. The dream of the qualified, well-paid and independent woman nurtured by early women’s rights activists such as Ricarda Huch or Alice Salomon remained unfulfilled. Instead,

¹²² Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 38.

¹²³ See Joan Wallach Scott and Louise Tilly, “Women’s Work and the Family in Nineteenth Century Europe,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 17 (1975): 52ff.

¹²⁴ Glaß, “Einkommen und Lebensbedingungen berufstätiger Frauen” 29.

¹²⁵ Geyer, Die Frauenerwerbsarbeit in Deutschland 218.

the economic repercussions of World War One as well as the extensive rationalization and mechanization of administrative professions during the 1920s had the effect that women entered hostile and rigid working environments and were reduced to a poorly paid and interchangeable workforce. The majority of young Weimar women had not entered the labor market by choice but as a result of financial necessity. This generation of female white-collar workers was not driven by a desire to realize their potential by pursuing a life-long professional career and to strive for personal independence. Instead, financial reasons had forced them to take a job and it should not surprise that they were frustrated by the limitations that were placed on them.

Some critics blamed the much-cited political disinterest or what Maria Hellersberg and Marianne Weber called the “Individualitätsdenken” of female white-collar workers for their failure to resist their exploitation and discrimination.¹²⁶ In 1924 only 25% of female commercial employees, compared to 27% of female blue-collar workers and 50% of male white-collar workers, were members of a *Berufsgenossenschaft* or union.¹²⁷ One of the reasons why few women organized was the fact that they had only been permitted to join unions in 1918 and, similar to the many women who did not make use of their new civil rights, many female white-collar workers did not make use of their newly gained professional rights. Looking at the agenda of Weimar Germany’s two largest

¹²⁶ Maria Hellersberg and Marianne Weber, Die soziale Not der weiblichen Angestellten (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1928) 17.

¹²⁷ Susanne Suhr, “Die organisierte Frauengewerkschaftsarbeit,” Gewerkschafts-Archiv 7 (1927): 241-50. See also Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen weiblichen Angestellten 97.

employee organizations – the GdA and the *Zentralverband der Angestellten* (ZdA) – further clarifies why female employees were reluctant to join: these professional associations were almost exclusively devoted to the interests of their male members.¹²⁸ Many men, as established earlier, continued to look back to a time when employment had been a path to independence and they were struggling with the loss of economic and social status. The unions tried to avert their further proletarianization and fought especially for the improvement of their working conditions and salaries. However, they were not particularly interested in the needs of their female members who had not experienced the erosion of formerly privileged positions as they had been treated poorly from the very beginning. Women were faced with different problems, and throughout the Weimar Republic unions were either indifferent to specifically female concerns or unable to assist its paying female constituency. At first glance the liberal GdA seems more progressive because it created divisions for women that worked closely together with the *Bund Deutscher Frauen* (BDF). It advocated the integration of women into all areas of economic, cultural and political life, and considered women's full incorporation into the labor market – especially the elimination of unequal pay, which would have been the prerequisite for such a development.¹²⁹ However, this call stood in contrast to two-thirds of the collective

¹²⁸ While calling for “eine Synthese des sozialen Lebensanspruchs der Arbeiter und Angestellten einerseits und der kapitalistischen Antriebsfaktoren Eigentum und Gewinnstreben andererseits” the GdA, for example, primarily represented the interests of predominantly middle-class male members. Specifically female needs and interests were also of secondary importance to the *Allgemeiner freier Angestelltenbund* (Afa) and the *Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenverband* (DHV). Rössiger, *Der Angestellte von 1930* 73.

¹²⁹ Helene Lange, *Die Frauenbewegung in ihren gegenwärtigen Problemen* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1924) 33.

bargaining agreements negotiated by the GdA and the emancipatory concept fell short of its potential. Similarly, the more socialist ZdA demanded its female members should receive the same salaries as its male ones, but under the pressure of industries it was all too willing to agree to salary cuts for women between 10 and 20%.

The attitude of organizations like the GdA and the ZdA changed slightly when increasing numbers of *Seidenstrumpfproletarierinnen* realized that the 3 Marks or 2% of an average salary of 150 Marks they paid in dues were not necessarily a worthwhile investment and began to cancel their memberships from the mid-twenties onwards.¹³⁰ One disillusioned woman cited by Steffi Tarrasch remarked: “Wenn ich den monatlichen Mitgliedsbeitrag zurücklege, habe ich genau so viel davon.”¹³¹ However, without any institutional backing to rely on female white-collar workers were unable to fight against their exploitation effectively. Susanne Suhr’s survey shows, for example, that many women were unhappy about their long workdays in combination with their small wages but those courageous enough to bring forward complaints were simply told that enough people would be ready to fill their place and that they were free to leave their job.¹³² What is more, the lack of support turned women, according to Karin Hausen “the cheapest [and most disadvantaged] labor on the market,” into fierce

¹³⁰ Ute Frevert, “Traditionelle Weiblichkeit” 521.

¹³¹ Cited in Steffi Tarrasch, Die weiblichen Angestellten: Das Problem ihrer Organisation, diss., U Heidelberg, 1931 56.

¹³² Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 25-8 and 32.

competitors.¹³³ By the time the unions were willing to cater to the needs of women and address health, economic, political or emancipatory issues, it was too late. The economy and the social climate of the late twenties and early thirties no longer granted the *Frauenfrage* room for implementation.

In light of the socio-economic climate even the exclusively female VWA was unable to alleviate the situation of women employees. Founded in 1919 it included, amongst others, the *Kaufmännischen Verband für weibliche Angestellte* (KVfWA) that had been founded in response to the union's ban of women in the late nineteenth century and sought to aid women "[sich] unabhängig von der Bevormundung durch männliche Führer zu vollen, echten Frauenpersönlichkeiten [zu] entwickeln."¹³⁴ In addition to providing its members with services (i.e. professional and legal aid, training, sick leave or unemployment benefits) and making weekend and leisure activities (sports or cultural programs) available to them, the VWA strongly promoted professional qualifications among its members as it hoped that these would improve their position on the labor market. As the period of rationalization made clear that women would remain systematically barred from higher positions, it abandoned its efforts. Instead, the VWA shifted its focus on women's traditional role at home and in the family: it began to stylize the domestic sphere into a healthy balancing

¹³³ Karin Hausen, "Unemployment also Hits Women: The New and the Old Woman on the Dark Side of the Golden Twenties in Germany," *Unemployment and the Great Depression in Weimar Germany*, ed. Peter Stachura (London: Basingstroke, 1986) 78-120.

¹³⁴ J. Waescher, "Vorwärts und aufwärts," *Die Handlungsgehilfin* 15.7 (1919): 3.

source to the office.¹³⁵ Faced by society's resistance against women's economic equality and emancipation, the VWA increasingly favored the same regressive gender role as the conservative wing of the women's movement and claimed that women's true workplace is the home and their ultimate vocation is that as wives and mothers.¹³⁶

This contributes to explaining why increasing numbers of employees embraced traditional gender structures during the final years of the Weimar Republic. Marriage, Ellen Lorentz points out, became an attractive alternative particularly to the misery in the office and, ironically, implied possibilities of freedom for women.¹³⁷ Marriage entailed sacrificing personal freedom and sometimes a financial setback but it also bore the promise of liberating female white-collar workers from monotonous, underpaid work and oppressive living conditions. Marriage was increasingly seen in a very positive light as it allowed young women to indulge in the fantasy that they would be able to escape their dire working conditions, determine their own working hours and to mind their own business. As a result, most women returned to the domestic sphere after a short stint at the office – which incidentally fulfilled the prophecy that lengthy commercial training of young women is no worthwhile investment because gainful employment constitutes an interim period between school and marriage in

¹³⁵ G. Israel, "Was bedeutet die Organisation für unser berufliches und persönliches Leben?," Die Frau 19 (1912): 422.

¹³⁶ Katharina Müller applied the dictum "Arbeit ist Dienst am Volk" equally to female white-collar workers and mothers. Katharina Müller, Frauenberuf und Frauenverband (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten, 1924) 3-7.

¹³⁷ Lorentz, Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? 63.

their lives. Few and typically only extremely needy women continued working after they got married and, as a result of society's prejudiced attitude toward female employment combined with the prevailing definition of womanhood and femininity, white-collar work remained what Tim Mason calls a "Zwischenspiel" of albeit limited "persönlicher Unabhängigkeit."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Tim Mason, "Zur Lage der Frauen in Deutschland 1930-1940," Gesellschaft 6 (1976): 124.

Chapter Two

Kunstseide and *Bubikopf*: The Republic's New Woman

The previous chapter established the figure of the female white-collar worker and paid particular attention to her working and living conditions. In order to create a more comprehensive backdrop against which to discuss the fictional characters of mainstream films and popular novels, I will, in this chapter, focus on key cultural aspects that defined the figure. It is vital to lay these out as the young, female professionals of the Weimar Republic did not attract as much attention as they did simply because they worked in administrative or service-related professions. As established in Chapter One, the economic developments that set in during the late nineteenth century and peaked during the years following World War One brought about structural changes that affected women's lives. At the same time the texture and character of German urban culture changed radically and it is due to this combination that the *Büromädel* grew into, as art historian Marsha Meskimmon puts it, an "icon of her time."¹³⁹ The political and economic instability allowed for a socio-cultural landscape that burst with energy and challenged traditional values as well as morals. Especially in Berlin women's entry into the public sphere coincided with a change in conventions and social behavior, and the experience of women became wider and more complex than ever before. Most notably, young women began to engage in consumer activities on a mass scale and spent their salaries on clothes and cinema tickets.

¹³⁹ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough* 163.

In particular the marked change in the physical appearance of women and, compared to previous generations, their radically different lifestyle prompted contemporaries to think of the *weibliche Angestellte* as a key symbol of a new era. The need for a visual marker that embodied economic, social and cultural changes gave rise to the construct of the New Woman.

Women of all ages and social backgrounds – and especially Berlin’s young office clerks – embraced the figure, yet this does not mean that they were proto-feminists and recognized the emancipatory potential inherent in the New Woman. If they lived the lifestyle of a New Woman they did not always do this intentionally and most of them dressed the part because they were susceptible to a highly stylized media image. This is not to say, however, that young women merely adapted a role fabricated by the media and consumer industries. Even if they had wanted to, their limited buying power would have prevented them from doing so. The stereotype of the sexy typist, who sported fashionable clothes, bobbed hair and a made-up face and frittered away the nights dancing Charleston or watching Ufa and Hollywood films while working in a typing pool by day, was a myth. The figure was too exaggerated to be true. Yet she should not be reduced to mere media hype either, as women lived parts of the figure and, by contributing to shaping her, turned her into what Atina Grossmann calls a “gesellschaftliche Realität.”¹⁴⁰ In retrospect it is difficult to disentangle the ratio of *Fremd-* and *Selbstbilder* that influenced the image of the New Woman, and to this day she remains a complex and ambivalent figure that was both a creation of

¹⁴⁰ Grossmann, “Eine ‘neue’ Frau im Deutschland der Weimarer Republik?” 161.

modern women as well as a construct of the media and consumer industries. Regardless, the construct provided a framework for salaried workers within which they could experiment with a more modern lifestyle and femininity.

The New Woman did not outlive the Weimar Republic and the vision of women's emancipation as put forward by activists like Elsa Herrmann or Aleksandra Kollantaj remained a dream. The New Woman as professional, emancipated and confident, politically aware and independent person never materialized. The Weimar constitution was democratically ambitious and, granting women equality in all areas of life, promised to ring in a new, more liberated era for them. However, the New Woman was strongly tied to economic, social and cultural developments and while she could blossom during the tumultuous post-war years and become a fixture during the republic's period of relative political and economic stability between 1924 and 1929, she gradually disappeared as the republic faltered and eventually collapsed. As the statistics referred to in Chapter One showed, few women working in offices during the years of the Weimar years were financially entirely self-sufficient. Yet, as the social historian Fritz Croner noted, financial independence would have constituted an indispensable prerequisite for women's genuine and lasting emancipation.¹⁴¹ Most women employees also lacked political awareness and without either the means or a vision of femininity to fight for, they were not equipped to defy society's resentment and secure a permanent place for themselves in the public sphere. However, female gender roles did undergo

¹⁴¹ Fritz Croner, Soziologie der Angestellten (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1962) 180.

changes during the Weimar Republic and for a short period of time at least women became, as Weimar contemporary Heinrich Jacob remarked, “Mitbesitzer der Öffentlichkeit.”¹⁴²

The New Woman, as a cultural phenomenon, was a child of her times but like the socio-economic phenomenon of the female white-collar worker, she did not materialize out of nowhere after 1918. Rather, the figure was the popularized and depoliticized version of a new type of woman that had begun to draw the attention of critics around the turn of the century.¹⁴³ The process of economic, political and social modernization triggered the transformation of female gender roles during the pre-war years and Weimar contemporaries like Stefan Zweig considered the changes that took place before the war so radical that he spoke of a glorious revolution. He even believed “daß eine zukünftige Kulturgeschichte diese vollkommene Umwertung und Verwandlung der europäischen Frau um 1900 sogar mehr beschäftigen [würde], als der Weltkrieg.”¹⁴⁴ Elsa Herrmann rightly stressed that the New Woman was not an artificially conjured up spectacle but had developed organically:

Die Frau von heute ist keine künstlich gewollte Erscheinung, aus bewußter Auflehnung gegen ein bestehendes System konstruiert,

¹⁴² Heinrich Jacob, “Haarschnitt ist noch nicht Freiheit,” Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 129.

¹⁴³ Katharina Sykora, “Die Neue Frau: Ein Alltagsmythos der Zwanziger Jahre,” Die Neue Frau, eds. Katharina Sykora, Annette Dogerloh, Doris Nell-Rumpeltes and Ada Raev (Marburg: Jonas, 1993) 9-24.

¹⁴⁴ Stefan Zweig, “Zutrauen zur Zukunft,” Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 7.

sie ist vielmehr organisch mit der wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Entwicklung der letzten Jahrzehnte gewachsen.¹⁴⁵

The figure of the New Woman should therefore be seen as the product as well as the spectacular climax of earlier socio-cultural developments.

To situate the New Woman historically and to understand why she amazed, shocked and distressed contemporaries to the extent she did it is essential to look back to the development of female gender roles during the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. As Jürgen Habermas, *Sozialphilosoph* and key representative of the Frankfurt School's second generation, points out, the unity of production and consumption beneath one roof dissolved with the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the concurrent bureaucratization, and with it went the gender roles that were based on the different functions of women and men in the household.¹⁴⁶ As a result of the economic emancipation of the bourgeoisie, Habermas argues, the workplace and the home were progressively divided into separate spheres (*System* and *Lebenswelt*), and while men pursued a profession and earned money outside the home women remained at home (the private sphere) and became the guardians of the family and its emotional wellbeing. What is more, stepping into the *Öffentlichkeit*, for example appearing in public without the presence of a man, was soon considered inappropriate or *unsittlich* for women.

¹⁴⁵ Elsa Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau (Hellerau: Avalun, 1929) 43.

¹⁴⁶ Traditionally, the *Lebenswelt* had not been separate from the *System* (a bureaucratic state and the market) mainly because pre-industrial production was not divided into separate processes. This changed in the decades following the Reformation and reached a first climax with Germany's industrialization. Jürgen Habermas, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962) 43ff.

By the late nineteenth century women had become firmly established as the infamous *schwache Geschlecht* and, as Richard Huelsenbeck observed, adjectives such as 'pure' and 'loving' were commonly used to describe the "behütete Weib."¹⁴⁷ With the rise of Imperial Germany's moneyed bourgeoisie, female gender roles further polarized and underwent additional restriction. While the male Wilhelmine entrepreneur embodied industriousness, women were reduced to mere representatives of the status and wealth of their families. The sole purpose of these women was to represent the economic potency of their industrialist husbands by means of graceful behavior and *Muße*.¹⁴⁸ Activist Rosa Mayreder, the *grande dame* of the Austrian women's movement, called attention to the problematic nature of this gender role early on, and criticized in particular the passivity to which women were condemned:

Alle großen und ernsten Probleme des Lebens sind daraus verbannt; der Salon, in dem die Dame herrscht, ist [...] bewohnt von eleganten Puppen, deren oberste Aufgabe ist, sich zu schmücken und zu gefallen. Im Begriff der Dame selbst liegt etwas, das sich nicht mit dem Begriff der freien Persönlichkeit verträgt. Das Weib, als Dame scheinbar auf den höchsten Gipfel der schönen Menschheit erhoben, führt als Individualität ein Leben innerhalb eng gezogener Grenzen.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Richard Huelsenbeck, "Bejahung der modernen Frau," Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 18.

¹⁴⁸ As Elsa Herrmann remarked, the passivity inherent in the role was in part reflected in the fashion of the day: laced in corsets and dressed in extravagant clothes the bourgeois woman was almost unable to move and to engage in any activity but reading, painting or embroidery. Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau 13-7.

¹⁴⁹ The *Salons* referred to by Mayreder had little in common with those of the 18th and 19th century, which had served as gathering places for the middle classes to enjoy one another as well as to educate themselves through conversation or readings. Typically hosted by affluent and educated women, such as Henriette Herz, Bettina von Arnim or Rachel Varnhagen, these circles had been frequented by eminent writers, scholars and artists. Rosa Mayreder, Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1907) 38; and Ute Frevert, "Frauen – bewegt Euch! Die 'Weibs-Bilder' der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert," Weibsbilder: Das neue Bild der Frau in Gesellschaft und Politik, eds. Mechthild Blum and Thomas

The leisurely lifestyle of a lady, even if characterized by wealth and luxury, allowed for little personal freedom let alone power but, reducing them to elegant *Puppen*, infantilized women instead.

What is more, only a very small percentage of women could actually afford to live the Wilhelmine ideal of femininity and this reality triggered a first shift. Idleness and consumption were not an option for the majority of middle-class women and, especially as the economic situation of the middle-class worsened from the late nineteenth century onwards, the figure of a more active woman gained popularity.¹⁵⁰ As historian Helgard Kramer identifies, women – regardless of whether they could afford to employ domestic servants or had to see to all household chores themselves – were encouraged to adopt the same economic principles that increasingly governed the modern labor market.¹⁵¹ A refined work ethic and a strong sense of duty, for example, became desired characteristics in women because they were thought to allow women to manage the household most (cost-) effectively. The façade of *Muße* began to crumble and the image of the well-organized housewife gradually replaced the cliché of the *müßige* lady: the “Typus der ‘Dame’ im Sinne der hochmütigen Lebenspassivität, [...] die Frau,

Nesslerer (Freiburg: Rombach, 1994) 61-4. See also Hannah Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen (München: Piper, 1992); Ingeborg Drewitz, Berliner Salons: Gesellschaft und Literatur zwischen Aufklärung und Industriezeitalter, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1984); or Rolf Strube, Sie saßen und tranken am Teetisch: Anfänge und Blütezeit der Berliner Salons 1789 – 1871 (München: Piper, 1992).

¹⁵⁰ Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau 17ff.

¹⁵¹ Kramer, “Weibliche Büroangestellte während der Weltwirtschaftskrise” 23-4.

die nichts war und nur repräsentierte” gradually disappeared.¹⁵² By and large however, women remained confined to the domestic sphere and society continued to deem women’s presence let alone participation in the public sphere *unschicklich*.

While diligence and efficiency were increasingly stylized into female virtues and considered prerequisites for a successful marriage, Wilhelmine society resisted the emergence of a radically new gender role, let alone women’s emancipation. Especially members of the upper echelons of society thought it was unladylike to work outside the home and looked down on commercially employed women, stigmatizing them as well as their families:

Mädchen wie ich haben an Arbeit außerhalb des Hauses nicht gedacht. Ich wußte, daß es Arbeitermädchen in der Fabrik gab, und es gab Mädchen aus gutem Hause, die arbeiteten im Büro. Aber es galt als große Schande, wenn eine Familie es nötig hatte, die Tochter zur Arbeit zu schicken. Damit war das Ansehen der Familie ruiniert. Niemand hatte gesagt: Hut ab, das Mädchen verdient sein eigenes Geld – alle haben gesagt: Oh je, so tief gesunken, die haben es nötig ihre Töchter zur Arbeit zu schicken.¹⁵³

White-collar employment clashed with traditional notions of femininity and even though it became more and more a necessity for young middle-class women during the pre-war years, conservative critics continued to consider gainful employment a social disgrace.

In contrast, more progressive contemporaries nourished the hope that the necessity to work in the office would allow women to move beyond Wilhelmine

¹⁵² Zweig, “Zutrauen zur Zukunft” 10.

¹⁵³ As reported in Monika Held, Beruf Sekretärin (München: Mosaik, 1982) 35.

society's rigid construct of femininity and enable them to find a new gender identity.¹⁵⁴ Women's rights advocates hoped that the experience of employment would make women stronger and produce an independent and empowered generation:

Geistig wie körperlich zeichnet sich die moderne Frau, die ja beinahe durchweg Berufsfrau ist, vor dem weiblichen Durchschnittstypus durch eine gewisse Freiheit des Wesens, ein erhöhtes Selbstgefühl, kurz durch den stärker betonten Persönlichkeitsausdruck aus. [...] Diese unmerkbar werdenden Veränderungen resultieren [...] aus dem Bewußtsein, [...] irgend eine Stelle auf Erden auszufüllen, festen Boden unter den Füßen zu haben.¹⁵⁵

The vision of women like Ida Kisker or Waly Zepler did not materialize because society, despite the fact that the emerging gender role corresponded to the new economic realities, was reluctant to embrace the changes triggered by modernization. Since the number of female white-collar workers was still relatively small and the structures that allowed women to exist outside the home or the office were not yet in place, Wilhelmine society could resist women's entry into the *Öffentlichkeit* as well as the development of a less traditional femininity.

That the New Woman came fully into society's view and developed into a mass phenomenon was one result of World War One. It contributed to women's further integration into the labor market and thrust German society into a period of radical change. Peter Gay and Andreas Huyssen are among those who call

¹⁵⁴ Ida Kisker, Frauenarbeit in den Kontoren einer Großstadt: Eine Studie über die Leipziger Kontoristinnen. Mit einem Anhang über die Berufsvereine der Handlungsgehilfinnen (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910) 161.

¹⁵⁵ Waly Zepler, "Das Mutterschaftsproblem," 1927, Frauenarbeit und Beruf 289.

attention to the fact that especially men experienced Weimar modernity as a period of chaos and social displacement.¹⁵⁶ Many customs and traditions, especially those pertaining to public behavior, lost their meaning and failed to provide them with stability. Women's experience of modernity was also characterized by upheaval but, as Sigrun Anselm stresses, they were also presented with extensive opportunities for participation.¹⁵⁷ The romanticized figure of the idle bourgeois lady vanished and for the first time it became possible for women to fully participate in the public sphere.

In particular the female commercial employees of Berlin adopted the new lifestyle but while they popularized and eventually embodied the figure of the New Woman, they were not the ones who initially conceived her. Instead, a relatively small number of women intellectuals and artists must be credited with her creation. These women, who were born around the turn of the century and typically came from *großbürgerlichen* or aristocratic families, formed the avant-garde that inspired a modern femininity, and used their intellectual or artistic capabilities to create a new female lifestyle. As Petra Bock highlights, these women were not all identical, which suggests that the term New Woman united qualitatively different characteristics and attitudes that existed simultaneously

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, Peter Gay, Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); or Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1986).

¹⁵⁷ Sigrun Anselm, "Emanzipation und Tradition," Triumph und Scheitern in der Metropole: Zur Rolle der Weiblichkeit in der Geschichte Berlins, eds. Sigrun Anselm and Barbara Beck (Berlin: Reimer, 1987) 255.

under one umbrella.¹⁵⁸ Some New Women took up the principles of the Weimar constitution and assumed responsibility as citizens. Others, as Maria Luise Weissmann remembers, were affluent *Lebedamen*, who merely chased the inane ideal of having a good time.¹⁵⁹ What women like Erika Mann or the wives of industrialists shared was their economic independence and this allowed them to indulge in a daringly new lifestyle.¹⁶⁰ Engaging in sports like boxing, going out in the evening, driving a car or traveling extensively meant they actually became a new kind of woman.¹⁶¹ The majority of female employees, faced with modern life, simply imitated the looks and to an extent also the behavior of these trendsetters. Most were too young, for example, to remember the many restrictions society had placed on women during the *Kaiserzeit*. They were by

¹⁵⁸ Bock differentiates between “Typus” and “Image”; the former being women who realized that the post-war realities provided them with a chance to participate in society while the latter were those who cut their hair and wore skimpy dresses but were by and large unaware of opportunities of emancipation. Petra Bock, “Zwischen den Zeiten: Neue Frauen und die Weimarer Republik,” *Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten* 21.

¹⁵⁹ Maria Luise Weissmann, “Verlorenes Ithaka,” *Bubikopf: Aufbruch in den Zwanzigern*, ed. Anna Rheinberg (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988) 220-1.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview of some of Weimar’s most prominent New Women see, for example, Birgit Haustedt, *Die wilden Jahre in Berlin: Eine Klatsch- und Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Ebersbach, 1999); and Ute Scheub, *Verrückt nach Leben: Berliner Szenen in den zwanziger Jahren* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000). Both works discuss the lives of writers, comedians, dancer, poets and actresses like Erika Mann, Dinah Nelken, Gabriele Tergit, Ruth Landshoff-York and Vicki Baum, Valeska Gert, Rosa Valetti and Trude Hesterberg, Anita Berber, Else Lasker-Schüler and Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl.

¹⁶¹ This applies in particular to driving cars. At the beginning of the automobile era it had not been socially acceptable for women to drive. Following the unhooking of gender roles during World War One, women like Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Ruth Landshoff-York, Clärenore Stinno, Margret Boveri and most notably Erika Mann (she participated in a rally across Europe, covering a distance of 10,000km in ten days, and trained as a mechanic) jumped behind the steering wheel. Driving a car became a symbol of freedom and self-determination, as well as women’s search for new possibilities. See Gesa Kessemeier, *Sportlich, sachlich, männlich: Das Bild der ‘Neuen Frau’ in den Zwanziger Jahren. Zur Konstruktion geschlechtsspezifischer Körperbilder in der Mode der Jahre 1920 bis 1929* (Dortmund: Ebersbach, 2000); and Irmela von der Lühe, *Erika Mann: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 1996).

and large indifferent to the fact that the new look and lifestyle were also a form of political or social activism. They became New Women because they wanted to comply with the trendy surface image.

Modernization created the structures that allowed them to do so. It facilitated the development of sophisticated entertainment and consumer industries and a significant number of women, earning their own money and moving freely in the public sphere for the first time in modern history, were able to consume on a mass scale. The emerging culture of leisure and consumption created a space that allowed women to adopt the image created by the avant-garde but also shape a new gender role. For this reason I will explore in what way other industries provided women with opportunities for participation prior to investigating the relationship between mainstream cinema and the New Woman. Most notably, the fashion industry encouraged the young clerical workers of the Weimar Republic to experiment with a new gender identity. Its modernization was a crucial factor in the rise of the New Woman as it produced the material conditions necessary for women's participation in society through consumption. In an effort to develop a new market the pre-war fashion industry had begun to create new product lines but it was not until after World War One that fashion for the masses became feasible.¹⁶² The high-end segment of the market continued to offer expensive and exclusive designs for its well-to-do clientele, but in order to

¹⁶² Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion" 189-91. See also Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1982) 226.

attract new customers, especially among “der breiten Schicht geldverdienender Frauen, die nicht mehr einsahen, daß Mode nur für die Haute Volée sein soll,” companies began to produce clothes that were more affordable but nonetheless *en vogue*.¹⁶³ *Konfektionsmode* was henceforth manufactured according to industrial methods and could be offered at a fraction of the cost of *haute couture*. The quality of mass produced ready-to-wear clothes was inferior to custom-tailored garments but they were good value for money. As part of this process fabrics like jersey and knits were improved by making them more comfortable and easier to care for and synthetic fabrics – most importantly artificial silk or rayon, as it was called after 1926, but also acetate and fake fur or leather – were created.¹⁶⁴ Mass production popularized both fabrics and clothes, and since it required a sizeable market, fashion was no longer a privilege of the elite: the growing numbers of large department stores such as Wertheim, Tietz or Landauer in Berlin expanded their fashion departments and sold inexpensive ready-to-wear collections to large sections of society and especially fashion-conscious female white-collar workers.¹⁶⁵

The daytime fashion of the 1920s differed radically from nineteenth-century and pre-war styles and was strongly influenced by women’s changed

¹⁶³ Barbara Mundt, Metropolen machen Mode: Haute Couture der Zwanziger Jahre (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1977) 8.

¹⁶⁴ *Bembergseide* was one such type of artificial silk. Created by the German company J.P. Bemberg in 1901, the material was similarly delicate and shiny as natural silk and predominately used for making stockings.

¹⁶⁵ Christiane Koch, “Sachlich, sportlich, sinnlich: Frauenkleidung der zwanziger Jahre,” Neue Frauen: Die zwanziger Jahre, ed. Kristine von Soden and Maruta Schmidt (Berlin: Elefanten, 1988) 16.

participation in the labor market and the public sphere. As increasing numbers of middle-class but also working-class women worked in offices or service-related professions and enjoyed the urban leisure culture, they required clothes that suited the new lifestyle:

Die *arbeitende* Frau stellt an die Mode ganz andere Ansprüche als die Frau, die unbeschränkte Zeit zur Auswahl ihrer Kleidung hat. Sie muß zuerst an die *Zweckmäßigkeit* denken. [...] Der vernünftigen schaffenden Frau haben wir es in erster Linie zu danken, daß wir so eine legere Mode bekommen haben.¹⁶⁶

In addition to being stylish, clothes had to be functional and comfortable, which explains why daytime or office fashion was relatively plain. Again, changes had already set in during the pre-war years when, partially in response to women's increasing employment, advocates of *Reformkleidung* had begun to challenge the corset and other constraining wire-appliances and had promoted clothing that did not restrict women's movements.¹⁶⁷ During the war women's fashion underwent further changes as hemlines rose, in part due to the shortage of textiles. But it was not until after the war that the transformation of women's fashion was complete and, owing to Weimar Germany's socio-cultural climate, gained mass appeal. As Elke Kupschinsky points out, by the mid-1920s loose fitting dresses with low waistlines had replaced the tight fitting and high-necked blouses and dresses that commercial assistants of the pre-war years had

¹⁶⁶ Irma Sernau, "Was jede Frau von der Mode wissen muß," *Die Frautribüne* 4 (February 1933): 13.

¹⁶⁷ Koch, "Sachlich, sportlich, sinnlich" 16.

worn.¹⁶⁸ Especially popular among office workers were coordinates in varying forms because they were stylish and versatile. Coordinates became their uniform and throughout the twenties female employees wore knee length skirts (straight, plissé or pleated) and a blouse or a sweater, which were combined with either a smart jacket or a more causal cardigan or vest. These pieces could be combined well with each other and, as Barbara Mundt observes, with a little help from accessories, such as scarves or costume jewelry, many different looks could be created with only a few pieces.¹⁶⁹ Medium-high pumps with straps, “flache Jimmyschuhe” or boots and a cloche hat, a soft and brimless felt hat that hid much of the wearer’s face, completed the outfit.¹⁷⁰

The look of the New Woman would not have been complete without make-up and the *Bubikopf*. Middle-class women and especially the young office workers of Weimar Germany’s large cities discovered beauty products that, as Marjorie Rosen emphasizes, had been considered the exclusive property of prostitutes up until 1914.¹⁷¹ The quintessential hairstyle of the era was even more noticeable than rouged cheeks and lips painted in various shades of red. The pageboy came to Germany from the United States where actresses like Colleen Moore or Louise Brooks had made it popular and women from all strands of

¹⁶⁸ Elke Kupschinsky, “Die vernünftige Nephertete,” Die Metropole: Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert, eds. Jochen Boberg, Tillmann Fichter and Eckhart Gillen (München: C.H. Beck, 1986) 168.

¹⁶⁹ Mundt, Metropolen machen Mode 15.

¹⁷⁰ Dinah Nelken paraphrased by Scheub, Verrückt nach Leben 21.

¹⁷¹ Marjorie Rosen, Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream (London: Peter Owen, 1973) 74.

society adopted it. In its basic shape, Sabine Hake explains, the “*Pagenkopf*” refers to a straight cut around the head, with the length level with the tips of the ears and the face framed by even sides and distinctive bangs.”¹⁷² Some variations exposed women’s hairline in the back and thereby emphasized the angularity of the cut; such as the Eton crop, originally a men’s cut, which some contemporaries called “die häßliche Millimeterfrisur.”¹⁷³ Women with curly hair often had chin length hair as well and wore it parted to one side. In tandem with the new clothes and make-up, the *Bubikopf* was a key marker of a new type of woman.

Fashion was the most instantly recognizable feature of the New Woman, which explains why descriptions of the figures so often revolve around imagery. Fashion played an important role in the lives of women of different ages and from various social backgrounds: from working-class women, who struggled with the double burden of work and family, to upper-class women, who were keen on indulging in their new hobbies, they all welcomed the practical and versatile new style. The female white-collar urbanites, however, as a comment by Franz Hessel, husband of Weimar journalist Helen Hessel, demonstrates, were particularly keen on the trend: “Scharen von jungen und jüngsten Mädchen [...], dieses Défilé von Jugend und Frische in den knappen, gut sitzenden Kleidern mit den Hütchen, denen eine Locke entquillt” populated the streets of Berlin.¹⁷⁴ One

¹⁷² Hake, “In the Mirror of Fashion” 187. See also Helene Pessl, *Der Bubikopf und seine Pflege* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1926).

¹⁷³ Jacob, “Haarschnitt ist noch nicht Freiheit” 128.

¹⁷⁴ Franz Hessel, *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (Berlin: Arsenal, 1984) 28.

reason why the young salaried workers dressed the part was that it allowed them to demonstrate their femininity. Exploited by their employers and treated like extensions of machines, buying a skirt or using mascara and lipstick allowed them to compensate for their miserable working conditions. Fashion also provided the members of this new social group with a tool to shape their identity and establish themselves within the Weimar republic's socio-cultural framework.

Female white-collar workers were presented with an opportunity to take a step toward women's emancipation, which explains why the look of the New Woman also bore a highly symbolic value. The artist Hannah Höch was among those who were excited about Weimar fashion: "Wir alle waren wie in einem Korsett eingeschnürt und wurden nun in die Freiheit entlassen."¹⁷⁵ The same applied to the *Bubikopf*. It was all the rage because unlike the elaborate and impractical hair creations of the *Kaiserzeit* it was easy to maintain. As Weimar critic Heinrich Jacob pointed out, it also symbolized women's liberation: "das lange Haar der Frau [...] war 2000 Jahre hindurch [...] das Sinnbild der Sklaverei."¹⁷⁶ By cutting off playful curls women exchanged a more romantic for a more masculine or androgynous look and, more importantly, also cast off character traits such as shyness and frailty that had been traditionally associated

¹⁷⁵ Hannah Höch as reported in Scheub, Verrückt nach Leben 7.

¹⁷⁶ Katharina Rathaus made a similar observation: "Allen Entwürfen der Unweiblichkeit zum Trotz [hat die Frau] ihre Haare und damit unzählige seelische Hemmnungen abgeschnitten und ist, [...] bewehrt [sic] mit allen Eigenschaften, die einst die Männer für sich monopolisiert hatten, auf den Platz gerutscht, von dem aus sie Leben und Auto bequem und überlegen steuern kann." Jacob, "Haarschnitt ist noch nicht Freiheit" 128; and Katharina Rathaus, "Der erzieherische Einfluß des Autos auf die Frau" Elegante Welt 23 (January 1927): 26.

with the female gender.¹⁷⁷ For progressive contemporaries like Höch or Jacob bursting out of the corset and cutting of braids was thus a literal as well as a symbolic act. The new fashion radiated youth and confidence and, mirroring the spirit of the Weimar Republic, it symbolized a more emancipated lifestyle.

Whether female white-collar workers were aware of this or not, fashion and shopping in department stores, “den modernen Konsumgütertempeln,” empowered them in a historically unprecedented manner.¹⁷⁸ The fashion industry, in tandem with other sections of the growing consumer industry, was keen on exploiting the new market, and for that reason the act of shopping and fashion in general started to gain repressive qualities. The fashion industry realized that clothing functioned as an important means for claiming a particular femininity, identified the New Women as customers and targeted both affluent women of the upper echelons of society *and* the new social group of gainfully employed women.¹⁷⁹ Picking up on women’s desires the agents of commodity culture, such as magazine editorials and advertisements or shop windows, captured the new female image and channeled dreams into a desire to consume. Consumer goods industries made full use of them in commercials. As Hilde Walter observed, typists were effective billboard; dressed sexily they became the

¹⁷⁷ Just as women’s fashion changed and became more masculine the appearance of men changed as well. Stiff top hats and high collars, for example, went out of fashion; as did markers of masculinity such as high-maintenance *Kaiser-Wilhelm*-style beards: “Der männliche Bart ist verpönt, gilt für unkultiviert, wenn nicht für anstößig und obzön.” Emil Lucka, “Die Verwandlung der Frau,” Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 86.

¹⁷⁸ Klaus Strohmeier, Warenhäuser: Geschichte, Blüte und Untergang im Warenmeer (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1980) 151.

¹⁷⁹ Joanne Finkelstein, The Fashioned Self (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) 2.

very emblem of sheer endless pleasure and youthful freshness.¹⁸⁰ In particular, goods that signaled luxury and social prestige were used to stimulate consumerist desires, suggesting that they shaped and completed any New Woman: cars, clothes, accessories and beauty products promised women an empowering self-image. As Max Rössiger remarked, the illustrated press of the time gave the impression that it had no idea what the actual life of the middle and lower classes was like.¹⁸¹ Leading women's magazines such as Die Dame or Elegante Welt only featured the rich and the famous: trendsetting ladies of the *haute volée* and increasingly celebrities who wore the latest fashion trends, used the finest beauty products and engaged in exclusive hobbies like golfing, sailing or traveling. Glamorous film stars and socialites were the representatives of an unconventional lifestyle and signaled personal freedom and independence. Therefore, reading magazines gave the reader not only the impression of being up-to-date but also supplied her with ideas about her own (visual) identity. However, rather than encouraging women to develop a modern gender role the illustrated press increasingly pressured women "auf allen Sprossen der sozialen Stufenleiter" – especially typists, secretaries and sales assistants – to look and live like those who had the means to consume extravagantly.¹⁸²

The promise to be someone special could only be fulfilled within a framework determined by consumer culture. Keen to comply with the fashionable

¹⁸⁰ Walter, "Frauendämmerung?" 210-1.

¹⁸¹ Rössiger, Der Angestellte von 1930 67.

¹⁸² Kollantaj, Die neue Moral und die Arbeiterklasse 5.

if stereotypical ideal, women constantly tried to be original, but they mostly remained 'fashion victims' or turned into a parody of the type. Moreover, their receptiveness for artificially created fantasies had the effect that the representation of the self was lastingly tied to consumer behavior. By pointing to the standardization resulting from this relationship Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *geistige Oberhäupter* of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, who also commented on the commodification of the artistic avant-garde by the *Kulturindustrie* in the essay "Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug," identified the increasingly repressive quality of fashion and consumption.¹⁸³

Siegfried Kracauer, too, observed a tendency of standardization among white-collar workers:

Je mehr die Rationalisierung fortschreitet, desto mehr nimmt die moralisch rosa Aufmachung überhand. Die Behauptung ist kaum zu gewagt, daß sich in Berlin ein Angestelltentypus herausbildet, der sich in Richtung auf die erstrebte Hautfarbe hin uniformiert. Sprache, Kleider, Gebärden und Physiognomien gleichen sich an, und das Ergebnis des Prozesses ist eben jenes angenehme Aussehen, das mit Hilfe von Photographien umfassend wiedergegeben werden kann.¹⁸⁴

The increasing commodification nurtured a type that was characterized by homogeneity and superficiality. Implied in the Marxist inspired critique is the

¹⁸³ Adorno and Horkheimer, influenced by the dialectical and historical materialism of Karl Marx as well as the dialectical idealism of Hegel, coined the term *Kulturindustrie* to talk about mass-produced culture. They argued that commodified or popular culture would serve as an anti-enlightenment opiate for the masses and would, by instilling them with false needs created by consumer capitalism, distract them from their socio-economic reality and manipulate them into passivity. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (1944; Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1961) 150. See also Deborah Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); or Robert Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁸⁴ Kracauer, *Die Angestellten* 24f.

claim that more radical aspects of the New Woman were usurped by the mainstream culture industry. Even though the visual markers of the New Woman did allow women to make choices regarding their identity, the commodification of the New Woman significantly limited the emancipatory potential initially inherent in the fashion trend and the figure.

The standardization of the New Woman further had the effect that the new fashion became increasingly restrictive. Old norms were simply replaced with new ones and women were pressured to comply with these. It would seem that in contrast to the dresses of the nineteenth and early twentieth century the clothes of the 1920s and the androgynous look, which deemphasized secondary sex characteristics and challenged traditional notions of beauty, did not restrain the female body. A more natural look superseded a more artificial feminine ideal and a slender body, flat chest and slim hips replaced voluptuous curves, a wasp waist and wide hips as ideals. Arguably these styles allowed women greater mobility than wire corsets had but they, too, symbolized a restriction of women's personal freedom and, as Gisela von Wysocki emphasizes, women often merely replaced the corset with tight-fitting brassieres that flattened their bosom.¹⁸⁵ Female white-collar workers were increasingly pressured to look like the New Woman. Especially after the onset of the Depression in 1929 when supply exceeded demand, it became crucial, as Irma Sernau stressed in the progressive women's publication Die Frauentribüne, for them to dress fashionably: "Heute *muß* jede

¹⁸⁵ Gisela von Wysocki, "Der Aufbruch der Frauen: Verordnete Träume, Bubikopf und 'sachliches Leben.' Ein Streifzug durch Scherl's Magazin, Jahrgang 1925," Massenkommunikationsforschung: 3 Produktanalysen, ed. Dieter Prokop (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1977) 295-305.

Frau zumindest 'anständig' angezogen gehen [...] und gerade die im Beruf stehende Frau, die stellungssuchende Frau muß gut und einigermaßen modisch gekleidet sein."¹⁸⁶ This explains why some, Hans Ostwald cruelly remarked, displayed "religiösen Eifer [...] um das quellende Fleisch einzudämmen."¹⁸⁷ As physical appearance was linked to women's mental and intellectual capacity women, in an effort to try and make themselves more attractive, wore products like the figure-improving *Hautana* rubber suit or the *Gentila Gürtel*, which promised its wearers elegant and enviable silhouettes.¹⁸⁸

Similarly, Siegfried Kracauer observed that the use of cosmetics and visits to the beauty parlor among salaried employees was less and less a playful act of vanity:

Die Angestellten müssen mittun, ob sie wollen oder nicht. Der Andrang zu den vielen Schönheitssalons entspringt auch Existenzsorgen, der Gebrauch kosmetischer Erzeugnisse ist nicht immer ein Luxus. Aus Angst, als Altwaren aus dem Gebrauch zurückgezogen zu werden, färben sich Damen und Herren die Haare, und Vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu halten.¹⁸⁹

The professional position and livelihood of female white-collar workers depended increasingly on appearance and attributes like beauty and youth gained importance.¹⁹⁰ Employers treated women's appearance as an additional

¹⁸⁶ Sernau, "Was jede Frau von der Mode wissen muß" 12.

¹⁸⁷ Hans Ostwald, *Sittengeschichte der Inflation* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius, 1931) 136.

¹⁸⁸ "Frauen, die beneidet werden," *Die schöne Frau* 2.7 (1927): 21.

¹⁸⁹ Kracauer, *Die Angestellten* 24.

¹⁹⁰ This applied even more so to sales associates, whose looks, as implied by a statement of the personnel manager of a Berlin department store, were exploited to sell goods. "Wir achten bei Engagements von Verkaufs- und Büropersonal vorwiegend auf ein angenehmes Aussehn." In some instances women were even dismissed because they did not dress to the liking of their

qualification and their bodies were, as Joanne Finkelstein argues, reduced to signs “of the individual’s accomplishments, talents, capacities and character.”¹⁹¹ Women were forced to keep their sexual marketability in mind and, by becoming a professional prerequisite, *Körper-* and *Schönheitspflege* turned against them. It furthermore turned members of a social group with little institutional support into competitors:

Aber durch diese Gleichberechtigung [der Frau] ist zugleich ein neuer Feind entstanden, die Konkurrenz. Und in dem harten Konkurrenzkampf siegt nicht immer der Tüchtigere, sondern der besser Aussehende. [...] Die Pflege des äußeren Menschen, der Wunsch schön zu sein, ist also nicht mehr nur eine ästhetische Frage, sondern häufig eine wirksame Waffe im Wirtschaftskampf.¹⁹²

Rather than allowing individuals to play with an alternative gender identity it contributed to solidifying their disadvantaged position on the labor market.

Advertisements for beauty products from the late Weimar period illustrate the pressure that was exerted on women by the consumer industry. They frequently tapped into the specific professional needs and worries of female white-collar workers. An ad for *Kaloderma* soap, for example, exploited the vulnerability especially of older female white-collar workers by promising users that their skin would maintain its “äußerliche Jugend und Spannkraft.” The woman depicted in this ad complies with current beauty standards, which both

employers or male customers. Sales assistants were also featured in ad campaigns without, however, being compensated for this. Referred to in Kracauer, Die Angestellten 34.

¹⁹¹ Finkelstein, The Fashioned Self 4.

¹⁹² Margarete Edelheim, “Das Schönheitsideal der modernen Frau,” Die Kultur der Frau: Eine Lebenssymphonie der Frau des XX. Jahrhunderts, ed. Ada Schmidt-Beil (Berlin: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1931) 440.

reinforces the ideal and nurtures the anxieties of female readers who do not comply. She is young and slender and, smartly dressed she wears high heels and sports an immaculate haircut. The notepad in her one hand and the telephone receiver in the other identify her as an office worker, yet she exudes none of the stress that stenographers or typists were typically subjected to. The product promises to deliver just that: it will bestow the user with youth and vitality and in doing so equip her with the means to survive the brutal mechanisms of the modern labor market.

Keen on selling its products the consumer industry reinforced the idea that good looks were more important than references, qualifications or experience. Some advertisements, such as one for *Palmolive* soap, capitalized on the discrimination of working women: “Die berufstätige Frau weiss, welches Kapital ein jugendzarter Teint darstellt.” This particular ad also conveys that society’s attitude towards women actually changed little but continued to value traditionally feminine characteristics such as beauty or chic. However during the Weimar period, Sigrun Anselm argues, these qualities were no longer tied to marriage but they facilitated a woman’s access to the public sphere and an income.¹⁹³ Finally, the ad makes evident that the consumer industries promised to relieve a socio-economic problem but in essence they merely displaced the problem of women’s discrimination onto consumer goods. By subscribing to the “belief [...] that we can translate most of our [...] needs and desires into material form” women’s

¹⁹³ Anselm, “Emanzipation und Tradition” 254.

newly found freedom was impeded.¹⁹⁴ This suggests that by the early 1930s German society had failed to radically rethink femininity in response to the emergence of the New Woman. The figure was progressively evacuated of her emancipatory potential and women were once again coerced into a socio-culturally imposed conformity.

Fashion played a key role in the shaping of the New Woman, however, it was not the only reason why she was considered a novelty. Many of the young female white-collar workers who dressed the part also embraced a radically changed way of life and lived on their own and went shopping or to the movies. Prior to turning to the discussion of the cinema in the next chapter, I will briefly look at two aspects of the New Woman's lifestyle because they feature strongly in at least three of the fictional texts I discuss. For one, women and especially the employees working and living in Berlin engaged in a number of leisure activities. Provided they could afford to do so, they went out in the evenings and frequented cafés. Working women were driven by the desire to have fun and leave their bleak workday behind, but visiting a dance hall, one of the most popular leisure activities at the time, also constituted an emancipatory act. One of the young women interviewed by Siegfried Kracauer attests to the immense popularity of dancing: "Ich vertanze alle paar Monate die Schuhe."¹⁹⁵ The city was in a frenzy and, like fashion, dancing allowed women to play with their newly gained

¹⁹⁴ Finkelstein, The Fashioned Self 4.

¹⁹⁵ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 10.

independence. The dance styles that took Germany by storm after World War One reflected this increase of freedom. The rhythms matched the new *Lebensgefühl* and they allowed women to move freely. Coming from the United States and influenced by African rhythms Foxtrot, Shimmy and Charleston did away with the strict choreography of European dances and eliminated any hierarchies on the dance floor.¹⁹⁶ Marlene Dietrich's character in Der blaue Engel saucily declares "Kinder, heut abend, da such ich mir was aus, einen Mann, einen Mann, einen richtigen Mann."¹⁹⁷ A vamp like Lola Lola could freely choose her sexual partners and the New Woman, the less sexualized modern woman, could at least pick her dance partners as she pleased.¹⁹⁸ In addition to being a fun recreational activity dancing allowed women to experiment with their sexuality

¹⁹⁶ Astrid Eichstedt, "Irgendeinen trifft die Wahl," Neue Frauen 10.

¹⁹⁷ Der blaue Engel, dir. Josef von Sternberg, perf. Marlene Dietrich, Emil Jannings, Rosa Valetti and Hans Albers (Germany: Ufa, 1930).

¹⁹⁸ The colloquial term vamp was used to describe the femme fatale as popularized by the media. A highly stylized figure, the vamp wore glamorous clothes, was heavily made up and coldheartedly seduced men, who were unable to resist her. Germany's most famous vamp was Mata Hari (that is Margaretha Gertruida Zelle), an exotic dancer and courtesan who was executed for espionage during World War One and whose enduring popularity was largely owed to the films Mata Hari (1920), Mata Hari, die rote Tänzerin (1927) and, starring Greta Garbo, Mata Hari (1931). Weimar cinema's most famous vamp was probably lascivious Pola Negri (née Barbara Apolonja Chałupiec), who rose to stardom by seducing manhood in films directed by Ernst Lubitsch such as Carmen (1918), Die Bergkatze (1921) and above all Madame Dubarry (1919). Mata Hari, dir. Ludwig Wolff, perf. Asta Nielsen (Germany, 1920); Mata Hari, die rote Tänzerin, dir. Friedrich Fehér, perf. Magda Sonja, Wolfgang Zilzer, Fritz Kortner and Elisabeth Bach (Germany: National-Film AG, 1927); Mata Hari, dir. George Fitzmaurice, perf. Greta Garbo, Ramon Novarro, Lionel Barrymore and C. Henry Gordon (United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1931); Carmen, dir. Ernst Lubitsch, perf. Pola Negri, Harry Liedtke, Leopold von Ledebur and Paul Conradi (Germany: Projektion-AG Union, 1918); Die Bergkatze, dir. Ernst Lubitsch, perf. Pola Negri, Victor Janson, Paul Heidemann and Wilhelm Diegelmann (Germany: Projektion-AG Union, 1921); and Madame Dubarry, dir. Ernst Lubitsch, perf. Pola Negri, Emil Jannings, Harry Liedtke and Eduard von Winterstein (Germany: Projektion-AG Union, 1919). See also Rachel M. Gaikowa, Dämonische Weiber: Pola Negri und Mata Hari (Leipzig: Eva, 1930); Diane Samuel, The True Life Fiction of Mata Hari (London: Nick Hern, 2002); Richard Skinner, The Red Dancer: The Life and Times of Mata Hari (London: Faber, 2001); Norman Ziergold, Sex Goddesses of the Silent Screen (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1973); and Axel von Cossart, Pola Negri: Leben eines Stars (Köln: Voco, 1988).

within a safe environment. The dance floor was not only a clearly defined physical space but also governed by the rules of the new dances.

Because women adopted habits that used to be reserved for men, society's perception of them changed and prompted some observers to ring in the "age of the liberated women."¹⁹⁹ They were no longer seen as a purely "romantische Wesen" but creatures who took life into their own hands, and who seemed to be able to do anything and were allowed to do almost everything.²⁰⁰ Certain aspects of the New Woman such as her sexuality were dramatically different that the reaction of contemporary critics like Erik Ernst Schwabach and Otto Flake seems justified. As has been pointed out, the "lang erzwungene Prüderie" gave way after the war to an unprecedented sexual liberty and particularly the younger generation of women claimed sexual equality for themselves.²⁰¹ As the lives of men and women converged, "verwitterte das alte Weltbild, darin alles auf den Mann ausgerichtet war, von Jahr zu Jahr mehr," and women explored and satisfied their desires.²⁰² Not all women entered relationships or had sexual encounters, regardless of whether they had the intention of marrying the man or not. But the changed climate did provide an opportunity for female white-collar workers to explore a different femininity.

¹⁹⁹ Erik Ernst Schwabach, Die Revolutionierung der Frau (Leipzig: Der Neue Geist-Verlag, 1928) 88.

²⁰⁰ Otto Flake, "Die alte Aufgabe – die neue Form," Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 161.

²⁰¹ Bärbel Schrader and Jürgen Schebera, Kunstmropole Berlin 1918-1933: Die Kunststadt in der November Revolution, die 'goldenen' Zwanziger, die Kunststadt in der Krise (Berlin: Aufbau, 1987) 108.

²⁰² Frank Thiess, "Krise der neuen Freiheit," Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 180.

Women's more active sexuality destabilized existing ideas about the subject and ignited public debates that were so far reaching that they included scientific publications, such as Alice Rühle-Gerstel's Die weibliche Sexualität, as well as novels, droll stories and comedies.²⁰³ Even vaudeville songs, many of which became hits, were dedicated to the topic:

Warum soll eine Frau kein Verhältnis haben, kein Verhältnis haben,
kein Verhältnis haben?
Ist sie hübsch, wird man sagen: Na, sie muß doch eins haben, na,
sie muß doch eins haben, 's wär zu dumm!
Ja, und wenn man schon so redet und sie hat keins, na dann ist es
doch viel besser gleich: Sie hat eins!
Warum soll eine Frau kein Verhältnis haben?
Können Sie mir sagen: Warum?
Man lacht diskret und maliziös und so entsteht die ganze
'Chronique scandaleuse'!²⁰⁴

Due to the popularity of the topic the mass medium cinema participated in the discourse as well. The state-owned Ufa produced and distributed a number of *Kulturfilme*, a specifically German film genre closely related to today's documentary, that both educated and entertained audiences. The film Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit: Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur (1925), for example, promoted a modern body culture by celebrating harmony between body and

²⁰³ See, for example, Irmgard Volkmer-Natesta, Bubikopf-Hängezopf (Berlin: Vobach, 1927); Joe Weyermoor, Ein gefährlicher Bubikopf (Dresden: Mignon, 1926); Max Dietzel, Um einen Bubikopf (Mühlhausen: Danner, 1926); Curt Kraatz, Bubiköpfe (München: Wende, 1927); Fritz Stein, Der Bubikopf (Leipzig: Otto Teich, 1926); and Lajos Luria, Der Glatzkopf und der Bubikopf (Berlin: Vertriebsstelle des Verbandes deutscher Bühnenschriftsteller und Bühnenkomponisten, 1926).

²⁰⁴ From the hit musical Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will (1932), which was turned into a movie and released across Germany in 1934. Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will, dir. Victor Janson, perf. Lil Dagover, Anton Edthofer, Maria Beling and Anton Walbrook (Germany: Slovia, 1934). See also Cabaret Berlin: Kabarett and Film Music between the Wars (Hamburg: Edel Records, 2005).

spirit.²⁰⁵ While informing the viewer about cultural ideals of classical antiquity the film also indulged in nudity and it was due to the display of the female naked body that the film broke all box office records.²⁰⁶

More progressive sex reformers such as Helene Stöcker, president of the *Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*, or Magnus Hirschfeld, founder of the *Berliner Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*, supported the more liberal sexual ethics and were especially keen on detaching sexuality from reproduction.²⁰⁷ In contrast, reactionary population experts criticized women's changed attitude towards sexuality and accused New Women of being sexually promiscuous. They also held them accountable for, amongst other things, falling birth and rising divorce rates. Women's different attitude toward sexuality was not only fuelled by the wish to fulfill their hedonistic desires. Many young women embraced the new choices that became available because, as will be remembered, the war had created a surplus of women. The modern labor market further diminished women's chances to marry and in times of economic instability, unemployment and decreasing salaries parenthood was frequently not

²⁰⁵ *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit: Ein Film über moderne Körperkultur*, dir. Nicholas Kaufmann and Wilhelm Prager, perf. Leni Riefenstahl, Johnny Weissmüller, Jack Dempsey and Janny Hasselquist (Germany: Ufa, 1925).

²⁰⁶ "Dream Factory and State Enterprise: The History of Ufa. The Kulturfilm," *Filmportal*, ed. Deutsches Filminstitut – DIF e.V. 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.filmportal.de/df/72/Artikel,,,,,,,,,EF A2EB3975F183E8E03053D50 B37088F,,,,,,,,,,,,,html>>. See also "Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit," *Filmportal*, ed. Deutsches Filminstitut – DIF e.V. 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.deutsches-filminstitut.de/zengut/ dt2tb00542i.htm>>.

²⁰⁷ They were keen on educating women about sexuality and reproduction, supplied them with contraceptives at no cost, fought against §218, advocated the simplification of divorces and the improvement of the rights of single mothers with illegitimate children. See Atina Grossmann, "Die 'Neue Frau' und die Rationalisierung der Sexualität in der Weimarer Republik," *Die Politik des Begehrens: Sexualität und neuer Puritanismus in den USA*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (Berlin: Rothbuch, 1985) 38-62, especially 39.

an option for young couples.²⁰⁸ Contraceptive methods or abortions were a necessity for many because children were a problematic investment.²⁰⁹

Prejudiced by what Andreas Huyssen identified as “a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious,” critics failed to consider the socio-economic context of sexuality and therefore obstructed the development of a truly modern gender role.²¹⁰

The issue of women’s changed sexuality contributed substantially to the demise of the New Woman. German society never fully accepted but merely tolerated the figure and, as Alice Rühle-Gerstel observed, the embodiment of the modern lifestyle was the target of sharp criticism throughout the 1920s.²¹¹ Anti-feminist critics consistently challenged women’s participation in the urban public sphere, condemned their allegedly unleashed sexuality and turned them into scapegoats. According to Katharina von Ankum, however, until the onset of the

²⁰⁸ Statistics show that working-class rather than middle-class female white-collar workers were responsible for the decline in birth rates. Most middle-class women had one or two children if, however, at a later age. Working-class women, realizing that they could reduce both expenses and labor, chose to have fewer children and frequently obtained abortions. See Karen Hagemann, Frauenalltag und Männerpolitik: Alltagsleben und gesellschaftliches Handeln von Arbeiterfrauen in der Weimarer Republik (Bonn: Dietz, 1990); and Karen Hagemann, ed. Eine Frauensache: Alltagsleben und Geburtenpolitik 1919-1933 (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1991).

²⁰⁹ According to Marliese Eckhof nearly every other pregnancy was terminated during the late twenties not least because, as Atina Grossmann calls attention to, birth control was generally too costly for the lower income classes. Marliese Eckhof, “‘Gegen die Abtreibungsseuche!’ Ärzte und §218 in der Weimarer Republik,” ‘Euer Körper gehört uns!’ Ärzte, Bevölkerungspolitik und Sexualmoral bis 1933, eds. Marliese Eckhof and Petra Fink (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1987) 90-8; and Atina Grossmann, Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform 1920-1950 (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 15.

²¹⁰ Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture, eds. Tania Modleski and Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1986) 196.

²¹¹ Alice Rühle-Gerstel, “Zurück zur guten alten Zeit?,” Die literarische Welt 9.4 (January 1933): 5-6.

depression society gave itself more flexible and seemingly tolerated the transgression of established gender constructs – whether financial, social or sexual – but as the republic entered its final crisis “Weimar’s intrinsically patriarchal structures [came] to the fore.”²¹² As a result, female clerks were held accountable for issues far beyond their control and linked to a variety of other causes: from women’s rights to the unloved political system, the “new rampant, pleasure-seeking consumerism and the Americanization of Germany.”²¹³

Significantly, the fashion industry, which facilitated the rise of the New Woman also contributed to the figure’s decline. It successively hollowed the figure out and at the same time it supplied the visual characteristics that made the New Woman a target of social criticism. In particular the new ‘masculine’ quality of women’s fashion drew the attention of critics. According to reactionaries like Hans Moreck women’s clothes, which had traditionally served to celebrate femininity, were likely to induce the masculinization of women and, as a result of this, their sexuality would experience perversion and would inspire them to reject, for example, motherhood.²¹⁴ The argument ignores that women’s fashion of the 1920s had to be more ‘masculine’ because women’s changed lifestyle necessitated it. Women continued to wear skirts and blouses and, as

²¹² von Ankum, Women in the Metropolis 6.

²¹³ Briendenthal et al., “Introduction,” When Biology Became Destiny 13.

²¹⁴ Hans Moreck, Das weibliche Schönheitsideal im Wandel der Zeit (München: Franz Hanfstaengl, 1925) 282.

Rosa Mayreder stressed, did not *become* more masculine.²¹⁵ The more practical look merely assisted their participation in the public sphere. By equating the new fashion with unbound egoism or unleashed female sexuality, critics such as Hans Moreck failed to consider the modern woman's socio-economic situation.

The *Bubikopf* as well as make-up were subject to similar criticism. As mentioned earlier, many contemporaries viewed the disappearance of long hair in a positive light and recognized the practical and sanitary value of the hairstyle. However, reactionaries considered the bob a sign of cultural decay and held it responsible for a variety of social tensions.²¹⁶ They united against "the threat of a liberated femininity" by criticizing women's increased use of make-up, in particular the look women flirted with in the evening: red lips and heavily made up eyes.²¹⁷ This look was widely associated with the vamp, the most visually striking version of the New Woman, which, however, was ultimately a media-generated fantasy that was too exaggerated to be true. The predominantly male criticism of make-up that even included perfume constituted an effort to bring the destabilization of female sexuality to a halt and reflected men's fear of female sexuality and independence. This view failed to consider, however, that a ban of make-up would not have produced a more natural femininity because, as Joanne

²¹⁵ Rosa Mayreder referenced by Hanna von Vollmer-Heitmann, Wir sind von Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt: Die zwanziger Jahre (Hamburg: Ernst Kabel, 1993) 44.

²¹⁶ See Erich Fromm's 1929 survey Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches: Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung (1929; München: DTV, 1983) 168ff.

²¹⁷ Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion" 189.

Finkelstein stresses, gender roles are always social constructs.²¹⁸ The widespread criticism of beauty products demonstrates, however, that many men were keen for women to return to a more traditional femininity and a time when gender roles had been more clearly defined. Inspired, as Ute Frevert suggests, by “fear or an exaggerated sense of progress” this attitude was evidence of men’s overall uneasy relationship with modernity.²¹⁹ Ultimately women’s willing return to traditional gender roles – what Ernst Bloch called “die reumütige ‘Rückkehr der verlorenen Tochter’ in die Sicherheit und an den warmen Ofen” – was as much influenced by the economic climate as it was caused by the limitations placed on female employees by society.²²⁰ The barriers between male and female domains did become more fluid but the gender-specific limits of social, economic and political action remained largely unchanged: women did enjoy greater employment opportunities, they could vote and concepts of morality had become more liberal. However, society never made its peace with the more emancipated femininity as embodied by the New Woman.

The decline of the New Woman from 1929 onwards was rapid and accompanied by little protest because, despite the upheavals that characterized the post-war decade and the extensive talk about changed gender roles,

²¹⁸ Joanne Finkelstein argues that whatever we find aesthetic about the human body is not determined by nature or any biological principle but by a society’s culture. Finkelstein, The Fashioned Self 4.

²¹⁹ Frevert, Women in German History 179.

²²⁰ Ernst Bloch cited in Wysocki, “Der Aufbruch der Frauen” 304.

expectations had remained fairly stable throughout the Weimar Republic. In fact, the return to traditional gender roles went relatively smoothly because the New Woman was never a political figure and had never fully supplanted existing notions of femininity. Significantly, the organized women's movement of the Weimar Republic, divided into a socialist and a bourgeois camp and, plagued with disagreements between the various feminist groups, played a critical part in this development.²²¹ The movement's left wing considered gainful employment key to women's emancipation and it was strongly concerned about the "proletarianization of women" as under-paid, over-worked employees.²²² Leftist activists such as Gertrud Baer, member of the *Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit*, or Helene Stöcker, founder of the *Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform* and board member of the *Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte*, also fought discriminatory legislature, such as §218, which made abortion illegal and forced thousands of women to break the law.²²³ Yet even though they fought for women's equality as citizens and members of the workforce, they were not in favor of a more liberated female sexuality and lifestyle. Instead, Cornelia Usborne emphasizes, they tried to turn a generation of young women into

²²¹ See Ute Gerhart, *Unerhört: Die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990); Gertrud Pinkus and Gertrud Baer, "Frauenbewegung bis 1920," *Frauenoffensive* 10 (1978): 30-4; or Renate Wurms, "Gleichberechtigt, aber 'zur linken Hand': Zur Frauenbewegung in der Weimarer Republik," *Neue Frauen: Die zwangziger Jahre*, eds. Kristine von Soden and Maruta Schmitt (Berlin: Elefanten, 1988) 50-64.

²²² Rühle-Gerstel, *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart* 26.

²²³ For detailed discussion of the controversial §218 see Grossmann, "Die 'Neue Frau,'" 38-62; or Kristine von Soden, "'§218 – streichen, nicht ändern!' Abtreibung und Geburtenregelung in der Weimarer Republik," *Unter anderen Umständen: Zur Geschichte der Abtreibung*, ed. Gisela Staube (Berlin: Argon, 1993) 36-50.

committed partners (*Kameradschaftsehe*), willing mothers, mentors of their children and health-conscious homemakers.²²⁴

The so-called bourgeois division of the women's movement was equally committed to promoting women's traditional role in the family, motherhood and ideals of female duty, service, and self-sacrifice.²²⁵ Activists such as Helene Lange, board member of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* and delegate for the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, and Gertrud Bäumer, Member of the *Reichstag* for the *Deutsche Staatspartei* and editor of the movement's organ Die Frau, did not tire to bemoan the decline of the family (and thus the nation), sinking birthrates and the supposed debauchery of the times. Denouncing the flighty and individualistic attitude of the younger working generation that was keen on satisfying its materialistic desires, reactionary critics supported organizations such as the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (the umbrella organization of the bourgeois women's movement) and claimed that sexual freedom does not correspond to women's nature:

Die moderne Frau [ist] nicht auf Ausschweifung und Bandelosigkeit aus. [...] Sie [träumt] im Gegenteil einer feiner verpflichteten Gestaltung des Verhältnisses zwischen Mann und Frau nach und damit – denn die Frau will nun einmal für den Mann da sein – einer feineren, edleren Beglückung des Mannes.²²⁶

²²⁴ Cornelia Osborne, Frauenkörper – Volkskörper: Geburtenkontrolle und Bevölkerungspolitik in der Weimarer Republik (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994) 265 and 268.

²²⁵ Briendenthal et al., "Introduction," When Biology Became Destiny 1ff.

²²⁶ Friedrich M. Huebner, "Die Frau und der Dichter: Eine Einleitung," Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen 3.

In addition, conservative adversaries of the New Woman claimed that women would always do better in traditional roles than in a profession:

Was immer für Frauenberufe und was immer für selbstständige Frauen auch noch auftauchen mögen, so glauben wir doch, daß eine Gattin oder eine Geliebte von ihrem Beruf mehr verstehen wird als die flinkeste Stenotypistin, die beste Ärztin und die gerissenste Politikerin von dem ihren.²²⁷

Other critics claimed that it would be a dangerous misapprehension to assume that employment would enable women to develop their personality; only marriage and a husband, who shows her the way, can make a woman a complete and satisfied human being.²²⁸ Against this backdrop it was easy for conservatives to combat the new urban type and to promote women's ultimate vocation and purpose in life: motherhood. However, the stylized image of the pure, prudent and loving mother or, if absolutely need be, the figure of the ascetic and asexual working spinster stood in stark contrast to young and single clerks. As a result of the incompatibility of the types, Richard Evans points out, a generational gap emerged between women's activists and Weimar's young urbanites.²²⁹

²²⁷ Alexander Lernet-Holenia, "Die Frau aller Zeiten," Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen, 108.

²²⁸ "Es ist einer der gefährlichsten Trugschlüsse, zu glauben, die Frau brauche zur Realisierung ihrer Persönlichkeit den Beruf, die Arbeit. Die Frau wird zur Persönlichkeit durch den Mann, durch die Ehe." J.B. cited in Hilde Walter, "Man spricht von uns – was sagen wir?," Frauentribüne 1/2 (January 1933): 15.

²²⁹ Richard J. Evans, The Feminist Movement in Germany 1893-1933 (London: Sage, 1976) 236ff. The women's magazine Frauentribüne was one of the few efforts that tried to bring the women's movement and the New Woman together but it was only launched in 1933 and the Nazis put an end to both. See Petra Bock, "Die Zeitschrift 'Die Frauentribüne' 1933: Wahrnehmung und Deutung im Übergang zum Nationalsozialismus," Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten 245-6.

Motherhood was not the only issue that divided the New Woman and the conservative members of the organized women's movement. Its key activists, mentioned above, were typically born prior to 1880 and they had fought against the legal discrimination of women in Imperial Germany.²³⁰ The experience of women born after 1900, however, was quite different. As these women reached adulthood key legal discriminations had been done away with. The challenges for these women were therefore socio-economic rather than political as they faced barriers that challenged their right to professional and social equality. The women's movement failed to address the professional and personal issues relating to the next generations' realities, which explains why some young women believed the organized women's movement emphasized rather than worked towards eliminating "den Gegensatz der Geschlechter."²³¹ Towards the end of the Weimar Republic women did enjoy greater personal freedoms but they were also faced with new problems. As a result, as journalist and novelist Gabriele Tergit lamented, the professionals of the Weimar Republic were unable to appreciate the accomplishments of the organized women's movement:

Unsre siebzehnjährigen oder fünfzehnjährigen Töchter aber finden uns *altmodisch*. "Die Frau gehört ins Haus" erscheint ihnen als revolutionäres Feldgeschrei. Von der ganzen Weltgeschichte sehen sie nur das Grauensvolle, was seit zwei Jahren geschieht: daß die Frau übermüdet in der Fabrik, in der Aufwartestelle, im Büro schuftet, die Betten ungemacht liegen, die Nahrung nicht aufs Feuer kommt, das schmutzige Geschirr stehen bleibt, während der

²³⁰ Thomas Schuhbauer, "Die Neue Frau und die radikale Frauenbewegung," Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten 42.

²³¹ Irene Stoehr, "Neue Frauen und Alte Bewegung? Zum Generationskonflikt in der Frauenbewegung der Weimarer Republik," Frauenmacht in der Geschichte, eds. Jutta Dahlhoff, Uschi Frey and Ingrid Schöll (Düsseldorf: Swann, 1986) 390-402.

Mann dasitzt, Hände im Schoß, und zermürbt zuletzt zum Alkohol greift.²³²

An increasing number of women expressed that their goal in life would be to become a homemaker: “Wenn die Liebe und das dazugehörige kommt, [...] so hoffe ich mich doch einmal als Hausfrau zu betätigen, das wäre eigentlich mein größter Wunsch.”²³³ Bearing witness to the struggle of female employees, increasing numbers of younger women subscribed to the idealized concept of marriage and motherhood.²³⁴ The desire to return to the home and the dream of a family idyll were escapist fantasies but in light of the realities of female white-collar workers as well as the choices available to young women, their desires might have actually seemed like a progressive move.

Finally, the retreat into the private sphere marked also a response to the media’s role in the shaping of the New Woman. Fashion and lifestyle magazines increasingly presented the New Woman as a kind of Super Woman that penetrated and dictated women’s lives. This modern woman had to be perfect in all areas of life while coping with her role nonchalantly:

Sie muß weiblich sein und energisch und selbstbewußt. [Sie müsse aber auch] gut angezogen sein, mit Geschmack flirten können und einer berühmten Schauspielerin ähnlich sehen. [...] Bildung [ist] sehr wichtig. Eine Frau, die sich keinen geistigen Kreis schaffen kann, ist reizlos. Sie muß Mittelpunkt sein und Anregungen geben – allerdings dürfen Männer das nicht merken. Es enterotisiert nämlich, wenn eine Frau zu klug ist, und erotischer Charme ist

²³² Gabriele Tergit, “Die Frauentribüne,” Die Frauentribüne 1/2 (1933): 2.

²³³ Interviewee cited in Else Brökelschen-Kempner, “Politik, Frauenbewegung und junge Generation,” Die Frau 37.4 (October 1931): 238.

²³⁴ Fritz Urbschat, Das Seelenleben der kaufmännisch tätigen Jugendlichen (Berlin: Beltz, 1932) 29.

doch das mindeste, was man von einer gescheiterten Frau erwarten kann. Und bitte noch eins – nicht so stark schminken.²³⁵

The New Woman had started out as an ideal that was denied its ultimate realization because Weimar society and economy were not willing to accept, let alone support independent women.²³⁶ In addition, the culture and consumer industries appropriated and exploited the New Woman and by depoliticizing the figure they undermined the emancipatory potential of a more modern gender role. The image collapsed in the early 1930s: women began to reject the figure as socio-economic limitations were increasingly felt and attacks became more severe. Instead, they warmed to the idea of a more traditional femininity as promoted by the organized women's movement. The National Socialists, though not introducing an altogether new female identity, made this trend irreversible and saw to the radical implementation of women's traditional role as wife and mother. Historian Fritz Croner is thus not entirely right when claiming that the period after World War One marked the beginning of women's real emancipation.²³⁷ The Weimar Republic presented women with extensive opportunities for participation: women explored and asserted their identities by dressing very differently and by engaging in empowering activities like shopping or going out. However, because of society's resistance combined with adverse economic developments few of the changes were lasting and the rise of the New Woman constituted less a gradual development of a new female gender identity

²³⁵ From an article in Die Dame (July 1930) referred to in Scheub, Verrückt nach Leben 105.

²³⁶ Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau 167.

²³⁷ Croner, Soziologie der Angestellten 180.

but rather the first step toward the continuation of a traditional role in a changed that is modern environment.

Chapter Three

Inspiring or Misleading? The Cinematic Spectacles Die Privatsekretärin and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus

Having situated the female white-collar worker in the previous chapters, I now turn to the discussion of fictional texts concerned with this figure. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the female commercial employee was as much a product of economic developments and the vision of a small group of emancipated women as she was a cultural artifact shaped by Weimar Germany's burgeoning consumer industry and mass media. Fashion and print media played an important role in this process but the cinema played an equally if not more important role in shaping the figure. In this chapter, I sketch the relationship between film and women, that is the young women who worked and lived in Germany's large cities and especially Berlin, and I show why and how the cinema contributed to the process of identity formation. More specifically, I investigate two mainstream films, Die Privatsekretärin (1931) and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus (1931), key films of a genre that is excluded from the canon of Weimar cinema and has hitherto attracted little scholarly attention, in part because of its lack of artistic sophistication. However, if we want to better understand the role the medium cinema played in the development of the New Woman it is paramount to explore secretary films because they addressed female white-collar workers more directly than any other films. My textual analysis of these films will show how middle-of-the-road rather than artistically accomplished or critically acclaimed movies depict the figure of the female

commercial employee, and in particular her working and living conditions. However, I not only examine if these films portrayed the figure and her circumstances in a realistic manner or whether they presented escapist fantasies. In order to shed further light on women's process of subjectivity formation during the period I also investigate what these films said to their female audience.

Office workers of the Weimar Republic participated in the public sphere of commerce and embraced the new culture of leisure. Detlev Peukert points out that the emergence of modern leisure and Germany's popular culture was strongly tied to the changing working conditions of the middle-class during the 1920s.²³⁸ In particular the eight-hour day facilitated a framework for leisure activities and a weekend for salary earners, and a new industry began to make pleasures previously reserved for the upper echelons of society available to a mass audience. The most popular leisure activities at the time, Peukert argues, were in part new and partially commercialized versions of existing activities. Sports activities, for example, gained tremendous popularity not least because they were considered to promote people's overall well-being. Clubs and associations, which were often sponsored by white-collar organizations or unions, prospered and sports events such as boxing matches or six-day races drew massive crowds. Cultural events continued to attract substantial audiences as well, but traditional institutions such as the theater or the opera were

²³⁸ Peukert, The Weimar Republic 175. See also Gerhard Huck, Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1982).

increasingly faced with competition from modern forms of entertainment. Variety shows, fun parks, cafés, dance halls and night clubs gained popularity from the mid-twenties onwards, not least, as Helmut Lethen calls attention to, because they opened their doors to people who had been excluded from venues of high culture such as the theater, the centerpiece of bourgeois public culture.²³⁹ Of all leisure activities that were popular in the Weimar Republic it was the cinema that was considered the ultimate metropolitan cultural experience. In a relatively brief period of time, cinema developed from an inexpensive, fleeting amusement into Germany's first mode of entertainment to acquire true mass appeal. Bridging the gap between the monopoly of exclusive high culture, the alluring novelty film became a respectable cultural medium, a form of entertainment for people of all backgrounds and grew into a public sphere in its own right. By the late 1920s the medium, which, as film scholar Sabine Hake emphasizes, integrated economic, political and cultural aspects in an unprecedented interdependency, became so popular that it gained a "place in the urban landscape that could only be compared to the cathedral."²⁴⁰

Like the rise of Germany's new middle class and the New Woman, the rise of the medium was a product of high capitalism and what Weimar critic Oswald Spengler called the "technologische-industrielle Revolution."²⁴¹ New types of

²³⁹ Helmut Lethen, "Chicago und Moskau," Die Metropole: Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert, eds. Jochen Boberg, Tilmann Fichter and Eckhart Gillen (München: Beck, 1986) 202-4.

²⁴⁰ Hake, "Girls and Crisis" 152.

²⁴¹ Oswald Spengler, Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte, vol. 2 (München: Beck, 1923) 122.

commercial entertainment such as the cabaret or the variety show had first been created around the turn of the century, in response to the need for a more modern culture as well as an urban identity for the growing numbers of city dwellers. It was not before long, Peter Jevalich claims, that the middle class, which had initially looked down upon vaudeville-style leisure, was won over to mass entertainment's popular theatricality.²⁴² Society's initial attitude towards popular cultural forms explains why film was initially considered a mere technical curiosity and remained largely confined to the fairground and vaudeville shows. It was not until the 1910s, as Anton Kaes points out, that cinema successively legitimized itself and, by exploring its artistic potential and thanks to the efforts of marketing strategists, rid itself of its plebeian origins.²⁴³

This development was significantly assisted by the construction of theaters designed specially for motion picture shows in the downtown areas of German cities.²⁴⁴ According to Thomas Saunders, the number of cinemas rose from 1,000 to 3,731 between 1910 and 1920, and by the end of the decade Germany boasted more than 5,000 picture houses that were designed to

²⁴² Peter Jevalich, "Modernity, Civic Identity, and Metropolitan Entertainment: Vaudeville, Cabaret, and Revue in Berlin, 1900-1933," *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 96-8.

²⁴³ Many members of the literary elite and intellectuals criticized film as the embodiment of 'trivial' mass culture, primarily because they had a strong investment in different realms of culture: they were afraid of losing customers from the already waning *Bildungsbürgertum* to the cinema. Anton Kaes, ed. *Kinodebatte: Literatur und Film 1909-1929* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1978) 2-3.

²⁴⁴ During the first decade of German cinema, films were primarily shown in *Wanderkinos*. More permanent, however unimposing facilities gained momentum from 1904 onwards and the *Laden-* or *Vorstadtkino* became the most popular locale for screenings. See Miriam Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?," *New German Critique* 29 (Spring/Summer 1982): 162.

cultivate an air of distinction.²⁴⁵ The elegant *Lichtspielhäuser* appeared most notably in Berlin's West End and, designed by the same people who built the film sets at the Ufa studios in Babelsberg near Berlin, their grand architecture and pompous interiors mimicked traditional cultural sites.²⁴⁶ Picture houses such as the *Ufa-*, *Marmor-*, *Tauentzien-* or *Gloria-Palast* seated as many as 2,000 viewers and they had little in common with neighborhood *Kintopps*, which had been offering laughter, tears and excitement for little money in a grungy environment. Admissions rivaled ticket prices for the opera or live theater and like these, the palatial movie houses displayed elegant furnishing, bars, cloakrooms, uniformed ushers and illustrated program notes.²⁴⁷ They also presented films in the context of a program of visual and acoustic effects. Light shows and music turned the movie-going experience into a dazzling extravaganza:

Bei den meisten Filmen war es ja auch üblich, daß vorher eine Bühnenschau lief mit einem großen Orchester. [...] Während man noch erwartungsvoll auf seinen Plätzen saß, ging das Podium hoch mit einer weißen Elektronenorgel. Der Organist [...] spielte schon mal die Melodien aus dem Film.²⁴⁸

Furthermore, magicians or illusionists appeared in programs that were reminiscent of vaudeville revues and heightened and expanded a movie-going

²⁴⁵ Thomas Saunders, Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 23.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, Rolf-Peter Baacke, Lichtspielhausarchitektur in Deutschland: Von der Schaubude zum Kinopalast (Berlin: Frölich & Kaufmann, 1982); or Lothar Binger, Hans Borgelt and Susann Hellemann, eds. Vom Filmpalast zum Kinozentrum Zoo-Palast (Berlin: Zentrum am Zoo Geschäftsbauten AG, 1983).

²⁴⁷ Hans Wollenberg, Fifty Years of German Film (London: Falcon, 1948) 15.

²⁴⁸ Gisela von Wysocki's mother cited in Gisela von Wysocki, Die Fröste der Freiheit (Frankfurt a.M.: Syndikat, 1980) 107.

experience that Siegfried Kracauer, the most prolific and influential contemporary cinema critic, appropriately referred to as a “*Gesamtkunstwerk der Effekte*.”²⁴⁹ Gala premieres, attended by leading government and business personalities as well as celebrities, further lent the cinema respectability and glamor.²⁵⁰ As a result, going to the cinema, regardless of how vacuous the films might have been, was considered an experience that was as respectable as it was spectacular and entertaining.

The bid for cultural respectability coincided with the technological improvement of the medium, which facilitated the production of feature-length films that were frequently based on literary or historical material. Around the same time German banking capital overcame its initial reservations, began to invest in motion pictures, and quickly turned the film business into a multi-million Mark industry. Attracting an increasingly middle-class clientele, especially Berlin’s rapidly growing population provided the audience necessary for the monetary success of costly film productions: film industry’s gross profits already exceeded 150 million Marks annually in the years before the war.²⁵¹ At that time box office hits drew as many as 3.5 million spectators nationwide.²⁵² Yet, it was

²⁴⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Kult der Zerstreung,” 1926, Das Ornament der Masse 312.

²⁵⁰ Saunders, Hollywood in Berlin 33-4.

²⁵¹ Victor Noack, Das Kino: Etwas über sein Wesen und seine Bedeutung (Gautzsch: Felix Dietrich, 1913) 16.

²⁵² “Jeder Film geht durch circa 20 Theater. Durchschnittlich werden international von jedem Film-Negativ 45 Kopien angefertigt und verkauft. Jedes Theater hat durchschnittlich pro Tag 550 Besucher, [...] also pro Woche 3850; wenn also ein Film durch seine 20 Theater gelaufen ist, ist er von 77000 Menschen gesehen worden. Dieselbe Film-Idee ist aber insgesamt 45mal kopiert und der Öffentlichkeit übergeben worden, also ist eine einzige Film-Idee zur Kenntnis von

not until the Weimar Republic when the structure of the labor market shifted in the context of the general process of rationalization and produced an army of white-collar workers, that films started to pull in large crowds every evening and became the most universally accepted form of modern amusement. This applied in particular to the capital Berlin: by the end of the decade there were 39 seats for every thousand Berliners. Estimates of daily attendance vary but according to Weimar contemporary Herbert Jehring “[ging] die Zahl der Menschen, die Filme [sah] in die Millionen.”²⁵³ Film scholar Alexander Jason supplies more numbers: in the late 1920s approximately 340 million patrons visited the cinema annually, which means that on average every German over 18 years of age went to the movies 6.6 times per year.²⁵⁴ In Berlin the numbers were even higher and two-thirds of the 10,000 Berlin teenagers questioned for a survey in 1932 claimed that they went to the movies at least once a week.²⁵⁵

In 1930 six million movie tickets were sold in Berlin every week and working women, who made the fashion of the 1920s a massive commercial success, played a key role in making modern leisure, created for the modern-day

insgesamt 3465000 Menschen gelangt.” A. M., “Der Siegeszug der Kinematographie,” Lichtbild-Bühne 110 (September 1910): 3.

²⁵³ Herbert Jehring, “Ufa und Buster Keaton,” Von Reinhardt bis Brecht: Vier Jahrzehnte Theater und Film, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin (1926; Berlin/DDR: Aufbau, 1959) 509. See also Wilhelm L. Guttsman, Workers Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990) 263.

²⁵⁴ Alexander Jason, Handbuch der Filmwirtschaft (Berlin: Verlag für Presse, Wirtschaft und Politik, 1930) 69.

²⁵⁵ John A. Williams, Turning to Nature in Germany, 1900-1939: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation from the Second Empire to the Third Reich (Manuscript, 2006). See also Alois Funk, Film und Jugend: Eine Untersuchung über die psychischen Wirkungen des Films im Leben der Jugendlichen (München: Reinhardt, 1934) 48.

laborers, fashionable.²⁵⁶ Statistics about the actual composition of the cinematic audience remain estimates. However, the demographics at amusement sites but also Emilie Altenloh's groundbreaking study on female spectatorship from 1914 as well as commentaries on women spectators by prominent figures such as Siegfried Kracauer suggest that women made up a considerable percentage of the regular mass audience.²⁵⁷ Film critic Victor Noack observed that the seats of movie theaters in Berlin always filled up with young commercial employees and sales girls and, judging by the topics of their conversations, these women never missed a new release.²⁵⁸ The comment of a young commercial trainee further attests to the popularity of cinema-going among her peer group: "An einem Sonntag hatte ich nichts vor. Ich ging zu meiner Freundin und fragte sie, wo wir heute hingehen wollten. 'In ein Kino,' sagte sie."²⁵⁹

Film production required large audiences to generate profits and studios like the Ufa would not have produced as many social- and melodramas – traditionally genres favored by women – had they not at least recouped their investment. As Shelley Stamp's analysis of pre-war cinema in America shows, cinema's dependency on a mass audience led distributors and theater operators to recognize that women make valuable patrons; and not only because middle-

²⁵⁶ Peukert, The Weimar Republic 175.

²⁵⁷ Altenloh, Zur Soziologie des Kinos; Kracauer, "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehn ins Kino" 279-294; Siegfried Kracauer, "Film 1928," 1927, Ornament der Masse 295-310; and Siegfried Kracauer, "Mädchen im Beruf," Der Querschnitt 12.4 (April 1932): 238-43.

²⁵⁸ Noack, Das Kino 8.

²⁵⁹ Interviewee cited in Erna Barschak, Die Schülerin der Berufsschule und ihre Umwelt (Berlin: Herbig, 1926) 22.

class women helped the industry to “shed its association with tawdry, lowbrow amusement.”²⁶⁰ The same dynamics drove the German film market during the 1920s. According to Weimar contemporary Viktor Mataja, market researchers quickly identified that modern women toured the city in search for diversion and advised the operators of *Lichtspielhäuser* on luring female audiences on their premises.²⁶¹ Similarly, the film industry responded to the central role played by women consumers and, keen to exploit this profitable segment of the market, it courted women and in particular the white-collar residents of Berlin by supplying them with stories that met their interests.

Women were seized by a veritable passion for film and integrated visits to the cinema into their patterns of consumption. A key reason for the cinema becoming a recreational preference of women was, as Emilie Altenloh established, that it granted them, who had never been perceived as an audience, a place where they could spend their free time.²⁶² Siegfried Kracauer also pointed out, that the employees of Berlin visited the *Vergnügungslokale* and cinemas that sprung up on and around *Kurfürstendamm* because they constituted a public sphere in its own right where they could feel at home. Physically disconnected from more traditional lifestyles or “Herkunft und Scholle” Weimar Germany’s new middle-class frequented these establishments because

²⁶⁰ Shelley Stamp, Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) 6.

²⁶¹ Viktor Mataja, Die Reklame: Eine Untersuchung über Ankündigungswesen und Werbetätigkeit im Geschäftsleben, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1926) 322-31.

²⁶² Altenloh, Zur Soziologie des Kinos 55.

it lacked faith in traditional cultural values.²⁶³ They did not subscribe to a particular ideology – whether proletarian or the bourgeois humanistic value system, which had lost validity with the collapse of Imperial Germany anyhow – and they lacked an intellectual or spiritual home:

Die Masse der Angestellten unterscheidet sich vom Arbeiter-Proletariat darin, daß sie geistig obdachlos ist. Zu den Genossen kann sie vorläufig nicht hinfinden, und das Haus der bürgerlichen Begriffe und Gefühle, das sie bewohnt hat, ist eingestürzt, weil ihm durch die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung die Fundamente entzogen worden sind.²⁶⁴

The cinema was thus not only a physical space female white-collar workers could visit in their pastime; it also constituted a site where they could ease their sense of displacement. Patrice Petro shows in her seminal study Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Cinema that women read or rather looked at the images in fashion and lifestyle magazines to derive ideas about their selves and modern life.²⁶⁵ Cinema functioned in much the same way: the full-length feature films of the 1920s addressed aspects relevant to women's lives, such as working in the office, the latest fashion or leisure all within one narrative. In addition to giving culture, as Bela Balázs, one of the leading film critics of the day, remarked, "eine neue Wendung zum Visuellen" cinema combined economic, social and cultural aspects pertaining to women's lives and

²⁶³ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 15.

²⁶⁴ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 91.

²⁶⁵ Critics like Siegfried Kracauer, who melted trends in the film market with social tendencies and politics, claimed it deals by and large with Oedipal rivalries and the unsuccessful challenge to patriarchal authority. Patrice Petro showed that Weimar cinema was not reserved for male spectators but also offered female spectators avenues for identification. Petro, Joyless Streets, esp. Chapter Three. See also Patrice Petro, "Perceptions of Difference," Women in the Metropolis 41-66; and Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler.

allowed them to use the medium as a source of inspiration.²⁶⁶ As Carl Dreyfuß emphasized, at a time when society experienced great instability cinema became an important instrument in the formation of the public's opinion.²⁶⁷ More specifically, the glamorous medium film offered commercial employees what Sabine Hake calls a "forum for their explorations of new identities and desires."²⁶⁸

This applied in particular to films about the figure of the female white-collar worker. Filmmakers were mindful of their audiences and according to Ute Frevert this explains why the talkies "latched on to the figure of the secretary."²⁶⁹ Frequently considered the embodiment of modern woman, she presented the ideal star for films that were supposed to attract paying female customers. This explains why films about commercially employed women and especially working-girl comedies flourished in the wake of the Weimar Republic's last economic crisis.²⁷⁰ The genre was imported to Germany from the United States where every well-known actress under the age of twenty-five, most notably Colleen

²⁶⁶ Bela Balázs, Der sichtbare Mensch (Halle: Knapp, 1924) 23.

²⁶⁷ Carl Dreyfuß, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage des Films," Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus 1/2 (1933): 91.

²⁶⁸ Hake, "Girls and Crisis" 158.

²⁶⁹ Frevert, Women in German History 182.

²⁷⁰ German films that starred attractive and successful salesgirls were popular as well. The comedy Delikatessen (1930) is one example of a movie featuring a sexy and savvy female sales assistant. The plot adheres to the pattern of the working-girl comedy and has few surprises in store. A young woman meets a nice delivery boy, who actually is the owner's son, and during an extravagant and costly night out they fall in love. Next, a passionate rivalry ensues between the two but after quarreling sufficiently they declare their love for each other and get married. Delikatessen, dir. Géza von Bolváry, perf. Harry Liedtke, Georgie Lind, Ernő Verebes and Gustl Gstettenbaur (Germany: Deutsches Lichtspiel-Syndikat, 1930).

Moore and Clara Bow, had offered her version of a stenographer or salesgirl.²⁷¹ Since Hollywood cinema was the single strongest influence on German film after 1924 and vast numbers of American films made their way into Berlin's movie theaters, it is worthwhile to mention Ella Cinders (1926) and It (1927), which were two of the greatest American box-office successes of the genre: It, for example, grossed more than \$1,000,000.²⁷² Like most of the films coming out of Hollywood these films are light-hearted, and especially the star vehicle Ella Cinders exemplifies how the American film industry transformed the female white-collar worker into a glamorous and escapist fantasy. As the title could not state more obviously, the film is a modern Cinderella story. Colleen Moore, the quintessential flapper and screen stenotypist at the time, plays a working-girl that enters a competition to star in a film and becomes a successful actress in due course. However, unfulfilled by her professional accomplishments she gives up her career to marry her boyfriend, whom she believed to be penniless but who turns out to be a millionaire's son in disguise. Similarly, Clara Bow, who gave depth and breadth to the screen image of the lower-class flapper, played a salesgirl in It who abandons her job in favor of marriage. As a bored lingerie salesgirl with a penchant for the city's nightlife she attracts the handsome owner

²⁷¹ For a discussion of the New Woman or Flapper as the figure was called in the United States, see, for example, Cally Blackman, The 20s and 30s: Flappers and Vamps (Milwaukee, WI: Gareth Stevens, 2000); or Joshua Zeitz, Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern (New York: Crown, 2006).

²⁷² Ella Cinders, dir. Alfred E. Green, perf. Colleen Moore, Lloyd Hughes, Vera Lewis and Doris Baker (United States: John McCormick Productions, 1926); and It, dir. Clarence G. Badger, perf. Clara Bow, Antonio Moreno, William Austin and Priscilla Bonner (United States: Paramount Pictures, 1927).

of the department store and after some commotion he realizes that despite her modern lifestyle she has a good heart, and proposes to her.²⁷³

The German mainstream film industry was keen on profiting from the popularity of Hollywood films, and studios like the Ufa began to produce their own romantic working-girl comedies.²⁷⁴ The Babelsberg versions of the female white-collar worker typically resemble the American ones in that they present young and pretty women, who sport the look of the New Woman. In terms of the plot, German mainstream films are also modeled on Hollywood productions and essentially fall into two categories. Both types of films feature women who attract the attention of their employer or another rich man. The 'heroines' belonging to the first category typically comply with the glamorous image of the New Woman and wholeheartedly embrace the modern urban lifestyle. These girls seem to take dictation for the fun of it and with plenty of time and energy on their hands to groom themselves, they always look glamorous and fresh when going out in the evening. At cafés and nightclubs they rub elbows with men and in the end, not least because the cinematic world is one without class contrasts, even the lowest ranking employee gets her hands on a respectable, well-to-do man. The

²⁷³ Hollywood superstars Gloria Swanson and Louise Brooks also starred in working-girl comedies. In *Stage Struck* (1924) Gloria Swanson slings hash in a beanery but takes an acting class because she finds actresses so irresistible. In *Manhandled* (1924) Swanson then plays a department store salesgirl, who has a fling with a wealthy man but returns to her first boyfriend, a poor inventor who made a million in her absence. Similarly, Louise Brooks works in a drugstore as a salesgirl in *It's the Old Army Game* (1926). *Stage Struck*, dir. Allan Dwan, perf. Gloria Swanson, Lawrence Gray, Gertrude Astor and Oliver Sandys (United States: Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, 1924); *Manhandled*, dir. Allan Dawson, perf. Gloria Swanson, Tom Moore, Lilyan Tashman and Ian Keith (United States: Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, 1924); and *It's the Old Army Game*, dir. A. Edward Sutherland, perf. Louise Brooks, W.C. Fields, Blanche Ring and William Gaxton (United States: Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, 1926).

²⁷⁴ Altenloh, *Soziologie des Kinos* 198-203.

'heroines' of the second category differ from this type of woman in that they stand out less because they indulge in leisure and fashion but because they are highly committed to their work. Company owners respond positively to their model employees and the unusual zeal, strong sense of duty and the exceptional loyalty of this kind of woman are rewarded. In the end, marriage to the employer or a millionaire in disguise crowns the career of this Hollywood-style female white-collar worker as well. Each of the two types of romantic comedies proposes a different way to obtain the same goal, namely social advancement through marriage. According to film scholar Lary May, more than 85% of the period's working-girl movies culminated in marital bliss.²⁷⁵

German mainstream cinema had a choice of how to represent the figure: it could portray it either in a realistic manner or it could create a Hollywood-style fantasy and "zauber das Angenehme und Gute, was alle Menschen sich wünschen, herbei."²⁷⁶ As established, the film industry was highly dependent on paying mass audiences and therefore, somewhat in contrast to high art forms, films were designed to satisfy spectators' expectations and tastes. As a stenographer interviewed by Siegfried Kracauer revealed, young women were drawn to Berlin's grand *Pläsiertkasernen* and *Amüsierbetriebe* precisely because they projected glamor and allowed them to temporarily escape reality.²⁷⁷ The same applied to film, and mainstream cinema responded to this preference by

²⁷⁵ Lary May, Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry (New York: Oxford UP, 1980) 219.

²⁷⁶ Rudolf Arnheim, "Psychologie des Konfektionsfilms," Die Weltbühne 27 (1931): 711.

²⁷⁷ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 92.

choosing fantasy or, to cite pre-war film critic Hans Schliepmann, “das Kino, das die Menge verdient [weil] diese ‘verdient’.”²⁷⁸ This explains why the German film industry favored “Glanz” and “Zerstreuung” rather than “Gehalt” or “Sammlung.”²⁷⁹ The working-girl comedies of the late Weimar Republic integrated some social and cultural aspects of the female white-collar workers’ existence but ultimately mainstream cinema presented her and her working and living conditions as a glamorized and apolitical dream. As a result, German secretary films frequently distorted realities and instead celebrated the possibility of social mobility – not to be confused with occupational promotion – by coming to a happy ending. Modeled on Hollywood types, films such as Die Privatsekretärin or Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus are strongly pleasure-driven and can be referred to as classical Hollywood cinema. Central to this style, as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson explain, is the emphasis on narrative as opposed to form and the assumption that all action in the narrative springs from causal agents.²⁸⁰ Though individual characters face opposition, these kinds of films ignore both society and the economy as influencing factors and it is due to the main character’s personal strength as well as her determination that she overcomes any conflict and succeeds in achieving her goal.

²⁷⁸ Hans Schliepmann, Lichtspieltheater: Eine Sammlung ausgeführter Kinohäuser in Groß-Berlin (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1914) 4.

²⁷⁹ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 91.

²⁸⁰ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997) 108.

If mainstream cinema merely provided relaxation and distraction, and presented misleading images and scenarios, how did it assist female white-collar workers in the process of identity formation? Critics like Siegfried Kracauer had initially welcomed the decision of the culture industry to cater specifically to the marginalized group of urban employees. For one because he had hoped that the decline of high culture, at least its function as a dominating model, and its substitution by a populist culture, whose audience “vom Bankdirektor bis zum Handlungsgehilfen, von der Diva bis zur Stenotypistin *eines* Sinnes ist,” would bring an end to the complex set of repressive socio-cultural anachronisms.²⁸¹ Moreover, he recognized cinema’s revolutionary potential: its capacity to expose socio-political realities. Yet, mainstream cinema and in particular films such as Die Privatsekretärin and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus lacked criticism, a central element of Western European high culture. As a result, if we believe Kracauer, audiences were blinded and the status quo was re-affirmed:

Außer ihrem eigentlichen Zweck erhalten [Filme und Filmveranstaltungen] noch den anderen, die Angestellten an den der Oberschicht erwünschten Ort zu bannen und sie von kritischen Fragen abzulenken. [...] Was die gegenwärtige Filmproduktion betrifft, [rechtfertigen] nahezu sämtliche von der Industrie gelieferten Erzeugnisse das Bestehende [und betäuben] die Menge durch den Similiglanz der gesellschaftlichen Scheinhöhe.²⁸²

To assume that light-fare entertainment was part of a conspiracy to systematically manipulate the audience seems a bit one-dimensional today.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Kracauer, “Der Kult der Zerstreuung” 313.

²⁸² Kracauer, Die Angestellten 98-9.

²⁸³ In addition, the left-wing film activities sponsored by Münzenberg’s *Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe*, most notably the production company Prometheus and the distributor Weltfilm, challenge

Nevertheless, as Martin Osterland argues, cinema may well have contributed to preserving the social order, which included the promotion of consumer capitalism.²⁸⁴

While Kracauer's disappointment is valid he overlooked that films had always been a medium whose primary concern was to entertain rather than educate the audience. Though the film industry began to mimic bourgeois culture by building fancy picture houses it never concealed its *Genuß-* and *Gebrauchscharakter*. Mainstream cinema never attempted to compete with bourgeois high art in terms of its mission and for that reason remained true to the light-fare style of the early variety-like programs. And, as Kracauer himself pointed out, movie-goers had always visited the cinema precisely because they sought pleasures that allowed them to temporarily escape everyday life:

Je mehr die Monotonie den Werktag beherrscht, desto mehr muß der Feierabend [sich] aus seiner Nähe entfernen. [...] Der genaue Gegenschlag gegen die Büromaschine aber ist die farbenprächtige Welt. Nicht die Welt, wie sie ist, sondern wie sie in den Schlagern erscheint.²⁸⁵

the thesis of a one-dimensional political nature of Weimar films. The substantial amount of research, especially by GDR scholars, on proletarian film further weakens this claim. See, for example, Toni Stoos, "Erobert den Film! oder Prometheus gegen Ufa & Co," Erobert den Film! Proletariat und Film in der Weimarer Republik: Materialien zur Filmgeschichte (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek e.V., 1977) 482-525; Gertraude Kühn, Karl Tümmler and Walter Wimmer, eds., Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1918-1932, 2 vols. (Berlin/DDR: Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen der DDR, 1975); or David Welch, "The Proletarian Cinema and the Weimar Republic," Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television 1.1 (1981): 3-18.

²⁸⁴ "Indem der Film reproduziert, was ist, kann er dazu beitragen, daß die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse – und mit ihm seine Konsumenten – so bleiben, wie sie sind." Martin Osterland, Gesellschaftsbilder in Filmen: Eine soziologische Untersuchung des Filmangebots der Jahre 1949 bis 1964 (Stuttgart: Enke, 1970) 216.

²⁸⁵ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 97.

The desire to forget the experience of the everyday grew ever larger as the republic and the economy became increasingly instable: “Warum die Leute so viel in Lokale gehen? [...] Doch wohl deshalb, weil es zu Hause elend ist und sie am Glanz teilhaben wollen.”²⁸⁶ After eight to nine hours of rationalized and impersonal office work, a long and straining day of typing at the desk, few were able to absorb intellectually demanding or critical information. Consequently, any interest in education – in the sense of the German concept of *Bildung* – let alone the desire to engage in political activities was stifled among most, “nicht von Natur aus, eher durch das Leben, das die Gesellschaft sie zu führen zwingt.”²⁸⁷

This does not mean, however, that the movie-going experience was entirely passive because female spectators used it to explore their desires and a more modern gender role, which means that they engaged actively with films and read them critically. According to Kracauer the young, urban white-collar workers were particularly attracted to the reassuring images of formulaic, from-rags-to-riches movies and their promise of wealth and happiness. He claimed that commercial employees concluded from watching a typical romantic office comedy

daß ihr glänzender Chef auch inwendig aus Gold ist [...] und wenn die kleinen Ladenmädchen heute abend von einem

²⁸⁶ Cited in Kracauer, Die Angestellten 91. See also the section ‘Apologie der Schaulust’ in Kaes, Kinodebatte 37-53.

²⁸⁷ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Der Ersatz für die Träume,” Das Tagebuch 2 (1921): 683-7, rpt. in Kaes, Kinodebatte 149.

fremden Herrn angesprochen werden, halten sie ihn für einen der berühmten Millionäre aus der Illustrierten.²⁸⁸

As implied by the essay's underlying sexism, Kracauer denied women spectators any critical abilities and believed they could be easily transformed into "gefügige[s] Werkzeug" of consumer society.²⁸⁹ Kracauer was not the only critic discussing the emerging film culture who condescendingly spoke of women's lack of good or educated taste. Max Rössiger, who also welcomed Berlin's *Angestelltenkultur* because he questioned whether the upper classes were culturally more refined than white-collar workers and sensed modern Germany's need for a new culture, was among the many male critics who doubted the critical abilities of female spectators.²⁹⁰ According to Rössiger, viewers were unaware of entertainment's stultifying quality and did not notice how socio-economic conditions were manipulated. However, scholars such as Andreas Huyssen have pointed out that the association of woman with a 'mindless' consumerist popular culture was not coincidental but "a structural necessity."²⁹¹ The cinema was a medium that elicited anxieties among the male intellectual and cultural elite because it seemed to threaten bourgeois, patriarchal order and since it could not be banned it was pejoratively defined as 'feminine' or 'Other' in

²⁸⁸ The essay from 1927 was originally titled "Film und Gesellschaft" but Kracauer changed it in 1963 because he felt the title had become too much of a cliché by then. Kracauer, "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehn ins Kino" 289-91.

²⁸⁹ Kracauer, "Mädchen im Beruf" 238.

²⁹⁰ Rössiger, Der Angestellte von 1930 65-8.

²⁹¹ Huyssen, After the Great Divide 44-62.

order to maintain the centrality of ‘masculine’ high culture.²⁹² More specifically, Sabine Hake demonstrates that aligning women with popular cinema had the convenient effect that the progressive or critical potential of the cinema remained reserved for men.²⁹³

In order to challenge modernist critics like Kracauer it is essential to analyze working-girl comedies from the late Weimar period, demonstrate how mainstream cinema represented the female white-collar worker, and explore the effect of the figure’s fictional treatment on women spectators. Prior to discussing the motion pictures Die Privatsekretärin and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus I will briefly elaborate on why I choose these films. Both films are ‘secretary flicks’ that feature working-girls who eventually marry their employer: Die Privatsekretärin focuses more on the female white-collar worker as a consumer and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus creates an image of a diligent professional.²⁹⁴ Their relevance for

²⁹² Significantly, the lack of respect for women spectators resembled the antagonism female white-collar workers were met with by their male colleagues.

²⁹³ Hake, “Girls and Crisis” 158.

²⁹⁴ Numerous Ufa-style films stuck to the same formula: the professional career of the female heroine culminates in marriage after she successfully overcomes obstacles and the true identity of her lover is revealed. The plot of Ein bisschen Liebe für Dich (1932), for example, comes to this conclusion: the intelligent and competent private secretary of a car sales representative walks down the aisle with an American car manufacturer, who comes to inspect her boss’ showroom. Similarly, films featuring male white-collar workers were also popular – and similarly formulaic. Der brave Sünder (1932), for example, features a hard-working and honest bookkeeper who is promoted to the position of manager after his predecessor made off with the funds. Like their female counterparts, male employees are rewarded for their efforts at the end of the film, however, never for their good looks. Instead, they are allowed to marry the daughter of their boss because they demonstrated great skill. It is implied that unlike female white-collar workers they will continue working, making their success personal as well as professional. The young men get the girl they love and they are able to secure a good position in her father’s company. In Die Drei von der Tankstelle (1930), for example, a young man from a wealthy family who pretends to be impoverished is determined to earn his own living. He becomes the manager of a large corporation with the help of a young woman, who is his employer’s daughter and whom he marries in the end. Similarly, the main character of Ein Mann mit Herz (1932) averts a great loss for the bank he works for and may marry the girl he loves. She, a plain stenographer has

this discussion is, however, not merely grounded in their exemplary plots but also their “tremendous popularity.”²⁹⁵ The sheer number of working-girl films flooding German cinemas from the mid-twenties onwards proves the general popularity of the genre and, if we believe critics like Carl Dreyfuß, white-collar workers received them especially “begeistert.”²⁹⁶ However, few other working-girl comedies were received as enthusiastically and did as well at the box office. Both films, according to Dreyfuß, were seen by record audiences. In light of the fact that at the time of their release, just three years after the stock market crash in 1929, the majority of white-collar workers was forced to live on a very tight budget and going to the cinema constituted a considerable expense for them, people must have enjoyed them tremendously if they went to see them, as Dreyfuß claimed, several times.²⁹⁷ The films did not only strike a cord with audiences but they also attracted the attention of contemporary critics. Even traditional newspapers such as the organ of the *Verband der weiblichen*

concealed her true identity because she has long since been in love with him and he only learns towards the end that she is the daughter of the company president. In perpetuating existing gender structures, mainstream films about male white-collar workers thus reflect the anti-modern and anti-emancipatory forces that were inherent in Weimar society. Ein bisschen Liebe für Dich, dir. Max Neufeld, perf. Hermann Thimig, Lee Parry, Magda Schneider and Rosi Barsony (Germany: Herman Millakowsky Film GmbH, 1932); Der brave Sünder, dir. Fritz Kortner, perf. Heinz Rühmann, Max Pallenberg, Dolly Haas and Josefina Dora (Germany: Allianz Tonfilm, 1931); Die Drei von der Tankstelle, dir. Wilhelm Thiele, perf. Lilian Harvey, Willy Fritsch, Heinz Rühmann and Oskar Karlweis, (Germany: Ufa, 1930); and Ein Mann mit Herz, dir. Géza von Bolváry, perf. Gustav Fröhlich, Ali Ghito, Paul Kemp and Maria Matray (Germany: Super-Film GmbH, 1932).

²⁹⁵ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 213.

²⁹⁶ Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 243.

²⁹⁷ “Mir [wurde] immer wieder bestätigt, daß sie diese Filme, [...] genau kennen, sie mit großer Begeisterung aufgenommen und zum Teil mehrmals angesehen haben.” Quoted in Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 250.

Handels- und Büroangestellten dedicated an article to Die Privatsekretärin.

Elisabeth von Klopmann reviewed it very favorably and, even though she dismissed parts of it as nonsense, she nevertheless recommended it highly to readers precisely on account of the film's ideological value:

In dem Tonfilm Die Privatsekretärin, der vor einiger Zeit auch das kleinste Kino beglückte und der durch seine Kitschigkeit nicht dazu angetan war, für das Niveau der weiblichen Angestellten zu werben, hat mir doch das eine gut gefallen: das frisch-fröhliche Draufgängertum der 'Heldin' bei ihrer Stellensuche und ihre Ueberzeugung, daß sie bestimmt etwas erreichen würde.²⁹⁸

Precisely the popularity of Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus and especially Die Privatsekretärin, combined with the way in which they represent the working and living conditions of female white-collar workers, make them key representatives of the entire genre.

Die Privatsekretärin: "Ich möchte sehr viel erreichen, jeder Mensch hat sein Ziel."

The romantic comedy Die Privatsekretärin (1931) represents the climax of the popular trend.²⁹⁹ Typical of the genre, the plot is straightforward and a modern Cinderella story. A bubbly and attractive girl, Vilma Förster, from a small town manages to get a modest position in a bank in Berlin. While working

²⁹⁸ Elisabeth von Klopmann, "Arbeitslos," Die Handels- und Büroangestellte 38.4 (1932): 48.

²⁹⁹ Die Privatsekretärin, dir. Wilhelm Thiele, perf. Renate Müller, Hermann Thimig, Felix Bressart and Ludwig Stössel (Germany: Ufa, 1931).

overtime one evening her boss approaches her but she believes him to be a co-worker. They spend the evening out together and, as Siegfried Kracauer put it, the “predictable result is her promotion to the position of the banker’s wife.”³⁰⁰

The film incorporates elements considered typical for this generation of new, modern women, thereby creating a recognizable atmosphere for the audience. Vilma works in an office and participates in the city’s leisure culture. However, the film neither uses these characteristics to lay out a vision of emancipation for women nor does it offer suggestions of how female commercial employees might deal with the problems or restrictions that had become apparent by the film’s release date. Instead, as my analysis will show, it emphasizes luck over self-determination and creates a fantasy as well as an image of the female white-collar worker that serves to promote materialistic attitudes coupled with more traditional gender roles: altogether a source of inspiration that proved challenging for women under great social scrutiny and extreme economic pressure.

The problematic nature of the film is evident from the very beginning. It is plausible that Vilma comes to the city from the country looking for work, but in light of the economic crisis it is somewhat unrealistic that she should find a position in a large bank this quickly. Even less likely is Vilma’s experience of her work. She has the stamina to always type fast as well as accurately and, despite the fact that, as mentioned in Chapter One, low-level employees were habitually coerced to work extra hours without being compensated for their efforts, she is content to work over-time. The cinematic representation of the working

³⁰⁰ Kracauer devotes an entire paragraph to the film in Caligari to Hitler 213.

environment also bears little resemblance to the large typing pools where most female clerks actually worked.³⁰¹ It was not uncommon for up to eighty people to be arranged in a single small room and the noise produced by this many typists hammering away on machines from morning to night was as deafening as it was nerve-racking.³⁰² Bearing in mind the stress triggered by the working conditions and the physical fatigue caused by the repetitive activity, the ease with which Vilma performs her job is preposterous. More importantly, it gives the impression, Siegfried Kracauer observed, as if “vergnügte junge Privatsekretärinnen oder Stenotypistinnen [...] eigentlich nur zum Spaß Diktate aufnehmen und ein wenig tippen.”³⁰³ Similarly, the relaxed, upbeat mood in the fictional typing room and the consistently light-hearted demeanor of employees conveys the subliminal message that offices were places where people always interacted with each other in a friendly way and happily spent their days. There is also no reference to the rigid control systems, referred to by Hendrik de Man, that made interaction between employees difficult, and the supervisors that followed workers even to the lavatory or the locker room, the only places where they could find a minute of respite.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ The same applies to the representation of Vilma’s living quarters. She is the tenant of a small yet altogether nice room, which positions her as a modern, independent woman. However, as it will be remembered, only a minority of women could afford to live by themselves and most stayed with family or relatives.

³⁰² Cited in Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 23.

³⁰³ Kracauer, “Mädchen im Beruf” 239.

³⁰⁴ Hendrik de Man, Der Kampf um die Arbeitsfreude: Eine Untersuchung auf Grund der Aussagen von 78 Industriearbeitern und Angestellten (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1927) 29.

Vilma's attitude stresses the absurdity of the fictional working environment most: at various points in the film she joyfully sings in tune with the rhythm of her typewriter. Inspired by her newfound love, she types to the beat of the music, as if she were playing the piano, and her ecstatic mood finds its expression in the film's theme song "Ich bin ja heut' so glücklich." In terms of editing, it makes perfect sense to link the typist to the machine via music as it provides a smooth transition from dialogue to song. Given that talkies had arrived in Germany only recently, the technique granted spectators an effortless viewing experience. However, the ease as well as Vilma's delight obscure the fact that mass-scale rationalization and office mechanization had turned women into mere extensions of machinery. As an anecdote cited by Siegfried Kracauer suggests, music was not only used by cunning teachers at commercial schools to teach their students how to type but students' preference for particular rhythms were exploited to manipulate them into typing as fast as possible.

Der schlaue Lehrer kurbelt ein Grammophon an, nach dessen Klängen die Schülerinnen tippen müssen. Wenn lustige Militärmärsche ertönen, marschierst du noch einmal so leicht. Allmählich wird die Umlaufgeschwindigkeit der Platte erhöht, und ohne daß die Mädchen es recht merken, klappern sie immer rascher [und werden] zu Schnellschreiberinnen.³⁰⁵

In light of the pressure female typists were subject to it was unlikely that they broke into songs while at work or even, as a certain Dr. Bode argued, daydreamed.³⁰⁶ As it will be remembered, many commercial employees did not

³⁰⁵ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 30.

³⁰⁶ Given the high rate of unemployment during the final years of the Weimar Republic the laconic advice for women by Dr. Bode, who prefers to be addressed by his title rather than his full name, to seek another job if they feel dissatisfied seems nothing less than cynical. Dr. Bode, "Der Beruf

take pleasure in something as trivial and mechanical as copying letters all day long. By presenting the working environment of typists in a flattering manner and by playing down the strenuous and dull nature of their work, Die Privatsekretärin creates an image that makes office work seem more attractive than it actually was.

Featuring the star Renate Müller in the lead role further had the effect that a considerable amount of glamor and allure was attached to the figure.³⁰⁷ Actresses like Müller, Thomas Harris shows, were turned into celebrities by the Hollywood-inspired star system that used the media to fabricate off-screen personalities for actresses and paid them to lead opulent life-styles.³⁰⁸ The artificially created persona of stars then deliberately permeated all their film roles. Consequently, Renate Müller was not simply an actress playing the character Vilma Förster but her star persona also served as a vehicle to promote a glamorous image of the female white-collar worker and her profession as such. Always full of energy and warmth she conquers any difficulties and, by solving the problems of the current day, her character literally becomes a star and provides spectators with a model of success. Clearly, the screen persona and the fictional office influenced the public's perception: seeing a highly attractive

der Stenotypistin," Jahrbuch der Frauenarbeit, ed. Josef Silbermann, vol. 6 (Berlin: Verband der weiblichen Handels- und Büroangestellten e.V., 1930) 74.

³⁰⁷ Renate Müller was one of the great beauties of her day, who frequently played natural, self-confident women. Together with Marlene Dietrich she "impersonated a new type in German cinema" and was considered the embodiment of fashionable Weimar Berlin by many. Renate Müller, ed. Thomas Staedeli, 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.cyranos.ch/smmuel-e.htm>>. See also Aros (d.i. Alfred Rosenthal), Renate Müller: Ihr Werden und Wirken (Berlin: Scherl, 1932).

³⁰⁸ Thomas Harris, "The Building of Popular Images," Stardom: Industry of Desire, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991) 40-4.

secretary in a pleasant work environment may well have inspired girls, who falsely assumed a subliminal relationship between the two, to decide on a white-collar career.

Though the film ignores work-related problems of commercial employees, it ironically and inadvertently taps into actual concerns for this social group, namely that working women had slim chances of creating an enduring and viable financial existence for themselves. However, rather than exploring the reasons for this, the film displaces the conflict away from the professional sphere into the personal realm. Employing the narrative device of mistaken identity, a standard in comedies, the conflict is shifted away from the social reality of young employees and draws the spectator's attention to the romantic intrigue between Vilma and bank director Arvai instead. After their first evening together it is obvious that a romance is budding. However, in the car on the way home Vilma makes it very clear to the presumably ordinary clerk that she is not interested in a romantic relationship with him because she wants to marry someone with greater social prestige and especially a more substantial checkbook: "Ich möchte sehr viel erreichen, jeder Mensch hat sein Ziel." Her sober remark communicates the desire to be provided for and this suggests that in spite of everything her job is not as much fun as it appears. Implied is further the understanding that Vilma will not bring about the fulfillment of her strong desire herself: she will never earn enough money to afford a decent, much less so an extravagant life-style herself and she wants 'out.' It is not explicitly stated whether she sees the problem in her

job or in the existing social structures or not. Regardless, she is determined to wait for a suitable candidate to marry because she believes a wealthy man will make her dream of a better, financially more stable life come true.

It is typical for this kind of secretary films that Vilma's ambitions and the implied possibility of upward social mobility should be fulfilled. As demonstrated by Renate Müller, the on-screen female white-collar worker typically appeared young and attractive but her professional qualities varied. Vilma is a decent typist and displays an admirable work ethic but she does not stand out from the crowd of employees because she is brilliant or, another well-liked narrative device in the genre, she averts disaster or negotiates a superb deal. Recalling the rudimentary education and poor vocational training of most female white-collar workers, Vilma cannot draw her employer's attention as a result of professional accomplishments. Instead, to use Ernst Bloch's words, her "gepflegtes Äußere[s]" must compensate for "einiges," if not everything, and Arvai takes to Vilma because she is physically attractive.³⁰⁹ By subliminally stressing the importance of appearance the film reinforces the discrimination of women in the office. It encourages the practice to hire women based on their looks rather than their skills, and signals to women that success on the labor market depends on external qualities, which made them all the more susceptible to the promises attached to consumer goods.

³⁰⁹ Ernst Bloch, "Der glänzende Filmmensch," *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935; Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992) 35-6. Kracauer stressed the importance of physical attractiveness as well: "Freilich, hübsch muß man sein." Kracauer, "Film 1928" 298.

As Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen as well as Douglas Gomery demonstrate, the link between spectatorship and consumer activities was established early on in the United States.³¹⁰ The same applied to Germany: alluring images were linked to the emerging consumerism, the modern way of life, and as such played a key role in the genesis of Weimar popular imagination. Film scholar Miriam Hansen points out that one of the first pictures ever to be shown in Germany incorporated an advertisement.³¹¹ Subsequently, the cinema brought audiences up to date on fashions, brands and sentiments, and like magazines it contributed to linking them to the emerging culture of consumption. Aware of this relationship Berlin department stores, for example, which, according to historian Hans Traub, were an undisputable favorite among women consumers, began to use the new medium for advertising purposes and the site for promotional activities.³¹² The most potent instruments to promote consumption were, of course, the stars themselves. Elegant and glamorous stars like Colleen Moore or Renate Müller eclipsed the sentimental heroine of the pre-war years (most notably Hollywood actress Mary Pickford) and changed notions of cinematic womanhood as well as

³¹⁰ Ewen and Ewen, Channels of Desire, especially Chapter Three, "City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies" 54-73. See also Douglas Gomery, "The Movies Become Big Business: Publix Theaters and the Chain Story Strategy," Cinema Journal 18.2 (Spring 1979): 26-40.

³¹¹ Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema" 176.

³¹² Hans Traub, Die Ufa: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des deutschen Filmschaffens (Berlin: Ufa Buchverlag, 1942) 156 cited in Friedrich von Zglinicki, Der Weg des Films: Die Geschichte der Kinematographie und ihrer Vorläufer (Berlin: Rembrandt, 1956) 325.

real-life femininity in profound ways.³¹³ Keen to look like their favorite stars, women also bought the products the consumer industries attached to stars like Moore and Müller. Capitalizing on an actress' popularity, her radiant eyes and immaculate complexion, her bright teeth as well as her shining hair were used to promote beauty products, toothpaste and hair products. Colleen Moore, for example, even had her own perfume and soap line that promised female users her beauty and allure.³¹⁴

In order to boost women's role as consumers, German screen secretaries like Vilma, regardless of her modest incomes and exhausting workdays, were glamorous. In addition to being young, pretty and full of energy she is always dressed fashionably. On any given workday Vilma dresses like a textbook New Woman. For example, she might wear a knee-length skirt whose good fit shows off her figure and a simple black sweater with a white, feminine collar. A little hat completes the outfit and gives it a smart as well as playful quality. Her dress is simple yet stylish, and therefore suitable for the office, and her entire look does not seem to set her apart from her real-life colleagues. However, the perfect cut of her clothes suggests that they are not cheap department store garments; their quality is superior and either they are expensive ready-to-wear pieces – resembling those featured in up-market style bibles such as Die Dame and Elegante Welt – or custom-made. Vilma's dress might serve as an inspiration for

³¹³ Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s," Wide Angle 13.1 (1991): 9-10; and Renate Seydel, "Stars der Zwanziger," Neue Frauen 149.

³¹⁴ The New New York Woman (New York: Museum of the City of New York, 2003).

female spectators, but, due to the budget constraints mentioned in Chapter One, high-quality and expensive pieces of clothing remained an unfulfilled fantasy for most women. The star's immaculate hairdo and makeup demonstrate the average female white-collar worker's lack in a similar way. Renate Müller's makeup reflects the increased acceptance and availability of cosmetics, as well as the possibility for women to use mascara or lipstick to explore a more modern femininity. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, beauty products became a professional necessity for women in white-collar positions: in order for them to remain viable candidates on the labor and marriage market they *had* to use them. The pristine and youthful complexion of Renate Müller inspired overtired female spectators to spend money on cosmetics but at the same time it instilled them with a sense of failure because, in contrast to their filmic counterpart, they were unable to comply with the ideal popularized by the media and consumer industries.

If the majority of women in the audience were unable to afford the goods and looks displayed in films, should mainstream cinema offer spectators glamor beyond their means? Many people in the German but also American film industry claimed that audiences wanted to see stars in silver fox stoles and satin negligees no matter what role they played. According to contemporary American film critic Joseph Mankiewicz, for example, secretaries and typists preferred to see the star dressed in extravagant gowns they wished they could wear themselves.³¹⁵ The images allowed women to fantasize about their own identity.

³¹⁵ Joseph Mankiewicz cited in Charlotte Cornelia Herzog and Jane Marie Gaines, "Puffed Sleeves Before Tea-Time": Joan Crawford, Adrian and Women Audiences," Stardom 86.

Yet consumption led to the objectification of women, and their efforts for self-realization became a product of presentation and display that lacked substance. Women were tempted to become Renate Müller look-alikes and this development did not foster women's emancipation.³¹⁶ The construction of the secretary persona in films like this had the effect that it promoted a distorted image of commercial employees. It encouraged the female white-collar viewer to objectify herself through the mirror of the screen and abandon the mere idea of a more conscious and therefore substantiated identity.

In addition to attaching professional success to beauty, which emphasized rather than contributed to eliminating the inequality between female and male white-collar workers as well as further undermined what was left of the originally innovative figure of the New Woman, Die Privatsekretärin also manipulates the viewer into believing in social advancement that is based on appearance and consumption. More specifically, it implies that a man who falls in love with a woman because of her looks may bring about an employee's upward mobility. In doing so it admits not only to the problems this social group was faced with, but it also encourages female spectators to think that consumption is a key instrument to attracting a man and overcoming their socio-economic problems. To achieve this goal, the ordinary woman must appear like a woman of class and enhance her natural beauty by means of fashionable and expensive-looking clothes and

³¹⁶ Especially young women were keen to look like their screen idols: "Wenn ich im Kino war und nach Hause kam, habe ich sofort versucht, mich so zu frisieren, wie die Schauspielerin, die mir gefallen hatte." Gisela von Wysocki's mother cited in Wysocki, Die Fröste der Freiheit 105.

accessories. In order to win the heart of her employer Vilma, whose background remains vague but who is certainly not a well-heeled socialite in disguise, tries to surround herself with an aura of luxury. Women like Vilma were unable to wedge ermine capes and lamé gowns into their budgets and at times she must try to hide that her wardrobe is incomplete. To fulfill her dream of a better life she must borrow items of clothing from her friends in order to put together an impressive evening outfit. The film grants her success and Arvai unsuspectingly applauds her efforts to wear a budget outfit as though it were couture – “Sie sind aber elegant” – and in due course rewards Vilma with his love. The monetary investment pays off and leads to marriage and a leisure-oriented life that only a man with money can buy.

The film encourages consumer behavior and since the act of shopping allowed women, at least in theory, to express their spending power and to shape their identity to their liking, it urges women to be modern. At the same time it endorses a gender role that is far from modern: Die Privatsekretärin presents a woman who complies perfectly with the prevailing ideal of beauty but her sole motivation is to attract a man. This explains why Vilma’s sexuality is very traditional. She refuses to chat to several young men, who would like to get to know the beautiful woman upon her arrival in Berlin, and even though she agrees to spend an evening out with someone who is essentially a stranger to her she is not a woman who is keen on sexual adventures. She will not accompany her date to his apartment and, appalled by the immorality of the proposition, even threatens to resign after her employer proposes a ‘friendship’ – and everything

that goes with it: clothes, car, jewels, other luxuries and, of course, sex. Her behavior echoes the still strong taboo against pre-marital sex and also indicates that traditional gender roles put great pressures on women, especially young and single ones. Vilma differs from her nineteenth-century predecessors in that she radiates sensuality and, embracing the period between girlhood and wifedom, dares to play. But for all her teasing, she will not entirely abandon tradition and refuses to enter a temporary love affair. Instead, her conservative beliefs give her strength to exert pressure on her employer, something that would have been very difficult for any woman in her position, to create a more permanent frame for their relationship. Vilma succeeds and, in order to ensure that this valuable employee never parts with the company, Arvai promotes her to the lifetime position of bank director's wife.

The film suggests that female white-collar workers can succeed professionally as well as personally provided that they conform to the visual ideal of the New Woman as endorsed by the media and consumer industry as well as behavior considered traditionally female. It promotes a return to a gender identity that constrained women because it denied them the possibility to pursue their interests or desires. In fact, by treating his secretary/lover like a child throughout most of the film Arvai demonstrates that he does not take her altogether seriously. Evoking a gender role reminiscent of Wilhelmine ideals of femininity the film validates sexual and therefore also socio-economic inequality and challenges the freedoms women had been granted during the early years of the Weimar Republic. Furthermore, it communicates to women that they failed to

secure a place for themselves in the public sphere and suggests that they, to remedy their situation, return to more traditional and clearly limited gender roles, where men take on the part not only of provider but also of the intellectual and moral guardian. The director's lack of respect for Vilma – he enjoys to tease her and makes jokes at her expense – was unlikely to benefit the public's image of female white-collar workers. Just like Renate Müller's on-screen persona would have inspired women to dress in a certain way, the attitude of the fictional boss would have validated and even encouraged men's antagonistic and misogynist attitude. As a result, Die Privatsekretärin reinforced the discrimination and marginalization of women employees.

The film's ending, which is in line with many Hollywood-style films of the 1920s and early 1930s, is problematic not only because real-life stories rarely ended as happily. It celebrates commodities and encourages women to play an active role in modern life by means of consumption but it also insinuates that women did not have the financial means to do so on their own. In the end Vilma sits in Arvai's fancy apartment and it seems she now has the money to participate in the urban environment and consumer society. However, this is only possible as a result of her engagement and the price she pays for financial stability is her independence. Therefore, the film refrains from criticizing women's incomplete integration into the white-collar labor market – their entrapment in inferior positions and their psychological, sometimes physical abuse. By suggesting that women cannot succeed in the traditionally male public sphere it

implies that female white-collar workers lack the capacities to overcome the professional and social issues they were confronted with and should – ironically – rely on men to be rescued. Instead of offering female spectators ideas of how to address the complex set of problems they were faced with, let alone facilitate women's genuine emancipation, it nourishes fantasies that promised relief from monotonous and exhausting jobs, hostile working environment and financial hardship. Inadvertently or not Die Privatsekretärin exploits the vulnerability of this social group: Vilma's longing for financial stability and social mobility fulfill, and this affirms the decisions of increasing numbers of women to abandon their white-collar professions, marry and retreat back into the private sphere.

Promoting domesticity as a cure-all solution was no deliberate conspiracy orchestrated by the media or the entertainment and the consumer industries but it does point to the social forces that worked against women's emancipation in addition to the economic ones. By incorporating these elements into the narrative, Die Privatsekretärin becomes a text that informs the viewer that the promise of professional and personal equality as well as mobility had been broken and that, as a result, female white-collar workers would not be able to succeed.

Arm Wie Eine Kirchenmaus: “Endlich eine Angestellte, wie ich sie mir wünsche!”

The box-office hit Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus (1931), also ends in the marriage between a female white-collar worker and her boss, but it differs from consumption-oriented films such as Die Privatsekretärin in that the employee's skill rather than her beauty lead to the happy ending.³¹⁷ As established above, the protagonist of this type of film is usually portrayed as being very competent and diligent, and it is due to her untiring commitment and good work that she wins the respect and ultimately the love of her employer. As was the case with Die Privatsekretärin, the plot is straightforward and easy to follow. Susie Sachs is an unemployed stenographer searching for work and boldly slips into the private office of bank president Baron Thomas von Ullrich. He engages her after a brief trial session, primarily because she displays great typing skills and promises to work hard. She makes it quite clear that her job is her absolute priority – she even forsakes her private life in favor of work – and succeeds in motivating her co-workers to be more efficient and conscientious. During a trip to Paris with her boss and other members of the bank's senior management Susie further demonstrates her commitment to the company: she declines an invitation for supper while on the train to Paris because she wants to prepare a meeting and refuses to go to bed in the first-class sleeping car because she wishes to work through the night. Once in Paris, she abstains from visiting any of the sights and turns down a dinner invitation issued by the chairman, Count Friedrich Thalheim,

³¹⁷ Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus, dir. Richard Oswal, perf. Grete Mosheim, Anton Edthofe, Hans Thimi and Paul Hörbiger (Germany: Richard-Oswald-Produktion, 1931).

because she feels compelled to work. Von Ullrich compliments his secretary's work ethic and her contributions to the company throughout the film and after the bank's successful merger with a French trust, he honors Susie's role in this process by leading her to the altar.

Susie's determination and diligence are rewarded early on: because she has the courage to approach von Ullrich she is appointed his private secretary and since he is at the top of the company hierarchy, she is automatically better off than the secretaries working in the company's typing pool. She might not necessarily earn more than her colleagues but her position is certainly more prestigious. However, if the conditions of this fictional office were to resemble reality it would be near impossible for a typist like Susie to stand out at all. In order to obscure the implausibility of Susie's advancement the film begins by creating an unrealistic setting that displaces the spectator's focus from the actual working conditions of commercial employees and provides a backdrop against which the individual may advance. Prior to Susie's arrival on the screen, the audience is allowed to glimpse into different departments of the bank and gets the impression that the employees of this company do not work but lounge about all day. Some clerks are shown reading the newspaper while others take pleasure in smoking cigarettes. The last of these establishing scenes shows two typists: an elderly woman sitting at her typewriter knitting instead of typing and a pretty and fashionably dressed young woman looking absentmindedly out the window. The relaxed atmosphere ignores that streamlined offices did not allow for any kind of idleness and that the management consistently pressured low-

level employees into performing at their peak. The attitude of the fictional characters does, as a “Tippmädle” interviewed by Siegfried Kracauer confirmed, reflect that of many female white-collar workers. However, despite their disinterest “an dem mechanischen Geklapper” they would not have displayed this openly as the threat of being replaced in case of underperformance loomed above their heads.³¹⁸

Susie’s enthusiasm and commitment distinguish her from the other employees from the very beginning.³¹⁹ It is highly unlikely that a prospective employee would have had access to the president’s office and would not have had to compete against other candidates or require no references. However, Susie’s determination combined with her skills impress her boss-to-be and she is hired after an interview of only a few minutes. During the interview she makes clear that she would not be distracted by anything – she will not even stop typing to tell von Ullrich her name – which leads him to exclaim ecstatically: “Endlich eine Angestellte, wie ich sie mir wünsche! Sie haben Energie! Sie haben Ausdauer und Sie haben Freude an der Arbeit.”³²⁰ Susie is able to type so fast

³¹⁸ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 34.

³¹⁹ One of the reasons why Susie’s enthusiasm does not subside is her privileged position. She can enjoy typing because in contrast to the average typist she is much more involved in the production process. She even gets to go on a business trip to Paris.

³²⁰ In a previous conversation with his assistant von Ullrich already established what he expects of his personnel. He informs a clerk, Schünzl, that he may not take a lunch break, that he may not go home for supper and that he must stay at the bank overnight. Schünzl dutifully repeats after his employer and by comparing the bank to a lover he demonstrates willingness to forsake his private life for this employer. Von Ullrich is pleased about such unconditional loyalty and commitment, and praises Schünzl for being the company’s only useful employee. The scene between von Ullrich and foolish Schünzl is comical but it nevertheless reveals that employers were able to exert enormous pressure: given the economic instability and the weak positions of unions, white-collar workers had few choices but to comply with the whimsical requests of their employers.

that the president can barely keep up with her and, responding to her bond with the machine, he exclaims jubilantly that Susie and her typewriter belong together. The seemingly organic relationship between the typist and her working instrument is stressed throughout the film and, in fact, it is not before long that Susie is no longer considered a human being but part of the machine. What is more, the film suggests that the monotonous and equally draining activity fulfills her and, like Vilma Förster of Die Privatsekretärin, she expresses her delight by humming along to the rhythm of her typewriter.

In contrast to Expressionist works such as Georg Kaiser's play Gas I (1918) or Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1927), which asserted that blue-collar workers were treated as extensions to machines and criticized the dehumanization of laborers, this mainstream movie celebrates the worker's union with the machine. As a result, Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus obscures the problems caused by mechanization and rationalization, in particular the feelings of alienation and boredom. The film stresses that such attitudes were unacceptable and thereby stifles any critique of the economic practices of the time. Significantly, this view is not far removed from that of some Weimar contemporaries, who claimed office machines are instruments that grant their users freedom. As mentioned in Chapter One, typewriters did facilitate or rather accelerate women's entry into the office but rather than bringing about their financial and personal independence office machinery contributed to their marginalization. By implying that only those who embrace "die Maschine [als] ein Instrument der Befreiung" will succeed, the

film manipulates especially female spectators into submissive behavior.³²¹ At the same time it encourages the viewer to displace the effects of the economic principles of Fordism and Taylorism into the personal realm. The employee Susie is presented as a casual agent and it is solely her positive attitude or willingness to ignore the complex, underlying issues such as exploitation and discrimination that determine her professional success. In light of the fact that members of the female audience had few chances to advance professionally, regardless of how skilled, enthusiastic or committed they were, and were forced to leave their jobs because they were physically and mentally exhausted, Susie's proposition would seem provocative.

Susie stands not only in contrast to her co-workers by being energetic and dedicated but she also differs in that she does not live the consumption-driven lifestyle associated with the New Woman. Susie is not interested in fashion or make-up and tells to her boss that she never wore perfume and preferred to make herself sleeve protectors rather than a fancy dress. She presents herself as a sexless worker and rebuffs advances by various members of the senior management. She fends off Count Thalheim, who attempts to kiss her hand during a dictation session, by replying brusquely that her hand is dirty because she just inserted a new ribbon into the machine. Similarly, she informs von Ullrich that it is not part of her job to arouse pleasurable thoughts in him. Initially it seems her ability to navigate these situations makes Susie a true heroine: a

³²¹ A member of a large company's workers' council quoted by Kracauer, Die Angestellten 34.

professional who objects to sexual harassment and is able to keep men at bay, who try to abuse power based on gender. The film does not explore the fact that women were frequently coerced to enter sexual relationships with male colleagues or superiors. Instead, it makes the viewer believe that her conduct is laudable because it is unusual; because she does not display the sexual looseness that was misleadingly attached to the New Woman by the media.

In order to highlight Susie's moral qualities, her predecessor is introduced into the plot. Unlike Susie, Olly Frey did not object to mixing work and pleasure but was keen on an affair with her boss. She flirted heavily with him and devoted much attention and probably a substantial percentage of her income to her physical appearance. The young woman enjoys wearing make-up and fashionable outfits but she also sports lipstick and sexy outfits because she was expected to do so. Therefore, von Ulrich's reaction to Olly seems unlikely. He reprimands her on a number of occasions for dressing up, for wearing tight, low-cut outfits that accentuate her figure and expose her shoulders and urges her to stop using perfume and lipstick. Von Ullrich is not opposed to beauty per se but believes that female employees are supposed to become part of the machinery they operate and that the look of the New Woman is inconsistent with business. Possibly his attitude is fuelled by the understanding that desexualizing or dehumanizing employees, easily accomplished by clothes, makes it easier for employers to align their staff with technology and treat them as indistinguishable and interchangeable extensions of office equipment.³²² Yet, employers expected

³²² Siegfried Kracauer cites a case in which a woman was dismissed because "die Angestellte wollte nicht als Angestellte behandelt werden, sondern als Dame." Kracauer, Die Angestellten 9.

their female staff not only to identify with their work and the means of production. They also encouraged them to flaunt coquettish behavior for their entertainment, as a result of which, according to Hendrik de Man, the atmosphere in many offices was flirtatious.³²³ Therefore, it seems von Ullrich wants Olly to dress down because he finds himself attracted to her and knows that eventually he would want to have an affair with his secretary. In fact, him offering her a severance pay six-times her monthly salary suggests that they were lovers at one point because such generous compensation was simply unheard of at the time. Von Ullrich's interaction with Olly Frey reveals that he is unable to engage with an at least visually emancipated woman on a professional level and his unease points to patriarchal society's overall inability to abandon a concept of femininity that reduced women to their sexuality and condemned them to passivity.

What is more, his behavior is hypocritical, as his budding romance with Susie makes strikingly clear. Evidently, he is not opposed to mixing work and play because soon after she starts working for him he begins to pursue her. On the train to Paris, for example, he brings Susie supper to her compartment, an act that is driven by the ulterior motive to gain access to her private space, and eventually he proposes to his secretary. The implausibility of von Ullrich's character, however, serves another purpose. It emphasizes the film's premise that dedication to one's employer combined with a more reserved or traditional sexuality will be rewarded. Female white-collar workers, according to the film,

³²³ de Man, Der Kampf um die Arbeitsfreude 31.

can succeed professionally but if they do, in contrast to men, they are not promoted and they do not receive a bonus or a salary increase. The film echoes a belief that was widespread during the Weimar Republic: regardless of talent or accomplishments, women's ultimate vocation remained marriage and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus celebrates marriage as the highest reward there is for a woman.

Significantly, the relationship between the bank's president and his secretary resembles that of a middle-class couple well before their relationship becomes personal. Vilma demonstrates skills that would make her the perfect wife of a man like Arvai. However, by emphasizing the importance of traditionally 'female' character traits and skills the film devalues Susie's professional achievements, most notably her involvement in the merger. It celebrates her commitment and skill but, in the end, she needs little persuasion to give up her career for marriage. By portraying a commercial employee who is successful and enjoys her work but nevertheless chooses marriage the film sends a clear message to female spectators. As we have seen, more qualified and better-paid positions remained the domain of men and even Susie is not rewarded for her efforts with a more senior position. If someone as competent and fortunate as Susie will not be promoted, who will? Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus suggests that marriage is Susie's sole option for upward mobility. The film supports the cause of large, more conservative sections of society, which considered employment inappropriate and disapproved of a more modern femininity. It does not discourage women from working in an office per se yet the Hollywood-style

ending implies that, in fact, employment should be understood to be a period of training that would allow the modern woman to acquire a set of skills that would make her a better wife and mother. Tapping into the anxieties and existential problems of the social group, the film manipulates them: it suggests they take their unchallenging, draining and poorly paid jobs seriously and, at the same time, encourages them to return to a traditional gender role and domesticity. A peculiar mix of modern and traditional scenarios and convictions, the film reflects the complexities that affected 1920s German society and had a strong effect on women's experience of Weimar modernity.

Cinema had a tremendous influence on Weimar society and this raises the question how female spectators and in particular white-collar workers responded to films like Die Privatsekretärin or Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus. Women embraced the new mass medium more readily than men because they recognized and liked its entertaining value. More importantly, they, somewhat in contrast to men, who continued to cling to outdated social structures and patterns of masculinity, sensed that the cinema constituted a modern source of meaning. The cinema, the first public space to welcome the emerging female audience, provided a place for the feminine and for women. The claim that women were susceptible to the promises of movies because they lacked the analytical capacities to interpret them must therefore be questioned. As previously noted, critics like Siegfried Kracauer argued that female viewers were unable to see beyond the image and the plot of films, which led them to believe in the cinematic

spectacle and, for example, nurture the illusion that they might marry their boss, too. However, the reaction of the audience to, for example, Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus makes it very clear that spectators were not as shallow as Kracauer or Rössiger thought. The decade's most avid movie-goers were well aware that it was highly unlikely that an employer should lead his secretary up the aisle in recognition of her beauty and/or professional skills precisely because they were familiar with the office environment. Therefore, they laughed while watching the film not only because it is a comedy and features much slapstick but also because the screen fantasies contradicted their experience. Significantly, representatives of white-collar organizations such as the aforementioned Dr. Bode were disturbed about women's response to secretary films.³²⁴ Bode disapproves of the female spectators' laughter that expresses both joy and criticism but it is *his* rather than their reaction that gives reason for concern. This suggests that educated middle-class men like him were actually *more* likely to subscribe to cinematic illusions than semi-educated and 'superficial' female employees, not least because of their *Standesdünkel*.

Mainstream cinema could not do without beautiful, sexy and hard-working secretaries and encouraged young, professional women to model themselves on a fantasy that would always remain at odds with reality. Especially its reliance on pseudo-princes and knights of the economy or, to cite Renate Bridenthal, "Prince Charming in a business suit," had the effect that secretary films never blended

³²⁴ Bode, "Der Beruf der Stenotypistin" 62.

with the daily life of employees.³²⁵ Not surprisingly, the discrepancy between fantasy and reality did not entice women to subscribe to the screen fiction but instead the chimeras induced a sense of disillusionment among spectators. With the social as well as economic limitations increasingly being felt, female white-collar workers were no longer easily “intoxicated.”³²⁶ Though by the early 1930s they had reason to dream of a better existence more than ever, they had sobered up and even began to speak disparagingly about the swindle on the screen. Edith Head, a costume designer working in Hollywood at the time, for example, was well aware of women’s disillusionment with glamor beyond their means. When a star she was costuming wanted to wear a gold-threaded evening gown to portray a working-girl, she argued that commercial employees – and this applied equally to German ones – were unable to afford fur coats and silk evening gowns.³²⁷ When the star was not convinced, Head suggested she listen outside theaters to the cynical comments of female white-collar workers concerning the elaborate wardrobes displayed by their fictional counterparts. Indeed, even misogynistically-inclined Kracauer sensed women’s disenchantment with screen fantasies and conceded that the female audience

³²⁵ Renate Bridenthal, “Something Old, Something New: Women Between the Two World Wars,” Becoming Visible: Women in European History, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) 435.

³²⁶ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 518.

³²⁷ Edith Head quoted by Beryl Williams, Fashion Is Our Business (New York: Lippincott, 1945) 149.

was not as simple as he had claimed but aware of the discrepancy between film and reality.³²⁸

Even critically acclaimed films that dealt with socio-economic realities and issues concerning specifically working women were unable to bridge this tension.³²⁹ Pictures such as Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück (1929), considered “Germany’s first proletarian film,” were keen on raising the viewer’s overall political awareness and hoped to enlist women in the workers’ revolutionary struggle.³³⁰ The film tells the story of the middle-aged woman Krause who commits suicide after her family has been inflicted with a number of tragic incidents. In this context her teenage daughter Erna is of greater interest because even though the girl comes from a proletarian background it is likely that she, given the numbers of girls from working class families who went into gainful employment at the time, might enter a low-level clerking position in the future. Like her mother, Erna suffers from the family’s harsh living conditions. She shares a small and shabby apartment with her mother and her older brother as well as a seedy pimp, who keeps a prostitute and her child in his room and constantly molests Erna, possibly even raped her in the past. The family’s economic situation is very bad and not even the lodger’s rent suffices to boost

³²⁸ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 518; and Kracauer, “Mädchen im Beruf” 238.

³²⁹ For detailed analyses of proletarian cinema see, for example, Welch, “The Proletarian Cinema and the Weimar Republic” 3-18; Stoos, “Erobert den Film!” 482-525; or Kühn, Tümmler and Wimmer, eds. Film und revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1918-1932.

³³⁰ Sabine Hake, The Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933 (London: U of Nebraska P, 1993) 199; and Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, dir. Phil Jutzi, perf. Alexandra Schmitt, Friedrich Gnaß, Ilse Trautschold and Holmes Zimmermann (Germany: Prometheus Film-Verleih und Vertrieb GmbH, 1929).

the household income adequately. After Erna's brother Paul, frustrated by unemployment and desperate for some money, is arrested for participating in a burglary, the despairing mother takes her life because she is unable to visualize a better future for herself and, significantly, the prostitute's small child.³³¹ After her brother's arrest and her mother has died Erna, anxious to earn some money, takes up the advice of the pimp and seeks work as a prostitute. However, she is unable to go through with it and recognizes that her personal future can only be improved if she joins the class struggle.³³² The film ends with the girl searching the streets for Max, the Socialist worker she is in love with, and joining a protest march of disgruntled workers.³³³ The film gives a clear idea about the economic conditions of the time, "acknowledge[s] them with melancholy" and shows their devastating impact on families.³³⁴ Though Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück does not specifically address the problems of female white-collar workers it does call attention to sexual abuse, an offense that especially young women were the subject of and which reminds viewers of the sexual harassment women were

³³¹ At the time, suicide by means of opening the gas pipe was not uncommon and, in times of economic crisis, it was the last resort of despair for many. The issue was also addressed by novels, such as Irmgard Keun's Gilgi, eine von uns. An old friend of Gilgi kills himself and his entire family because he cannot envision a future for his sick wife and their two young children. Unemployed he cannot even make ends meet by selling shoe-polish and after forging a check he sees no other option but suicide. Keun, Gilgi, eine von uns (1931; Hildesheim: Claassen, 1993) 246-50.

³³² Bruce Murray, "Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück: An Analysis of the Film as a Critical Response to the 'Street Films' of the Commercial Film Industry," Enclitic 5-6.1-2 (1981-2): 52-3.

³³³ The topic of workers uniting was also addressed in fiction. In Maria Leitner's Hotel Amerika: Ein Reportage-Roman (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1930) for example, a young female employee working at a hotel recognizes that being part of the fight against social and economic injustice is more important than the fulfillment of her personal dream of a glamorous and carefree life.

³³⁴ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 198.

often exposed to in offices. The film points to specifically female issues but it does not offer solutions that are tailored to women's needs. Instead it merely expresses hope that "the revolution will come" and that joining the organized workers' movement will solve women's problems and bring an end to their position as society's underdog.³³⁵

By featuring a New Woman as main character, the film Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt? (1932) addresses female spectators even more directly.³³⁶ Anni also comes from a working-class background but her smart and fashionable dress, black skirt and white blouse with tie, as well as her immaculate *Bubikopf* indicate that she works in an office. Something like a Super Woman, she looks better kept than any of her family and, more importantly, she is the only one who copes successfully with the difficulties caused by economic hardship and modern life. Her mother, a traditional housewife, continues to subscribe to a Prussian value system, which maintains that individual ability determines people's prospects in life, and her embittered and long-term unemployed father spends his time drinking in the pub. Her brother is out of work as well and, unable to brace himself against the "morbid atmosphere," commits suicide.³³⁷ Anni, in contrast, earns her own but also the family's keep and it seems as if the promise of social mobility has come true for her. Her resolve

³³⁵ Jan Christopher Horak, "Mother Krausen's Trip to Happiness: Kino-Culture in Weimar Germany, Part 2," Jump Cut 27 (July 1982): 55-6.

³³⁶ For a discussion of the film's communist ambition see, for example, James Pettifer, "Against the Stream: Kuhle Wampe," Screen 15.2 (1974): 49-64. Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?, dir. Slatan Dudow, perf. Hertha Thiele, Ernst Busch, Helene Weigel and Lili Schönborn (Germany: Prometheus Film-Vertrieb und Verleih GmbH, 1932).

³³⁷ Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 243.

further characterizes her as an emancipated person: she solicits the authorities as her parents are faced with eviction and breaks off the engagement with Fritz, who feels pressured into marrying her because she is pregnant, and moves in with a girlfriend. The film suggests, however, that her emancipation is incomplete until she joins a Leftist sports club that sees itself as part of the workers' movement and uses its events as a platform to disseminate socialist ideas. The film does express sympathy for gender-specific issues such as pregnancy and abortion but ultimately the larger cause of class struggle is more important than these. In line with the principles of the radical workers' movement the film therefore inadvertently admits that the organized political Left had little to offer to women. The film also fails to capitalize on the widespread appeal of the actress Hertha Thiele, who had shot to fame the previous year playing the lead in Mädchen in Uniform (1931).³³⁸

Primarily because of their political message both pictures were well received by film critics and have since made their way into the canon of Weimar cinema. However, neither Kuhle Wampe nor Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück engrossed a large audience at the time of their release. Produced and distributed

³³⁸ Journalist and drama critic Herbert Jehring praised especially Thiele's "Begabung für frische, nicht für sentimentale Rollen" and women from all over the world sent her fan letters. However, the actress' fame was short-lived because, refusing to participate in National Socialist propaganda, she was barred from the *Reichstheater* and *Reichsfilmkammer* in 1936. From an article by Herbert Jehring published in 1931 in *Berliner Börsen-Courier* referred to in "Hertha Thiele," *Filmportal*, ed. Deutsches Filminstitut – DIF e.V. 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.filmportal.de/df/a6/Uebersicht,,,,,,,,,2D67D8743E594198B40E3421B5B30986,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,html>>. See also Mädchen in Uniform, dir. Leontine Sagan, perf. Hertha Thiele, Dorothea Wieck, Emilia Unda and Erika Mann (Germany: Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, 1931); Karola Gramann, ed., Herta Thiele (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1983) 54; and Das Herz auf der linken Seite: Die Schauspielerin Hertha Thiele erzählt, dir. Ullrich Kasten, perf. Hertha Thiele (GDR: Fernsehen der DDR, 1975).

by Willi Münzenberg's Prometheus Film, the political and economic Left's answer to the Ufa, these films satisfied, as Wilhelm Guttsman identifies, "the political demand for the visual representation of the dialectical tensions in working-class existence."³³⁹ The promise or rather the suggestion put forward by both films, namely that joining the collective will solve all problems and will induce personal happiness, remains vague and the films fail to present specific paths of emancipation. These films neither encourage women's commodification by aligning consumption with personal happiness nor do they champion traditional gender roles. But since they do not offer solutions to the problems either it is understandable why the masses preferred to spend their money on light-hearted entertainment. Films made by communists or social democratic organizations stood no chance against the constant stream of entertainment coming out of the dream factories in Hollywood and Babelsberg. The disinterest, as Renate Seydel argues, of the general cinema-going audience was in part due to the generally pessimistic tone of films that drew attention to and denounced the misery of the working but also the new *Angestelltenschicht*.³⁴⁰ As a comment by a contemporary witness reveals, young women were not particularly interested in seeing such films:

Es gab Filme wie Kuhle Wampe oder Berlin Alexanderplatz und ich weiß wohl, daß es Filme waren, die von ihrer sozialen Seite her engagiert waren, aber diese Filme haben uns, glaube ich, nicht so interessiert. [...] Das hatten wir ja selber, die Einschränkungen.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Guttsman, Workers Culture in Weimar Germany 273.

³⁴⁰ Seydel, "Stars der Zwanziger" 151.

³⁴¹ Gisela von Wysocki's mother cited in Wysocki, Die Fröste der Freiheit 122.

Since films that were critical did not present attractive or viable alternatives to solving specific female problems, the audience preferred to indulge in films that obscured the problems of white-collar workers while allowing them to experience “für billiges Geld den Hauch der großen Welt,” and granting them a temporary escape from reality.³⁴²

Female white-collar workers visited movie theaters to satisfy their “Bildhunger” and seek relief from their work through diversion.³⁴³ Films served a compensatory function for them, which is why especially lighthearted, apolitical comedies such as Die Privatsekretärin or Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus drew large audiences. They made the everyday prettier and, by taking away the pressure exerted by social reality, they comforted female white-collar workers’ experience of the quotidian, with the effect, as film scholars like Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Zurek claim, that the audience was more tolerant of reality.³⁴⁴ However, this does not suggest that women, according to Ernst Bloch, were “mehr stumpf als rebellisch” or simply the prey of mass culture.³⁴⁵ As Andreas Huyssen stresses, they did not simply lose themselves “in dreams and delusions and merely

³⁴² Kracauer, Die Angestellten 95.

³⁴³ “Neuland für Kinematographentheater,” Lichtbild-Bühne 111 (September 1910): 3.

³⁴⁴ Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Zurek, eds., “Einleitung,” Film und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Dokumente und Materialien (Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe, 1975) 10-1.

³⁴⁵ Bloch, “Künstliche Mitte,” Erbschaft dieser Zeit 33.

[consumed]” but they engaged actively with the medium.³⁴⁶ Their attempt to use film as a means to shape a modern gender identity shows that entertainment did also serve a social function for them.

Mainstream cinema did incorporate some aspects of the reality of female white-collar workers and thereby insinuated that they reflect the challenging situation of this social group. However, by presenting them in a distorted, reductionist manner, screen personas and fictional scenarios could not provide spectators with genuine inspiration, let alone guidance of how to shape their professional or personal lives. Instead, the entertainment industry exploited cinema’s power and, reducing the figure of the female white-collar worker to a promotional tool, channeled the gaze of movie-goers toward interests like beauty, romance and domesticity. Secretaries on the silver screen embraced the delights of consumer culture and encouraged spectators to imagine and emulate a subjectivity that was heavily defined through consumption. However, the cinematic “commodity fetishism,” as Sumiko Higashi argues, did not fulfill women’s needs and instead had the effect that their desires as well as anxieties were displaced onto material goods.³⁴⁷ While the cinema did provide women with visual clues regarding their gender identity, it also fostered the commercial exploitation of attributes associated with the New Woman. Playing a key role in the figure’s successive devaluation, reducing her to a commodified and shallow

³⁴⁶ Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman” 199.

³⁴⁷ Sumiko Higashi, “The New Woman and Consumer Culture: Cecil B. DeMille’s Sex Comedies,” *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, eds. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002) 322.

phenomenon, mainstream cinema contributed to the resistance against women; their integration on equal terms into modern society.³⁴⁸

The cinema functioned increasingly as a mirror that showed women their deficiencies. As we have seen, female spectators did not subscribe to the chimera that they would marry their employer. At the same time, any spectator that read between the lines of cinematic fantasies would have detected her own misery and the professional success of a fictional character like Susie Sachs would have pointed to the viewer's own failure. It seems that the story of an industrious secretary that facilitates a merger would have inevitably reminded viewers of the limitations that were placed on them. Similarly, the promotion of a stenotypist like Vilma Förster to the comfortable and prestigious position of director's wife would have drawn the female viewer's attention to her own precarious financial situation that was the result of her ongoing institutionalized discrimination. Women did not abandon white-collar employment and the lifestyle that went with it because movies suggested they do so. However, by tapping into the feelings of personal or even collective failure the secretary films of the Weimar period worked against the possibility of women's emancipation. While championing the visual characteristic of the New Woman, they also promoted a very traditional gender identity. Characters like Vilma bear out this observation: she teases and dances the night away but the mere proposal of a love affair offends her. She may dress like a New Woman but her independence is as

³⁴⁸ As outlined in Chapter One, male white-collar employees also struggled to come to terms with modernity. However, while the economic and thereby also social status of this group changed for the worse their position remained nonetheless superior to that of women, society's ultimate underdog.

dubious as the quality of the outfits worn by real-life female white-collar workers. She may rebel against hemlines and the length of hair but her views on sexuality or marriage are very traditional and she expresses no ambition to challenge established gender roles.³⁴⁹ Vilma is only partially modern and, just like her fashion would have inspired women to dress in certain ways, her character would have encouraged women to explore the fictional character's traditional femininity.

It should be ironic that film's like Die Privatsekretärin or Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus appropriated the figure of the modern female white-collar worker. After all they incorporated certain aspects of this social group's reality to promote a non-modern gender role. While mainstream cinema was not the cause of women's return to domesticity, its failure to present alternative female identities contributed to the restoration of a more traditional femininity and encouraged the retreat of a whole generation of female white-collar worker back into the private sphere. As mentioned above, with the rise to power of the Nazis this trend became irreversible. Regardless, the discussion of these two highly popular mainstream films furthers our understanding of why the New Woman as embodied by the female white-collar worker was not a precursor to women's genuine liberation, that is social and financial in addition to political emancipation,

³⁴⁹ Significantly, the actress Colleen Moore came to a similar conclusion. An icon of her time and an inspiration to an entire generation of women, Moore had encouraged her fans to believe that the modern girl is "independent, a thinker [who] will not follow slavishly the ordinances." Yet in an interview from 1971 she acknowledged the limitations of the headstrong jazz babies she played, among them Patricia Fentriss in Flaming Youth (1923). According to Moore, "all she did was drink a cocktail and smoke a cigarette in public. Underneath she was a good girl." Colleen Moore cited by Angela Taylor, "This Flapper Altered Fashion's Course," The New York Times (26 Oct. 1971): 36; Flaming Youth, dir. John Francis Dillon, perf. Colleen Moore, Milton Sills, Elliott Dexter and Sylvia Breamer (United States: Associated First National Pictures, 1923).

and why the “Flapper Revolution” was essentially reduced to one of style and surface.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ Rosen, Popcorn Venus 75.

Chapter Four

Inciting or Placating? The Fictional Accounts Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat and Das kunstseidene Mädchen

Weimar Germany's burgeoning consumer industry and the cinema figured prominently in the lives of young female white-collar workers and they contributed significantly to shaping the socio-cultural artifact that was the New Woman. Though less visible and less spectacular, literature played an equally important role in their lives. In this chapter I elaborate on the relationship between members of this social group and literature.³⁵¹ More specifically, I discuss the novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (1930) by Christa Anita Brück, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin (1930) by Rudolf Braune, and Das kunstseidene Mädchen (1932) by Irmgard Keun. All three texts are strong representatives of a genre that increasingly draws the attention of scholars. As popular women's novels they are – except for Keun's novel – not of great literary quality, but they are not pulp fiction or *Trivialliteratur* either; situated somewhere in-between they made enjoyable and exciting reads for female white-collar workers. In order to broaden our understanding of these women and their experience of Weimar modernity it is vital to investigate these

³⁵¹ Male white-collar workers were also a subject of fictional texts. Some examples include Bruno Arndt, Aus dem Leben des Schreibers Tobias Kiekbusch (Trier: Friedrich Lintz, 1922); Franz Müller-Partenkirchen, Der Lehrling: Kaufmannsgeschichten (Frankfurt a.M.: Diesterweg, 1925); Karl Lütge Der Lügenbuchhalter und andere ernste und heitere Geschichten (Leipzig: Seiler, 1928); Karl Aloys Schenzinger Man will uns kündigen (Berlin: Dom, 1931); as well as the better known novels Erich Kästner, Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1931); and Hans Fallada, Kleiner Mann – was nun? (1932; Berlin/DDR: Buchclub 65, 1980). See also Andrew Weeks, The Paradox of the Employee: Variants of a Social Theme in Modern Literature (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1980).

texts in addition to Hollywood or Babelsberg-style secretary films. In this chapter I examine whether entertaining *weibliche Angestelltenromane* presented, like mainstream cinema, escapist fantasies or portrayed the figure and her circumstances in a more realistic manner. Furthermore, I explore how fiction, even though it contributed less to shaping the New Woman visually, constituted a site for women working or aspiring to work in offices to negotiate their reality. The analysis of this select group of *Unterhaltungsromane* will shed further light on the experience of female white-collar workers, as well as women's subjectivity formation during the Weimar period.

There is little doubt that the cinema was the quintessential mass medium of the Weimar period. A technical novelty, it satisfied more than any other medium people's desire for imagery at a time when culture and society were becoming increasingly visual. It attracted massive crowds on a regular basis, allowed these to experience glamor while escaping their reality, and it functioned as a tastemaker. As critics asserted: "Ein erfolgreicher Film [wurde] von vielen Millionen Menschen gesehen, während zum Beispiel die meistgelesenen Bücher im allerhöchsten Fall Auflagen von einigen hunderttausend Exemplaren erreich[t]en."³⁵² Carl Dreyfuß is right that more box office tickets were sold than copies of the novels I discuss in this chapter but this is not to say that, as a result of cinema's ascent, printed material drifted into oblivion or that books lost their cultural significance. Not least because commodified entertainment was

³⁵² Dreyfuß, *Beruf und Ideologie* 242.

expensive: an evening out at the popular *Vergnügungspalast Haus Vaterland*, a favorite among Berlin's new *Angestelltenschicht*, could easily cost a couple between 6 and 7 Marks.³⁵³ Recalling the average salary and tight budgets of female employees and bearing in mind Susanne Suhr's findings, it becomes clear that it was too costly for most to indulge in this kind of entertainment on a regular basis, if at all: "Ins Theater oder Kino konnte die Hälfte aller Befragten überhaupt nicht gehen. Wovon denn? lauten in vielen Fällen die Antworten."³⁵⁴ At the same time, alternative choices became available for those with little dispensable income. Avid readers could pick up relatively inexpensive magazines or newspapers such as the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, which printed bestseller novels as a serial.³⁵⁵ They were also able to join book clubs that, according to Wolfgang Langenbacher, had been founded with pedagogical goals in mind and offered books for much lower prices than retailers.³⁵⁶ Alternatively, they could sign up with a public or commercial lending library and gain access to

³⁵³ Rössiger, Der Angestellte von 1930 68.

³⁵⁴ Otto Suhr comes to a similar conclusion: few employees could afford to go to the movies regularly. Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 45; and Suhr, Die Lebenshaltung der Angestellten 24.

³⁵⁵ Vicki Baum's most successful novel Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer (Berlin: Ullstein, 1928) and Keun's debut Gilgi, eine von uns are two examples of novels that appeared serialized either before or after they were published in book form. See Julia Bertschik, "Vicki Baum: Gelebter und inszenierter Typ der 'Neuen Frau' in der Weimarer Republik," Nora verläßt ihr Puppenheim: Autorinnen des 20. Jahrhunderts und ihr Beitrag zur ästhetischen Innovation, ed. Waltraud Wende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000) 67.

³⁵⁶ Wolfgang Langenbacher, Der aktuelle Unterhaltungsroman: Beiträge zu Geschichte und Theorie der massenhaft verbreiteten Literatur (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964) 116. See also Hans Ferdinand Schulz, Das Schicksal der Bücher und der Buchhandel: System einer Vertriebskunde des Buches (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960) 165.

reading material by paying a nominal membership fee.³⁵⁷ A remark by contemporary Elisabeth Fließ demonstrates the popularity of this option: despite the fact that libraries carried multiple copies of Das kunstseidene Mädchen it was impossible to obtain one for months on end: “Das ‘kunstseidene Mädchen’ läuft tatsächlich durch alle Straßen – monatelang kann man es in keiner großstädtischen Bibliothek bekommen und wenn es in fünf Exemplaren vorhanden ist.”³⁵⁸

That novels by Irmgard Keun, for example, became hugely successful bestsellers is evidence of the fact that even though German traditional, book-oriented culture came to an end the literary market flourished during the 1920s.³⁵⁹ Keun’s debut novel Gilgi, eine von uns (1931) was an instant hit and, going through six editions within its first year of publication, reached the sensational number of 30,000 copies.³⁶⁰ Keun’s second novel, Das kunstseidene Mädchen, was an even greater commercial success and the Universitas Verlag had 50,000 copies printed in 1932 alone.³⁶¹ Keun was not alone and authors like Vicki Baum or Hedwig Courths-Mahler, “First Lady des deutschen

³⁵⁷ The popularity of public and commercial lending libraries increased dramatically after 1929 when hundreds of thousands of people were hit by unemployment. For a discussion of *Leihbüchereien* see Raimund Kast, “Der deutsche Leihbuchhandel und seine Organisation im 20. Jahrhundert,” Archiv für die Geschichte des Buchwesens 36 (1991): 177-85.

³⁵⁸ Elisabeth Fließ, “Mädchen auf der Suche,” Die Frau 3 (1932): 172.

³⁵⁹ The term bestseller only came into common usage during the 1920. The first bestseller list appeared in 1927 in Die literarische Welt. “Die Best-Seller-Liste,” Die literarische Welt 3.41 (1927): 38. See also Billie Melman, Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties (London: MacMillan, 1988) 7.

³⁶⁰ Krechel, “Irmgard Keun” 106.

³⁶¹ Bender, Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns 43.

Unterhaltungsschrifttums,” were equally if not even more successful.³⁶² For example, 49,500 copies of Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht (1924) by Courths-Mahler were sold between 1924 and 1931.³⁶³ These numbers were significant and point to the drastic developments, which the book trade underwent at the time: as new literary audiences emerged, more books and especially popular women’s novels were published than ever before and individual works were read by a record number of people.

This development was triggered by the same set of factors, in particular the rapid growth of the large urban centers combined with the economy’s structural changes, that had given rise to the cinema. As a result of modernization large numbers of semi-educated people worked eight-hour days in offices and had time and some money to spare.³⁶⁴ Time, as Helmut Hiller stresses, that could either be spent going to the cinema or reading books, magazines or newspapers.³⁶⁵ In fact, as women interviewed by Susanne Suhr demonstrated, many could only opt for reading because they worked long hours: “Ich kann keine Versammlungen oder Theater besuchen, da ich keinen Abend vor 8 Uhr nach Hause komme” and “Wie gern möchte ich mal ins Theater oder

³⁶² Gustav Sichelschmidt, Hedwig Courths-Mahler: Deutschlands erfolgreichste Autorin (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985) 1.

³⁶³ Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 127.

³⁶⁴ This development commenced in the eighteenth century and climaxed during the 1920s. Audiences had been broadening consistently yet the majority of readers had only an eight-grade education. See Herbert G. Göpfert, Vom Autor zum Leser: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Buchwesens (München: Hanser, 1977) 36.

³⁶⁵ Helmut Hiller, Zur Sozialgeschichte von Buch und Handel (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966) 102.

ins Kino, aber ich kann mich nicht frei machen.”³⁶⁶ From the early 1920s onwards, publishing houses realized that they too could benefit from Germany’s transformation into a consumer society and, as Jochen Schulte-Sasse argues, economic factors and calculations began to affect the book trade in an unprecedented way.³⁶⁷ In order to compete with the products of the entertainment industry as well as to exploit the artificially stimulated desires of the masses, publishing houses drastically increased production and, indeed, the volume of literary material published during the Weimar Republic was considerable.³⁶⁸ This was only possible because sophisticated new technology became available after World War One that allowed the publishing business, not unlike the fashion industry, to industrialize. Subsequently, books but also magazines and dailies could be manufactured cost-effectively as well as on a mass scale, which turned literature into a relatively inexpensive consumer good. While literature had once been a privilege reserved for a small segment of society, Germany’s educated social elite, it was now produced for a mass-market and a novel like Das kunstseidene Mädchen cost as little as 3.80 Marks (the

³⁶⁶ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 25.

³⁶⁷ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Die Kritik an der Trivialliteratur seit der Aufklärung: Studien zur Geschichte des modernen Kitschbegriffs (München: Fink, 1971) 50.

³⁶⁸ In 1925, for example, as many titles were published in Germany as in the United States, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Hungary and Switzerland combined. See Herbert G. Göpfert, “Die ‘Bücherkrise’ 1927 bis 1929: Probleme der Literaturvermittlung am Ende der zwanziger Jahre,” Das Buch in den zwanziger Jahren: Vorträge des 2. Jahrestreffens des Wolfsbütteler Arbeitskreises für die Geschichte des Buchwesens, ed. Paul Raabe (Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1978) 35.

deluxe hardcover version cost 4.80 Marks).³⁶⁹ So-called popular editions, first printed by Ullstein and soon thereafter by most publishing houses, were even less expensive: bound in linen, *Volksausgaben* were up to 700 pages long and were sold for the standard price of 2.85 Marks.³⁷⁰

Especially highly commercial publishers like Ullstein treated books as a commodity and as they expanded their product portfolios, literature experienced substantial commercialization. As a result of culture and commerce no longer being strictly separated Germany's literary landscape changed drastically, and not least the rise of *Unterhaltungsliteratur* for women sparked off a heated debate among the representatives of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Key to the debate about the *Bücherkrise* was the concern that, as a result of the market catering to the masses, light-fare entertainment would become a more important quality for a book than its artistic or educational value.³⁷¹ The crisis was less economic than intellectual. Indeed, publishers like Samuel Fischer complained less about slumps in sales – after all Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), published by Fischer, sold 700,000 copies in the seven weeks after he won the Nobel Prize in

³⁶⁹ Kurt Herwarth Ball, "Aus der Bücherwelt," *Hammer: Blätter für deutschen Sinn* 31.709/710 (January 1932): 251.

³⁷⁰ Lynda J. King, *Best-Sellers by Design: Vicki Baum and the House of Ullstein* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 1988) 38.

³⁷¹ See, for example, Carl von Ossietzky, "Ketzerien zum Büchertag," *Die Weltbühne* 25.12 (1929): 12; Siegfried Kracauer, "Über Erfolgsbücher und ihr Publikum," 1931, *Ornament der Masse* 64-70; or Georg Jäger, "Der Kampf gegen Schmutz und Schund: Die Reaktion der Gebildeten auf die Unterhaltungsindustrie," *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 31 (1988): 173.

1929 alone.³⁷² Instead, they were concerned about the “Abkehr von alter bürgerlicher Tradition,” which implies that the debate, like the *Kinodebatte* referred to in Chapter Three, was part of a larger debate about mass culture.³⁷³ It was inspired by the realization that the intellectual and literary elite also depended on the marketplace, a fact that it had been inclined to ignore, but more importantly it was fuelled by the fear that intellectuals, critics and artists would lose what Georg Bollenbeck calls its role as “kulturelle Trägerschaft.”³⁷⁴ Responding to women’s increased participation in the public sphere as well as the emergence of a populist culture, Weimar’s male elite, as mentioned in the context of cinema, pointed to the “feminization of culture.”³⁷⁵ Anxious to preserve the validity of high culture these men objected to the fact “[dass] Frauen als Konsumentinnen und Zuschauerinnen neue Subjektpositionen eingeräumt wurden.”³⁷⁶ Significantly, this group’s uneasy relationship with modernity had the effect that *Unterhaltungsliteratur* and specifically women’s fiction was pejoratively labeled lowbrow and, as will be remembered, excluded from the critical discourse until the rise of women and cultural studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In

³⁷² Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* (1901; Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, 1981); and King, *Best-Sellers by Design* 38-9.

³⁷³ Samuel Fischer, “Bemerkungen zur Bücherkrise,” *Die literarische Welt* 2.43 (1926): 1.

³⁷⁴ Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur: Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1994) 267.

³⁷⁵ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* 44-62.

³⁷⁶ Eve Rosenhaft, “Lesewut, Kinosucht, Radiotismus: Zur (geschlechter-) spezifischen Relevanz neuer Massenmedien in den 1920er Jahren,” *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Alf Lüdtke, Inge Marßolek and Adelheid von Saldern (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996) 126.

order to better understand the modern realities of women and in particular female white-collar workers it is paramount to examine precisely the texts that featured as well as addressed Weimar's new women.

Modernist critics were right to point out that the literature that gained mass appeal during the 1920s sometimes lacked sophistication or complexity. Most middlebrow popular women's fiction was aesthetically less refined than canonical literature and, in part due to the ongoing commercialization of the literary market, rather standardized. Compared to highbrow fiction, the language of such texts was usually not very ambitious or experimental. Not unlike classical Hollywood cinema, popular fiction tends toward the cliché and adheres to well-tried formulas regarding content and form. This explains why certain subjects such as love are a staple of the genre or why narratives more often than not conclude in a happy ending. The protagonists of such texts develop very little during the course of the narrative and the most striking aspect especially of female protagonists, Peter Nusser points out, is their passivity.³⁷⁷ Because they have internalized society's morals and values, these women suppress any questions or desires and accept their fate stolidly. Rarely are they plagued by doubts, which explains why popular fiction tends to lack complex psychological explanations. Any conflict that might arise during the course of the narrative is eventually resolved, typically thanks to the intervention of a higher power, and many protagonists are rewarded for their

³⁷⁷ Peter Nusser, Trivalliteratur (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991) 123.

unconditional loyalty to norms and traditions.³⁷⁸ The lack of character development and the protagonists' lack of awareness combined with the celebration of society's morals and values that make popular novels strongly affirmative of the status quo.

The popularity of *Unterhaltungsliteratur* was not only based on the preference of female readers during the Weimar period, but also had historical reasons that were beyond women's control. Partially as a result of the structural changes that affected German bourgeois society from the eighteenth century onwards, women discovered literature and the act of reading for themselves. As the work place and the home were separated for economic reasons women were confined to the domestic sphere, which was increasingly perceived as a sanctuary that was supposed to grant men "Entlastung, Entspannung [und] Genugtuung für den [ihnen] angetanen Zwang im Erwerbsleben."³⁷⁹ Women were largely responsible for creating a relaxing and cultured environment within the privacy of the home. Not least because literature was physically accessible to them it became an integral part of bourgeois domestic culture. Similarly, they were not in a position to explore their creativity. While middle-class women often could read and write they were not allowed a level of education that would have enabled them to produce aesthetically or intellectually challenging texts. They were excluded, as Sabine Becker calls attention to, from the "literarische Öffentlichkeit," and a more highbrow female literary scene, comprising both

³⁷⁸ Nusser, *Trivalliteratur* 135.

³⁷⁹ Gert Ueding, *Glanzvolles Elend: Versuch über Kitsch und Kolportage* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973) 27.

accomplished writers as well as educated readers, could not emerge.³⁸⁰ This explains why *Unterhaltungsliteratur* and specifically *Frauenromane*, a term first coined during the nineteenth century to refer to low- or middlebrow fiction for and about women, became the preferred genre of female readers.³⁸¹

If aesthetics, innovation and complexity were the sole criteria for judging a fictional text, the manner in which especially male modernist critics stigmatized and condemned popular fiction might have been justified. Yet the artistic or intellectual quality of a text does not, as Josef Witsch emphasized, determine its overall worth.³⁸² It would be wrong to assume that a novel, even though it might be “künstlerisch völlig wertlos,” would be completely unaware of reality and, unlike more traditional *Erbauungsliteratur*, would have no ambition to inspire readers to lead their best possible life.³⁸³ Popular fiction was designed to fulfill readers’ expectations and therefore reproduced the familiar. Nevertheless it incorporates, if in a less sophisticated manner, economic, social and cultural aspects into the narrative. Though the connection of women’s novels to these realities is often superficial, they – in contrast to the majority of texts included in the literary canon – at least addressed them. This makes popular *Frauenliteratur*

³⁸⁰ Wolfgang Langenbucher points out that middle-class women frequently read the same texts as their working-class counterparts because their level of education was not dissimilar. Sabina Becker, “Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman,” *Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman: Neue Interpretationen zum Roman der Weimarer Republik*, eds. Sabina Becker and Christoph Weiß (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995) 24; and Langenbucher, *Der aktuelle Unterhaltungsroman* 116.

³⁸¹ See, for example, Christine Touaillon, *Der deutsche Frauenroman des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Braumüller, 1919).

³⁸² Witsch, *Berufs- und Lebensschicksale* 13.

³⁸³ Witsch, *Berufs- und Lebensschicksale* 14.

a very viable genre; albeit, as Weimar contemporary Emil Lucka remarked, one with different intentions as well as a very different readership.³⁸⁴

The fact that women gained access to the public sphere after World War One raises the question why, apart from the fact that books were less expensive than movie tickets, women remained attracted to the more traditional medium literature. Surveys, statistics, essay competitions and book-lists written by students at the request of teachers provide valuable information on why this was the case.³⁸⁵ Women's preferences had changed little since the nineteenth century and both psychologist Alice Rühle-Gerstel, who taught women how to read romance novels as part of evening classes at local libraries, and Walter Hofmann, who surveyed the lending habits of library patrons, confirm that fiction rather than non-fiction or so-called self-help books continued to be women's preferred genre.³⁸⁶ A survey conducted by the magazine Die Frau in 1931 substantiates Rühle-Gerstel observation: women were avid readers of novels

³⁸⁴ Emil Lucka, "Volkstümliche Dichtung, Unterhaltungslektüre, Kitsch," Deutsche Rundschau 224 (1930): 222-7.

³⁸⁵ Readers' surveys gained popularity during the 1920s not only because, for example, youth and welfare workers or sociologists were keen on learning more about Weimar Germany's youngsters but also because they became powerful marketing tools for librarians and especially booksellers and publishing houses. See, for example, Hertha Siemering, Erna Barschak and Willy Gensch, eds. Was liest unsere Jugend? Ergebnisse von Feststellungen an Schulen aller Gattungen und Erziehungsanstalten sowie bei Jugendorganisationen und Jugendlichen (Berlin: G. Schenk, 1930); Berchem, "Was liest unsere heranwachsende weibliche Jugend?" 106-7; or Ricarda Huch, "Das junge Mädchen heute: Bemerkungen anlässlich eines Preisausschreibens," Die literarische Welt: Sonderausgabe zum 'Tag des Buches' 7.12 (1931): 1.

³⁸⁶ This marks the continuation of a trend: according to a survey from 1917, 75% of female library patrons were commercially employed and they mostly borrowed fiction and educational stenographische Schriften. Walter Hofmann, Die Lektüre der Frau: Ein Beitrag zur Leserkunde und zur Leserführung (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931) 29; Alice Rühle-Gerstel, "Frauen und Liebesgeschichten: Ein kleiner Bericht," Die literarische Welt 7.12 (1931): 9; and Rühle-Gerstel, Zeitschrift für weibliche Handlungsgehilfen 7/8 (1917): 5.

and they were especially fond of “ausgesprochene Frauenromane” that satisfied their “phantasie- und gemütsmäßigen Bedürfnisse.”³⁸⁷ A more recent study comes to a similar conclusion: women, according to Janice Radway, like to read enjoyable stories and whilst reading they wish to leave reality behind.³⁸⁸ However, Radway also found that women’s motivation for reading is tied to the desire to make sense of their lives. This led Radway to conclude that female readers use novels as primers about the world they live in.

The same holds true for readers of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Female white-collar workers did read traditional *Frauenromane* to satisfy their desire for the spectacular, the exotic and even the erotic.³⁸⁹ However, as Weimar contemporary Margarete Kupfer stated, they also used “[das Unterhaltungsbuch] zur Ergänzung des Alltags.”³⁹⁰ Hoping they would find inspiration and guidance but also answers to questions they could not resolve themselves:

Wir sind [...] nicht voll falscher Romantik, erfüllt von unerfüllbaren Illusionen. Wo wir praktisch sein müssen, sind wir’s. Die Zeit zwischen fünfzehn und zwanzig benutzen wir nicht, um uns aus Büchern merkwürdige Vorstellungen vom Leben zu bilden.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Margarete Kupfer, “Frauenlektüre als Spiegel weiblichen Seins,” *Die Frau* 38.12 (1931): 352.

³⁸⁸ Janice Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading,” *Daedalus* 113.3 (1984): 59.

³⁸⁹ Rolf Grimminger, ed., *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart: Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution 1680-1789*, vol. 3 (München: Hanser, 1980) 682.

³⁹⁰ Anni Jacker, “Das Verhältnis der Frau zum Buch,” *Börsenblatt* 89.50 (1931): 182.

³⁹¹ Susanne Krammer, “Wir sind gar nicht sachlich!,” *Der Querschnitt* 3 (1933): 205.

As Walter Hofmann identified, they were looking for “Menschen, Frauen, [...] mit denen man sich identifizieren kann.”³⁹² Commercial trainees and recent graduates, who were interviewed as part of a survey conducted by the *Börsenverein*, the German book trade association, were right to assert that books about *Backfische* or *höhere Töchter* as well as “Pensionsgeschichten” no longer reflected the reality of young women adequately and could therefore not fulfill this function.³⁹³ They also stated what kind of fiction they would like to read instead. Aware of the complexity of modern life they wanted to pick up books that supplied them with practical information and role models: they wanted to engross themselves in narratives about young, commercially employed women like themselves, who were neither stunningly clever nor amazingly beautiful, protagonists who would show them how to come to terms with the modern world in which they lived and worked.³⁹⁴

The views expressed by these young women demonstrate that Weimar readers did not consume the products of the culture industry passively. Their behavior challenges the arguments of modernist critics like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno or Siegfried Kracauer.³⁹⁵ It shows that female readers engaged

³⁹² Hofmann, Die Lektüre der Frau 29.

³⁹³ A sixteen year old commercial trainee cited in Max Norden, Was wir vom Buch erwarten: Antworten von 15-20jährigen Mädchen (Leipzig: Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler, 1931) 25 and 21.

³⁹⁴ A nineteen year old stenotypist communicated her preferences even more clearly: “Am liebsten möchte ich als Handelsschülerin natürlich den Werdegang eines Lehrmädchens beschrieben haben.” Cited in Norden, Was wir vom Buch erwarten 27.

³⁹⁵ As pointed out in Chapter Two, their view of popular culture was pessimistic because they saw it being under the sway of monopoly capitalism. See page 91 of this dissertation.

actively with the texts they read and that they used novels as a site to explore and understand their personal realities. *Frauenromane*, whether affirmative of the status quo or not, played a strong role in the reader's view of the world and her subjectivity formation. In light of the changed economic position as well as living conditions of these young women in combination with the instability of gender roles it would seem understandable that female white-collar workers turned to fiction for inspiration and guidance.

It was the commercialized, profit-oriented publishing industry rather than high culture, that responded to the need of this group to read about itself. Always hoping for another bestseller, they readily published manuscripts by first-time authors such as Irmgard Keun's Gilgi, eine von uns: "Wir haben die ganze Nacht gelesen. [...] Der Klofrau haben wir das Manuskript auch zum Lesen gegeben. Und die war entscheidend. Wir drucken es."³⁹⁶ Similarly, established talents were encouraged to write stories about secretaries and typists that would appeal to a mass readership. Hermann Ullstein, director of the Ullstein Verlag, for example, commissioned Vicki Baum to write a novel about a "hard-working girl as its central character [...] someone like his secretary."³⁹⁷ Salaried workers but also other types of modern women did not enter *Verlagsprogramme* on a mass scale until the mid-twenties. It was not until the New Woman had turned into a socio-cultural phenomenon that the figure of the female white-collar worker became a popular subject on a fictional level. Prior to the mid-twenties *Frauenliteratur* had

³⁹⁶ Wolfgang Krüger of Universitas Verlag cited in Kreis, "Was man glaubt, gibt es" 79.

³⁹⁷ King, Best-Sellers by Design 38.

been dedicated not only to other types of women but to a different image of womanhood as well. In fact, the majority of novels had idealized the lifestyle of affluent middle-class women and avoided questioning time-honored values or gender roles.³⁹⁸ Such texts continued to enjoy popularity during the post-war years and Anna Elisabeth Weirauch's Ruth Meyer: Eine fast alltägliche Geschichte (1922) is one example of a novel about a *höhere Tochter*.³⁹⁹ Coming from an affluent middle-class family, the protagonist spends her teenage years carefree and idle, and becomes the wife of a man her father chose for her. That Ruth only agrees to marry this man because she loves him does not, however, compensate for the fact that the novel ignores the significantly changed reality of her real-life contemporaries. Ruth Meyer distracted from actualities and instead celebrated and thereby affirmed old-fashioned morals and behavior. As women began to carve out a place in society for themselves their interest in the lives of

³⁹⁸ Novels that were less affirmative of the status quo did gain popularity from the turn of the century onwards. Influenced by both the economic changes that were affecting the middle class but also the organized women's movement, in particular younger authors began to criticize women's living conditions and their position in society. One example of such a text is Gabriele Reuter's Aus guter Familie: Leidensgeschichte eines Mädchens (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1894). The novel portrays how women were forced to comply with the bourgeois ideal of femininity and calls for a more modern and liberated femininity. The protagonist Agathe enjoys the privileges of a financially secure lifestyle but she also suffers from a spectrum of socially accepted forms of female subjugation. She learns how young women must repress their emotions, endure humiliation and prostitute themselves publicly in order to attract a husband. In addition, the novel illustrates the boredom that governs Agathe's quotidian existence and in doing so anticipated Hedwig Dohm's Sibilla Dalmar (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1897). This novel takes up the subject of young women, who were emotionally and intellectually stunted as a result of the leisurely and inane lifestyle that was imposed on them. Aware of the fact that marriage will not rescue her from this bleak existence, Agathe is unwilling to conform to society's expectations of a lady. Her attempt to rebel against society fails and, after a two-year stay at a 'spa' that is actually a mental institution, Agathe is forced to acknowledge the futility of her resistance and she resigns to a life of needlepoint and idleness. Society was shocked about these depressing and critical accounts, however, according to Heinrich Spiero, they reflected accurately "[was] die jungen Frauen der Zeit empfanden." Heinrich Spiero, Geschichte der deutschen Frauendichtung seit 1880 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913) 77.

³⁹⁹ Anna Elisabeth Weirauch, Ruth Meyer: Eine fast alltägliche Geschichte (Berlin: Eysler, 1922).

daughters of the upper classes diminished.⁴⁰⁰ As Robert Dinse remarked in 1932, “Bücher, die in die tatsächliche Welt und die Wunschwelt der einzelnen Jugendlichen nicht hineinpass[t]en” were no longer received well by readers.⁴⁰¹ Publishers and authors responded to the consumer’s requests and new heroines such as skilled and ambitious teachers, doctors or students began to populate the fictional worlds of books.⁴⁰²

Women’s interest in such novels was in part triggered by their insightful quality. Erika Mann rightly pointed out that this kind of fiction was not “ungemein hohe Literatur, aber doch eine brauchbare, angständige, oftmals

⁴⁰⁰ Significantly, it was not only the taste of adult readers that changed but the literary preference of girls and adolescents experienced modifications as well. During the first two decades of the twentieth century girls devoured books about *Backfische* such as Clementine Helm’s *Backfischchens Leiden und Freuden: Eine Erzählung für junge Mädchen* (1863; Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1914), Emmy von Rhoden’s *Trotzkopf* (Berlin: Weichert, 1916) or Else Ury’s 10-volume series *Nesthäkchen* (Stuttgart: Thielemann, 1922) as well as novels set in boarding schools. During the 1920s and the early 1930s, however, titles like Else Hofmann’s *Mädels von heute* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius, 1920), Arthur Zapp’s *Berliner Mädel* (Berlin: Ehrlich, 1922) and *Junggesellinnen* (Berlin: Ehrlich, 1923), Franz Werner Schmidt’s *Prachtmädel Gerda* (Berlin: F. Schneider, 1927), Hans Richter’s *Das Mädel mit dem Steuerknüppel* (Hannover: Sponnholtz, 1930), Annemarie Land’s *Ein Mädel im Auto* (Leipzig: Tamara, 1933) as well as stories about female students or women doctors that were set in an urban environment enjoyed far greater popularity. See Hertha Siemerling and Eduard Spranger, eds. *Weibliche Jugend in unserer Zeit: Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen von Jugendführerinnen* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1932) 12ff; and Elizabeth Harvey, “Private Fantasy and Public Intervention: Girl’s Reading in Weimar Germany,” *Determined Women: Studies in the Construction of the Female Subject 1900-90*, eds. Jennifer Birkett and Elizabeth Harvey (London: MacMillan, 1991) 38-67.

⁴⁰¹ Dinse, *Freizeitleben der Großstadtjugend* 58.

⁴⁰² Clara Viebig’s *Die mit den tausend Kindern* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1929) and Grete von Urbanitzky’s *Der wilde Garten* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1927) are examples of novels that feature successful teachers. Similarly, Hilde Maria Kraus’ *Ärztinnen* (Breslau: Bergstadtverlag, 1929) and Juliane Karwath’s *Marie Duchanin: Die Apothekerin und ihr Weg* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1926) feature women who succeed in medical professions. Gertrud Grote’s *Studentinnen* (Dresden: Reißner, 1927) and Vicki Baum’s *Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* feature women in higher education. The protagonist of the latter, a sympathetic and diligent young woman, must cope with poverty, death and an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, but eventually becomes a successful chemist and marries her much-adored former chemistry professor. The novel was an instant bestseller, which explains why literary critic Emmy Wolff labelled Helene Willfüer Weimar Germany’s “bekannteste Studentin.” See Emmy Wolff, “Studentinnen in Tagesromanen von heute,” *Die Frau* 36.8 (1929): 481-5.

liebenswert.“⁴⁰³ Popular fiction thus played a very similar role in the lives of women as film did. As established in Chapter Three, the cinema constituted a physical space they could visit and call a home. Mainstream films also functioned as an opinion-shaping instrument, and by creating and endorsing the visual imagery, in particular the fashion, associated with the New Woman, movies like Die Privatsekretärin inspired the female audience. While informing viewers about the latest trends, “die blödsinnigen und irrealen Filmphantasien” fulfilled viewers’ needs only partially.⁴⁰⁴ This explains why women equally embraced more traditional media. The act of reading did not require the reader to be in a particular place and therefore it is more appropriate to consider fiction a mental sphere. But like film it allowed women to escape their everyday and provided them with a space of fantasy and mobilization. Since novels were less suited to celebrate modern woman’s visual characteristics, which does not imply that writers (and publishers) had no choice of how to present the female white-collar worker on a fictional level, they presented women’s complex set of living and working conditions, which typically played a marginal role in films, in a more critical manner. Novels provided an alternative perspective on modern womanhood and by encouraging readers to explore their identity as well as their place in society against a more realistic and less affirmative background, they contributed to shaping the New Woman.⁴⁰⁵ Like the cinema, they constituted a

⁴⁰³ Erika Mann, “Frau und Buch,” 1931, Bubikopf 12.

⁴⁰⁴ Kracauer, “Das Ornament der Masse” 280.

⁴⁰⁵ In contrast to mainstream cinema, popular fiction was at least inclined to provoke debates about issues like love, abortion, harassment. Even Ullstein novels, which were designed for easy

modern *Öffentlichkeit* or what Vibeke Rützow Petersen calls a decidedly “female public sphere.”⁴⁰⁶

While *weibliche Angestelltenromane* served as a site for subjectivity formation, not all novels portrayed the working and living conditions of this social group in the same fashion. The many novels that were published during the 1920s and early 1930s had in common that they were designed to entertain readers. Yet, many novels published between 1918 and 1929, such as Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht (1924) by Hedwig Courths-Mahler and Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt (1923) by Adolf Sommerfeld, differed from those that were published during the final phase of the Weimar Republic in that they presented the lives of female white-collar workers in another way. It seems that a key reason why the novels are less realistic in their representation was the difference in age between the authors – Christa Anita Brück was born in 1899, Irmgard Keun in 1905 and Rudolf Braune in 1907. In contrast, Hedwig Courths-Mahler, the most commercially successful German author of all times, for example, was born in 1867 and nearly sixty years old when she wrote Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht in 1924.⁴⁰⁷ As a member of an earlier generation of women she had lived most of

consumption and almost always ended happily, incorporated problematic issues into their narratives. See King, Best-Sellers by Design 32.

⁴⁰⁶ Petersen, Women and Modernity 5.

⁴⁰⁷ Courths-Mahler wrote 208 novels and her estate contained material for an additional 140 books. On average she supplied her dedicated readers with four to five novels per year and in 1924 alone 13 titles were published under her name. During her lifetime she sold approximately 30 million copies and many more since her death in 1950. See Sichelschmidt, Hedwig Courths-Mahler 21; and Lia Avé, Das Leben der Hedwig Courths-Mahler (München: Drei Ulmen, 1990).

her adult life in a very different environment, in times when women's role in society had been even more limited, and morals and values had been highly restrictive. The texts reflect this experience and the author had no intention of presenting an inspirational view of modern female life.⁴⁰⁸

The *Angestelltenromane* Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht (1924) by Hedwig Courths-Mahler and Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt (1923) by Adolf Sommerfeld illustrate this point. Courths-Mahler's novel tells the story of Käthe Lindner, a young woman from a working-class background who rises up the social ladder. Anticipating films like Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus, the novel is essentially a semi-modern Cinderella story. Käthe Lindner commences her white-collar career as a stenographer at a factory but thanks to her skill and commitment as well as her moral integrity she is soon promoted to the position of private secretary, and is eventually led to the altar by the general manager and company heir.⁴⁰⁹ It was Courths-Mahler's intention to provide her readers with a delightful, escapist read: "Ich habe nicht anderes getan als später der Film: ich habe schwer arbeitenden

⁴⁰⁸ The same could be said about Clara Viebig (1860-1952). The portrayal of female sexuality and morality in Die mit den tausend Kindern (1929), for example, is very traditional with the protagonist sacrificing her duty as a teacher and guardian for her personal happiness. Similarly, the novel champions the natural look and deprecates, for example, cosmetics that were used by women to experiment with their femininity. See, for example, Andrea Müller, Mutterfiguren und Mütterlichkeit im Werk Clara Viebig's (Marburg: Tectum, 2002).

⁴⁰⁹ Fedor von Zobeltitz' Dagmar springt in die Freiheit (Berlin: Ullstein, 1930) is yet another example of a modern Cinderella story. The protagonist Dagmar, a young girl from the country, comes to Berlin where she hopes to find white-collar employment. She learns to type and other skills such as shorthand that will qualify her for an office job and she soon becomes the private secretary of a textile company's general manager. Dagmar performs well in the position and thanks to her efficiency as well as her refined manners she befriends her boss and his family. Her boss' daughter is particularly fond of Dagmar and regardless of their different social and economic position they become close friends. At a lavish party at her employer's house, Dagmar makes the acquaintance of her employer's son, who holds a managerial position and is the heir to the company. He is impressed as well as smitten by Dagmar and the ensuing friendship between them leads to marriage.

Menschen jenes Leben gezeigt, nach dem immer ihre Sehnsucht ging. [...] Ich habe Märchen für große Kinder erdacht."⁴¹⁰ The *Unterhaltungsroman* encouraged the reader to escape into a romanticized environment that is untainted by the negative aspects of modernization. While incorporating aspects of the lives of female white-collar workers into the narrative it refrains from addressing them in a realistic let alone critical manner.

The experience of Käthe Linder contradicts that of most women at the time. Her being a private secretary explains why her workplace bears little resemblance to the typical clerical working environment laid out in Chapter One. She operates machinery on a daily basis but her work is not characterized by standardization and therefore Käthe feels neither alienated nor exhausted. On the contrary, she is presented as someone who enjoys her job and even has the energy to study during her spare time. The relationship between the protagonist and her boss is similarly problematic. She is very fond of him because she trusts in his competence and good will but also because she is secretly in love with his second-born son Gert. Because of this emotional attachment she is delighted to work for the Ruhland family and it seems as if she cares little about her actual salary. What is striking and contributes to the distortion of reality is that her boss reciprocates her feelings. According to Ruhland Senior, Käthe is indispensable:

Sie ist unsere tüchtigste Korrespondentin und hat einen so blendenden Stil, daß wir ihr alle diffizilen Korrespondenzen zur Erledigung übergeben. Sie ist entschieden ein Sprachtalent und beherrscht die englische und französische Sprache vollständig.⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Hedwig Courths-Mahler referred to in Sichelschmidt, Hedwig Courths-Mahler 13.

⁴¹¹ Hedwig Courths-Maher, Arme kleine Anni, Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht, Im fremden Land (Bergisch Gladbach: Bastei Lübbe, 1993) 307-8.

Her marriage to Gert Ruhland at the end of the narrative is largely a reward for her skill, diligence and moral uprightness. Ultimately, the novel, like Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus, suggests that any woman can be as lucky as Käthe and advance into the highest spheres of the commercial or industrial bourgeoisie, provided her character resembles that of the protagonist.

A further problematic issue is the sexual harassment that Käthe is subjected to by Ruhland's first-born son Georg. Käthe attracts his interest because she is exceptionally beautiful and the innocent heroine must suffer because Georg "stellt den Frauen und Töchtern der Arbeiter nach, [denn] sie gelten ihm nicht mehr als Sklavinnen seiner Leidenschaft." (318) The conflict taints Käthe's otherwise idyllic existence but she silently endures Georg's advances, even though "sie sich [gerne] ihr Mißbehagen von der Seele gesprochen hätte." (329) She feels she must accept her fate and, as typical for *Frauenromane* that are affirmative of the status quo, her passivity is presented as strength rather than lack of character. Consequently it is not her action that brings liberation but intervening fate: Gert Ruhland learns of her troubles by chance and her tormentor conveniently dies in an accident. In the end, all tension is resolved and order is restored, a situation that Peter Nusser calls "Strategie der Bestätigung."⁴¹² However, the novel disregards that sexual harassment was not the personal problem of a select few but part of a larger social conflict, and Käthe's lack of awareness would have encouraged the reader to displace the issue into the private realm.

⁴¹² Nusser, Trivialliteratur 126.

Another novel that represents the figure of the female white-collar worker and in particular womanhood in a more traditional and therefore problematic manner is Adolf Sommerfeld's Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt. It tells the enjoyable and heartwarming story of Inge Berger, a lower middle-class woman who marries her employer's wealthy son, but also refrains from challenging the status quo. After her father died and the protagonist realizes that she and her mother cannot live off Mrs. Berger's small pension, Inge, who visited a *höhere Töchterschule* and a commercial training school, enters commercial employment. She draws a good salary, and thanks to her skill and enthusiasm she is soon promoted to the position of private secretary, where she attracts the interest of both her employer and his son. Before long Erich Markgraf proposes to Inge but she is in love with his son Wolfram and declines. Because she does not want to hurt Erich Markgraf's feelings she moves to another city and refuses to marry Wolfram, who is deeply in love with her, until Markgraf Senior gives them his blessing. After Wolfram is nearly killed by a jealous suitor, Inge dotingly cares for him and Markgraf Senior realizes that he must agree to the union.

The novel differs from Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht in that it incorporates aspects of modern life into the narrative. Near the beginning, for example, Inge takes the subway to work and the reader gains insights into daily life in Weimar Berlin. At her subway stop she observes the urban hustle and bustle:

Der Bahnsteig war angefüllt mit Menschen der verschiedensten Art, Angestellte beiderlei Geschlechts, die auf schnellstem Wege zu ihrer Beschäftigungsstätte gelangen wollten; ein jeder nur auf sich bedacht, stehend oder sitzend mit dem einfahrenden Zug befördert

zu werden. [...] Die täglichen Fahrgäste haben eine gewisse Gewandheit erlangt, sich ohne Schädigung von Leib und Leben in die Wagen der Untergrundbahn hineinquetschen zu lassen. [...] Der Berliner hat sich an den Massenandrang gewöhnt.⁴¹³

Similarly, Inge's colleagues, members of the new urban clerical class, are thoroughly modern in that they enjoy leisure activities such as going to the cinema or dance halls. However, Inge and her story are decidedly traditional and the elements of modern life merely serve to create a background against which she may rise. For example, the text presents Inge's colleagues as stereotypical New Women and, stressing the negative qualities that were associated with the figure, such as loose morals, contrasts them with Inge's natural and 'pure' femininity.⁴¹⁴ She is not keen on light-fare entertainment such as "Schundbücher," is not particularly interested in fashion and disapproves strongly of her colleagues' casual love affairs. (30) Instead, she is upright and pure; in fact her character complies perfectly with nineteenth-century bourgeois society's ideal of women.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Adolf Sommerfeld, Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt: Lebensroman einer Stenotypistin (1923; Berlin: Continent, 1929) 21-2.

⁴¹⁴ Clara Viebig's Die mit den tausend Kindern echoes this attitude and descriptions of the protagonist Marie-Luise and her friend Marga demonstrates that the novel favors traditional rather than modern femininity. Marie-Luise, the virtuous heroine, is presented as a genuine beauty: "Mit Wohlgefallen sah er das reiche blonde Haar, die Gestalt mit der aufrechten Haltung, die Augen, die ihn hell und offen anblickten." The appearance of Marga, also a teacher, strongly contrasts the protagonist's look: "Das Gesicht [Margas] war nicht unauffällig. Samtige, tiefdunkle Augen, die etwas Melancholisches hatten, ein feiner, sehr roter Mund, und ein Hauch von Puder auf den Wangen." Especially older colleagues struggle with what they consider to be an exotic look and think of her as a "Filmdiva" rather than a peer. The text implies that women who embrace the modern look also adopt an immoral femininity. Viebig, Die mit den tausend Kindern 50-65.

⁴¹⁵ Such an attitude was not altogether unusual. According to Kracauer, a certain Trude and her friend, both female white-collar workers from Berlin, abided by similar morals. They did not want anything to do with their made-up colleagues and looked down on them for having dinner with men at exclusive restaurants. Kracauer, Die Angestellten 69.

This explains why her gender identity is primarily characterized by passivity. It is due to her integrity that Inge must endure considerable suffering: Erich Markgraf pursues her aggressively and her refusal to marry him antagonizes him. At first glance it seems as if Inge were an independent modern woman, who is determined to choose her husband rather than be chosen and refuses to be harassed at her workplace. Yet, the novel distorts the conflict inherent in the relationship between the secretary and her employer. While it is *his* behavior that is utterly inappropriate – as her employer he is in a more powerful position than her, not to mention the fact that he is thirty years her senior – Inge feels responsible for the conflict. Therefore she gives notice not because her boss behaved inappropriately but because, as Wolfram later tells his father,

ihr tiefes, von dem reinsten und edelsten Empfinden durchtränktes Gemüt hat es nicht gelitten, in deiner Nähe zu bleiben. Tränenden Auges erzählte sie mir oft, sie habe das Gefühl gehabt, daß ihre Gegenwart dich beunruhigt, weil sie dir mehr sei als eine Privatsekretärin. Und schließlich sei sie zu der Ueberzeugung gelangt, daß du ihretwegen Seelenqualen erduldest. So gewaltig war nun ihre Ergebenheit und Anhänglichkeit zu dir, daß sie sich schweren Herzens von dir riß und sogar ihre Mutter verließ, nur um dich nicht leiden zu sehen. Sie verehrte, sie liebte dich wie einen Gott. (207)

The protagonist feels such loyalty towards her employer that she refuses to marry the man she loves. The novel suggests that precisely the willingness to endure suffering eventually bestows her with happiness. It ignores that a new female gender identity had emerged which promised to empower and allow women to take control of their lives. Das Mädchen vom Spittelmarkt is not a text that would have contributed to raising women's awareness, let alone inspire them

as to how they might cope with the emotional and mental challenges they faced. Instead, it encouraged readers to return to a more traditional gender identity.

Popular novels like Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht or Das Mädchen vom Spittelmarkt differed from mainstream secretary films such as Die Privatsekretärin in that they do not seek to stimulate their readers to engage in consumer behavior. A parallel is evident nevertheless, because like the cinematic fantasies the novels romanticized the working conditions of female white-collar workers as well as promoted non-modern gender roles and more conventional forms of living. According to Josef Witsch the misleading impression created by novels like these had a particularly strong impact on adolescents, who were yet to choose a professional career:

[Solche] Romane vermitteln zumal jüngeren Angestellten Anschauungen von Arbeitsverhältnissen im Beruf, die nicht existieren, und suggerieren ihnen Wünsche und Hoffnungen, deren Erfüllung durch den Beruf nicht möglich ist.⁴¹⁶

If we believe Witsch, the texts had the effect that young women were keener on entering white-collar employment than they would have been if they had been aware of actual conditions. Since Das ist der Liebe Zaubermacht and Das Mädchen vom Spittelmarkt displace conflicts into the private realm, Witsch is also right in pointing out that such works further thwarted possibilities of political organization, since the majority of young working women was neither politically organized nor particularly interested in politics.⁴¹⁷ Not unlike mainstream cinema the texts appropriated the modern female white-collar worker to advocate the

⁴¹⁶ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 14.

⁴¹⁷ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 14.

conservative belief that women belong at home.⁴¹⁸ As such they represent yet another force that worked against women's genuine integration into the public sphere.

In contrast, younger and, especially in the case of Rudolf Braune, more political authors wrote about young female professionals in a way that was not only captivating but also critical of the status quo.⁴¹⁹ Both Christa Anita Brück and Irmgard Keun had worked in offices and influenced by their personal experience, wrote novels that addressed the socio-economic realities of female white-collar workers realistically and critically. These authors did not create a distorted image of the figure by playing down the actualities of her working environment or by turning the New Woman into a kind of Super Woman. Their texts did not present her as a harbinger of change, celebrate women's achievements, or express gratitude for the rights women had been granted by the Weimar constitution either. To these authors, New Women in their own right, the figure was not a novelty because by the early 1930s it was quite normal for young women to work outside the home. In addition, they were too young to remember the limitations that had been placed on women in the past, which made them more sensitive to

⁴¹⁸ The implications of these two texts are in line with the views of the conservative wing of the organized women's movement laid out in Chapter One. It favored a fiction such as Dorothea Hofer-Dernburg's Babys Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (Berlin: Paul Neff, 1930), Ina Seidel's Das Wunschkind (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1930) or Ilse Meister's Mutter sein heißt... (Stuttgart: Union, 1931) that reminded women of their duties as mothers and reflected "wahre[s] Frauentum." See Kerstin Brandt, Sentiment und Sachlichkeit: Der Roman der neuen Frau in der Weimarer Republik (Köln: Böhlau, 2003) 49ff; and "Anzeigenteil der Sonderausgabe des Börsenblattes zum Tag des Buches," Frau und Buch 89.50 (1931): 1336.

⁴¹⁹ Ernst Toller, "Eine Jugend in Deutschland," 1933, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 4 (München: Hanser, 1978) 10.

the economic and social limitations that were placed on women. They had few illusions about the republic's initial promise of independence, mobility and emancipation, and their texts reflect this: they present young women, who struggle with the ambivalent mixture of progress and tradition.

To a varying degree, all three novels introduced a sense of wittiness into women's literature of the late Weimar era.⁴²⁰ At first glance it might seem as if the novels' protagonists are model examples of the much-publicized New Woman. Their "vitale Energie, Lebenshunger und Aktivität, verbunden mit dem Bemühen, sich durch eine betont sachliche Haltung der Realität gegenüber zu behaupten" sets them apart from the heroines of more traditional *Frauenromane*.⁴²¹ As products of modernization they lack what Elfriede Jelinek calls "Mystizismus des geheimisvollen Universell-Weiblichen [oder] Pathos."⁴²² The protagonists try to realize the promise of economic and social mobility and their individual success or failure raises the question whether a truly New Woman – educated, financially autonomous and a consumer in control – did, in fact, materialize. In addition, as Vibeke Peterson remarks, the novels "are also repositories of social observations."⁴²³ They are *Zeitromane*, the narrated time of the novels is more or less identical with the historical time, yet they mostly avoid addressing larger

⁴²⁰ Ritta Jo Horsley, "Warum habe ich keine Worte?... Kein Wort trifft zutiefst hinein': The Problematics of Language in the Early Novels of Irmgard Keun," *Colloquia Germanica* 23.3/4 (1990): 298.

⁴²¹ Rosenstein, *Irmgard Keun* 13.

⁴²² Jelinek, "Weil sie heimlich weinen muß" 223.

⁴²³ The novels further incorporate reality by weaving actual names of historical figures, streets and venues as well as song texts, references to films, movie stars and advertisements into their fabrics. Petersen, *Women and Modernity* 2.

social or political events or currents and do not ask “die Frage nach den gesellschaftlichen Ursachen.”⁴²⁴ By focusing on the period’s everyday life and telling the experiences of individuals, who mostly lack political awareness but are familiar with the limitations, they present a much more intimate picture. They describe “die [persönliche] Lebenshaltung einer ganz bestimmten Frau,” her problems and worries as well as her joys and dreams, and create scenarios of how women coped with their growing sense of disillusionment.⁴²⁵ Addressing the problematic issues that increasingly dominated female white-collar workers’ experience of modernity, they represent what Dietrich Steinbach calls “eine ungeschminkte und illusionslose, eine authentische Darstellung des wirklichen Geschehens” and as such a truly contemporary response to the challenges of the period.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Kollektiv für Literaturgeschichte, eds., Romanführer A-Z: Der deutsche Roman bis 1949, 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin/DDR: Volk und Wissen, 1973) 404.

⁴²⁵ Irene Lorisika, Fraueendarstellungen bei Irmgard Keun und Anna Seghers (Frankfurt a.M.: Haag & Herchen, 1985) 145.

⁴²⁶ Dietrich Steinbach, “Einleitung: Das neuerliche Interesse an Irmgard Keun,” Das kunstseidene Mädchen, by Irmgard Keun (Stuttgart: Klett, 1999) 146.

Schicksale Hinter Schreibmaschinen: “Ich will Freude in der Arbeit suchen.”

Christa Anita Brück's novel Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (1930) tells the story of a young, upper middle-class woman, who is forced to take up employment after her parents are killed in an accident.⁴²⁷ The orphaned daughter of an officer accepts her changed economic situation and is willing to seize her provider's death as an opportunity.⁴²⁸ Fräulein Brückner has the skills and knowledge that would allow her to survive on the modern labor market.⁴²⁹ She is intelligent, she enjoyed a *Lyzealbildung* and she is highly motivated: “Ich will vorwärtsstreben, ich will nicht [...] arbeiten, bloß um zu verdienen, ich will Freude in der Arbeit suchen und [...] mir ein menschenwürdiges Leben zu gestalten versuchen.” (24) Initially Fräulein Brückner is confident that her skill and motivation will enable her to pursue a career, however, her optimism and energy

⁴²⁷ Christa Anita Brück is a pseudonym for Christa Ladisch, née Jaab. Her second novel, the mystery Ein Mädchen mit Prokura (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1932) also features a female white-collar worker but the text does not focus on working or living conditions. See Wilhelm Kosch et al., eds., Deutsches Literaturlexikon: Biographisch-bibliographisches Handbuch, vol. 2, 3rd rev. ed. (Bern: Francke, 1969) 138.

⁴²⁸ According to Ernst Bloch the impoverished middle class “[wollte] zurück in den Vorkrieg, wo es ihr besser ging” but Fräulein Brückner never once complains about her *Deklasseierung*. Compared to male white-collar workers and for reasons laid out in Chapter One, women were less inclined to fear proletarianization, and *weibliche Angestelltenromane* reflect this attitude. Like Fräulein Brückner, the character Mucki Schöps in Martin Kessel's Herrn Brechers Fiasko (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1932) comes from a bourgeois background and is forced to enter employment after her father dies. In addition to Mucki having to take up a secretarial job in an advertising agency, she and her mother are forced to move into a much smaller apartment in one of Berlin's less fashionable neighborhoods. Yet, the young woman does not resent these developments but, recognizing quickly that it grants her freedom and embraces the new situation.

⁴²⁹ Significantly, the protagonist lacks a first name and this reflects society's attitude towards female professionals. As Elsa Herrmann remarked, “man bezeichnet [die berufstätige Frau] kurzweg als ‘Fräulein’ und bringt damit zum Ausdruck, daß man auf ihre Persönlichkeit an sich nicht den geringsten Wert legt. ‘Fräulein’ ist ein Kollektivbegriff, der nach der herrschenden Ansicht auf jede berufstätige Frau paßt, gleichgültig in welcher Position sie ist.” Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau 131-2.

fade away as she experiences discrimination and exploitation. She is not promoted even though she delivers excellent results because she is a woman and witnesses how a colleague is discriminated against because of her age. Determined to find a position that will allow her to grow, she gives notice but comes to understand that she is faced with the same problems everywhere. Working for film distributors or a company dealing in baked goods she can perfect her secretarial and office management skills, but she will never be treated as an equal by men or promoted to a more senior position. She works in unpleasant, at times even hazardous environments and this begins to take its toll on her health. Determined to remain faithful to her dream of a lifelong and fulfilling career Fräulein Brückner continues to try and improve her situation, however with the effect that her struggle intensifies. Employers take advantage of her dedication, and sexual harassment in particular makes employment increasingly intolerable for her. The same reason that leads her to work overtime causes her to tolerate the abuse: fully dependent on her income she must constantly fear that she might lose her job if she speaks up. Eventually she can no longer bear the combination of discrimination, exploitation and harassment and, physically and mentally exhausted, she gladly accepts her notice and escapes to the countryside.

Christa Anita Brück's debut novel does not necessarily deserve attention because of its literary quality. The language is old-fashioned and characterized by kitsch and one example shall illustrate that its style is not, as a certain Höpker

claimed, “schlicht.”⁴³⁰ While working for the film distributor Murawski, who constantly forces himself onto his female staff, Fräulein Brückner finds herself in a situation unable to escape. He surprises her looking at puppies in the stockroom and could have easily raped her. The language describing the scene is laden with excessive pathos:

Nur ein Wunder läßt mich entkommen. Vielleicht war es der schützende Wille meiner seligen Mutter in dem Hundekind und berührte das Herz des Entarteten, daß es jene Grenze streife, jene ferne, unirdische Grenze, da der Glorienschein alles Werdens die zerstörenden Brände unreiner Sinnlichkeit überstrahlt.⁴³¹

A higher power or *Schicksal* comes to the protagonist’s rescue and makes it seem as if, Christa Jordan observes, Brück were “gewaltsam um poetisches Schreiben bemüht.”⁴³² Given the novel’s general tone it should seem odd that even a modernist like Siegfried Kracauer considered the novel’s language “ungekünstelt.”⁴³³

Nevertheless, at the time of its publication the book caused “großes, beinahe sensationelles Aufsehen.”⁴³⁴ Because it presented the realities of female white-collar workers in a realistic manner and explicitly critiqued these women’s deplorable situation “wurde [das Buch] in der Tagespresse, vor allem aber in der Fachpresse solcher Verbände, denen arbeitende Frauen angeschlossen [waren],

⁴³⁰ Höpker, “Ein Angestelltenschicksal: Rezension von C.A. Brück, Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen,” Die Tat 22.2 (1930/31): 574.

⁴³¹ Christa Anita Brück, Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (Berlin: Sieben Stäbe, 1930) 219.

⁴³² Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung 124.

⁴³³ Siegfried Kracauer, “Ein Angestelltenroman: Rezension von C.A. Brück, Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen,” Frankfurter Zeitung (6 Jul. 1930): 6.

⁴³⁴ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 14

wie Gewerkschaften, Frauenorganisationen und dergleichen viel beachtet.“⁴³⁵

Christa Anita Brück was, according to Max Rössiger, “die erste Frau, die [das] Angestelltenschicksal aus eigenem Erleben heraus [gestaltete].“⁴³⁶ The author had firsthand experience to draw from as she herself had held several clerical positions before writing the novel.⁴³⁷ The resemblance of the names of the author and the protagonist – Brück and Brückner – might be a heavy-handed device to substantiate the claim that the narrative is not entirely made-up but at least in part based on the experiences of an individual. Some critics, such as literary scholar Josef Witsch, questioned the novel’s accuracy and credibility.⁴³⁸

However, as critics like Siegfried Kracauer argued, the autobiographical novel “verbürgert die Wirklichkeitsnähe, durch die allein solche Frontberichte gerechtfertigt werden.“⁴³⁹ As my discussion of the novel will show, this fictionalized personal experience or *Schicksal* constitutes “ein[en] treffende[n] Beitrag zur Bestandsaufnahme der Angestelltenwelt”: it provides insights into the realities of female white-collar workers on a fictional level and, more specifically,

⁴³⁵ Anne Gausebeck, Liebe und Ehe im Anschauungswandel des internationalen Frauenromans (Düsseldorf: Nolte, 1934) 213.

⁴³⁶ Rössiger, “Hinter Schreibmaschinen” 61.

⁴³⁷ The same applies to Irmgard Keun, who worked “einige Jahre als Stenotypistin” after leaving school and prior to taking up acting. Silvio Vietta, Das literarische Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001) 114.

⁴³⁸ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 14.

⁴³⁹ Kracauer, “Ein Angestelltenroman” 6.

furthering our understanding of the identity shaping process of modern Weimar women.⁴⁴⁰

The novel touches on various issues that affected working women during the late 1920 and early 1930s and, by focusing on different aspects of discrimination, in particular the issues of age, sexual harassment and exploitation; it brings the deplorable state of affairs to the reader's attention in an unrivaled way.⁴⁴¹ The novel opens with a description of a group of employees who are chatting together on the occasion of forty-two year old Urschl's return to the office. The woman, the oldest stenotypists working for the company, had been absent for some time because she was sent on a health cure. She had suffered from severe headaches and just before she left for the sanatorium she threw up daily from exhaustion. When she first started, she was a jovial and energetic person but working as a typist for a phenomenal twenty-seven years has worn her out. Sitting for long hours in a poorly ventilated office every day, as well as the pressure put on her by superiors to produce enough strokes on the machine, have taken their toll. After "siebenundzwanzig Jahre Krummsitzen, Stubenluft, ungezählte Überstunden, siebenundzwanzig Jahre lang unregelmäßige Mahlzeiten und immer Hetze, Eile, alleräußerste Anspannung," and not to mention the monotonous character of her noisy work, Urschl is no

⁴⁴⁰ Kracauer, "Ein Angestelltenroman" 6.

⁴⁴¹ The novel does not address leisure or Weimar Germany's entertainment industry. Whether Fräulein Brückner objects to, for example, going to the cinema or whether she does not consider it an important part of her existence as a female white-collar worker and therefore does not address the topic, remains unclear.

longer able to carry out her job. (18) Her case might be extraordinary but, as it will be remembered, “eine achtstündige Tätigkeit an Buchungs-, Büro- und Rechenmaschine [ging] auf die Dauer über jede Arbeitskraft hinaus und bedeut[e]t einen rücksichtslosen Raubbau an der Gesundheit der Angestellten.”⁴⁴²

Urschl’s headaches return soon after she has come back to work and she tries to fool her colleagues and especially her boss into thinking that she is well by applying lots of make-up, the secret weapon of Weimar Germany’s female professionals. She is quite sick and only copes by taking high dosages of painkillers throughout the day and drinking “alle zwei Stunden starken Bohnenkaffee.” (18) She is afraid her doctor will put her on the sick list, possibly send her to another lengthy health cure, which would increase her chances of losing her job: “So eine Schreibmaschine, wenn sie ruiniert wird, kostet Geld. Aber eine Angestellte setzt man an die Luft, wenn sie reparaturbedürftig ist und man sucht sich eine unverbrauchte neue.”⁴⁴³ (20) Similarly, Urschl hesitates to see the doctor of her disability insurance because she senses that he would not acknowledge the severity of her ailment. His flippant comment – “ach, die Kopfschmerzen, die werden schon noch wegzukriegen sein!” – is highly inconsiderate if not offensive. (20) It demonstrates that the legal framework

⁴⁴² Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 57.

⁴⁴³ A participant in Susanne Suhr’s survey confirms that lengthy health cures were a particular thorn in the flesh of employers and they often lead to an employee’s dismissal: “Ich bin lungenkrank und soll in eine Heilstätte, wage aber nicht, das zu beantragen, da ich sonst entlassen werde.” Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 32.

enabled insurers, keen on saving costs, to avoid paying women like Urschl the disability pension they were legally entitled to.

Being a typist might have initially presented Urschl with an opportunity; possibly the job was attractive when still new and she might have been proud to earn her own money.⁴⁴⁴ But now her workday is no longer exciting but more akin to torture. She is in a desperate situation: “Wenn wir fünfundsechzig sind, kriegen wir eine Rente. Ich bin zweiundvierzig. Dreiundzwanzig Jahre noch. Bitte, sagen Sie mir, wie ich noch dreiundzwanzig Jahre arbeiten soll.” (20) She cannot rely on institutional support and because Urschl, an unmarried woman who is dependent on her income, is too young to retire she has no choice but to desperately cling to her job. As indicated in Chapter One, even middle-aged women in perfect health were unable to compete with the many teenagers that flooded the job market especially after 1929. Indeed, “die Not der älteren Angestellten” commenced at a much earlier age and Fräulein Brückner learns that the chances to find employment are very slim even for an educated and highly qualified woman in her twenties.⁴⁴⁵ Any job posting she reads in the

⁴⁴⁴ Fräulein Brückner’s experience is similar. She is required to operate office machinery and during the early stages of her career she does not mind the monotony. This explains why she occasionally even speaks affectionately about the typewriter: “Unter den Schreibmaschinen gibt es kleine, behende Mädchen, die laufen wie Wiesel, geschäftige treue Tanten, niemals verdrossen, allzeit hilfsbereit, und alte Großmütter.” (228) However, after almost seven years in employment, the eternal rattle of office machines has become unbearable and Fräulein Brückner feels devoured by the machine: “Der Mensch strömt hinein in die Maschine. Die Maschine, das ist er selbst, sein äußerstes Können, seine äußerste Sammlung und letzte Anspannung. Und er selbst, er ist Maschine, ist Hebel, ist Taste, ist Type und schwirrender Wagen. Nicht denken, nicht sich besinnen, weiter, weiter, geschwinde, geschwinde, tipp, tipp, tipptipptipptipp... Im Kopf beginnt ein kleiner Schwindel zu kreisen.” (229) The criticism inherent in Fräulein Brückner’s comment recalls that expressed by Expressionist films like *Metropolis* and plays like *Gas I*. See also page 144.

⁴⁴⁵ Ludwig Preller, *Sozialpolitik in der Weimarer Republik* (Kronberg: Athenäum, 1978) 137.

newspaper invites only very young women to apply, which explains her astonishment when she comes across an ad that is specifically addressed at women above the age of twenty-five:

Ich lese, [...] daß eine studentische Organisation eine intelligente und gebildete Sekretärin suche, nicht unter fünfundzwanzig Jahren, erste Kraft, an selbstständiges Arbeiten gewöhnt, mit guten englischen und französischen Sprachkenntnissen. Zielbewußten Bewerberinnen biete sich eine gutbezahlte, in jeder Beziehung entwicklungsfähige Lebensstellung. (266)

Fräulein Brückner's delight is understandable: jobs that required skills beyond typewriting were only rarely offered to women.

In addition to institutionalized discrimination Urschl must also endure being harassed by male colleagues, in particular the correspondent Stockmann, who has been with the company for less than half the time she has. As he summons her to dictation for the first time after her return to the office Urschl is presumably unable to gather a shorthand pad and pencil quickly enough. Stockmann is fully aware of her situation and knows her reaction is due to nervousness rather than incompetence. Nevertheless he lashes out at her, attacking her unfairly on grounds of her health but also age and gender: "Nun lassen Sie schon den Unfug! Scheint mir nicht viel besser geworden zu sein mit Ihnen. Ich sage ja, Weiber über vierzig gehören nicht mehr ins Büro." (10)

Stockmann derives validity for his inappropriate behavior from his seniority though actually he is not much higher up in the company hierarchy than Urschl. Stockmann is encouraged to disrespect women like Urschl by their employer. When passing staff in the hallway Alfred Dudenmeyer only acknowledges and greets male employees whereby he signals to them that they rank higher than

women. Clearly, Stockmann harasses Urschl to make himself feel better, because as a result of office rationalization his market worth is actually not significantly greater than hers. By subscribing to a class consciousness or *Standesbewußtsein* that has become obsolete Stockmann thwarts the possibility of solidarity among him and his fellow employees and thereby that of women's full integration into the office environment.

The combination of this middle-aged female white-collar worker's physical and mental suffering validates sociologist A. Kasten's claim that "im höheren Alter noch Stenotypist zu sein, in das Kapitel des Martyriums der modernen, mechanisierten industriellen Teilarbeit gehört."⁴⁴⁶ The few choices that are available to Urschl explain why she advises Fräulein Brückner to abandon her dream of a white-collar career and to marry instead:

Hören Sie auf die arme Urschl. [...] Suchen Sie sich einen Mann. Lassen Sie alles andere laufen wie es läuft. Wenn heute ein Ungeheuer käme mit sechs Beinen und acht Armen und fünf Mäulern und wollte mich haben, ich überlegte es mir nicht, ich würde es nehmen. Heiraten Fräulein Brückner, heiraten, heiraten! [...] Denken Sie an mich, heiraten um jeden Preis. (22)

Fräulein Brückner is shocked by her colleague's advice and in particular irritated by her vehement tone. Her reaction is based on her inexperience.⁴⁴⁷ Even though she has been working at Alfred Dudenmeyer's for almost two years she herself has not yet had any of the disillusioning experiences that led women like Urschl to speak in this way. She is still confident that she will be able to pursue a

⁴⁴⁶ Kasten, Wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten 94.

⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, after having toiled in offices for several years, Fräulein Brückner thinks just like Urschl: "Im stillen hofft eine jede, früher oder später durch Heirat befreit zu werden." (252)

lifelong career, speculates on being promoted in the near future and thinks Urschl is exaggerating because she is sick. However, as she learns that it is essentially impossible for women to achieve genuine professional success she comes to understand her colleague's reasoning and begins to see marriage and motherhood in a different light as well.

Fräulein Brückner's process of realization commences shortly after her conversation with her distraught colleague. She finds out that her superior is leaving the company and because she has been his assistant for quite some time, Fräulein Brückner feels qualified to move into the position of first correspondent. She is well acquainted with the division's structure, has handled much of its day-to-day business and the correspondence, which she has been writing all by herself anyway, has never once been the cause of complaints. It should seem logical that she would be considered for the job: a promotion would not only reward Fräulein Brückner for her accomplishments and commitment but it would ensure a smooth transition and disrupt business as little as possible. But Alfred Dudenmeyer passionately refuses her request. However, his reasoning why Fräulein Brückner would be unsuited for the position is not guided by objective criteria. At first he at least tries to conceal his true motive and claims he objects to her promotion because she is a semi-trained stenotypist, who lacks the skills necessary for the job. Fräulein Brückner proves him wrong by informing him of her expertise, but rather than appreciating her services for the company and recognizing this woman's potential Dudenmeyer expresses anger. Her superior

should not have allowed her to complete any tasks other than typing – and now his real motive begins to show through – because if anyone were to find out about this it might hurt the company’s reputation. Fräulein Brückner is determined and, unwilling to accept no for an answer, she persists. Sensing her resolve Dudenmeyer claims that she is too young for the job but because she knows the age of other candidates she is able to dismantle this argument as well. Finally, Dudenmeyer has no choice but to admit that he will not give her the job because of her gender.

Geben Sie sich keine Mühe. Sie sind [...] eine Frau. Möglich, daß Sie etwas können. Ich will es dahingestellt sein lassen. Aber was würde wohl meine Konkurrenz dazu sagen, wenn sie erfährt, daß Stenotypistinnen bei mir die Korrespondenzabteilungen führen? [...] Stellen Sie mir hier einen jungen Mann hin. Meinetwegen soll er auch nicht älter als dreiundzwanzig Jahre sein. Wenn er auftritt wie Sie, soll er den Posten haben. Aber ein Mädels?
Ausgeschlossen. (31-2)

Regardless of her suitability for a more senior position, Fräulein Brückner has no prospects of ever moving up this company’s ladder. What is more, Dudenmeyer is willing to give the job to someone completely unqualified; he rather promotes her incompetent colleague Pehlke than “in [s]einem Büro mit [...] Weibwirtschaft anzufangen.” (31) Dudenmeyer fully internalized what Susanne Suhr called “veraltete Vorstellungen und unterbewußte Wünsche von der ‘Minderwertigkeit der Frau’” and has no qualms about confining Fräulein Brückner to the typewriter and thwarting her “Lebensmöglichkeiten.”⁴⁴⁸

Fräulein Brückner, fighting for “weibliche Autonomie, um ihre Selbstständigkeit,” refuses to accept his decision and thereby the hopelessness

⁴⁴⁸ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 5.

of her situation.⁴⁴⁹ She informs Dudenmeyer that her request was not only fuelled by ambition but also economic necessity. Unable to rely on anyone for financial support she simply cannot afford to continue working as a poorly paid typist and, inspired by her dream of professional advancement, she threatens to resign. Dudenmeyer's reaction is as unusual as it is indicative of the climate of the times. Typically, those employees who were bold enough to demand a promotion or a pay raise were dismissed without delay; especially "Tippmädel" because they were "billige Ware" and could be easily replaced. (20) Dudenmeyer asks her to become the private secretary of Pehlke. He makes this offer because he is aware of the fact that Pehlke has "keine Ahnung von dem ganzen Krempel," and he hopes that the division will manage if Fräulein Brückner helps him. (39) Unwilling to consent to her exploitation she rejects this proposition:

Ich bin doch wirklich nicht unbescheiden, wenn ich mir einen Posten wünsche, auf dem ich mich ein wenig unentbehrlich fühlen kann, so daß der Arbeitgeber sich's im Interesse seines Geschäftes überlegt, ob es nicht richtiger ist, mich zu behalten, ehe er mich vor meinem nächsten Geburtstag, der mich tarifmäßig in eine höhere Gehaltsstufe bringt, abbaut. (36)

Even though Fräulein Brückner's request to become head correspondent was not met, her boss agrees to promote her to a slightly more senior, possibly better paid and certainly a more prestigious position. It was the best position available to women and Fräulein Brückner would benefit from accepting it. Unaware of the

⁴⁴⁹ Friedrun Bastkowski, Christa Lindner and Ulrike Prokop, Frauenbewegung und die "Neue Frau" 1890-1933, vol. 2 (Frankfurt a.M.: Stadt Frankfurt, Dezernat für Kultur und Freizeit, 1980) 148.

fact that female white-collar employment is a cul-de-sac in every respect, she believes that not all employers are like Dudenmeyer and resigns.⁴⁵⁰

During the course of the narrative, however, Fräulein Brückner must learn that “die Mißachtung [ihres] Geschlechts” is widespread and nobody “macht die neue Mode mit den Weibern [...] mit. In [jedem] Haus sind [interessante] Posten nur für Männer da.” (31) After leaving Dudenmeyer, Fräulein Brückner works for Piepenbrock & Eckerlein, a company that is run according to the same old-fashioned or rather discriminatory principles, and she looks for another position. Increasingly aware of the limitations placed on women like her she communicates her dismay to a male colleague, Warius, who understands her predicament but cannot help her:

Damit tut ihr uns ab, unsern Kampf um das bißchen Dasein, zehnmahl härter als der Eure, unser Ringen um Anerkennung, unsere verzweifelte Gegenwehr gegen die Herabwürdigung zur toten Maschine. Ihr sagt: heiratet doch! und schlägt uns die Tür vor der Nase zu. Das ist so, als wollte man einem Verdurstenden sagen, iß doch Kuchen. Es handelt sich hier nicht um die Erfüllung des Frauendaseins, nicht um Glück, nicht um Liebe. Es geht darum, daß ich verdienen muß oder verhungern, daß ich nicht gewillt bin, mich jahrzehntelang elendig durchs Dasein zu krüppeln. (36-7)

Ironically, Fräulein Brückner’s desire to escape the fate of someone like Urschl and her determination to make a patriarchal system work to her advantage accelerates her *Schicksal* or failure to navigate modern society.

Professional and personal integrity are very important to Fräulein Brückner;

however, as she becomes increasingly desperate she agrees to work for shady

⁴⁵⁰ Similarly, she gives notice at Heinz Wagner’s company as her position as typist “birgt keinerlei Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten” and Fräulein Brückner, fuelled by her education and social background, ambitiously looks for a more fulfilling job. (275)

companies. One such example is her willingness to work as a booker for a certain Lichte, who owns a film distribution company, "eine Art Filmhökerei, einen Handel mit alten, abgespielten Kopien, die er billig aufkauft oder zu lächerlich günstigen Bedingungen in Kommission erhält." (70) She is aware of his questionable character and business ethic but agrees to work for him nonetheless because he, a shrewd businessman, senses Fräulein Brückner's professional ambition and knows how he can lure her into the position:

Sind Sie sich darüber klar, was Sie – nennen wir's mal beim richtigen Namen – als Tippmädel zu erwarten haben? Schließlich sind Sie Ihrer Herkunft einen gewissen Ehrgeiz schuldig. Es ist ein Unterschied, ob man sich elendig durchwürgt mit hundert Mark oder ob man jeden Monat eine nette Summe zurücklegen kann, anständig wohnt, sich anständig kleidet. Sie können sicher sein, die Antipathie gegen die Zunft legt sich, wenn man jedes Jahr eine schöne Reise macht und sich nicht mehr um die Zukunft zu sorgen braucht. Als erfahrene Disponentin finden Sie mit 50 Jahren noch eine Stellung. (54)

Lichte understands that ambition combined with economic necessity make her susceptible to his talk. Not unlike Dudenmeyer he exploits Fräulein Brückner's vulnerability to profit from her skill and commitment.

Lichte persuades Fräulein Brückner to work for him by making her a very attractive offer. He promises her that as a booker she may, as she always wanted, work independently and assume responsibility. He also gives her his word that working for him she will earn a minimum of 150 Marks, which would be, for example, 40 Marks more than she took home while working for Piepenbrock & Eckerlein. Once she starts the job his attitude changes completely and she must learn that his promises were essentially false: he not only denies her the right to a contract but also feigns surprise that she should demand more than 120

Marks a month. An employment contract would also determine such issues as the period of notice for both sides. Ultimately, a contract might not have been enforceable if Lichte decided to lay Fräulein Brückner off, however, it would clarify important aspects such as her salary.⁴⁵¹ Without one and regardless of the fact that Lichte promised Fräulein Brückner a higher salary, he gets away with paying her as little as 120 Marks per month. After a few weeks he agrees to pay her 15 Marks more but the amount of work she does for him stands in no relation to this sum. Even before the deduction of taxes and health insurance dues she earns less than the minimum subsistence rate of 150 Marks per month. According to the fictional *Zentralverband der Filmverleiher* Fräulein Brückner's salary should be much higher. Someone with her profile – a twenty-three year old woman, who is new to this field but has three years of commercial experience – should get paid almost twice as much:

Das Gehalt einer Disponentin im Filmverleih [richtet sich] nach der Größe des Betriebes. Wir nennen Ihnen als ungefähre Richtlinie hundertachtzig bis zweihundertfünfzig Mark. Hinzu kommt in der Regel eine Provision von 1/2 bis 1% des Umsatzes, je nach Vereinbarung. (66)

Lichte is audacious enough to lie to Fräulein Brückner and tells her that the organization recommends bookers be paid between 80 and 110 Mark per month. He further claims that bookers must work nine hours a day and should not expect

⁴⁵¹ The film distributor Murawski embodies a similar attitude. He refuses to enter into contractual agreements with his staff because this would grant them more rights: “Na, da packen Sie man gleich Ihre Sachen, wenn Sie mir mit dem Gesetz kommen. Leute, die immer gleich das Gesetz bei der Hand haben, kann ich in meinem Betrieb nicht gebrauchen. Für mich gibt's kein Gesetz. [...] Gesetz, Polizei, Gericht, solche Begriffe erkenne ich überhaupt nicht an. [...] Ich bin ein Geschäftsmann.” (176-7) Indeed, even legally binding contracts had little relevance during the final phase of the Weimar Republic as companies laid employees off regardless of what their contracts said.

to be compensated for working overtime. Lichte knows that Fräulein Brückner is worth much more than he pays her, but he is keen to maximize his profit: “Spare im Büro, wo immer du kannst, desto mehr hast du für deinen Privatgebrauch.”

(77) He is in such a powerful position that he can treat Fräulein Brückner however he pleases. This explains why he constantly exerts pressure on her and threatens to replace her with someone who is willing to accept a salary as low as 50 or 60 Marks a month if she fails to assume a more modest attitude.⁴⁵² Fräulein Brückner knows that Lichte, himself utterly incompetent and without any integrity, is ruthlessly taking advantage of her but without any institutional support she is unable to protect herself against this kind of exploitation.⁴⁵³ She could give notice and if she were lucky enough she would find a new position, however, in all likelihood she would meet a similar fate in any other office. Therefore, she has little choice but to accept her fate: “Ich werde mir meiner Wehrlosigkeit [...] erschreckend bewußt.” (62) Dependent on the income Fräulein Brückner may gain awareness but she is forced to endure humiliation and exploitation nevertheless.

Glass ceilings and exploitation are not the only kind of abuse Fräulein Brückner experiences. While working for the film distributor Murawski she learns

⁴⁵² On this point Lichte is telling the truth, for later on in the narrative Fräulein Brückner visits a job center to enquire about vacancies and is advised to hold on to her well-paying position at Murawski whatever the cost. She learns that the job market is so tight that even first-rate typists offer their services for 60 or 70 Marks.

⁴⁵³ Lichte consistently tries to exploit the skills of others, in part to make up for his own incompetence, and has no scruples to defraud insurances or even a dying man. (80-1 and 105-11)

what it means to be sexually harassed. The case of the film distributor Murawski is an extreme example of sexual abuse and, indeed, no other fictional text illustrates the ways in which a superior uses his position of authority to subject his female staff to his sexual advances as explicitly as Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen. As previously established, the scale of relationships that emerged between men and women at the workplace was broad. After having worked for Lichte for four strenuous and long years, Fräulein Brückner feels unable to continue working for him, and brushing aside any misgivings about a prospective employer, she accepts another position as booker with the film distributor Murawski. As a result of her desperation she is willing to ignore the rumors she heard about Murawski and chooses to believe “daß eine korrekte Frau vor jeder Unliebsamkeit sicher [ist]” and ignores signs of warning during her job interview. (157) His demeanor is unpleasant and aggressive, but Fräulein Brückner is willing to ignore these signs of warning because, at first glance, the job seems her dream come true: finally, a position that is as well paid as it is challenging. She will work eight hours a day and will receive a basic salary of 200 Marks a month – a figure that exceeds even recommendations issued by the *Zentralverband der Filmverleiher*. In addition to the high base salary, she might become eligible for a bonus of an additional one to 200 Marks per month.

She is delighted about the prospect of finally earning a decent income and it is ironic that Fräulein Brückner’s decision to accept a job that allows her to rise above poverty should turn out to be a bad one. She soon learns that the unusually high salary comes at a price: Murawski is a sex maniac and a sadist,

who is not afraid to impose his will on his staff by force. He pursues the women who work for him relentlessly and constantly violates their personal space:

Murawski umgiert mich wie ein hungriger Wolf. Stets tritt er einen Schritt zu nah an mich heran. Wo immer es sich ermöglichen läßt, streift er mich. Nie entgeht mir die Berührung seiner Finger, wenn ich ihm etwas reiche. Er atmet mich ein, wenn ich mit ihm spreche, er macht mir plumpe Komplimente und starrt mit lidverhangenem Blick auf meinen Mund. (187)

He even has sex with his female staff in a private antechamber next to his office. None of the women working for Murawski are attracted to him or have sex with him for pleasure. Instead, they are heavily dependent on their income and hence the goodwill of their employer, and are condemned to enduring the abuse silently. One of the reasons why finding a different job would constitute a great challenge for these women is their poor education. Inge Lindner, a seventeen-year old blonde without any qualifications is one example. She is paid 150 Marks a month despite the fact that she can barely type; and not to mention the 500 Marks Murawski gave the young woman's poverty-stricken mother. As the company accountant Maschke points out, not even an expert in his field let alone an unskilled clerical worker would be likely to earn this much. In return, however, Inge must endure Murawski's inappropriate and cruel advances:

Weil sie nichts gelernt hat. Die Marjell hat nicht einmal einen Handelsschulkursus durchgemacht. Keine Ahnung vom Stenographieren. Schreibmaschine tippt sie mit einem Finger. Bei uns hat sie ein bißchen gebucht, rein mechanisch, ohne jedes Verständnis. Das ist ja das Elend: diese Mädchen sind zum Teil so ungenügend vorgebildet, daß sie jeder Willkür ausgeliefert sind. (181)

Her situation is so destitute and hopeless that Maschke predicts she will even continue working for Murawski after he raped and beat her. She calls in sick after

the incident but after searching for a job for weeks or months in vain she will probably return.

According to Maschke, Murawski is very clever about making his female employees dependent on him. In addition to luring them into working for him by offering a desirable salary, he uses expensive items of clothing as bait. As established in Chapter Two, fashion played an important part in the lives of Weimar white-collar workers, which explains why many women working for Murawski gladly accept the presents he gives them. He manipulates them by helping them satisfy their craving for consumer goods and selling them silk stockings, fur coats and “Crêpe de Chine-Hemdhsosen” at a discounted price. (183) Most women do not grasp his true motive for doing so until it is too late and they must pay dearly for their desires. However, the novel does not blame Murawski’s employees for their interest in, for example, fashion and it also shows that they had little choice but to endure Murawski’s perversion because they have to support entire families. As it will be remembered, white-collar workers were frequently the sole breadwinners and Fräulein Brückner’s colleague Frau Suhl is one such case. A widow, she must earn enough money for her elderly mother and her teenage son to live on. That her son attends high school places an additional burden on this woman. At Murawski’s the thirty-two year old woman earns 180 Marks and she knows that no one would hire her at this age; let alone pay this much to her, who never underwent professional training of any sort. The same applies to Fräulein Müller. Her income must suffice to provide for her seven siblings, including a blind sister, as well as a sick father.

Without institutional support these women are condemned to passivity. Even if they were to take action as a collective their situation would not improve. As mentioned in Chapter One, most members of Weimar's judiciary were monarchist or at least very conservative. Especially judges continued to respect the social structures of the *Kaiserreich* and, nurturing strong anti-modern sentiments, seldom ruled in favor of female plaintiffs. In the unlikely event that Murawski would have been held accountable for his deeds, the gratification the women would derive from the conviction of their employer would probably be outweighed by their subsequent economic misery. For, if his company were shut down they would all be out of work. Similarly, members of governmental agencies also contributed to women's discrimination and exploitation. Worn down by her boss, Fräulein Brückner visits a job center but since vacancies are scarce and many people are willing to work for miniscule salaries, the agent recommends she stay put. Though she hints at the cause for her grief, he simply asks how much she earns and, upon hearing that she takes home about 400 Marks a month, dismisses her concern and angrily lectures her: "Für einen derartigen hohen Verdienst könnte man schließlich auch einige Unannehmlichkeiten mit in Kauf nehmen." (212) This explains why even women without dependents find it impossible to escape Murawski's clutches: Fräulein Brückner finds it impossible to put an end to the nightmare. Her rent alone is 35 Marks a month and if she gave notice she would not be able to meet this or any

other expense.⁴⁵⁴ Her reasoning is distressing but sound, however, it is her psychological motivation for staying that gives far greater reason for concern: “Ich fühle mich nicht mehr jung, nicht mehr widerstandsfähig und nicht mehr mutig genug, um die Not nicht zu fürchten.” (186) Having experienced exploitation as well as sexual harassment, Fräulein Brückner’s determination lessens.

Her new motto – “ausharren, jonglieren, Nerven trainieren” – implies that she has resigned to passivity instead. (186) Murawski’s behavior not only prevents Fräulein Brückner and her colleagues from doing their job properly but having to live in constant fear exerts a tremendous amount of stress on them: “Meine ganze Spannkraft bleibt darauf gerichtet, wie ich Murawski entgehe, für die Arbeit bleibt ein zerrütteter Rest.” (187) The question of who will be the next victim of his insatiable desire constantly hovers above their heads: every time a door opens they are afraid Murawski is sneaking up on them, and each time Fräulein Brückner is summoned to his office her tension intensifies. As if it were not enough that he abuses them during their eight-hour workday, he also forces his staff to stay in the office well into the night. He does not require them to work but wants to prevent them from enjoying their spare time or even meeting up with their boyfriends. Obsessed by his desire he wants total control:

⁴⁵⁴ Similarly, economic dependency leads Fräulein Brückner to endure the inappropriate behavior of Ludwig Wagner, the cherished uncle of another employer, Heinz Wagner. He too violates her personal space: “Er greift mir väterlich unters Kinn und drückt meine Wangen zusammen, daß mein Mund sich zu einem roten Wulste zusammenballt. Nun, das ist einer seiner harmlosen kleinen Scherze.” (261) In the same way, he feels free to touch any other part of her body. Wagner knows that she is dependent on her salary and therefore not afraid to mock her: “Oh bitte, bitte, kein Anlaß zu erröten.” (272) She endures the harassment and her desire to smack him in his face – the only time that Fräulein Brückner expresses anger about her helplessness – remains a fantasy.

Er muß quälen können. [...] Er muß sich an hassenden, leidenden, ermatteten Gesichtern erhitzen können. [...] Nichts ist ihm unerträglicher als der Gedanke, daß andere genießen könnten [...] während er sich zerfleischt in seiner unersättlichen krankhaften Gier, die keines der täglichen Opfer zu stillen vermag. (174)

The women resort to desperate means trying to fend Murawski off. Fräulein Brückner, for example, seeks help from her only male colleague Maschke and asks him to accompany her or burst into Murawski's private office whenever she is summoned for dictation. Similarly, she takes his advice to heart: he suggests she should cough whenever Murawski approaches her to give him the impression that she suffers from tuberculosis. Since a contagious illness might lead to her dismissal he also proposes she feign a sexually transmitted disease: "Markieren Sie sonst eine nette Sache, irgend was Sauberes unter den Röcken. Parfümieren Sie sich mit Karbol unten rum oder erzählen Sie ihm was von Sublimatpülungen." (188) As a last resort he suggests she injure herself in a way that would require a lengthy hospital stay.

Such defense tactics require energy and the situation has taken a toll on all the women working for Murawski. Before long Fräulein Brückner joins their rank:

Ich habe in den fünf Wochen, die ich hier bin, täglich meine fünfzehn Stunden Dienst gemacht, kann nicht mehr in den Turnverein gehen und nicht mehr die Abendkurse in der Handelshochschule besuchen. Ich bin abends nicht mehr imstande, die Zeitung zu lesen, geschweige denn ein Buch. Meine Spannkraft läßt nach, meine Lebensfreude. Meine Energie, mich weiterzubilden und vorwärtszukommen, hört ganz und gar auf. (184)

After several years in employment, especially after working for Murawski, none of Fräulein Brückner's initial ambition is left. In contrast to her colleagues she

succeeds in fending her employer off repeatedly but eventually she can no longer bear the working conditions in this office. She feels the same way as her predecessor Fräulein Hahne, who had left her job mentally completely exhausted: “Ich bin kaputt... Man sieht es mir ja wohl an.” (152) Fräulein Brückner senses that it is only a matter of time until she would be too exhausted to control the situation and she would be forced to have sex with Murawski as well. Finally, after he surprises her looking at the puppies in the stockroom “[verblaßt] die Furcht vor der wirtschaftlichen Not [...] gegen die vor unaustilgbarer Schmach” and “die Angst davor, zum Opfer [...] zu werden” leads her to abandon her job.⁴⁵⁵ (21)

Another aspect that strongly influences Fräulein Brückner’s experience of the office environment and which contributes to her mental exhaustion is the issue of solidarity – or rather the lack thereof. The relationship between the employees working for Alfred Dudenmeyer and even at Lichte was fairly amicable. Though the condescending and exploitative attitude of both employers did not contribute to creating a pleasant work atmosphere, Fräulein Brückner and her colleagues made the best of it, and even tried to look out for each other. The situation at Murawski’s differs significantly and the lack of solidarity among her “mißgünstige[n] Kollegen” makes the climate even more unbearable.⁴⁵⁶ Working for Murawski is unusual in that his employees must not worry about being laid off,

⁴⁵⁵ Bastkowski et al., Frauenbewegung und die “Neue Frau” 1890-1933 148.

⁴⁵⁶ Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung 122.

however, their position is only safe for as long as they comply with his requests. Aware of their financial dependency, they cannot translate their feelings of shame into action. They look away when Murawski summons a colleague into his private office and ignore torn dresses or bruised limbs. What is more, rather than supporting each other or even teaming up against their boss, the women treat each other with suspicion and direct their resentment towards each other. They gang up on the colleague who, on any given day, has to suffer the least from Murawski. This explains why the women act increasingly hostile towards Fräulein Brückner: like the other women she is appalled by the idea of having to satisfy Murawski's sexual desires but in contrast to her co-workers – and for reasons that remain unclear – she succeeds in warding him off.⁴⁵⁷ Because Murawski directs his anger at one of the other women every time Fräulein Brückner manages to escape him they do not respect her determination but resent her even more: “Warum soll es Ihnen besser gehen als uns?” (192) While still new to the office and not yet aware of the psychological mechanisms at work Fräulein Brückner puts her colleagues attitude down to “Bösartigkeit, Erbitterung und Niedertracht.” (161) She realizes that this office lacks collegiality and that “alle Härte, alle Unfreundlichkeit und Schweigsamkeit [...] nichts weiter [ist] als niedergerungene Qual.” (180) As she fully comes to understand the predicament she develops empathy for them but at the same time she has to acknowledge the hopelessness of her situation. Women like her may unite in fear and disgust

⁴⁵⁷ At times it seems, as if Fräulein Brückner were able to ward Murawski off thanks to her education. Unlike her poorly educated colleagues she can at least try to use language as a tool to protect herself. However, the level of her education or that of her colleagues is ultimately irrelevant as his aggression outweighs their abilities to defend themselves.

against their employer but they will only act ever aggressively towards each other, which ultimately serves the interest of someone like Murawski.

Fräulein Brückner's colleagues at Murawski's must constantly look out for themselves and, trying to cope with their stress, are not very friendly with each other. Even though they are not very collegial they do not think up intrigues to harm another woman and even Fräulein Brückner, who refuses to participate, must not fear their revenge. It is not until the first person narrator works for Heinz Wagner that she learns about the maneuverings and rivalries that dominated the workday of many women. While some might have taken delight in intriguing against their colleagues, most resorted to such means to cling on to their jobs because they were afraid of losing their position in times of economic crisis. At Heinz Wagner's low-level female employees talk about their colleagues behind their backs; they accuse some of lying, suspect others of spying and claim some women are such "ungebildete Wesen" that no one should interact with them.

(243) The lack of "Kameradschaftlichkeit" is fuelled by competition and helplessness, and it affects Fräulein Brückner in two ways. (242) Her workdays are stressful and unpleasant, and she cannot perform her job. The relationship between Fräulein Brückner and Fräulein Laue exemplifies this problematic. The protagonist was hired to do the bookkeeping and, in an effort to do well, she informs her colleague in a friendly manner that the card index is partially illegible and out-dated. Fräulein Laue feels threatened by the new colleague's competency and contentionsness, which explains why she is angry rather than thankful. She breaks into tears and informs Fräulein Brückner that anyone who

should dare criticize her, Wagner's private secretary, will lose her job: "Ich mache Sie schlecht bei Heinz Wagner. [...] Es [wird] mir ja wohl gelingen, Sie von Ihrem Posten zu verdrängen." (245) To avert being replaced by Fräulein Brückner and made redundant, Fräulein Laue begins to scheme against her colleague. She spreads rumors and soon "hagelt es Gehässigkeiten aus allen Richtungen."

(245) Fräulein Brückner, no longer a novice to the profession, is shocked by this behavior: "Ist das der Zusammenhalt, um den alle Angestellten sich bemühen sollten, um eine wehrfähige Gemeinschaft zu werden?" (243) If she, who wants to get on well with colleagues because this would allow everyone to work more efficiently and would make everybody's workday more pleasant, is unwilling to work under such conditions she has few choices. Since Fräulein Brückner does not want to participate in any mobbing herself she must leave the company.

She must learn that, just like economic exploitation and sexual harassment, rivalries and intrigues between female white-collar workers are as widespread as they are inescapable. The relationship between Fräulein Brückner and Gretchen Hultsch, her colleague at the *Internationaler Austausch akademischer Jugend*, makes the intrigues that dominated the workday at Heinz Wagner's – the gossip spread by Fräulein Laue or her sulky reactions whenever Fräulein Brückner failed to admire a dress – almost seem frivolous. When she applies for a high-level secretary position at the exchange organization her "wahre[r] Wille zum Aufstieg ist längst [...] gebrochen" but she has not yet entirely given up the hope that her ambition or "versteckter, sehnsüchtiger,

niemals ans Licht gehobener Traum” will come true. (281) The want ad reads promising, as her responsibilities would include

kritische Bearbeitung der Gesuche, [...] Zusammenstellung und Ergänzung der Erfahrungsberichte, Herausgabe eines monatlich erscheinenden Rundbriefes, die Erledigung der hiermit zusammenhängenden Korrespondenz und gelegentliche Beratungen persönlich vorsprechender Bewerber. (282)

It seems as if finally the intelligent, educated and experienced twenty-seven year old woman has found a meaningful and well-paid position.⁴⁵⁸ Yet, she must learn that reality differs radically from what she was promised and her time at the organization resembles previous experiences.

This is as much due to Fräulein Brückner’s colleague Gretchen Hultzsch as it is to their boss Dr. Maßmann. At first it seems impossible that a young woman like Gretchen Hultzsch “mit dieser gezierten Art sich zu drehen, laut und melodisch zu lachen, sanft und liebreizend zu sprechen” should be capable of such devious behavior. (290) It would seem that someone who is incapable of handling the correspondence by herself, who is essentially unable to complete any task that exceeds the “Bürokratisch-Technische” would be more humble. (291) Yet, it is precisely her lack of proficiency that drives Gretchen Hultzsch to manipulate and terrorize her colleague. She is aware of the fact that her professional skills do not suffice:

Ich komme nicht vorwärts. [...] Immer sind andere älter, gebildeter und erfahrener. Und wenn ich noch dreimal soviel Überstunden mache, mich dreimal irrsinniger anspanne, aufpasse, nachdenke,

⁴⁵⁸ Not least her ambition explains why working as a typist for Heinz Wagner could not have become the “Lebensstellung” she longs for. Not only is she being sexually harassed by her employer’s uncle but the position is not “entwicklungsfähig” either. (254 and 225)

ich bleibe doch nur ein Tippmädel und andere dürfen Karriere machen. (307)

Gretchen Hultzsch understands that she is an inadequately trained clerk who has been working since the age of fourteen and with an impoverished mother to care for. Therefore, if she wants to hold on to her position she must resort to altogether different means. Her technique is as simple as it is effective. In an effort to compensate for her incompetence she both displays unusual diligence and works on dismantling Fräulein Brückner. She always arrives early in the morning and takes no lunch break so Maßmann does not have to come into the office until eleven o'clock and may take long lunch breaks. She also stays late in the evening and exhausts herself typing letters until nine, sometimes even eleven o'clock at night. At the same time, she tries to win her boss' affection by flirting with him, assuming the role of an innocent and helpless girl to make him feel powerful, because she knows that his benevolence can protect her against criticism or even redundancy. She tries to outdo her new colleague and succeeds by not showing Fräulein Brückner how to do her job; she does not, for example, inform her about Maßmann's schedule or does not tell her if someone called for him in her absence. She is even bold enough to hide important documents from Fräulein Brückner in order to make her look incompetent not only in front of Maßmann but also his superior von Killar.

Maßmann encourages Gretchen Hultzsch to conspire against her colleague. Aware of the dynamic between the two women, he reprimands Fräulein Brückner for each mistake or neglect that is the fruit of Gretchen Hultzsch's calculation and agrees to condemning her to inactivity, only now and

again giving her assignments to complete that even Gretchen Hultzsch is too intelligent to do. What is more, he also encourages his long-time secretary to try and improve her own position at the expense of the newcomer. Thinking she is Maßmann's preferred employee and knowing she can count on his support, Gretchen Hultzsch gets away with anything. For example, the young woman manipulated the cook of the company cafeteria into selling her a meal without meat so she can stage a drama in front of Maßmann. Shortly after she issued her request he joins her as well as Fräulein Brückner for lunch and she seizes the opportunity to tell him that she cannot afford to pay for the meat. She does not earn much and she must try to save money wherever she can. However, at least in this instance she is lying: she can afford to buy herself a proper lunch because she lives with relatives and only has to pay 20 Marks for room and board. Whether Maßmann senses she is deceiving him or not does not affect the outcome of the episode. In a long-winded way he explains to Fräulein Brückner that she must accept a salary cut of 25 Marks because the company has to reduce its expenses and simultaneously he increases Gretchen's salary by the same amount.

Fräulein Brückner cannot fathom how anyone could be so mean. Yet despite all the distress Gretchen causes her she is nonetheless able to see the motivation underlying her colleague's antagonism and manipulative behavior. This explains why she demonstrates understanding, even claims to like her adversary as a person, rather than verbally insulting or smacking her, "wie sie es verdient hätte." (305) She can deduce from her own experience that Gretchen

Hultzsch has probably been treated with animosity: in all likelihood “[hat sie] gehungert, gedarbt, gelitten, auch gefroren und viel geweint, [...] und viel Unrechtes erfahren.” (306) The rationalized offices of the late Weimar Republic had little room for friendships and without a legal framework to rely on for support, Gretchen Hultzsch can simply not afford to be friends with Fräulein Brückner. However, despite her readiness to fight her competitor to the bone the young woman becomes a victim in much the same way as the protagonist. It is due to her scheming that Fräulein Brückner is laid off but Gretchen Hultzsch does not profit from her colleague’s dismissal. Maßmann encouraged her to nurture this illusion but Gretchen Hultzsch does not hold the power to determine her colleague’s fate nor, for that matter, her own. It is he who decides on Fräulein Brückner’s replacement and who hires a twenty-two year old graduate of a commercial school. Upon hearing that she will receive the same monthly salary of 120 Marks as herself, Gretchen realizes that his affection and praise for her was as false as hers for him; that he manipulated her as much as she tried to manipulate him:

Überstunden, Sonnabend nachmittags, Sonntags, jeden Tag bis in die Nacht hinein, nur, damit er morgens mit seiner Frau in Ruhe frühstücken kann und mittags sein Schläfchen halten, nur damit es heißt, der IAAI arbeitet am längsten von allen Abteilungen. Und dafür habe ich zwei Jahre lang das Gehalt einer Anfängerin bekommen. Er hat mich ausgenutzt. Ja, meine wahnsinnige Dummheit hat er ausgenutzt bis zur letzten Möglichkeit. Ein Phänomen, die tüchtigste Maschinenschreiberin der Welt, die Seele vom IAAI, sein rechte Hand, sein gutes Gedächtnis! Ich habe immer toller geschuftet, meine Nerven ruiniert, meine Gesundheit. Und jetzt bekommt eine Anfängerin dasselbe Gehalt wie ich. (346)

Maßmann fostered the competition between the two low-level employees to further his own interests. The patriarchal framework insures that they can never compete with him but his malicious and equally clever manipulation served a purpose nonetheless. By playing the two women off against each other Maßmann was able to prevent them from joining forces against him, and while they exhausted themselves combating each other he, a truly “charakterlose[r] Chef,” could exploit Gretchen Hultzsch to his greatest benefit.⁴⁵⁹

Mentally and physically worn out by her previous encounters of hostility between employees as well as her experiences of exploitation and sexual harassment, Fräulein Brückner is unable to endure this situation for long. After having worked for the organization for only a few weeks, she is no longer able to cope and, acknowledging that “alles nichts helfen wird und ich zum Schluß doch unterliegen werde,” she falls ill. (329) Aware of the fact that Maßmann can easily dismiss her even if she were no longer in her trial period Fräulein Brückner continues to go to work despite headaches and an ongoing fever. Like her former colleague Urschl she desperately wants to avoid unemployment – even at the expense of her health. To no avail: Maßmann fires Fräulein Brückner after she stays home for only a few days and, to signal the finality of his act, hires a replacement during her short absence. Unaware or rather indifferent to the consequences of his action for Fräulein Brückner, he coolly suggests she seek employment elsewhere: “Schließlich ist es ja keine Lebensstellung, was wir hier zu vergeben haben. Man strebt weiter. Man findet etwas Besseres.” (350) In light

⁴⁵⁹ Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreung und Berausung 122.

of the difficulties women faced at the time, Fräulein Brückner's frank remark seems in place: "Sparen Sie Ihre Worte, Dr. Maßmann. Wünschen Sie mir nur eins, wünschen Sie mir nichts weiter, als daß ich einem Arbeitgeber Ihrer Art nie mehr begegne." (351) After being made redundant this time, and regardless of whether she will find a new position or not, she must admit to the finality of her defeat:

Ich habe alles verloren, was sich auf dieser Welt wohl verlieren läßt. Ich habe keine Eltern mehr und habe keine Freunde, ich habe keine Arbeit und habe kein Verdienst, ich habe kein Vertrauen mehr und meine Arbeitskraft ist gebrochen. Vor wenigen Jahren war ich ein mutiger, zuversichtlicher, vertrauender Mensch. [...] Das ist nun alles zerrieben [und] zerdrückt. (351-2)

She worked under horrendous conditions for many years and no longer has the mental or physical strength to put her determination into action but must concede to the impossibility of her aspiration. Helpless and destitute she has no choice but to resign to the irrevocability of her destiny as a female white-collar worker.

In the end, after having worked in various white-collar positions for seven years, Fräulein Brückner collapses and is no longer capable of practicing the profession. Unscrupulous employers, who exploited and abused her, as well as competitive and spineless colleagues have left their mark on her. Exhausted and destitute, without family or friends to take care of her, she seeks refuge in nature. Significantly, her decision resembles that of many young women during the final years of the Weimar Republic: nature, like the domestic sphere, is traditionally associated with woman. This suggests that if Fräulein Brückner were presented with an opportunity to marry she might well view marriage as "eine Art Reposing

aus der Knechtschaft" and not be opposed to it.⁴⁶⁰ During the early phase of her employment Fräulein Brückner was skeptical when colleagues suggest she get married. She did not believe Urschl and resented the genuine advice Warius, a male colleague at Dudenmeyer's, had for her:

Aber Fräulein Brückner, liebes, armes, tapferes Mädcl. [...] Es ist doch kein regelrechter Beruf, in dem sie stehen, es ist doch ein notdürftiger Erwerb, der Sie ein paar Jahre über Wasser hält. Vergessen Sie doch um Gottes willen nicht, daß jede halbwegs annehmbare Ehe Ihre einzige Rettung ist. (37)

He tries to console her after Dudenmeyer refused to promote her and it is his experience that makes his advice valuable. Warius knows that there are no alternatives available to women like Fräulein Brückner and in sharing his knowledge with her he might help her escape Urschl's fate. Fräulein Brückner, however, was incredulous and it takes her several years to come to terms with reality. It is not until she has worked for the film distributors Lichte and Murawski that she realizes that she, too, is a modern slave. Slowly but surely Fräulein Brückner begins to see marriage in a different light and while she never expressed regrets about not being in a relationship or not having family she begins to long for both.

In dieser Stunde grenzenloser Verlassenheit in dem finsternen Büro, in der Ahnung kommender neuer Schrecknisse, überwältigt mich die Erkenntnis, daß wir alle irren, wir Frauen, die außerhalb des Muttertums stehen, und daß die Ausgeschlossenheit von unserer natürlichen Bestimmung weher brennt als alles, was wir leiden können unter einem Dudenmeyer oder Lichte oder Murawski. (218)

As a result of the abuse she suffered, marriage and motherhood appear to her as woman's true vocation. Fräulein Brückner does not marry and start a family but

⁴⁶⁰ Else Croner, Die Psyche der weiblichen Jugend, 3rd ed. (Langensalza: Beyer, 1926) 66.

by retreating to the countryside she demonstrates willingness to leave the white-collar world behind and embrace a different and certainly less modern lifestyle.

The autobiographical novel Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen addresses issues that shaped the realities of female white-collar workers during the Weimar Republic. As Josef Witsch points out, it is in part thanks to Christa Anita Brück that “Zustände in die öffentliche Beachtung gerückt [wurden], die – in dieser Tragik – ihre Existenz nur ihrer Verborgenheit verdanken.”⁴⁶¹ The text presents problems these women were faced with in a realistic manner and, by providing a space for the contemporary reader to experience, for example, exploitation or sexual harassment, it allowed them to negotiate their reality on a fictional level. However, while the novel calls attention to women’s working conditions it does not address the reasons for the various forms of discrimination. A conversation between Fräulein Brückner and Max about their boss Lichte illustrates this problematic. The film distributor exploits his staff and his behavior toward them is generally ruthless. Nevertheless, she comes to his defense when she learns that the errant boy stole some money from Lichte to boost his miniscule salary. She is right to tell the young man off for stealing but actually she is less concerned about Max’ moral failure than his willingness to rebel against his exploitation. Trying to calm him down she suggests their employer’s attitude is the result of his flawed character rather than socio-economic structures: “Glauben Sie nicht, daß es [...] auch Arbeitgeber geben kann, die

⁴⁶¹ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 40.

große Macht haben und doch gut sind?“ (95) Similarly, at a later point in the narrative she stylizes those who exploit white-collar workers as evil: “Wie wehren wir uns, wir ewig Abhängigen, Bedrohten und Gefährdeten vor der Zerstörung durch das Böse?“ (351) The issue of exploitation is displaced into the private realm and therefore Siegfried Kracauer rightfully remarks that

dieser ausgesprochene Individualismus nirgends an die Gesellschaftskonstruktion selber [rührt], die das Angestelltenschicksal bestimmt. Er möchte aus einzelnen Charakteren Unzulänglichkeiten ableiten, deren Vorhandensein faktisch in den sozialen Verhältnisse begründet ist.⁴⁶²

This has the effect that even though the protagonist's working conditions are caused by Weimar Germany's political and social structures, her experience is not contextualized.

Fräulein Brückner does not hold the economic system responsible for her misery either. More specifically, Fräulein Brückner assumes personal responsibility for circumstances beyond her control. For example, she criticizes her disinterest in menial and mechanical tasks and, rather than attributing her lack of enthusiasm to rigid and biased office structures, she blames herself: “Ich nehme nicht ohne Beschämung zur Kenntnis, daß die Voraussetzung für die Verödung im allzu gleichmäßigen Trott des Berufslebens mehr in uns selbst, als im Charakter unserer Arbeit liegt.” (270) Significantly, Christa Anita Brück expressed a similar view in her 1932 article, “Die Stenotypistin überm Durchschnitt.” Despite knowing better she claimed two years after the novel's

⁴⁶² Kracauer, “Ein Angestelltenroman” 6.

publication that diligence may bring about satisfaction, even professional upward mobility – provided that the female white-collar worker

es versteht, die Last der Erwerbstätigkeit abzuwandeln zu einer freudig erfüllenden Pflicht, das Einerlei der Schreibmaschinentätigkeit durch innere Anteilnahme an den Geschäftsvorgängen zu verlebendigen, [und weiß] das eigene Können und Wollen in Einklang zu bringen mit den Erfordernissen ihrer Stellung.⁴⁶³

The issue of self-determination and mobility featured strongly in white-collar rhetoric and, as mentioned earlier, especially men were susceptible to the promise. Employee organizations were among those who propagated these illusions not least to soothe the anxieties of their male members. Given her personal experience Brück's attitude surprises: in all likelihood she experienced appalling working conditions herself and she was aware of the hopelessness of women's situation, yet she claims on a fictional and a non-fictional level that it is up to the individual to seek change.

Even a topic like sexual harassment – Fräulein Brückner “[wird] geradezu zum sexuellen Freiwild, das skrupellosen Chefs ausgeliefert ist” – is not seen as part of a larger problem.⁴⁶⁴ Her experience at Murawski's is unusually severe but it points to the fact that sexual harassment was as common at the workplace as it was tolerated by patriarchal German society. As Leo Kofler remarks, “die Verantwortung für die Begegnung mit diesem Schicksal [wurde] dem

⁴⁶³ Christa Anita Brück, “Die Stenotypistin überm Durchschnitt,” Das Werk: Werkszeitung der Vereinigten Stahlwerke 7.3 (March 1933): 131.

⁴⁶⁴ Die Angestelltenbewegung 1928-1931 440.

vereinzelt Individuum aufgelastet.“⁴⁶⁵ Fräulein Brückner does not attempt to fight her adversaries and because her one visit to the job center is not very encouraging, she does not pursue the idea of seeking further help. The reaction of the job center agent, who advises her to continue working for Murawski and keep quiet about the abuse as long as he pays well, would have contributed to stifling the possibility of organization, let alone “gewerkschaftlichen Widerstand.“⁴⁶⁶ Without encouragement and support Fräulein Brückner cannot develop awareness, which means the novel fails to stress that her destiny is not that of an individual but – to a varying degree – of an entire social class.⁴⁶⁷ Consequently, the text, as Carl Dreyfuß observes,

weicht allen Konsequenzen sozialer Art aus und kommt trotz wirklichkeitsechter Schilderungen nicht zu der Erkenntnis, daß sie einem Kollektivgeschehen gegenübersteht, sie beschreibt ihr Erlebnis als isoliertes Einzelschicksal, das über sie, die verarmte, deklassierte Tochter aus großbürgerlicher Familie hereinbricht.⁴⁶⁸

While the novel acknowledges the impossibility of success for female white-collar workers it fails to present the individual experience as part of a social phenomenon or *Massenschicksal*.

That Fräulein Brückner fails to translate her experience into action and that the text does not situate her *Schicksal* historically might be “unverständlich”

⁴⁶⁵ Leo Kofler, Zur Theorie der modernen Literatur: Der Avantgardismus in soziologischer Sicht (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962) 194.

⁴⁶⁶ Die Angestelltenbewegung 1928-1931 440.

⁴⁶⁷ The reaction must also be attributed to her middle-class background. Fräulein Brückner subscribes to the class-specific principle that the individual has a duty to develop throughout her life, and that it is personal ambition rather than circumstances or social structures that determine a person's fate.

⁴⁶⁸ Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 109.

for some.⁴⁶⁹ Possibly a popular women's novel is not responsible for the "theoretische Aufbereitung des Materials."⁴⁷⁰ By displacing her conflict into the personal realm the novel does not fully realize its critical potential. It provided female readers with a site to experience their identities as commercial employees. However, it did not offer them ideas of how to cope with the obstacles they were faced with or how to position themselves in modern society differently. This could be seen as the novel's greatest shortcoming because Fräulein Brückner's retreat into nature confirms on a fictional level that women failed to carve out a space for themselves in the male-dominated professional sphere and that, therefore, their integration into modern life was unsuccessful. In tendency the novel inspired female readers, who had made similar experiences and felt exhausted and desperate, to follow the protagonist suit or affirmed disillusioned women in their decision to retreat back into the home.

⁴⁶⁹ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 17.

⁴⁷⁰ Eckhardt Köhn, "Konstruktion und Reportage: Anmerkungen zum literaturtheoretischen Hintergrund von Siegfried Kracauers Untersuchung Die Angestellten 1930," Text und Kontext 5.2 (1977): 115.

Das Mädchen An Der Orga Privat: “In letzter Zeit ändern sie sich ein bißchen.”

Josef Braune's novel Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin (1930) describes the experience of Erna Halbe, a young working-class woman, who comes to Berlin from the provinces to work in an office.⁴⁷¹

Employed as a typist by a company dealing in iron, she gains insights into the realities of female white-collar workers of the Weimar Republic. The young women working for this company are typical representatives of the modern female employee of the time: they hold low-level clerical positions that are intellectually undemanding and, in order to compensate for the monotony and stressfulness of their jobs, they participate in the urban consumer and leisure cultures. Erna embraces these pleasures: she goes to the cinema and, as part of her transformation into a modern woman, she adopts the look of the New Woman soon after her arrival in Berlin. At the same time she recognizes that economic need combined with a superficial craving for material goods and entertainment gives rise to a complex set of problems. The case of Trude Leußner demonstrates this. Driven by her poor financial situation as well as the desire for consumer goods, she entered into a relationship with the office manager Lortzing and got pregnant. The abortion was carried out improperly, as a result of which Trude falls ill, misses work, gets fired by her former lover and dies. Erna senses the problematic underlying Trude's predicament and tries to

⁴⁷¹ Born in 1907 Braune began writing at the age of seventeen. He also wrote the novels Junge Leute in der Stadt (Berlin: Agis, 1932) and Der Kampf auf der Kille: Die Geschichte einer Woche (Berlin/DDR: Neues Leben, 1978), which was not published until after his death, as well as poems, short stories and reportages.

inspire her colleagues to transcend their superficiality and ignorance. She persuades them to stand up against those who exploit them and demand Trude's reinstatement as well as contractual pay. The protest is unsuccessful because after Trude's death the women no longer see a reason for striking and Lortzing's boss, company manager Siodmak, refuses to grant them the salary increase they asked for. The narrative ends with Erna's dismissal and an optimistic outlook that the strike will have not been in vain but will inspire further, more fruitful political activism in the future.

The ideas of political awareness and solidarity are key to the novel, making it one of the few examples of Leftist mass or popular literature that both features and addresses Weimar's female white-collar workers.⁴⁷² Like Christa Anita Brück's novel, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat addresses the issues of economic misery and the financial dependency that springs from it, as well as sexual exploitation.⁴⁷³ However, it differs from it in that it attempts to do more than calling attention to the deplorable state of affairs and, voicing social criticism, it seeks to inspire the reader to act.⁴⁷⁴ Erna Halbe neither subscribes to

⁴⁷² Another example of this type of fiction is Josef Breitbach's novel Rot gegen Rot: Erzählungen (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1929). The novel's female protagonist Lene works as a sales assistant in a large department store. As a text influenced by communist ideology, it criticizes the lack of political awareness among white-collar workers and encourages political and class-conscious thinking. Similarly, Maria Leitner's novel Hotel Amerika, exposes the vacuity of materialist desires and stresses the importance of solidarity among society's underdogs.

⁴⁷³ Orga Privat is the make of a typewriter. See Ludwig Brauner and Victor Vogt, Illustriertes Orga-Handbuch erprobter Büro-Maschinen (Berlin: Organisation Verlagsgesellschaft, 1921); and Hans Kegel, Der Bürobetrieb (Leipzig: M. Gehlen, 1927).

⁴⁷⁴ This explains why Braune was well received by GDR critics. Otto Gotsche praises the author in the afterword of the 1960 reprint. Similarly, the Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller von

the promises of the entertainment and consumer industries nor does she accept her situation passively. Instead, she maintains a critical distance and, due to her “tief verwurzelt” if “unbewußtes Klassenbewußtsein,” she is motivated to bring about change.⁴⁷⁵ The novel propagates ideas of Weimar’s radical Left, which, as historian Sigrid Schneider establishes, was increasingly concerned about, to use Marxist-socialist terms, the ‘false consciousness’ of white-collar workers as well as their susceptibility to National Socialism.⁴⁷⁶ To enlist the new middle class in the revolutionary cause, Leftists like Otto Biha stressed, “eine Literatur, die auf die spezielle Lage der Angestelltenmassen eingeht” became necessary.⁴⁷⁷

Implied in the call for literature that has the power to inspire political action

den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart honors Braune “als der interessanteste, profilierteste und literarisch bedeutendste Vertreter jener jungen Schriftsteller bürgerlicher Herkunft, die in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik den Nachwuchs der proletarisch-revolutionären Literaturbewegung bildeten,” and Kurt Böttcher and Hans Jürgen Geerds call “Braune [...] das stärkste [...] Talent dieser Generation sozialistischer Schriftsteller.” Otto Gotsche, “Nachwort,” Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin, by Rudolf Braune (Berlin/DDR: Dietz, 1960) 227; Günter Albrecht, Kurt Böttcher, Herbert Greiner-Mai and Paul Gunter Krohn, Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1972) 333; and Kurt Böttcher and Hans Jürgen Geerds, Kurze Geschichte der deutschen Literatur, 1st ed. (Berlin/DDR: Volk und Wissen, 1981) 590.

⁴⁷⁵ Josef Witsch considers her awareness “unbewußt” because it is derived from her social background rather than a “Bewußtwerdungsprozess.” Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 28.

⁴⁷⁶ Sigrid Schneider, Das Ende Weimars im Exilroman: Literarische Strategien zur Vermittlung von Faschismustheorien (München: Saur, 1980) 519.

⁴⁷⁷ Otto Biha, “Die proletarische Literatur in Deutschland,” Sozialistische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Gesellschaft 11/12 (1972): 75 cited in Hanno Möbius, Progressive Massenliteratur? Revolutionäre Arbeiterromane 1927-1932 (Stuttgart: Klett, 1977) 8. Similarly, the members of the Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller agreed: “Aus der objektiven Lage ergibt sich die Notwendigkeit, daß die proletarisch-revolutionäre Literatur im klassenbewußten Vortrupp des Proletariats dazu beitragen muß, das Niveau seines Klassenbewußtseins zu erhöhen. In den rückständigen, indifferenten oder irreführenden [...] Schichten muß sie bestrebt sein, den richtigen Zusammenhang zwischen Klassenlage und Klassenbewußtsein aufzudecken und darzustellen, um auf diese Weise diese Schichten dem Vortrupp der Revolution näher zu bringen. Unter den Massen der werktätigen Kleinbürger [...] muß [die] Gestaltungskraft unserer Literatur sich das Ziel setzen, [...] den Anschluß an den Befreiungskampf der Arbeiterklasse als den einzigen Ausweg zu propagieren!” Excerpt from “Entwurf zu einem Programm des Bundes proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller” cited in Möbius, Progressive Massenliteratur? 80.

among readers is the understanding that it must appeal to a mass audience. In particular, authors had to avoid that “die apolitischen und kleinbürgerlichen Leser [...] durch eine antibürgerliche, agitatorische Klassenliteratur verschreckt wurden.”⁴⁷⁸ To compete with bestseller novels published by, for example, Ullstein Leftist authors had to cater to the taste of the masses and absorb at least some aspects of commercially successful novels into their texts. As literary scholar Helga Gallas puts it, they had to create

einen Massen- bzw. Milieuroman, der als Gegengewicht zum bürgerlichen Kitsch der Ullstein- und Scherl-Roman-Serien Beschreibungen aus dem kleinbürgerlichen Alltag bringen, dabei aber nicht die Klischeevorstellungen bürgerlicher Groschenhefte, sondern die politischen Vorstellungen der KPD vermitteln sollte.⁴⁷⁹

Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat reflects this awareness: mass literature that is supposed to serve as a vehicle for a political message must, in the first place, entertain the reader.

This explains why the novel is neither very complex nor demanding in terms of style and form: the narrative spans a few days in the spring of 1928 and is told by an omnipresent narrator in the present tense in strictly chronological order. The novel’s language resembles the simplicity of the form. Especially compared to Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen its language is sober, not least because Braune was keen on developing a distinctly working-class literary style:

Inhalt mit umgedrehten Vorzeichen und Parolen genügt nicht. Eine klare runde Form, die der Vorstellungskraft und dem Klassengefühl des Arbeiters entgegenkommt, eine solche Form, die sich bewußt

⁴⁷⁸ Helga Gallas, Marxistische Literaturtheorie: Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971) 63.

⁴⁷⁹ Gallas, Marxistische Literaturtheorie 62.

vom traditionellen Stil der Literaturpapas entfernt, haben wir im Roman in Deutschland noch nicht gefunden.⁴⁸⁰

At the same time Braune seems to have taken into consideration that, unlike the striving *Bildungsbürger* of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, his readers did not necessarily pick up books in order to develop their character. To achieve this goal, to reach female white-collar workers the author had to create popular yet political works of fiction that did not alienate audiences.

Not everybody appreciated Braune's account of commercial employment and, as Josef Witsch remarked, some critics and in particular employee associations dismissed Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat as "überhebliche[s] Geschwätz" of a profiteer.⁴⁸¹ Journalist Katharina Müller, for example, criticized the novel for distorting conditions to such an extent that it would have been "geeignet, jungen Stenotypistinnen Abscheu und Schreck vor ihrem Beruf einzuflößen."⁴⁸² The *Allgemeiner freier Angestelltenbund*, which had a considerable number of female members, also condemned the way the novel represents salaried workers and their working conditions. Because one of the sexual relationships in the novel has a melodramatic feeling to it, the organization took women's fictionalized experience and especially the role of sexuality in the office altogether too lightly: "Die erotischen Hintergründe des Büros sind zu dick

⁴⁸⁰ Rudolf Braune, "Arbeiterliteratur," Die literarische Welt 5.28 (1929): 4.

⁴⁸¹ Witsch, Berufs- und Lebensschicksale 32.

⁴⁸² Katharina Müller, "Reklame und Literatur gegen Angestellte," Die Handels- und Büroangestellte 37.2 (1931): 13.

aufgetragen und streifen bedenklich das Romanhafte.”⁴⁸³ Finally, the *Verband weiblicher Handels- und Büroangestellter* criticized the frailty, even spinelessness of most characters and dismissed the novel for being unrealistic. While some aspects of the novel are improbable if not utopian, the value of this *Unterhaltungsroman* is precisely grounded in its largely *realistic* presentation of both the circumstances as well as the mentality of average working women. It seems the novel’s critics were guided by misconceptions that were inspired by the very middle-class ideology the author sought to call attention to and demolish. The novel gave readers a place to encounter issues that had a strong bearing on their lives, regardless of the fact that few seemed to have taken Braune’s suggestion to heart.

Erna Halbe is portrayed as a modern and independently-minded woman from the very beginning. One of the reasons why she left her hometown for Berlin was her wish to escape parental authority: “Die Enge im elterlichen Hause, der ewige Streit und Krach paßten ihr nicht mehr.”⁴⁸⁴ When she encounters a family of five, who must do with a two-room apartment, she is reminded why she left the miserable living conditions behind: Erna has ten siblings and her father does not earn much working as a miner, which implies that she probably never enjoyed

⁴⁸³ Die Angestelltenbewegung 1928-1931 440.

⁴⁸⁴ Rudolf Braune, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin (1930; Berlin: Dietz, 1962) 6.

privacy.⁴⁸⁵ At this stage in her life she would never be able to afford her own apartment and only her married colleagues, Eva Hagedorn and Lieselotte Kries, neither live with their parents nor rent a furnished room. Lieselotte and Manni Kries have two rooms and a live-in kitchen in fashionable Schöneberg and Erna is greatly impressed when visiting them the first time. She may only dream about such a place and senses what Susanne Suhr's study confirmed: "Nur der gemeinsame Verdienst erlaubt in [einer] Ehe die Anschaffung von Möbeln und Gebrauchsgegenständen."⁴⁸⁶ However, a furnished room seems like a promising start for nineteen year old Erna – especially since many women twice her age did not even have that.

It is not easy for Erna to find a home because her funds are limited and rents are higher than she anticipated. She discovers that many people are willing to rent out a room to a stranger because they are in need of an additional source of income. Like the young working-class mother of three, whose husband was laid off and who is so desperate for money that she offers Erna a cot in their bedroom. Frau Neumann would want to charge Erna the exorbitant sum of 80 Marks a month, a sum that Erna could not afford. Yet no room costs less than 30 Marks – a significant sum for someone with a salary of 130 Marks minus insurance and health care dues. What is more, few rooms that are being offered

⁴⁸⁵ Erna is not the only character that resents living with family members. Grete Theier, a colleague of Erna's, also suffers from the lack of privacy. In addition, she quarrels constantly with her parents because they do not understand her lifestyle: "Ich kann das Geplärr und das ewige Geschimpfe bei meinen Eltern nicht mehr aushalten. Wenn ich nach zwölf Uhr noch nicht zu Hause bin, gleich geht die Welt unter. Nichts mache ich ihnen recht, immer haben sie etwas an mir auszusetzen. [...] Und meine Kleider sind auch immer verlegt [oder] so zerknüllt, daß ich sie nicht mehr anziehen kann." (149)

⁴⁸⁶ Suhr, Die weiblichen Angestellten 39.

to her are decent. Either they clash with Erna's expectations in terms of design – she is not fond of “Großvätermöbel, [...] malerisch gruppierte Nippesgestalten, [...] bunte Engelbilder, [oder] ermahnende Wandsprüche” – or they are outright shabby. (11) Erna senses that she needs an environment to relax after a long day at the office; anything else would make her “elend.” (18) This explains why she settles for a room that costs 32 Marks per month. Accepting that prices are higher in Berlin might seem naïve because as soon as her insignificant savings will be used up, Erna will have great difficulties to cover all her living expenses. But she is not yet familiar with the realities of white-collar employment and therefore optimistic about the future. But Erna is also a courageous young woman: she left her family and though only “neunzehn Jahre und allein in der Stadt Berlin” she takes matters into her own hands. She does not articulate that she is in search for an emancipated lifestyle, but clearly she is in search for something new: “Ich bin losgefahren, weil mich Berlin gelockt hat.” (120) By moving in with Frau Maschke she makes at least part of her dream come true and achieves something that remained an unfulfilled fantasy for most.

Erna is a woman of her generation: as typical for young lower-middle class women she learned how to type and write shorthand, and entered employment at a young age. Prior to coming to Berlin she worked as a typist in a law firm for four years. At the *Eisenverwertungs-G.m.b.H.* she works in a typing office, a modern *Schreibbüro* as they were crucial for the successful implementation of rationalized working methods. The room itself is plain and small but accommodates eleven women. The typing desks are arranged “wie in der

Schule,” with equal distance between each other, in two long rows, and when the typists sit at their desks they all face the front of the room. (53) Each woman has a desk to herself and, as Ernst Holstein’s comments demonstrates, the setup of this office is typical for period: “Die Schreibtische wurden in Felder eingeteilt, damit alle zur Arbeit erforderlichen Utensilien [...] stets auf einer ganz bestimmten Stelle lagen.”⁴⁸⁷ The typewriters are positioned on the writing table’s right-hand side, which leaves a space for documents to the left. Geared towards maximum efficiency, this modern typing office does not leave much room for the individual and there is not much space for the women’s personal belongings. The key accessories – pocketsize mirrors, brushes, compact powder and mascara but also needle and yarn or magazines and newspapers – that made these women who they were, have to be stashed away in small drawers beneath their desks.

Eleven of the women, without exception in their late teens and early to mid-twenties, work as typists. Except for the two secretaries they spend their entire day at the typewriter, filling in forms or copying documents. Because they do not compose letters themselves, they cannot make sense of what they write:

Die Maschine glotzt mit ihren fünfundzwanzig Tasten kalt und böse und völlig unbeteiligt auf die kräftigen Hände dieses kleinen Mädchens. Die rührend festen und eifrigen Finger klopfen den monotonen Takt, Zehnfingersystem, Grundhaltung. Die Gelenke schmerzen und im Unterarm zieht es und der Kopf tut weh ... a, s, d, f ... j, k, l, ö ... Daumen auf die Zwischentaste ... so hat sie Maschinenschreiben gelernt... ‘Das Wetzlar-Gräsersche

⁴⁸⁷ Ernst Holstein, “Hygiene im Büro und im kaufmännischen Betrieb vom ärztlich-psychologischen Standpunkt,” Beiheft zum Zentralblatt für Gewerbehygiene und Unfallverhütung (Berlin: Springer, 1931) 10.

Elektroschweißverfahren...’ Die Buchstaben tanzen auf und nieder.
(147-8)

The young women feel alienated and experience the drudgery of their work all the more. Keen on temporarily escaping the monotony, they entertain themselves by, for example, whistling the melodies of popular hit songs and hitting the keys of the typewriter in time to the tune. According to Friedel “kann [man dabei] besser schreiben” and her colleagues, who enjoy guessing the names of the pieces, beg her to whistle song after song. (55) This scenario recalls scenes from Die Privatsekretärin, however, the novel differs from the escapist screen fantasy in that it stresses that what seems like a boisterous atmosphere is really an effort on behalf of the women to bear their misery. Friedel ceases to whistle before long because she is tired and reality catches up with them. Drained of their energy, they struggle to complete their assignments: they are “schlapp und müde” and “vor ihren Augen tanzen die Buchstaben, die Tag für Tag und Stunde für Stunde mit der gleichen Monotonie angeschlagen werden.” (140) At the same time they have to cope with the pressure exerted on them by management. As pointed out in Chapter One, administrative work processes were increasingly compartmentalized during the 1920s and productivity improving principles made it possible to calculate the exact amount of time needed to complete a task and establish quotas. The management of the *Eisenverwertungs-G.m.b.H.* seems especially keen on identifying poor performers and, judging by the dread expressed by the young typists, these were typically laid off: “Alle müssen ein bestimmtes Pensum erledigen, und das ist

nicht wenig. Die Chefs haben eine genaue Kontrolle; wer mit der Arbeit im Rückstand bleibt, wird [...] entlassen.” (140)

The combination of these factors has the effect that the women do not enjoy their workday and they confirm Stephanie Herz' observation on a fictional level:

In den allerseltensten Fällen nur eilen die jungen Mädchen mit Hochgefühl [...] an ihre Arbeitsstätten. Sie sind im Gegenteil glücklich, wenn die Arbeitsstunden vorüber sind und das Arbeitspensum ihnen Zeit für Privatangelegenheiten lässt.⁴⁸⁸

Tired and bored they constantly look at their watches, eagerly anticipating their lunch break. As the clock strikes one, their mood changes visibly and they begin to chat about fashion and the latest films. However, the relief the young women feel while heading to a nearby restaurant that serves inexpensive lunches is nothing compared to their delight at the end of the day. As soon as the private secretary Erika Tümmeler gives them permission to leave, their spirits reawaken. After having been confined to the typewriter for many hours, the women look forward to the evening and the freedom it grants them: “Die Mädchen packen ihre Sachen zusammen, waschen sich, legen etwas Rouge auf, pudern sich ein bißchen, ordnen ihre Frisuren, maniküren die Fingernägel und machen sich fertig für den Abend, für die Freiheit.” (73) They freshen up a little, leave the office in a hurry to meet up with a friend or lover and delve into one of the many leisure activities Berlin had to offer: they go to cafés or visit dance halls and on the

⁴⁸⁸ Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen Angestellten 62.

weekends they make excursions to the surrounding countryside.⁴⁸⁹ Erna is no exception and she is attracted to Berlin's "Angestelltenkultur."⁴⁹⁰ Given her working-class background and her class consciousness, one would expect that she spends her spare time engaging in political activities or at least doing sports. Her colleagues Lotte and Erika are both members of sports clubs and while Erika plays tennis at a posh country club, Lotte and her bank clerk boyfriend "sporteln" at a club that resembles the one featured in Kuhle Wampe and which functions as a site of political identity formation. (74) Yet Erna, who would meet like-minded people at such a sports club, prefers forms of escapist entertainment.⁴⁹¹ She is not keen on films such as Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück that would nurture her political awareness but prefers to see Hollywood films.

Erna is susceptible to the magic of the silver screen but at the same time she demonstrates that young female white-collar workers were able to maintain a

⁴⁸⁹ Berlin plays an important role in the life of Erna Halbe. Because the city is, as Siegfried Kracauer remarked, "der Ort, an dem sich die Lage der Angestelltenschaft am extremsten darstellt[e]" or Weimar Germany's quintessential "Angestellten- und Beamtenstadt" it should also be the place where white-collar workers, the city's most visible social phenomenon, come together, fight for their rights and join the class struggle. This explains why much of the action takes place in the eastern part of the city. This part of town differed from the fashionable West End, the heart of Berlin's vibrant consumer and entertainment cultures. Throughout the 1920s the East remained strongly working-class or lower middle-class, factories were located here and certain parts such as the area around Alexanderplatz – including Erna's office and lunch spot – were not very attractive. The Berlin painted in the novel is a thoroughly modern environment but – including smoking chimneys, backyards, reeking staircases and drying laundry – it is also a distinctly proletarian milieu. While searching for a room Erna comes across advertisements for consumer goods but the occasional poster does not compare to the onslaught of visual imagery in the West. It seems, this part of the city is much more accommodating, which is why Erna, strengthened by her political awareness, is never disoriented and never risks being devoured by the city. Kracauer, Die Angestellten 7 and 15.

⁴⁹⁰ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 15.

⁴⁹¹ The film portrays the membership of white- and blue-collar workers in a sports club as a political action but there were also critics who considered sports as part of the entertainment industry. Siegfried Kracauer, for example, considered physical activities "ein Hauptmittel der Entpolitisierung." Kracauer, Die Angestellten 100.

distance to the escapist fantasies projected by it.⁴⁹² She visits the cinema on her first day in Berlin. She must calculate her budget carefully but she readily spends 60 Pfennig on something that is, in fact, beyond her means. She cannot resist the promise of pleasure and her enjoyment sets in as soon as she steps into the crowded theater: “Vor Freude schließt sie erst einmal ihre Augen einen Augenblick” and thinks “ist das Leben nicht schön in diesem Kino?” (29-30) This movie theater is much bigger than the little *Provinzkino* she is used to – “da gehen die *Viktorialichtspiele* zehnmahl hinein” – and though this movie theater is probably less flamboyant than the *Marmorhaus* or the *Gloria-Palast* it nonetheless resembles Berlin’s most spectacular picture palaces in terms of its program. (31) Prior to the film’s screening Erna savors the atmosphere, including people dressed in their Sunday best and lovers cuddling, and a light show, music, a short comedy and the newsreel entertain her while she waits for the main feature to begin. Given the sheer combination of audio-sensory impressions, the girl from the country is justifiably impressed.

The film Erna watches is a romantic comedy called Kiki (1926), starring Norma Talmadge in the lead role, a typical Hollywood-style rags-to-riches

⁴⁹² Fallada’s Kleiner Mann – was nun? is an example of a novel about a male clerk, and this text similarly takes up the topic of going to the movies. The sales assistant Pinneberg goes to the cinema to see a film about a character who also works in a large department store and suffers from the introduction of rationalized working methods. Unable to meet his daily quota the character’s job is in jeopardy but a benevolent customer sympathizes with him and purchases many goods in order to ward off the young man’s dismissal. In contrast to Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat, this novel does not focus on the glamorous experience and the excitement of seeing a favorite star on screen. On the contrary; a few days after the cinema visit the actor, who functioned as a *deus ex machina* in the film, shops in Pinneberg’s department store. Desperate to meet his quota Pinneberg appeals to the good heart the actor displayed on screen but the private person bears no resemblance to the fictional character. Instead of sympathizing with the low-level employee the star complains to the management about Pinneberg’s behavior and the incident contributes to his dismissal. Fallada, Kleiner Mann – was nun? 123ff.

movie.⁴⁹³ The heroine Kiki, a lively and loud-mouthed gamine, who creates havoc wherever she goes, “lernt einen feinen Mann kennen” and falls in love with him. (29) In the hope of marrying the revue manager Victor Renal, she joins the show but ruins the opening night and is kicked out of the chorus after fighting with the leading lady. Thanks to her determination and dexterity, Kiki wins his affection and, shortly after the heroine moves in with Renal, they marry. Erna is not entirely wrong to think that Kiki “ein richtiges Arbeitermädchel [ist], die sich durchschlagen muß und die sich Platz schafft.” (28) However, she is so engrossed in the filmic fantasy that she seems to forget that the question, whether she would act as smart as Kiki in such a situation or would marry rich almost certainly would not arise in real life. To be sure, Erna daydreams only as long as the film lasts: after the curtain closes “dreht sich ihr der Kopf ein bißchen” but she quickly regains her senses. (30)

It would seem that Leftist author Braune deliberately chose to feature Norma Talmadge as an inspirational figure in a novel about a female white-collar worker from a working-class background. The American actress was one of the superstars of the silent screen and, according to film scholar David W. Menefee, ranked “in the front lines of box office champions.”⁴⁹⁴ Talmadge was well liked among audiences because of her acting skills but it was her onscreen personality

⁴⁹³ The film was a box office hit: “Kiki [is] a whale of a good comedy. [...] Filled with situations, slapstick [...] there’s not a chance of it flopping before a real audience.” Bisk, “Kiki,” Variety (7 Apr. 1926): 36; and Mordaunt Hall, “The Parisian Waif,” The New York Times (6 Apr. 1926) 26:4; both cited in “Woman Disputed: Who was Norma Talmadge, and why aren’t more of her films available?,” The Norma Talmadge Website, ed. Greta de Groat, 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.stanford.edu/~gdegroat/NT/video.htm>>.

⁴⁹⁴ David W. Menefee, First Female Stars: Women of the Silent Era (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004) 175.

that catapulted her to stardom in the late teens.⁴⁹⁵ As film historian Greta de Groat points out, Talmadge differed from the silent actresses of the teens and twenties “who specialized in virginal innocence” by playing warm and loving young women who were well aware of the opposite sex.⁴⁹⁶ In particular female audiences adored the natural charm and good humor which Talmadge brought to her roles. Erna is smitten by a Hollywood star who is much less glamorous than, for example, Renate Müller of Die Privatsekretärin and thus identifies with a screen fantasy that less so endorsed a superficial lifestyle. Most importantly, Erna demonstrates that it is possible to watch and love movies without necessarily buying into myths. She does not subscribe to the fantasy that she could transform herself into an off-screen version of Kiki. She is enamored with the figure and keen on establishing a resemblance between her own appearance and that of the screen character: “Das schwarzäugige Mädchen mit der Baskenmütze... Erna Halbe oder Kiki.” (29-30) But she does not accept the filmic illusions as reality and truth. Similarly, she does not consider buying consumer products that might help her look like the fictional persona. Erna demonstrates that motion pictures played an important part in women’s lives and constituted a site where they negotiated their identity. However, while turning to the cinema for inspiration, she maintains her distance and resists the temptations of the entertainment industry and consumer capitalism.

⁴⁹⁵ Anthony Slide, A Biographical and Autobiographical Study of 100 Silent Film Actors and Actresses (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2002) 373.

⁴⁹⁶ Groat, The Norma Talmadge Website. See also Greta de Groat, “Rediscovering Norma Talmadge,” Griffithiana 71 (2001): 83-109.

During the course of the narrative various other female Hollywood film stars receive mentioning, which points to their omnipresence as well as their influence on the lives of Weimar contemporaries. While looking for an apartment, for example, Erna comes across a poster portraying Marion Davies. After becoming the constant companion and confidante of America's most famous publisher, William Randolph Hearst, Davies became "the most advertised actress in the world" in the 1920s.⁴⁹⁷ Erna does not know this actress but by comparing her colleague Lotte with the legendary flapper Clara Bow she demonstrates familiarity with another of Hollywood's greatest stars at the time: "Das nette Mädchen ähnelt Clara Bow. [...] Die kennt sie genau. Die braunen Haare fallen der Lotte anmutig in die Stirn, Ponyfrisur, dichtes weiches Haar. Ihre lustigen Augen haben vor keinem Menschen Angst." (43) The description matches the actress perfectly, and a reference to Greta Garbo further illustrates that female movie stars influenced the way female white-collar workers perceived their environment. While eating lunch Erna takes notice of a young woman as she passes her table "mit ihren langen schönen Beinen, die sie langsam, bedächtig, aber sehr leise aufsetzt, man hört nichts, wenn sie geht, man spürt es nur, ein sanfter, katzenhafter Schritt." (65) A young man immediately draws a parallel between this woman's gracious, rehearsed walk and that of one of the most alluring actresses of the era: "Sehen Sie mal, das Mädchen hat den Greta-Garbo-Gang." (65) The young woman adopted the mannerisms of Garbo and the

⁴⁹⁷ "Marion Davies," Hearst Castle, 13 Mar. 2005 <http://www.hearstcastle.org/history/marion_davies.asp>. See also Eve Golden, Golden Images: 41 Essays on Silent Film Stars (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

ignorance of an older by-stander – “Das versteht der ältere Herr nicht.” – demonstrates that copying film stars was a prerogative reserved for the young. (65)

During her first few days in Berlin Erna also visits the *Lunapark Terrassen am Halensee*. Modeled on New York’s *Coney Island* it was located at the lower end of the *Kurfürstendamm* and was one of the most famous mass cultural establishments of the day.⁴⁹⁸ According to Gottfried Korf and Reinhard Rürup, it was Europe’s most technically advanced amusement park and featured Europe’s longest escalator, “eine Geisterbahn, eine Rennbahn für Kleinautos [und] eine Wasserrutschbahn.”⁴⁹⁹ The park also featured sports and dance events, and it was not least due to special events such as boxing matches and jazz concerts that more than 50 million people visited the park between 1904 and 1933. Many considered the *Lunapark* an extravagant and exciting place to visit, and Erna’s boyfriend Fritz Drehkopf is among them: he thinks it is “das Schönste von Berlin.” (156) He is a politically active blue-collar worker and it would seem Fritz would prefer to visit the distinctly working-class fairground *Onkel Pelles Nordplatz* for ideological reasons.⁵⁰⁰ He is equally susceptible to the offerings of the culture industry as the white-collar workers who frequented the *Residenz Kasino* or *Haus Vaterland* for thrills.

⁴⁹⁸ Lethen, “Chicago und Moskau” 202-4.

⁴⁹⁹ Further attractions included a cinema, a dance hall, a radio house and a striptease bar. See Gottfried Korf and Reinhard Rürup, eds., *Berlin, Berlin: Die Ausstellung zur Geschichte der Stadt* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1987) 411-2.

⁵⁰⁰ For a discussion of *Onkel Pelles Nordplatz* see Knud Wolffram, *Tanzdielen und Vergnügungspaläste: Berliner Nachtleben in den dreissiger und vierziger Jahren, von der Friedrichstraße bis Berlin W., von Moka Efti bis zum Delfi* (Berlin: Hinrich, 1995) 411-9.

Fritz is more susceptible to mass entertainment than his girlfriend. She spent 60 Pfennig on a cinema ticket but in comparison to the 8 Marks he “verpulvert” in one evening her expenditure is insignificant. (158) It is Erna’s first visit to an amusement park and she would be content to just walk around and take in the atmosphere, which would have been “uplifting and morally beyond reproach.”⁵⁰¹ Fritz, in contrast, has been to the park before and is immune to the excitement caused by sensory impressions alone; he can only fully enjoy the visit if they join the fun. Curt Morek, author of a guidebook from 1931, intriguingly titled Führer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin, offers an explanation for his behavior:

Diese ‘Leichtfertigkeit’ ist das Antitoxin [...] der Verzweiflung. Man braucht den Aufschwung. Und der zauberhafte Boden der Großstadt gibt noch immer vielen Menschen die Mittel, für ein paar Stunden sich unter die Wirkung des köstlichen Narkotikums zu setzen, das Vergessenheit heißt.⁵⁰²

Fritz Drehkopf uses the visit to the *Lunapark* to forget about all worries, especially the fact that he was fired that day. This is why they go for a ride on the “Kettenkarussell,” the “Berg-und-Tal-Bahn,” two attractions called “Schimmy-Treppe” and “Eisernes Meer” and visit a variety show starring dwarfs and acrobats. (157) They also pay a visit to a gambling booth and Erna wins a piece of eel, which she eats greedily. The couple is so enraptured by the many attractions that they do not even notice that they are on a spending spree. Their experience is proof of the powers of commodified entertainment: even class-conscious people like Erna and Fritz can be seduced. Yet, according to the

⁵⁰¹ Lynn Abrams, “From Control to Commercialization: The Triumph of Mass Entertainment in Germany 1900-25,” German History 8.3 (1990): 278.

⁵⁰² Curt Morek, Führer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin (1931; Berlin: divan, 1987) 75.

novel, people like them merely revel in inane entertainment temporarily while their political awareness is permanent. The spell that the Lunapark casts on the lovers vanishes on their way home as Erna tells her boyfriend about Trude's predicament. Fritz' political spirit reawakens immediately: he tells her that "die Angestellten ja im allgemeinen jämmerliche Scheißkerle [sind]," criticizes their lack of organization and plants the seed for the strike in Erna. (158)

Prior to discussing the strike I will turn to fashion and romance, which also figure prominently in the lives of Erna Halbe and her colleagues. The women she works with but also the many strangers she sees on the streets, such as the girl she observes outside the train station, all look like New Women: "Vor ihr geht ein junges Mädchen, in ihrem Alter ungefähr, einen blauen Hut mit gelbem Band schief über den Kopf gezogen, in einem leichten, enganliegenden blauen Seidenkleid, das so kurz ist, daß Erna die Kniekehlen sehen kann." (26) The women in Erna's office wear fashionable dresses that are practical and versatile. They are suitable for the office but, especially once the women put on some more make-up, they can equally be worn in the evening to a café or the cinema. Accessories such as bags, shoes or a cloche hat – such as the blue felt cap with the little silver buckle worn by Lieselotte Kries – complete their outfits. The many conversations about clothes and hairstyles as well as the great pride each woman displays when showing off new acquisitions demonstrate that fashion plays a very important role in their lives. However, Erna's colleagues lack awareness and they do not think of fashion as a means to shape their identity, let

alone a vehicle for emancipation.⁵⁰³ Though Erna Halbe's colleagues visually embody the New Woman they do not take advantage of the potential inherent in the figure. Instead, they use fashion in a very similar way as leisure: they dress a certain way because work does not fulfill them and, by adding some sparkle to their lives, they hope to temporarily escape their monotonous and challenging reality. Erna's colleagues explore concepts of identities but because they do so without reflecting on their action, they ultimately enslave themselves to the dictates of the fashion industry. As far as they are concerned, the potential of the New Woman is lost and fashion, rather than fostering emancipation, creates dependencies.

Erna differs from her colleagues because she does not become a victim of consumption. She senses that the women in Berlin are put under greater pressure to look a certain way, that they are constantly inundated with visual examples of the New Woman: "Sei schön durch Elida.' Das Mädchen hat goldblondes Haar, rosige Wangen, glänzende Augen, einen duftenden Mund. So muß man hier aussehen, nicht wahr? Geld braucht man dazu." (16) Erna marvels at the beautiful girl featured in the ad but she is able to maintain a distance and is not tempted to buy something beyond her means. This is not to say that the young woman is immune to the allure of fashion. She secretly adores her colleagues' "gebobbtten, ondulierten, gedrehten, gelockten, glatt gekämmten und auf unterschiedliche Art frisierten Bubiköpfe" and considers getting a marcel

⁵⁰³ The novel also criticizes shallow upper middle-class women, who adopted the fashion without giving it much thought. While leisurely crossing a street "ein böses, elegantes Mädchen [...] eine Dame mit einem kleinen Stulphut aus weißem Stroh und einem rot-blauen Schal, mit einem weiß emalieren Gesicht" nearly runs Erna over. (27)

herself. (54) She understands that she cannot afford to spend money on an expensive haircut, nor buy any of the beautiful clothes displayed in the windows of department stores. Erna practices self-constraint but she does not want to be a “kleine Landpomeranze,” who wears dull clothes, either. (48) Inspired to look as smart as the women around her, to become one of the girls who wear “schiefe, schicke Hüte” and “knappe, geschmackvolle Frühjahrskleider,” Erna decides to make her own dress. (77) To accomplish her goal she uses her Sunday best, which might have served a purpose in her hometown but which has become useless in an urban environment that places great importance on physical appearance. If Erna wants to participate in the culture of Berlin she must own a pretty dress for each and every day, “ein [...] modernes Kleid, das sie im Büro und auf der Straße tragen kann.” (87) To complement her new outfit she also turns “eine altmodische Mantelkappe” into “eine tolle Kappe, wie sie in den Modezeitschriften abgebildet sind.” (87-8) Erna even cuts her hair herself and becomes an impressively stylish woman. Such a transformation was not entirely uncommon as many women, who came to Berlin, “hatten [verblüffend schnell] alles Provinzielle abgestreift.”⁵⁰⁴ More importantly, Erna demonstrates that it is possible to be fashionable *and* conform to the contemporary ideal of femininity without spending vast amounts of money and avoid becoming enslaved to fashion trends. However, by resisting the temptations of the consumer industries but transforming herself into a modern woman nonetheless, Erna becomes a real New Woman: she enjoys the freedoms available to women as well as the urban

⁵⁰⁴ Zitiert in Scheub, Verrückt nach Leben 19.

lifestyle of the 1920s. At the same time she is critical of it and thereby offers the reader a perspective that is truly modern, combining the pursuit of personal freedom and fashion.

It is in part due to her resistance against the consumer industries – according to Renny Harrigan she is “impervious to the lure of material luxuries” – that Erna also has a different relationship to men than most of her colleagues.⁵⁰⁵ Soon after her arrival in Berlin, Erna falls in love with the mechanic Fritz, a “netter, ehrlicher Kerl.” (135) As it was not uncommon at the time, she gets physical with him quickly and after their visit to the Lunapark she naturally spends the night with him. Their relationship is thoroughly modern: they treat each other as equals and with respect, which brings to mind the concept of the *Kameradschaftsehe* mentioned in Chapter Two. In contrast, the relationships of Lotte Weißbach, Eva Hagedorn, Grete Theier and Lieselotte Kries with men are characterized neither by emotional intimacy nor equality. These women select their partners according to their economic potential, which explains why the relationships lack substance. They are partnerships of convenience and their purpose is to satisfy very different needs: the women are not looking for love but they turn to men to supplement their meager income. According to Lotte, “[kannst] du dir mit den paar Groschen, die du hier kriegst, nischt leisten, nicht so viel!” (98) A girl, whom Erna meets during her lunch break, suggest there is only one solution to the problem: “Ehe ich krepriere, suche ich mir doch einen Freund.”

⁵⁰⁵ Renny Harrigan, “Novelistic Representation of ‘die Berufstätige’ during the Weimar Republic,” *Women in German Yearbook 4: Feminist Studies and German Culture*, eds. Marianne Burkhard and Jeanette Clausen (New York: UP of America, 1988) 114.

(62) Erna criticizes their behavior because she has not yet experienced financial difficulties herself. However, as she comes to understand the situation she must acknowledge that it will be difficult not to follow her colleagues suit: “Wie willst du mit einhundertzwanzig Mark in Berlin leben? Erna überlegt sich, sie rechnet, aber die Frage will ihr nicht aus dem Kopf, die Frage ist unangenehm und die Antwort darauf viel zu einfach.” (80) The novel ends before Erna is put to the test and, by criticizing “daß [weibliche Angestellte] bei dem geringen Einkommen einen Freund haben” it calls attention to the economic hardship of female white-collar workers, which coerces them to behave in this way.⁵⁰⁶

The women use men to fulfill their material desires. Eva Hagedorn’s casual remark – “Gott, wenn ihr kein Geld habt, müßt ihr euch eben einen Kavalier nehmen” – implies that lovers serve the purpose of a sugar daddy, who pays for clothes and treats such as cinema tickets or a restaurant meal. (71) Grete, only seventeen years old but extremely calculating, exemplifies this attitude. She proudly tells Erna about the additions she plans to make to her wardrobe: “Ich lasse mir jetzt ein Jäckchenkleid aus gelbem Panamastoff machen, mit einer weißen Bluse und oben einer Schleife daran.” (148) Erna has seen elegant items of clothing like these in shop windows and knows that Grete, who earns no more than 120 Marks a month, could never afford such an outfit. To finance her wardrobe she entered a relationship with forty year old bank clerk Herr Einsiedel and he also has to pick up the tab when they go out in the

⁵⁰⁶ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 69.

evening.⁵⁰⁷ Even married colleagues use men to finance their desires. Lieselotte Kries, for example, is married but her husband does not earn very much and their combined salary barely covers their living expenses. He plays the lottery but besides having won a toaster he can only hope that one day he will be able to satisfy her craving for consumer goods. To maximize her benefit, Lieselotte has affairs with various men, including Erika Tümmeler's brother and a colleague of Manni Kries, and she even makes out with her boss Lortzing.

As Martha Hummel, one of the typists, appropriately remarks: some women "machen für ein Kinobillett alles mögliche." (100) She does not share her colleagues' views and criticizes their behavior explicitly, albeit not for moral reasons but because of the futility of their striving:

Jetzt werdet ihr wohl gleich wieder erzählen, ihr müßt verhungern, wenn ihr eure Kavaliere nicht habt! Ich weiß ganz genau, daß wir einen Dreck verdienen und in der Bude nie auf einen grünen Zweig kommen werden. Aber ebenso schlimm ist die Protzerei, die bei einigen von euch nicht mehr zum Aushalten ist. [...] Theater, Autofahrten, Wein und ähnlicher blöder Quatsch, das ist immer das gleiche Lied. Jeden Tag erzählt ihr lange Geschichten, und Montag morgens ist es ganz besonders schlimm. Nur gut, daß der größte Teil Schwindel ist. [...] Ihr [befindet] euch nämlich alle in einem kleinen Irrtum! [Denn] wenn ein Mädchen nicht sehr gerissen oder sehr oberflächlich ist, bleibt sie im Schlamassel hängen. (99)

Martha expresses the author's view on a fictional level: "Die wirtschaftliche Selbstständigkeit der Büromädchen [steht] auf schwachen Füßen."⁵⁰⁸ As long as

⁵⁰⁷ Elsbeth is another example of a typist, who entertains relationships with men to supplement her wardrobe. She always wears "geschmackvolle Kleider, modern und schick" but her salary would not allow her to spend lavishly on pretty dresses. (148) The young woman, like many of them, does not come from an affluent family either; her father works as a subway conductor. No one knows who exactly pays for Elsbeth's clothes or the many cinema tickets, but it is evident that men are involved.

⁵⁰⁸ Comments by Käthe Mende in 1912 and Stephanie Herz anticipated Braune's view. However, both Mende and Herz fail to acknowledge that the female white-collar workers of the pre-war and

they chase materialist goods, they will not find the kind of fulfillment Erna derived from making her own dress, and, more importantly, as long as they do not acknowledge the reasons for their economic misery they will not challenge the system responsible for it. Ultimately, the young women have little to gain and, as the case of Trude demonstrates, they must discover that the disadvantages that come with such relationships outweigh the benefits by far.

Erna understands this intuitively and she questions whether her colleagues are as content as they pretend to be. Erika Tümmler, at twenty-six the oldest woman working in the office, confirms her suspicion by admitting that this lifestyle did not fulfill her. She used to be passionate about fashion and entertainment, and had sexual relationships with men, who paid for everything. After a while she realized that Berlin's excessive culture of leisure and consumption lacks substance and prevents people from leading a more meaningful existence. Erika is not fundamentally opposed to pretty dresses or going to the cinema but she emphasizes that a critical distance to the manifestations of the consumer and entertainment industries is paramount. Because those who lack "die notwendige Klarheit [und] ein bestimmtes Ziel" cannot ask critical questions and empower themselves. (114) Erika Tümmler is

the Weimar years were *de facto* unable to live off their salaries and had few other choices: "Welches junge Lehnmädchen widersteht da nicht nach ermüdender einförmiger Arbeit dem aufmunternden Zureden älterer Genossinnen, es ihnen gleich zu tun und sich, anstatt durch Lernen und Bemühen zu einer besseren Stellung, einem höheren Einkommen emporzugelangen, auf diese leichtere, vergnüglichere Weise das gleiche Resultat zu beschaffen?" And: "Die [Mädchen], ohne weibliche Scham, glauben nachher, nicht mehr ohne Freund leben zu können. Sie sind in der Kleidung anspruchsvoll, müssen stets das modernste haben, wenn auch in Talminqualität – sie jagen Scheinwerten nach, sie haben den Blick für Echtheit und Wahrhaftigkeit verloren." Rudolf Braune, "Büromädels," Die Tat 22.8 (1930/31): 355; Mende, Münchener jugendliche Ladnerinnen zu Hause und im Beruf 212; and Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen Angestellten 73.

also a New Woman with substance but it should be stressed that in contrast to her colleagues she can afford to be critical. The private secretary's salary is unusually high and the sum of 400 Marks a month grants her a freedom that women like Trude Leußner can only dream of. As a result, the women have learned to separate emotions from relationships: "Ach, denkst du etwa, wir sorgen nicht für unser Gemüt? Da brauchst du keine Angst zu haben. Das hat damit gar nichts zu tun, das ist zweierlei." (98) According to Lotte Weißbach most women care little about their *Kavalier*e but are only interested in the amount of money they can extract from them: "Der Trude ist ganz egal, ob Lortzing mit anderen Mädels loszieht. [...] Jeden Abend eine andere, ihretwegen! Bloß zahlen muß er." (95) There is little room for genuine emotions and human interaction, which implies that the women have to make sacrifices to navigate their modern existence.

The economic dependency of Erna Halbe's colleagues on men further has the effect that they put themselves in positions, in which they can be easily exploited. This holds particularly true if the lover holds a more senior position in the company the woman works for. Even the women who do not have an affair with their boss must endure harassment as Lortzing forces them to comply with his request for sexual favors.⁵⁰⁹ Grete Theier, for example, suffers from his advances: Lortzing kissed and inappropriately touched her, and she must keep quiet about the incident. To smack Lortzing in the face, as Erna suggests, is not an option because Lortzing made it clear that any woman resisting him will be

⁵⁰⁹ The sexual relationships mirror the company hierarchy: Lortzing treats the typists as his sexual prey and his boss Siodmak allegedly has an affair with his private secretary Erika Tümmeler.

made redundant. Aware of the typists' financial needs, the economic crisis and Weimar Germany's social structures he does not hesitate to abuse his power: "Wem [was] nicht paßt, der braucht sich bloß zu melden. Bitte schön! Dort ist die Tür." (105) Should she be laid off, no one would offer a low-level clerical worker like Grete support and in the unlikely event that she should win the court case against Lortzing she would not be able to benefit. She might receive as much as two times her monthly salary for compensation but without a positive letter of recommendation from her previous employer she would face great difficulties finding a new position. Financially dependent the women may only nourish fantasies to avenge his behavior: "Grete, wenn du ihm ein paar runterhaust, und er schmeißt dich hinaus, dann muß er dauernd Angst haben, daß du zu seiner Frau rückst." (128) Even the class-conscious protagonist must acknowledge her helplessness. Lortzing insults her by implying that sooner or later she too will get a *Kavalier* and she would like to respond by spitting in his face. Erna "beißt ihre Zähne zusammen" and does not say anything because she knows that "Lortzings Antipathie sie teuer zu stehen kommen [kann]. Arbeitslos in Berlin, das ist für so ein kleines Mädchen keine erfreuliche Aussicht." (70 and 106)

The case of Trude Leußner demonstrates how women, as a result of their economically and socially inferior position, were sexually exploited by men. More specifically, it shows that few women could profit from entering into a sexual relationship with their boss. As Renny Harrigan observes, "the Weimar woman may knowingly use her attractiveness for the purpose of exploiting her antagonist's weakness but she continues, just like her earlier sisters, to pay the

price.”⁵¹⁰ Trude agreed to the affair thinking that she would be able to challenge hierarchical structures and take advantage of Lortzing, and she only grasped the hopelessness of her situation once she learned of her pregnancy. She understood that Lortzing would not take care of her and the child because he is married. At the same time, having a baby would have required her to give notice and as an unemployed single mother her economic misery would have intensified dramatically. Driven by fear she unsuccessfully tried to induce a miscarriage using “Mixturen und holländisches Öl und irgendwelches ekelhaftes Zeug und dann Spritzen.” (141) Trude is desperate to hold on to her job and knows that Lortzing would dismiss her if she were not to come into the office. She is too sick to meet her quota and Lortzing threatens to lay her off: “Sie bekommen ja Ihre Arbeit überhaupt nicht mehr fertig. Wenn Sie immer krank sind, müssen Sie sich eben eine Stelle suchen, die Ihrer Gesundheit mehr zusagt.” (142) Lortzing knows of the pregnancy, he even gave her money for an abortion, which suggests that he is ultimately indifferent to her predicament. He no longer considers Trude an attractive sexual partner, which confirms the author’s belief that “der sexuelle Wert des Mädchens seine Stellung im Büro [erhöht]” – or that it diminishes as is the case with Trude.⁵¹¹ Lortzing enjoyed her company as long as the relationship was easy-going and trouble-free but as the situation complicates and would require him to assume responsibility, he

⁵¹⁰ Harrigan, “Novellistic Representation of ‘die Berufstätige’ during the Weimar Republic” 110.

⁵¹¹ Braune, “Büromädels” 345.

terminates the relationship. That he can dismiss Trude “wegen Arbeitsmangel” emphasizes that as a man he is in a position to unfairly exert power. (165)

If it had not been for the botched abortion – and the novel condemns the unavailability of legal and safe abortions – Erna would not have been able to motivate her colleagues to go on strike.⁵¹² Erna had already noticed a slight change in attitude, presumably inspired by her exemplary behavior, in her colleagues: “In letzter Zeit ändern sie sich ein bißchen. Wenn sie nämlich sehen, daß es noch andere Dinge gibt als schöne Kleider und reiche Kavaliere.” (159-60) Even though they were disgruntled about their salaries it would not have occurred to them to team up against Lortzing. But as the young women learn about their colleague’s fate, they remember all “die Demütigungen, die sie Tag für Tag in diesem Betrieb einstecken müssen” and everything “was sie an Bitterem hier erlebt haben. Anschauzer, Strafen, Nacharbeiten, Lohnabzüge, Unfreundlichkeiten, Schikanen, Beleidigungen.” (175 and 167) What is more, they understand that what happened to Trude could also happen to each one of them, and this realization awakens their desire to put an end to their financial but also their sexual exploitation. The abortion, an issue that concerned women specifically during the 1920s and early 1930s, shakes the women up, which suggests that a personal experience is far more effective in encouraging them to

⁵¹² Because of §218 many women were forced to obtain illegal abortions that, as Brigit Rehse remarks, frequently put their lives at risk: “Die aus unsachgemäßen Eingriffen” – during the late twenties approximately 800,000 to 1,000,000 – “resultierenden Folgeerscheinungen wie Unfruchtbarkeit beliefen sich auf fast 100,000 Fälle. Die Zahl der Todesfälle lag sehr unterschiedlichen Schätzungen zufolge zwischen 4,000 und 48,000.” Brigit Rehse, “Dein Körper gehört Dir! Ärztinnen klären über Geburtenregelung auf,” Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten 117.

revise their materialistic thinking and consumption-driven behavior than political theories could ever be. Inspired by their pity for Trude they spontaneously agree to ask for “die Rücknahme von Trudes Kündigung” and, because Erna thinks the strike would otherwise not fully benefit them, for “tarifgerechte Entlohnung.” (141 and 169)

Erna wants to teach her colleagues that they must stick together because otherwise they do not stand a chance against their economic and sexual exploitation. She senses that “sie tasten und suchen und treiben, sie haben keinen festen Halt” because they not only lack political awareness but also nurture, in Marxist-socialist terms, a false consciousness. (120) In terms of their salary they are working-class but they “halten sich für was Besseres wie Arbeiter.” (135) Lieselotte Kries exemplifies this attitude and, as the only member of the group, she expresses dissent about the strike. As a stereotypically negative example of a Weimar female white-collar worker she is quite superficial and, sensing that she will never earn significant sums of money, she fantasizes of becoming a film star or winning the lottery. It is her *Standesdünkel* rather than the fear that she could lose her job that leads her to criticize the protest. (159) According to Lieselotte, only manual laborers, whom she condescendingly and ignorantly calls Bolsheviks, go on strike. She thinks that her status is superior to that of blue-collar workers and nurtures the delusion that she and her male superiors are equals.

Ich will euch mal sagen, wie ich darüber denke. Wir sind schließlich Angestellte einer Eisenverwertungsgesellschaft und keine Arbeiter, und was wir hier machen, das tun die Kommunisten und solche Leute, aber mit so was haben wir schließlich nichts zu tun. Siodmak

ist noch lange nicht der Schlimmste, und ich habe noch immer bekommen, wenn ich was haben wollte. Ich bin freundlich 'reingegangen und habe mit den Herren gesprochen und die sind mir immer freundlich und zuvorkommend entgegengekommen. (214)

Lieselotte utterly lacks political sensibility and, ignorant of the fact that she is the victim of a system represented by Lortzing and Siodmak, believes in “Zugehörigkeit zur Geschäftsleitung.”⁵¹³ She trusts she may participate “an der Macht und dem Ansehen derer, die die Betriebe beherrschen,” which explains why she sides with her exploiters rather than her peers.⁵¹⁴ She has internalized the hierarchical thinking that ultimately serves the interests of her employers and the narrator suggests that she, putting her interests first, would not hesitate to accomplish her goal at the expense of a colleague.

Lieselotte’s attitude is strongly inspired by her desire for social mobility. Erna criticizes this attitude: “Alle wollt ihr nach oben, möglichst rasch” and “mit allen Mitteln und um jeden Preis.” (119 and 80) This is not to say that she has no ambitions. She has worked in a factory in the past and her decision to take up a white-collar profession and come to Berlin was fuelled by a desire to achieve something in life. Yet, in contrast to women like Lieselotte, she embraces her proletarian background and senses that the members of Germany’s new middle class actually belong to the working class: “Ich habe auch schon in der Fabrik gearbeitet. [...] Manche glauben, das wäre ein Unterschied.” (119) This also explains why she does not feel “zu gut für [einen] Arbeiter” and comfortably dates

⁵¹³ Dreyfuß, Beruf und Ideologie 75.

⁵¹⁴ Hans Speier, Die Angestellten vor dem Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977) 96.

a young man with a working-class occupation.⁵¹⁵ She encourages her colleagues to acknowledge their actual economic and social status as well as adjust their dreams and expectations. Because, as a young man selling cosmetics at their lunch place informs them, “so viele einigermaßen bejütete Männer wohnen ja jarnich in Berlin, um alle netten [...] Mädels auszuhalten.” (62) Erna knows what to expect. Standing in front of shop windows she dreams of pretty clothes and while at the cinema she dreams of looking like a film star. However, she senses that mimicking the upper class is pointless, and she is not addicted to copying “der Oberschicht eigentümliche Lebensgewohnheiten.”⁵¹⁶ She is able to adjust her material desires to her economic situation and realistically she aspires to marrying a decent man with whom she can have a family; she hopes for “ein Minimum an Glück.” (7)

The strike does not come to a successful end and it transpires that Erna’s efforts were in vain. However, the failure is not due to the women’s fading optimism; nor do they abandon their pledge because they are suddenly afraid of “der eigenen Kühnheit.” (177) Instead, Siodmak’s intervention brings it to a close. Trude died shortly after she was admitted to hospital and Siodmak would no longer need to revoke her notice to appease the women. Aware that her fate rather than political conviction was the driving force behind their decision to strike, he threatens to lay off the entire *Schreibbüro* and to take each one of them to court. Erna, whom Siodmak dismissed as soon as he learned of her role in this

⁵¹⁵ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 86.

⁵¹⁶ Rudolf Kuestermeier, Die Mittelschichten und ihr politischer Weg (Potsdam: Protte, 1933) 9.

act of solidarity, can only react by acknowledging that “Siodmak [...] den längeren Atem [hat]” and, rightfully suspecting that the unemployment agency will have sent replacements for all of them by Monday, she asks her colleagues to give in. (222)

The young women cannot be blamed for this outcome. A strike like this one, the narrator indicates, is unlikely to end in a way that would benefit this group of female white-collar workers.

Ein Lohnkampf wie dieser, in einem lächerlich kleinen Bezirk, Schreibzimmer im Hinterhaus, dreizehn Arbeitnehmer, ohne Betriebsrat, ohne Verbindung mit der Gewerkschaft, Mädchen noch dazu, um die Zwanzig herum, mit merkwürdigen Sehnsüchten und großen Hoffnungen, keß, tapfer, aber auch ein bißchen leicht und locker, ein bißchen weich und verschwommen, ein bißchen kleinbürgerlich, ein solcher Kampf steht von Anfang bis zu Ende in der Gefahrenzone der Desertion, der Fahnenflucht, des Verrats. (203-4)

It would be wrong to blame the women’s lack of commitment because the missing institutional support – the government, political organizations or chapters of the women’s movement – is the actual problem.⁵¹⁷ The novel mentions unions only in passing, which demonstrates how small a role government bodies or industry organizations played for female professionals. Only Erna and two other colleagues were or are members of a union and their attitude towards these demonstrates that unions met the interests of their male members “at the expense of working women:” they did not serve the interests of their female

⁵¹⁷ By featuring unions that actually existed the text’s criticism is all the more pungent. See also Chapter One, especially pages 57-61.

members.⁵¹⁸ Martha Hummel, the only active member of the ZVA, is absent on the day they decide to go on strike and her relationship to the organization is not elaborated on. Erna gave up her ZVA-membership some time ago and Annemie Bergemann, a member of the DHV, has neither paid her dues in a long time and no any idea of what the benefits of being a member might actually be: “Was meint Erika mit der tariflichen Entlohnung? Sollen dann Elfriede und Grete und Annemie genau so viel bekommen wie ich?” (177) The ignorance “[des] kleinen Flappers” is the result, as established in Chapter One, of the little attention the major unions paid to women. (165) Unions like the aforementioned GdA or Afa neither campaigned for the improvement of women’s salaries nor their professional equality. With not one typist working for the *Eisenverwertungs-G.m.b.H.* being an active member of a union the women have no mental and financial support to rely on, and their strike is doomed from the beginning: it could have never been more than a “kleiner Widerstand, [...] der in einer Stunde [beendet] werden kann, ohne daß sich viel ändert.” (170)

The text emphasizes that principles such as solidarity and class-consciousness are important but the unsuccessful outcome of the women’s protest implies that they are ultimately useless if their efforts remain unorganized. Despite their willingness to join forces and reevaluate their lifestyle, the young women must learn that they cannot escape their exploitation. The narrator may argue that the failed strike “sei kein Zusammenbruch, nur ein Rückzug,” yet in

⁵¹⁸ Petersen, *Women and Modernity* 48.

light of the obstacles the women faced during the protest, the phrase rings empty. (224) It seems unlikely that Erna will not be forgotten, as the narrator confidently asserts, and the ideas she represented will not gain momentum but cease to impact the lives of these women. What is more, by merely expressing hopefulness in the end, the novel does not succeed in bridging the gap between the hope for a better future and reality. Therefore, the author did not do justice to his ideological intention: because of the way the narrative ends but also because the texts acknowledges that unions had little to offer women it discourages the female reader to follow Erna Halbe suit.

Braune's novel inspired but few young white-collar professionals to complete a process that was terminated on a fictional level and to join the revolutionary cause. Nevertheless the novel constitutes a laudable effort to introduce a select social group to political ideas. The author, as established above, deliberately avoids presenting complex political theories and rallying cries but uses a personal experience to encourage commercial employees to explore a less familiar terrain. Because Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat is no political manifesto it is the protagonist's personal conviction rather than her, as GDR literary critics claim, "ausgeprägte[r] proletarische[r] Klasseninstinkt" that is supposed to persuade the reader.⁵¹⁹ Erna Halbe's class-consciousness is inspired by feeling, "ein heißes Gefühl, [...] ein [...] starkes mitreißendes Gefühl," and what Christa Jordan dismisses as "Gefühlssozialismus" is actually one of her

⁵¹⁹ Hans Kaufmann and Dieter Schiller, Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart: 1917-1945, vol. 10 (Berlin/DDR: Volk und Wissen, 1973) 324.

best qualities.⁵²⁰ (150) The same can be said about the novel's concept of solidarity. Erna repeatedly stresses the importance of solidarity and, because she wants to avoid "daß viele [Mädchen] enttäuscht werden und einige vielleicht ganz schlimm," she expresses solidarity on various occasions. (120) The novel does not offer a clear-cut definition of solidarity but encourages readers to stick together in times of crisis: "Neue Worte, neue Helden und viele neue Sorgen sind aufgetaucht, man schreibt 1928, man muß sich kameradschaftlich verhalten und manchmal nur, weil es nicht anders geht." (57) The solidarity of the novel never develops into a political concept. Instead "gesellschaftliches Handeln" and "mitmenschliche Hilfe" simply converge.⁵²¹

Braune's *Frauenroman* provided women with a space to explore their place in modern society. It discusses various aspects that determined the lives of female white-collar workers and shows how different women – Erna, Erika or Lieselotte – cope with their complex reality. As such, the text served as a tool for female readers to make sense of their existence and especially to see it as part of a social phenomenon rather than a unique and personal experience. In this sense, the fictional text contributed to empowering the contemporary reader. By supplying female white-collar workers with ideas for an alternative and ultimately more wholesome femininity, the novel granted women a place to negotiate their gender identity. By means of the protagonist it creates a positive counterpart to Weimar's stereotypical and superficial female employee. Her interests – fashion

⁵²⁰ Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung 229.

⁵²¹ Jordan, Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung 222.

and cinema – correspond to those of an entire generation but the text shows that it was possible to take cues from the new mass medium and the images created by the fashion industry without becoming a victim. Erna Halbe does not subscribe to the misleading promises of the culture and consumer industries but uses clothes to shape her own identity. She is a truly modern woman, who supplies readers with, if not an altogether new gender identity, alternative perspectives on modern womanhood. The *Unterhaltungsroman* Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat provides the female reader with a role model and, by offering ideas for a more aware or emancipated femininity, contributed to politicizing female white-collar workers.

Das Kunstseidene Mädchen: “Ich will ein Glanz sein.”

Irmgard Keun’s Das kunstseidene Mädchen (1932) tells the story of a young woman from a modest social background, who has internalized present-day white-collar ideology and succumbs to the temptations of the culture industry.⁵²² Employed as a typist in a mid-sized town, Doris feels trapped by her

⁵²² According to Stefanie Arend and Ariane Martin the novel was supposed to be called Mädchen ohne Bleibe, which would have made it much more obvious that the novel addresses the period’s social and economic realities. Stefanie Arend and Ariane Martin, “Nachwort,” Das kunstseidene Mädchen, by Irmgard Keun (Berlin: Claassen, 2005) 209. The edition also contains a comprehensive selection of reviews of the novel from the period. For a list of Keun’s work other than her Weimar novels Das kunstseidene Mädchen and Gilgi see Hiltrud Häntzschel, Irmgard Keun (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001).

monotonous job as well as her dysfunctional family.⁵²³ To distract herself she indulges in consumer goods and entertainment; however, without the means to pay for either she must rely on men to pay for both. At the same time, she fantasizes of economic and social mobility, and hopes that her dream will materialize if she relives images and scenarios created by the media. Following an argument with her boss, Doris loses her job and must work as an extra at a local theater to sustain herself. Her career as an actress comes to a sudden end when she, driven by her desire to improve her situation as well as her craving for consumer goods, steals a fur coat. Thinking she is wanted by the police and in pursuit of the freshly fuelled desire for luxury and glamor she escapes to Berlin. Doris tries to start anew in the capital and believes the fur coat, as a marker of economic and social status, will facilitate her mobility. Without working papers she cannot look for a job and has great difficulty staying afloat. She becomes increasingly dependent on others and has no friends to turn to for emotional comfort or intellectual nourishment. She senses the discrepancy between her media-inspired dream and reality, yet Doris remains hopeful and engages in little scams to achieve her goal. Temporarily she even sees her desire for glamor fulfilled when a dubious businessman keeps her as his mistress and showers her with luxury goods. As soon as the affair ends, however, Doris finds herself penniless and homeless, and feels she has no choice but to prostitute herself for food, money and shelter. Since her first client is not interested in having sex with

⁵²³ While Fräulein Brückner of Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen has no first name the protagonist of Das kunstseidene Mädchen has no last name, with the effect that Doris, too, is reduced to a type.

her but seeks companionship, she comes to experience a life that differs from the superficial and sometimes *halbseidene* world of glamor she so desperately wanted to be part of. Suddenly appearance and status are no longer issues and even though she remains torn between the two worlds, she feels somewhat settled for the first time. Once again Doris is forced to realize that her future lays elsewhere and with her hopes continually destroyed, she loses all illusions: acknowledging her failure to become either glamorous like her screen icons or a member of the establishment she resigns to her displacement and ends up at the train station as an outcast.

Like Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen and Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat this novel also is *Unterhaltungsliteratur*. Following the success of Gilgi, eine von uns (1931), Irmgard Keun wrote a second bestseller and not least because she bore the taste of female readers in mind the novel “can be read with amusement.”⁵²⁴ The novel also deserves attention because it is of respectable literary quality.⁵²⁵ As feminist literary scholar Joey Horsley rightly claims, Keun’s text “balancier[t] zwischen Unterhaltungsliteratur und ‘hoher’ Kunst” because while the novel contains formal elements typical for popular fiction it lacks others.⁵²⁶ Most notably, the protagonist may not rely on a higher power, and by

⁵²⁴ Graham Greene, “The Artificial Silk Girl,” The Spectator (20 Oct. 1933): 538.

⁵²⁵ This might explain why the novel has been receiving more scholarly attention than any other text discussed in this dissertation. For comprehensive bibliographies on Das kunstseidene Mädchen see Häntzschel, Irmgard Keun; and Stefanie Arend and Ariane Martin, Irmgard Keun 1905/2005: Deutungen und Dokumente (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2005).

⁵²⁶ “Die Romane, die zwischen Unterhaltungsliteratur und ‘hoher’ Kunst balancieren, wurden auch von wichtigen Literaten wie Kurt Tucholsky und Hans Fallada gelobt.” Joey Horsley, “Irmgard

avoiding a happy ending, the novel does not affirm the status quo. Similarly, the novel is anything but aesthetically unrefined as it contains formal elements of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, typically aligned with the stabilization period in Germany between 1924 and 1929. The style took the place of Expressionism after World War One and *neusachliche* authors were keen on creating “eine für Zeitgenossen nachvollziehbare und nachprüfbare Wirklichkeit.”⁵²⁷ As Sabina Becker stresses, “im Gegensatz zum Expressionismus [nahm] der Autor nicht die Position des geistigen Führers [...] ein,” which explains why this fiction did not offer blunt explanations of the social, political and economic realities it addressed.⁵²⁸ As scholars like Karl Prümm emphasized, *neusachliche* authors assumed “ein soziales Verantwortungsbewußtsein” and, taking the “wahren Bedürfnisse der Massen” into consideration, were committed to educating and possibly even politicizing the reader.⁵²⁹

By 1932, Stephanie Bender points out, *Neue Sachlichkeit* was no longer avant-garde and on the brink of decline but, as Das kunstseidene Mädchen demonstrates, the influence of the style lingered.⁵³⁰ And while Erika Mann’s comment about a new or modern type of author would have excluded authors

Keun 1905-1982: ‘Auf dem Trittbrett eines rasendes Zuges.’ Irmgard Keun zwischen Wahn und Wirklichkeit,” WahnsinnsFrauen, eds. Sybille Duda and Luise F. Pusch (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994) 289.

⁵²⁷ Rosenstein, Irmgard Keun 110.

⁵²⁸ Becker, “Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman” 10.

⁵²⁹ Karl Prümm, Die Literatur des soldatischen Nationalismus der zwanziger Jahre (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1974) 264.

⁵³⁰ Bender, Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns 15.

like Hedwig Courths-Mahler or even Christa Anita Brück it undeniably applies to Irmgard Keun:

Seit kurzem gibt es einen neuen Typ Schriftstellerin: [...] Die Frau, die Reportage macht, in Aufsätzen, Theaterstücken, Romanen. Sie bekennt nicht, sie schreibt sich nicht die Seele aus dem Leib, ihr eigenes Schicksal steht still beiseite, die Frau berichtet, anstatt zu beichten. Sie kennt die Welt, sie weiß Bescheid, sie hat Humor und Klugheit.⁵³¹

At a time of radical change Keun wrote a critical and “ästhetisch innovative[n]” *Frauenroman*.⁵³² The text avoids what Hermann Kesten calls “erfundene Tragik” and is free of what Friedrich Weissinger referred to as “romanhaft-romantische Zufälle.”⁵³³ It presents the economic, social and cultural realities of female white-collar workers in a sober yet sympathetic and witty way.

As was the case in the previously discussed novels, Das kunstseidene Mädchen presents various issues that shaped the reality of female white-collar workers of the late Weimar Republic. Only a fraction of the novel is set in an office, yet it nevertheless provides insights into the monotony as well as physical and mental stress that dominated the workday of women like Doris.⁵³⁴ In

⁵³¹ Mann, “Frau und Buch” 12.

⁵³² Günter Helmes, “Ausbrüche, Einbrüche, Aufbrüche: Autorinnen der Zwanziger und frühen Dreissiger Jahre,” Nora verläßt ihr Puppenheim: Autorinnen des 20. Jahrhunderts und ihr Beitrag zur ästhetischen Innovation, ed. Waltraud Wende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000) 88.

⁵³³ Hermann Kesten, “Irmgard Keun,” Ferdinand, der Mann mit dem freundlichen Herzen, by Irmgard Keun (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1950) 12; and Friedrich Weissinger, “Irmgard Keun: Das kunstseidene Mädchen,” Die literarische Welt 8.31 (1932): 5.

⁵³⁴ I disagree with Marion Heister, who argues that an analysis of the “Angestellthema” in this novel would remain “unergiebig” because the protagonist spends too little time in the office. While her experience at the workplace takes up relatively little narrated time her experience is, nevertheless, paradigmatic as it includes aspects such as economic or sexual exploitation that would have been likely to shape a young working woman’s life. Marion Heister, “Winzige Katastrophen”: Eine Untersuchung zur Schreibweise von Angestelltenromanen (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1989) 77.

particular the relationship between Doris and her boss demonstrates how financially needy women were exploited both economically – the threat of employment constantly looms above the young woman’s head – and sexually. Disheartened by the unbearable working conditions at a law firm and sensing that her prospects as a typist are meek, Doris tries to escape her situation by means of consumer goods, entertainment and love affairs. Yet, as Weimar journalist Meta Scheele claimed, it is not the novel’s intention to celebrate “diese[n] Götzen Materie” or “zu zeigen, wie sich alles um die Seidenhemden und den Pelzmantel dreht.”⁵³⁵ Instead, Das kunstseidene Mädchen exposes both the vacuity of the consumer industry’s promises and the hypocrisy of a society that offers its members few alternatives but to trust in superficial distraction. Against the backdrop of the glittering metropolis the reader learns how urbanites like Doris embraced Berlin’s culture of leisure and how they interacted with men. It shows how the longing of a young woman, who faithfully imitates behavior and scenarios perpetuated by the silver screen, for social integrity but also personal happiness remain unfulfilled.

Near the beginning Doris decides to keep a diary. This decision, casual as it might seem, is significant because it reveals her desire. She wants to alter her life, which implies that she – in contrast to Fräulein Brückner of Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen but similar to Erna Halbe of Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat – refuses to accept her situation. Trusting in the promises of happiness and

⁵³⁵ Meta Scheele, “Die Frau und die Gegenwart: Neue Frauenbücher,” Berliner Börsen-Zeitung: Literaturbeilage (21 Aug. 1932): n.pag.

equality propagated by the media, she feels inspired to script her life according to her dreams. The desire to become a *Glanz* becomes central to Doris' quest:

Ich will so ein Glanz werden, der oben ist. Mit weißem Auto und Badewasser, das nach Parfüm riecht, und alles wie Paris. Und die Leute achten mich hoch, weil ich ein Glanz bin, und werden es dann wunderbar finden, wenn ich nicht weiß, was eine Kapazität ist, und nicht runterlachen wie heute [...] Ich werde ein Glanz sein, und was ich dann mache, ist richtig – nie mehr brauch ich mich in acht nehmen und nicht mehr meine Worte ausrechnen und meine Vorhabungen ausrechnen – nichts kann mir mehr passieren an Verlust und Verachtung, denn ich bin ein Glanz.⁵³⁶ (28)

The term *Glanz* or glamor gained popularity in the 1920s and, according to Weimar critic Peter Amondo, was used to describe the “Glanz einer Erscheinung, [...] eines Werkes, eines Lebens [oder] einer Leistung.”⁵³⁷ The term has a more complex meaning for Doris; it comprises the desire for luxury commodities but at the same time it bears the possibility of power and social mobility. Her yearning for glamor is actually a dream of economic security that commingles with the desire of a validated social status.

Doris insists on her “autonomy” and wants to improve her life.⁵³⁸ As a remark by Otto Flake demonstrates, she expresses on a fictional level what many Weimar female white-collar workers dreamed of:

Sie träumen um so sehnsüchtiger, je freudloser ihr Alltag ist. Ihre Wunschfigur ist [...] die Dame. Genauer gesagt, die damenhafte Existenz, der Perserteppich, der Pelz, das Auto, das Grand Hotel,

⁵³⁶ The desire for a white car might be inspired by the Ufa-star Lilian Harvey: “Die Harvey hatte einen ganz tollen Wagen, [...] einen weißen offenen Mercedes, ein [sic] Wagen, den es damals noch gar nicht gab.” Gisela von Wysocki's mother cited in Wysocki, *Die Fröste der Freiheit* 120.

⁵³⁷ Peter Amondo, “‘Glamor’ – das neue Schlagwort,” *Der Querschnitt* 12.2 (1932): 589.

⁵³⁸ Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and ‘New Objectivity’* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 135.

das Marmorbad, Parfums aus Paris und der Schoßhund aus Peking.⁵³⁹

Doris' living and working conditions fully justify her ambition. She suffers from her family's poor economic situation and the smallness of her home. Her mother works as a cloakroom attendant and her stepfather, whom Doris' mother married because she needed someone to take care of herself and her illegitimate child, is an unemployed worker. More than sixty percent of Doris' salary goes towards meeting the family's living expenses and she resents her stepfather for squandering much of her hard-earned salary in the pub "weil er [...] arbeitslos ist und nichts anderes zu tun hat." (5) The family lives in cramped quarters and the lack of privacy strains especially the relationship between Doris and her stepfather. Even Doris' relationship with her mother, whom she is fond of, is uneasy because their mentalities and lifestyles differ significantly. Entering employment and participating in Weimar's culture of leisure has had the effect that, to cite Agnes Zahn-Harnack, "eine Kluft sich [ge]bildet [hat], die sich nicht ohne weiteres überbrücken läßt."⁵⁴⁰ Doris has come into contact with members of the middle-class and left the world of manual labor including its traditions behind, which explains why she, not particularly educated herself, looks down on her parents for being "vollkommen ungebildet" and speaking with a dialect. (16) Similarly, she disapproves of her mother's physical appearance, which does not

⁵³⁹ A comment by Gisela von Wysocki's mother supports this claim: "Wir haben Filme gesehen, die in uns Sehnsüchte erweckten: Entweder wollten wir so leben oder auch nur so sein, wie die Frauen, die da gezeigt wurden." Gisela von Wysocki's mother cited in Wysocki, Die Fröste der Freiheit 104.

⁵⁴⁰ Zahn-Harnack, Die arbeitende Frau 59.

correspond to the fashionable look of the New Woman: she is “ein bißchen dick” but does not wear a figure-improving *Schlankheitsgürtel* and, not following fashion trends, wears her “Hüte so altmodisch oben auf dem Kopf.” (16) Her mother is not only decidedly working-class in her thinking but also of a different generation, and Doris is also unable to genuinely relate to her. However, her meager salary leaves her little choice: she cannot afford the rent for a room but must live with her parents. Her miserable living conditions fuel her “Aufstiegswünsche” and she is confident that by becoming a *Glanz* she will succeed in escaping this milieu.⁵⁴¹

While Doris gets to spend some time in stylish apartments, she is unable to permanently improve her living conditions. Quite the contrary, after spending one night in a taxi and another on a bench in the *Tiergarten Park*, she ends up homeless in the waiting room of a train station. For the duration of her affair with Alexander she is allowed to stay in his “Zimmerflucht am Kurfürstendamm,” at the time one of most expensive residential areas: (78)

Die Wohnung ist so fein, [...] alles ist so fabelhaft [...] Und es sind Tapeten von dunkelroter Farbe – so toll vornehm – und Eichenmöbel und Nußbaum. [...] Und Klubsessel, die haben kleine Aschenbecher umgeschnallt wie Armbänder – so eine Wohnung ist das. (80)

She enjoys being waited on by a maid and wanders around the apartment aimlessly. Another apartment Doris gets to stay in is Ernst’s Bauhaus-style flat. Located in the middle-class neighborhood Friedenau, this less ostentatious place is modern and stylish:

⁵⁴¹ Lorisika, Frauendarstellungen bei Irmgard Keun und Anna Seghers 149.

Hat da'ne Wohnung mit Korkteppich, drei Zimmer mit Bad, einen Gummibaum und ein Diwan so breit mit seidiger Decke und so feine stahlene Zahnarzlampen [...] Hat da'n lackiertes Bett, so ganz flach, und kleine Nachttische wie japanische Kochkisten. (100)

Doris feels she has to give up this safe-haven because Ernst is still in love with his wife Hanne just as she has to vacate Alexander's apartment when his wife returns from her vacation prematurely. Only if she were to become a *Glanz* would she be able to afford such places herself.

Her other living quarters reflect her economic and social status much more accurately. Without an income Doris must stay with acquaintances or rent shabby rooms and replicate scenarios she tried to escape from. For a short time she stays with Tilli Scherer, whose apartment on Münzstraße, an area around Alexanderplatz frequented by "Arbeitslose[n] ohne Hemd," counts only two small rooms.⁵⁴² (42) The apartment of her neighbors is particularly miserable: their place is damp and the sleeping area is only separated from the kitchen by a curtain "voll armen Flecken." (64) The area counted at least seventy "Häuser, mit dem anspruchsvollen Schild 'Hotel,'" which explains why a prostitute and her pimp live upstairs.⁵⁴³ The room Doris rents after her affair with Alexander has come to an end is similarly gloomy. She considers it "eine Schweinerei" not only because it is shabby, unheated and overpriced but also because it fails to

⁵⁴² Tilli shares the apartment with her unemployed husband, who, in contrast to his wife, does not nourish dreams about becoming a *Glanz*. The concept of ostentatious consumption and luxury was predominately nourished in magazines as well as films aimed at women, which almost implies that men had no choice but to be worn down by the hopelessness of his situation. (49)

⁵⁴³ According to Curt Morek approximately 700 rooms accommodated five couples, a total of 3,500 couples, each night. Morek, Führer durch das "lasterhafte" Berlin 189.

provide her with shelter from the city and reinforces her feelings of loneliness.

(85) She senses the importance of having a decent home, its positive influence on one's mental and physical health. Yet, she lacks the means to actively shape her living situation and may only escape it by spending as little time as possible at home. This explains why Doris so frequently ventures out into other areas of the city and hopes to find shelter in one of Weimar's many *Vergnügungslokale*, which Siegfried Kracauer for that reason labeled "Asyle für [...] Obdachlose."⁵⁴⁴

Doris' desire to become a *Glanz* is equally fuelled by her working conditions. As a result of working in a middle-class environment her expectations are greater than those of, for example, her working-class parents but her white-collar salary does not permit her to participate in the consumer and leisure activities she has come to know. She senses that improving her status as a commercial employee would be difficult: because she enjoyed little education her German is substandard and without technical training worth mentioning her skills as a stenographer and typist are limited. Doris' workdays are overshadowed by sexual harassment and she neither derives satisfaction from her work nor does her salary compensate for the monotonous and strenuous work at the typewriter. Her days consist of typing letters, which she strongly dislikes because she is not a trained paralegal and has little grasp of the meaning of any document she types. Uneducated and poorly trained, she resents her work: "Kein Schwein wird daraus klug, und wochenlang schreib ich schon von Blasewitz seine Backenzähne, was einem eines Tages auf die Nerven geht." (14) The

⁵⁴⁴ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 95.

inaccessibility and “die Eintönigkeit der Arbeit” are an “untragbare Last” for Doris, which is why she tries to escape either physically by going out in the evenings or mentally by chatting with her colleagues or writing in her diary – and eventually provokes a situation that puts an end to her misery.⁵⁴⁵

Doris has few choices because like “diejenigen, welche nur Kommunalschulbildung besitzen und gar keine Sprachkenntnisse” she is “auf die [...] mechanischen Arbeiten bei Rechtsanwälten angewiesen.”⁵⁴⁶ Without qualifications she will never be able to move into a more senior position that would allow her “eine angemessene Lebensführung aus eigener Kraft zu gesta[[l]ten.”⁵⁴⁷ Aware of the limitations that are placed on her, she concludes:

Kommt denn unsereins durch Arbeit weiter, wo ich keine Bildung habe und keine fremden Sprachen außer olala und keine höhere Schule und nichts. Und kein Verstehen um ausländische Gelder und Wissen von Opern und alles, was zugehört. Und Examens auch nicht. Und gar keine Aussicht für über 120 zu gelangen auf eine reelle Art. [...] Man hat 120 mit Abzügen und zu Hause oder von leben [sic]. Man ist ja nicht mehr wert, aber man wird kaum satt davon trotzdem. (117)

As the case of Fräulein Brückner of Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen demonstrated, even highly educated and experienced women were unable to move into higher-ranking positions. Therefore, Doris, who is too young to consider marriage with its promise of financial stability and validated social status, has little choice but to fantasize about her own upward mobility by means

⁵⁴⁵ Herz, Zur Typologie der kaufmännischen Angestellten 63.

⁵⁴⁶ Max Norden, Frauen-Führer: Handbuch für Frauenbildung und Frauenberuf, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Habel, 1904) 86.

⁵⁴⁷ Kasten, Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten 194.

of another path and explore alternatives to realize her dream. Indeed, the novel creates a scenario of what might happen if a woman were to try and challenge her economic exploitation and socially sanctioned discrimination and tried to take control of her life.

Doris' determination identifies her as an ambitious and modern woman, however, her endeavor is doomed to fail because she subscribes to the myth that "das Leben [sich] vom Tonfilm nicht mehr [...] unterscheiden lassen [soll]" and turns to mainstream cinema for inspiration.⁵⁴⁸ Doris' understanding of the film industry is not misguided and despite her "medial produzierten Aufstiegsträume" she knows that she cannot become an actual cinematic *Glanz*.⁵⁴⁹ She laughs about men who promise to turn her into a glamorous star and has few illusions about becoming a film-diva through her own efforts: "Film [...] bietet wenig Aussicht." (49) Similarly, she does not naïvely believe in media fabricated stories about stars. According to film historian Lary May, stars were frequently said to have experienced hardship before they could relax into a lavish lifestyle in order not to alienate middle-class spectators, and the media often claimed that stars, too, had once been ordinary girls, who used their charm and sex appeal to rise from anonymity.⁵⁵⁰ Yet, stories about women who were discovered out of the office or off the street typically sprung from the pen of a scriptwriter or a public

⁵⁴⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung 134.

⁵⁴⁹ Anne Fleig, "Das Tagebuch als Glanz: Sehen und Schreiben in Irmgard Keuns Roman Das kunstseidene Mädchen," Irmgard Keun 1905/2005 45.

⁵⁵⁰ Lary May, Screening Out the Past 232.

relations agent. Films like Die Gräfin von Monte Christo (1932), in which a film extra becomes a star, suggested otherwise.⁵⁵¹ Doris is realistic enough to admit that her chances to succeed are slim: “Könnte noch Film versuchen. Dann kann ich mich ins Film-Kaffee setzen von morgens bis abends, jahrelang. Eines Tages entdecken sie mich für Statisterie zu machen als verhungerte Leiche. Dreckbande.” (85) She knows that “everyday life itself” is typically not “a fairy tale” but nevertheless she dreams of the *lifestyle* of a *Glanz*.⁵⁵²

The novel does not discourage the reader to turn to cinema as a source of inspiration. On the contrary, Doris dismisses the traditional diary, according to Ingrid Marchlewitz a “beliebte Ausdruckform sogenannter höherer Töchter,” as sentimental.⁵⁵³ Das kunstseidene Mädchen recognizes the increasing impact of film on people’s experience of reality:

⁵⁵¹ Die Gräfin von Monte Christo tells the story of Jeanette and Mimi, two young women, “mit großer Sehnsucht” for luxury commodities and “winzigem Einkommen,” who are keen on working in film but who spent most of their time waiting to be discovered in the film studio cafeteria. One day Jeanette is hired to play a socialite but because she is preoccupied by financial worries she does not act well. The director wants to discontinue working with her and a frustrated Jeanette hijacks the car from the set and – together with Mimi, who was supposed to play her maid – escapes to an exclusive ski resort. Pretending to be the Countess of Monte Christo, she books herself into a suite but upon reading about themselves in the newspaper the women decide they must return the car and apologize to the hotel manager. Yet fate has something else in store for Jeanette and equips her with the wardrobe of a socialite, which persuades her to continue with the masquerade. It is not before long that the imposters face lawsuits from the production company and the hotel, and it is only due to a newspaper article about a Countess of Monte Christo written by a friend that the charges are dropped. The narrative comes to a happy end and all her colleagues are delighted to hear that for once an extra played a lead role. As Fred Gehler remarks, the film “persiflierte zum einen die ‘Spielregeln’ der Traumfabrik und erfüllte doch selber wieder mit ein paar koketten Umwegen deren soziale Funktion. Der Einstieg in die ‘bessere Gesellschaft’ blieb auch hier das Ziel aller Wunschträume und hatte es zu bleiben.” Die Gräfin von Monte Christo, dir. Karl Hartl, perf. Brigitte Helm, Gustav Gründgens, Theo Lingen and Lucie Englisch (Germany: Ufa, 1932); and Fred Gehler, “Die Gräfin von Monte Christo,” Deutsche Spielfilme von den Anfängen bis 1933, eds. Günther Dahlke and Günter Karl (Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1988) 294-5.

⁵⁵² Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler 214.

⁵⁵³ Marchlewitz, Irmgard Keun 101.

Und ich denke, daß es gut ist, wenn ich alles beschreibe. [...] Ich denke nicht an Tagebuch – das ist lächerlich für ein Mädchen von achtzehn und auch sonst auf der Höhe. Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein. [...] Und wenn ich später lese, ist alles wie Kino – ich sehe mich in Bildern.
(4)

The novel revisits the *Kino-Debatte* mentioned in Chapter Three and acknowledges the influence of cinema on German culture and society. As established, especially female white-collar workers used the cinema as a source for meaning and Doris' desire to script her life, to shoot her very own "Berlin-Film," corresponds to this identity-shaping process.⁵⁵⁴ In contrast to traditional media, film supplies Doris with visual cues that she could apply towards her subjectivity formation, which is why she rejects conventional German on the base of its grammatical rigidity. The relief and pleasure to write "mal für mich ohne Kommas [...] und richtiges Deutsch – nicht alles so unnatürlich wie im Büro" signals an opposition to the language of the social and cultural establishment. (4) Pointing to the need of a culture that responds to the lives of female white-collar workers Doris uses images rather than words to negotiate her identity: "Ich sehe aus wie Colleen Moore, wenn sie Dauerwelle hätte und die Nase mehr schick ein bißchen nach oben."⁵⁵⁵ (4) That she substitutes the Hollywood actresses' name

⁵⁵⁴ Urte Helduser, "Sachlich, seicht, sentimental: Gefühlsdiskurs und Populärkultur in Irmgard Keuns Romanen Gilgi, eine von uns und Das kunstseidene Mädchen," Irmgard Keun 1905/2005 21.

⁵⁵⁵ Doris makes references to film stars throughout the narrative. For example, she compares one of her lovers to Conrad Veidt – "Ein Gesicht wie Conrad Veidt, wie er noch mehr auf der Höhe war" –, who starred in the critically acclaimed Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (1920), and, while touring the city one evening she refers to Lilian Harvey, one of Germany's biggest stars at the time: "Und Kinos – der Kongreß tanzt – Lilian Harvey, die ist blond." (8 and 82) The actress was typically cast to play a sweet girl and starred in lighthearted romances or musical comedies such as Der Kongreß tanzt (1931), an international Ufa-blockbuster that cost, according to Christiane Habich, four million Marks. As Joachim Reichow points out, audiences loved "die Ausstattung, die

for a detailed description of herself and merely elaborates on the visual differences between herself and Moore points to what Knut Hickethier calls the “Phänomen der filmspezifischen Veränderung der ästhetischen Wahrnehmung.”⁵⁵⁶ Without any reference to Moore’s profession or physical appearance only the informed reader, the reader who has seen Moore’s films or publicity photographs of her, would have been able to determine what Doris looks like.⁵⁵⁷

It was fitting that Erna Halbe modeled herself on Norma Talmadge and similarly it seems natural that Doris turns to Colleen Moore for inspiration. The “natural comedienne’s” first blockbuster, Flaming Youth (1923), made her one of Hollywood’s top-grossing actresses and an international superstar. Moore, as mentioned in Chapter Three, practically defined the “the flapper era” in the United States.⁵⁵⁸ As contemporaries like F. Scott Fitzgerald observed, all her characters were “deliciously celluloid” and satisfied spectators preference for “glamor” over

Dekors und Kostüme, nicht zuletzt die rauschenden Bälle” and especially the love story between the czar of Russia and a sales girl. Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, dir. Robert Wiene, perf. Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss, Friedrich Feher and Lil Dagover (Germany: Decla-Bioscop AG, 1920); and Der Kongreß tanzt, dir. Erik Charell, perf. Lilian Harvey, Willy Fritsch, Conrad Veidt and Lil Dagover (Germany: Ufa, 1931). See also Christiane Habich, Lilian Harvey (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1990) 31; and Joachim Reichow, “Der Kongreß tanzt,” Deutsche Spielfilme von den Anfängen bis 1933 271.

⁵⁵⁶ Knut Hickethier, “Beschleunigte Wahrnehmung,” Die Metropole 151.

⁵⁵⁷ Doris only describes herself to her blind friend Brenner and has so internalized Moore’s image that the resemblance strikes the reader to be remarkable: “eine sehr schöne Figur, aber ein bißchen spillrig, das ist ja gerade modern, und [...] Augen von einem braunen Schwarz. [...] Und mein Haar ist schwarz. [...] Und mein Mund ist von Natur ganz blaß und wenig. Und geschminkt sinnlich. Ich habe aber sehr lange Wimpern. Und eine ganz glatte Haut ohne Sommersprossen und Falten und Staub.” (62)

⁵⁵⁸ See also Heather Stewart, ed., Early and Silent Cinema: A Sourcebook (London: British Film Institute, 1996) 83.

“realism.”⁵⁵⁹ Film scholar Barry Langman stresses that her lighthearted characters embodied the “wild antics and liberated attitude” of the entire jazz generation.⁵⁶⁰ It is evident why Doris, who has an insatiable appetite for *Glanz*, would be attracted to an actress, who not only complied with the period’s *Schönheitsideal* but also set the standards for 1920s glamor. Doris also tries to imitate the behavior of the characters played by Colleen Moore. During the 1920s the actress starred in a number of comedies that told the stories of young women – most notably the aforementioned Ella Cinders – who overcome their socio-economic misery and find romantic happiness. In Her Wild Oat (1927), for example, Mary Brown, an orphan, falls in love with a man, whom she believes to be a chauffeur but who actually is quite wealthy.⁵⁶¹ Marital bliss ensues and the same happens in Orchids and Ermine (1927).⁵⁶² To satisfy her craving for luxury goods, Pink Watson takes a job as telephone receptionist in a hotel catering to rich men. She meets a millionaire but, after falling in love with his butler, decides that love is more important than money. However, she learns the millionaire switched identity with his butler and gets to marry rich after all.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Margaret Reid, “Has the flapper changed? F. Scott Fitzgerald discusses the cinema descendants of the type he made so well known,” Motion Picture Magazine 33.6 (July 1927): 28-9 rpt. in Harry M. Geduld, ed. Authors on Film (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1972) 271.

⁵⁶⁰ Barry Langman, Encyclopedia of American Film Comedy (New York: Garland, 1987) 420.

⁵⁶¹ Her Wild Oat, dir. Marshall Neilan, perf. Colleen Moore, Larry Kent, Hallam Cooley and Gwen Lee (United States: First National Pictures, 1927).

⁵⁶² Orchids and Ermine, dir. Alfred Santell, perf. Colleen Moore, Jack Mulhall, Sam Hardy, Gwen Lee (United States: First National Pictures, 1927).

⁵⁶³ Two other films are worth mentioning in this context. In Irene (1926), Moore plays a young woman, who manages to get a job at New York’s most exclusive fashion salon. After becoming a top model she finds happiness in the arms of a rich man. Similarly, in Why Be Good (1929) she

Star-vehicles, as will be remembered, in which “wohlfrisierte Kitschproletarierinnen [...] auf 2500 Metern ihren geschwinden Umzug aus der Wohnküche in die herrschaftliche Villa bewerkstelligen” were hugely popular during the 1920s and early 1930s.⁵⁶⁴ According to such films ordinary women, portrayed by period icons of exceptional beauty and style, can transcend their humble origins by marrying rich while society actually only granted opportunities and success to a select few. They inspired low-level employees like Doris to dream of a better life and, encouraged to blur the differences between fiction and reality, she tries to make “die vom Film gesetzten Maßstäbe” come true.⁵⁶⁵ This it not to say that Doris is incapable of differentiating between the two. Similarly, as a comment by Irmgard Keun demonstrates, the author had little question that female white-collar workers were able to tell cinematic fantasies and reality apart:

Im Kopf Kino: Frauen in Not werden in vornehmen Lokalen bei vornehmen Getränken – Ober, noch zwei Wein! – von vornehmen Männern gerettet; das Kleinstadtmädchen heiratet den Berliner Generaldirektor. Hast du den Film gesehen? Renate Müller als Privatsekretärin. Ein unglaublicher Blödsinn! Aber die Kunstseidenen glauben daran. An irgendwas müssen sie ja glauben, [...] obwohl sie's besser wissen. Du, die wissen soviel! 8,80 Mark Stütze die Woche, 2 Mark fürs möblierte Zimmer, 5 Pfennig extra für ein Töpfchen heißes Wasser.⁵⁶⁶

plays a salesgirl, who falls in love and eventually marries the heir to a department store. Irene, dir. Alfred E. Green, perf. Colleen Moore, Lloyd Hughes, Georges K. Arthur and Charles Murray (United States: First National Pictures, 1926); and Why Be Good, dir. William Seiter, perf. Colleen Moore, Neil Hamilton, Bodil Rosing and John Polis (United States: First National Pictures, 1929).

⁵⁶⁴ Rudolf Arnheim, “Filmwinter,” Die Weltbühne 28 (1932): 465.

⁵⁶⁵ Klotz, “Forcierte Prosa” 261.

⁵⁶⁶ A similar comment by Rudolf Braune demonstrates that he shared her views on mainstream cinema: “So sehen diese jungen Mädchen gar nicht aus, die Tippsen, Verkäuferinnen, ‘Privatsekretärinnen’, die haben verdammt andre Sorgen, mit der Liebe setzen sie sich zwar sehr leicht auseinander, aber nicht so! Kennt keiner dieser Flimmerkoryphäen solch ein kleines Mädchen, die ihm nun mal genau erzählt, was da eigentlich lost ist: Der Chef, die Direktrice, das

Das kunstseidene Mädchen challenges the perspectives of critics like Siegfried Kracauer and Max Rössinger, who criticized the marginal group's susceptibility to cinematic fantasies.⁵⁶⁷

The novel agrees with the theoretical writings of Kracauer and Rössinger in that it, too, sees mainstream cinema as a manipulative and ideological apparatus.⁵⁶⁸ At the same time, it offers a more sympathetic inquiry into the topic. Doris is not too simpleminded to see through silly plots of the silver screen. She knows that cinema's promises are rarely fulfilled but decides to trust in them nevertheless because she cannot see any alternatives.

Die kleine Büroangestellte entwirft ihr Leben als ein Hollywood-Drehbuch, das auf ein unwahrscheinliches Happy-End angelegt ist, [...] gerade weil sich bei ihr Lebenshunger und Lebensmut mit der Einsicht verbinden, daß ihr ein 'reeller' Durchbruch durch die Klassengrenzen nicht möglich ist, die das Fehlen von Besitz und Bildung mit sich zieht.⁵⁶⁹

Doris lacks the critical skills to develop an awareness that would enable her to transcend her position. By presenting a character that subscribes to the false

neue Kleid, der Krach zu Hause, Vorschuß, Lohnabzug, die Schattierungen der Freude [...] und Angst." Irmgard Keun cited in Kreis, "Was man glaubt, gibt es" 91; and Rudolf Braune, "Ein Jahr Provinzkritik," Die Weltbühne 25.6 (1929): 235.

⁵⁶⁷ Kracauer, "Die kleinen Lädenmädchen gehn ins Kino" 289; and Rössinger, Der Angestellte von 1930 65-8. See also my previous remark on pp. 123-5.

⁵⁶⁸ Implicated in Doris' understanding of mainstream cinema is the critique that pundits like Kracauer or Rössinger dismissed the little shop girls too quickly because they underestimated the critical abilities of the young, female movie-going audience.

⁵⁶⁹ Helmut Kreuzer, "Kultur und Gesellschaft in der Weimarer Republik," Zur Geschichtlichkeit der Moderne: Der Begriff der literarischen Moderne in Theorie und Deutung, eds. Theo Elm and Gerd Hemmerich (München: Fink, 1982) 282.

promises of Weimar's entertainment industry the novel demonstrates what might happen *if* the spectator were unable to maintain a critical distance to films and were to reenact those promises literally. It offers the reader a chance to gain insight into the complex issues women were faced with. By exposing the role of the mass media in Doris' quest for cultural, social and gender identity the novel provides the reader with insights that might facilitate a better understanding of her own reality.

The young woman chooses to disregard the discrepancy between fiction and reality and, as a result, her desire to become a *Glanz* turns into a nightmare. An argument with her employer is Doris' most ill-fated adaptation of fiction because her inability to translate a filmic scenario into a more realistic context leads to her dismissal and, thrusting her into economic uncertainty, accelerates her downfall. The fear of unemployment – “der Alte hat's auch nicht mehr dick und kann einen jeden Tag entlassen” (3) – requires her to constantly distract her boss from her inability to place, for example, commas correctly. As pointed out in Chapter Two, women's appearance and their sexuality increasingly constituted what Frankfurt School critic Herbert Marcuse called the “entscheidende[n] Faktor [ihres] Mehrwertes.”⁵⁷⁰ Female employees were encouraged to bring their femininity into play, which explains why Doris experiments with various seductive techniques, trying hard to manipulate compromising situations to her advantage. Whenever her boss is about to reprimand her, she teases him by pressing her

⁵⁷⁰ Herbert Marcuse, Zeit-Messungen (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975) 15.

breast against his shoulder or trembling with her nostrils “wie ein belgisches Riesenkaninchen beim Kohlfressen.” (14) When looking at him “wie Marlene Dietrich so mit Klappaugen-Marke: husch ins Bett” he wants her to deliver what she promises. (14) As Leo Lensing points out, Doris’ point of reference is almost certainly Der blaue Engel (1930).⁵⁷¹ Two years prior to the novel’s publication the film had catapulted Marlene Dietrich to stardom and established her, film historian Alain Gersault remarks, as the “quintessential vamp” of late Weimar Germany.⁵⁷² Doris knows her boss would eventually react in this way but she did not expect him to do so until much later and, caught by surprise, she is unable to control herself and bursts out in anger. Her reaction is evidence of her critical abilities: she understands that not least because her employer is married any sexual relationship with him would be temporary. She objects to being exploited sexually as well as financially while his wife “für viel Geld Kosmetik macht und in einem Auto rumsaust und nichts tut den ganzen Tag an solider Arbeit.” (15-6) Without at least the possibility of social or economic gain she refuses to comply with his request.

The highly sexualized character Lola Lola, who dominates and humiliates sexually repressed men, is an erotic fantasy that has no place in real life. Doris is not in a position to argue with, let alone dominate, her employer and by slapping him in the face she challenges Weimar Germany’s strict hierarchical structures: it

⁵⁷¹ Lensing, “Cinema, Society, and Literature” 130.

⁵⁷² Alain Garsault, “‘Femme Fatale’ und ‘femme éternelle’: Notizen zur Mythologisierung Marlene Dietrichs,” Marlene Dietrich: Dokumente/Essays/Filme. Zweiter Teil, ed. Werner Sudendorf (München: Hanser, 1978) 49.

is he who may exert power and any typist who turns him down gets, as J.M. Ritchie puts it, “sacked.”⁵⁷³ Rudolf Braune stressed that, as a result, of these dynamics female employees “wag[t]en in den seltesten Fällen ihren Willen durchzusetzen [und] das schl[oß] nicht unwesentliche Gefahren für junge Mädchen ein.”⁵⁷⁴ Unlike Fräulein Brückner, who merely fantasizes of avenging her tormentors’ behavior, Doris gives way to her fury and her suppressed frustration, but in doing so she ruins any chances of a film-like happy ending. As a result of her action, which is not inspired by a proto-feminist awareness but her inability to use her knowledge of films and her sexuality to her advantage, she loses her job. The 120 Marks, exactly one monthly salary, she negotiates as her severance pay are no genuine success either because, as A. Kasten revealed, the period of notice for employees of legal offices was exactly one month.⁵⁷⁵ Doris is unable to secure herself a lasting advantage. Due to the conflict she is in fact worse off. Nevertheless she chooses to consider the episode part of her effort to script her life and – paradoxically – the failure to recast a cinematic plot successfully thrusts her further into the pursuit of becoming a *Glanz*.

Doris is condemned to a certain passivity: she can only absorb what Ernst Bloch calls “leeren, ablenkenden Glanz” and re-enact the insufficient.⁵⁷⁶ Each of her experiences contributes to exposing the fallacy or vacuity of artificially

⁵⁷³ James M. Ritchie, “Irmgard Keun’s Weimar Girls,” English Goethe Society Publications 60 (1989/90): 74.

⁵⁷⁴ Braune, “Büromädels” 354.

⁵⁷⁵ Kasten, Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten 248.

⁵⁷⁶ Bloch, Erbschaft dieser Zeit 41.

created promises and she begins to sense that her dreams might not materialize. Like one of Kracauer's paradigmatic employees Doris "lebt [...] ohne eine Lehre, zu der sie aufblicken, ohne ein Ziel, das sie erfragen könnte."⁵⁷⁷ Like the many white-collar workers, who were keen on leaving their grim reality behind and too "ausgepowert, als dass sie noch etwas mit sich anzufangen vermöchten," Doris frequents "Lokale des Vergnügens."⁵⁷⁸ She draws pleasure from this activity but more importantly she hopes that by visiting "Pläsierkasernen" she will be able to realize her social and economic ambitions.⁵⁷⁹ She is unable to draw conclusions from her action because sites such as *Haus Vaterland* or the *Residenz Kasino* obscure reality and fuel her desires, which contribute to perpetuating her socio-economic misery rather than improving her situation.⁵⁸⁰

Doris senses that the sites of commercialized pleasure of Berlin are neither as spectacular as they seem at first glance nor do they hold up to their promise. Doris, Irene Lorisika points out, "flieht vor Öde, [und] Enge des kleinbürgerlichen Provinzalltags in die Großstadt, die Zerstreung und Möglichkeiten des Aufstiegs bietet."⁵⁸¹ She is willing to embrace the modern and the new, but also "Bindungslosigkeit [und] Anonymität" because Berlin seemed to

⁵⁷⁷ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 91-6.

⁵⁷⁸ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 96.

⁵⁷⁹ Kracauer, Die Angestellten 95.

⁵⁸⁰ Both *Haus Vaterland*, the city's largest and "vollkommenste" venue, as well as the *Residenz Kasino* or *Resi* were core sites of Berlin's *Angestelltenkultur*. Kracauer, Die Angestellten 95-6.

⁵⁸¹ Lorisika, Frauendarstellungen bei Irmgard Keun und Anna Seghers 156-7.

offer freedoms and opportunities, including the possibility of mobility, in return.⁵⁸² Like Erna Halbe Doris must learn that the urban environment will not allow her to take charge of her life, and her changing perception of the city reflects this realization. Initially, the city, especially Berlin's fashionable Westend, the neighborhood with the most surface quality, fills her with energy: "Der Westen ist enorm vornehm mit hochprozentigem Licht – wie fabelhafte Steine ganz teuer und mit so gestempelter Fassung. Wir haben hier ganz übermäßig Lichtreklame." (42) Doris is similarly impressed by Berlin's elegant movie theaters such as the *Gloriapalast* and concludes that she very much likes Berlin: "Berlin ist sehr großartig, [...] ich möchte Berliner sein und zugehören." (56-7)

As Doris' situation worsens her "Lebenslust" lessens and the city loses its spell.⁵⁸³ She increasingly notices the city's unattractive sides, bears witness to fights, notices the desperate look on people's faces and sees evidence of the widespread economic misery: "Ich habe gesehen – ein Mann mit einem Plakat um den Hals: 'Ich nehme jede Arbeit' – und 'jede' dreimal rot unterstrichen." (65) She also senses that *Vergnügungslokale* perpetuate rather than fulfill people's longings. While out one evening she indulges in spectacular thrills, yet observes that many people are not having a genuinely good time, are frustrated and spend their hard-earned money: "Und manchmal lacht einer – und stopft sich mit seinem Lachen den ganzen Ärger von gestern und morgen in den Mund zurück." (76) Her expectations also remain unfulfilled and the feeling of homelessness,

⁵⁸² Jost Hermand and Frank Trommler, Die Kultur der Weimarer Republik (München: Nymphenburger, 1978) 64.

⁵⁸³ Katharina Viebrock, Von weiblicher Freiheit (Königstein: Helmer, 2002) 72.

which she hoped Berlin and *Vergnügungsorte* would ease, prevails: “Mein Herz [hat] Heimweh und nicht immer nach Hause, sondern was Wirklichem zu Hause. [...] Was mache ich wohl falsch in meinem Leben?” (87) Doris has nowhere else to go and, desperately trying to ease her sense of homesickness, she continues not only to trust in the illusions of the cinema but also visits these physical, emotional and intellectual ersatz homes. The objective of Keun’s novels is thus twofold. By means of the detailed description of entertainment sites such as *Haus Vaterland* or the *Residenz Kasino* Das kunstseidene Mädchen invites the reader to indulge in their thrills on a fictional level.⁵⁸⁴ At the same time it also exposes the “krampfhaft[e] Lustigkeit,” the futility of these surface distractions

⁵⁸⁴ According to the Führer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin, *Haus Vaterland* featured “so ziemlich alle Nationen der Kulturwelt. [...] Das eigentliche deutsche ‘Vaterland’ ist mit dem Rheinland und durch Bayern vertreten. In dem einen Raum spielt eine Gebirglerkapelle unentwegt auf der Klampf’n und jodelt, in dem anderen öffnet sich der Blick auf eine romantische Rheinlandschaft mit Weinbergen und Ruinen und ‘drunten fließt der Rhein,’ immer lang, immer lang, von der Suppe bis zum Dessert und immer weiter, und auf Sonnenschein folgt Regen mit Donner und Blitz [...], bis man die Zeche zahlt und geht. [...] Ein anderer Raum lädt zum ‘Heurigen’ nach Grinzing und es gibt im Hintergrund als Panorama die Wienerstadt mit dem Stephansdom und Straußsche Walzermusik.” Doris’ description of *Haus Vaterland* is very similar to that given in Curt Morek’s visitors’ guide: “Im Vaterland sind toll elegante Treppen wie in einem Schloß mit Gräfinnen, die schreiten – und Landschaften und fremde Länder und türkisch und Wien und Lauben von Wein und die kolossale Landschaft eines Rheines mit Naturschauspielen, denn sie machen einen Donner. Wir sitzen, es wird so heiß, die Decke fällt – der Wein macht uns schwer. [...] Es ist doch schön und wunderbar, welche Stadt hat denn so was noch, wo sich Räume an Räume reihen und die Flucht eines Palastes bilden?” (74) The same applies to the *Residenz Kasino*, which, according to the guide, attracted customers with gadgets such as table phones and a pneumatic dispatch system: “Durch die Kanäle der Rohrpost schießen Briefe von Tisch zu Tisch. [...] Tischtelefone ergänzen das Arsenal der Mittel, die der Verständigung und der Annäherung dienen.” Doris is fascinated precisely by these attractions: “... und rrrr macht das Telefon, das ist an allen Tischen. Mit ganz echten Nummern zum Drehen. [Und] es gibt Rohrpost – da schreibt man Briefe und tut sie in Röhren und in ein Wandloch, da kommt ein Zugwind und weht sie zum Bestimmungsort.” (57) See Morek, Führer durch das “lasterhafte” Berlin 87-8 and 192. For an in-depth discussion of venues visited by Doris see Deborah Smal, White-collar Workers, Mass Culture and ‘Neue Sachlichkeit’ in Weimar Berlin: A Reading of Hans Fallada’s “Kleiner Mann – was nun?,” Erich Kästner’s “Fabian” and Irmgard Keun’s “Das kunstseidene Mädchen” (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1999).

and prompts readers to reflect on the nature of these sites, whereby it encourages them to negotiate their relationship with commodified pleasure.⁵⁸⁵

Doris cannot conclusions from her observations because she, though speaking almost without dialect, lacks education and has no access to alternative sources of meaning. As Doris Rosenstein remarks, education remained the “Bastion bürgerlichen Standesbewußtseins” during the Weimar Republic and without this quality Doris will not be able to transcend her unidentified existence and become a member of this social strata.⁵⁸⁶ Her encounters with bourgeois or aristocratic members of society render visible on a fictional level what Weimar contemporaries like Elsa Hermann observed: “Die aus kleinen Verhältnissen stammende Verkäuferin ist durchaus nicht gesellschaftsfähig, auch nicht, wenn sie noch so tüchtig ist.”⁵⁸⁷ A confrontation with the aristocrat Mila von Trapper reveals this impossibility, as well as Doris’ frustrations and feelings of personal and social inadequacy that spring from her lack. The two meet while Doris works at the theater and an innocent comment by Doris, who does not understand Mila’s improvisation of Friedrich Hebbel’s Judith (1840) because she never even heard of the tragedy, insults Mila: “Nehmen Sie sich jetzt vor Zugluft in acht, denn Sie haben sich enorm heiß geschrien, und man weiß, wie die Grippe grassiert.”⁵⁸⁸ (24) Sensing Doris’ ignorance of the play – a symbol of bourgeois

⁵⁸⁵ Franz Wolfgang Koebner, Cocain: Mondaine und demimondaine Skizzen (Berlin: Gratilgo, 1921) 48f.

⁵⁸⁶ Rosenstein, Irmgard Keun 95.

⁵⁸⁷ Herrmann, So ist die neue Frau 121-2.

⁵⁸⁸ Friedrich Hebbel, Judith (1840; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1950).

culture – Mila humiliates Doris: “Leider wird die Kunst immer mehr proletarisiert.” (25) While Doris is able to see the irony in the aristocrat von Trapper playing the role of a prostitute in Schiller’s Wallenstein (1799), she lacks the tools to participate in a discourse about drama or defend herself verbally.⁵⁸⁹ Aware of her ignorance she can only react physically (i.e. locking Mila up in the bathroom) and suffer from feelings of embarrassment and inferiority:

Ich war eine kurze Zeit in einer ganz traurigen Wolke, denn immerzu sind in meinem Leben Dinge, die ich nicht weiß, und immer muß ich so tun als ob und bin machmal richtig müde vor lauter Aufpassen, und immer soll ich mich schämen müssen, wenn Worte und so Sachen sind, die ich nicht kenne. (25)

As Ursula Krechel remarks, Doris “hat keinen Begriff davon, aber die Erfahrung, daß der Platz in der Welt, der ihr auf Grund ihrer Klassenzugehörigkeit zusteht, ein kläglicher ist.”⁵⁹⁰ This explains why she could not become a member of the “geistige Elite” that frequents the *Romanische Café* either. (66) She may mingle with intellectuals like Lippi Wiesel but will never impress them, even if she utters *Fremdworte* like “internationale Imponierung.” (87) Doris is not stupid and she grasps that intellectuals, who try desperately to make a cup of coffee last for hours because they cannot afford to pay for another one, are often pretentious. Yet, because she lacks certain class-specific skills Doris cannot bond with

⁵⁸⁹ Friedrich Schiller, Wallenstein (1799; Leipzig: Reclam, 1951).

⁵⁹⁰ Similarly, Doris Rosenstein points out that Doris must acknowledge the difference “zwischen der Behauptung bürgerlicher Werte und der tatsächlichen Praxis.” While working as a nanny Doris learns that the bourgeoisie abides by a different and hypocritical set of rules: “Wenn eine junge Frau mit Geld einen alten Mann heiratet wegen Geld und nichts sonst und schläft mit ihm stundenlang und guckt fromm, dann ist sie eine deutsche Mutter von Kindern und eine anständige Frau. Wenn eine junge Frau ohne Geld mit einem schläft ohne Geld, weil er glatte Haut hat und ihr gefällt, dann ist sie eine Hure und ein Schwein.” (54) Krechel, “Irmgard Keun” 107; and Rosenstein, Irmgard Keun 95.

members of either social group. The novel exposes the hypocrisy underlying Weimar society, which presented itself as a liberal, classless society but ultimately forbade individuals to move freely among the different social strata.

While living with Ernst Doris must concede that without *Bildung* she will never attain middle-class status. It is not just the fact that she is unfamiliar with a specific play or a particular discourse. Rather, she is not anchored in bourgeois culture per se and may only sense that Baudelaire provides some readers with meaning inaccessible to her.⁵⁹¹

[Ich] kann niemand fragen und Lehrer kosten ein Geld. [...] Sie hatten auch höhere Schule, Herr Ernst, und was [sic] Ihre Eltern sind auch. Und haben Bücher auf Nachttischen und eine Bildung und ein Verstehen von so Sachen, womit Sie was zu tun haben und gern, und kostest kein Geld immer oder sehr wenig, und es gibt Ihnen doch eine fröhliche Vergnügtheit. Aber Thereses und meine Vergnügtheiten, die müssen wir kaufen und mit Geld bezahlen.⁵⁹²

A visit of Ernst and Doris to the cinema exemplifies this problematic. Ernst goes to the cinema in order to participate in a critical dialogue about society and, thanks to his analytical skills, he can penetrate the cinematic projection of films such as Mädchen in Uniform (1931) and extrapolate the inherent social critique. In contrast, Doris is able to follow the plot and understands that love is one of the film's key themes: "Ein Film von Mädchen in Uniform. Das waren bessere Mädchen, aber es ging ihnen ja wie mir. Man hat wen lieb, und das gibt einem

⁵⁹¹ The same applies to music. Ignorant of both Tschaikowsky or Schubert, Doris is reminded of the pimp Rannowsky when Ernst mentions the Russian composer and, aware that Schubert has something to do with music, thinks of the hit tune "Das ist die Liebe der Matrosen" when Ernst mentions the composer. (108 and 120) Werner R. Heymann, "Das ist die Liebe der Matrosen," Finest Selection of Comedian Harmonists (1931; Fresh, 2004).

⁵⁹² Keun, Das kunstseidene Mädchen 117-8.

manchmal Tränen.” (123-4) She senses that the film revolves around what Siegfried Kracauer calls a “Revolte im Mädchenstift” but the critique of Prussian militarism as well as the subject of lesbianism are beyond her critical abilities.⁵⁹³ Without the privilege of *Bildung*, Doris has not only fewer choices of what to do during her spare time but the types of meanings she may derive from literature or film are restricted as well.

Similarly, Doris has little grasp of politics; however, her ignorance is not due to her disinterest. She bears witness to political events, such as a visit of French prime minister Pierre Laval and secretary of state Aristide Briand to Berlin, and is sensitive to the increasing popularity of National Socialism among blue- and white-collar workers.⁵⁹⁴ She even expresses the “Wunsch nach politischer Aufklärung” because she hopes she could benefit from this. (46) Yet, as her visit to a working-class club demonstrates, no political organization fulfills her desire.

Geh ich mit in' Klub hinten beim Alex. [...] Zwei Zimmer, viele Bücher und so gestürzte Buchstaben an den Wänden und in einer jüdischen Sprache. Ich sprech mit dem Mädchen, das Arbeiterin ist und Else heißt und eine feine Haut hat. Ich lege meinen Kopf auf ihre Schultern. Sie reden zusammen, und ich verstehe von nichts, von nichts. Es sind ungeheure Ereignisse auf der Welt, ich verstehe von gar nichts. So dumm. Aber ihre Stimmen geben mir ein schläfriges Summen... – ich schlafe und träume, dass ich esse. (97)

⁵⁹³ Siegfried Kracauer, “Revolte im Mädchenstift: Ein guter deutscher Film,” 1931, *Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Karsten Witte (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1979) 237-40.

⁵⁹⁴ Laval (1883-1945) and Briand (1883-1945) visited to Berlin in September 1931. Their stay drew much attention and especially the memorial service to honor the late Chancellor's Gustav Stresemann (1887-1929) caused a media frenzy. See Cole Hubert, *Laval: A Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1963); and Ferdinand Siebert, *Aristide Briand: Ein Staatsmann zwischen Frankreich und Europa* (Stuttgart: Rentsch, 1973).

Doris is desperate for alternative sources of meaning but proletarian ideology fails to provide her with it because information is presented in a manner that is inaccessible to her. Doris does not understand that her problems could be conceptualized or contextualized. Intimidated by books that symbolize a type of knowledge she does not have she reacts by falling asleep, which points to her need for a home, and dreaming of food.⁵⁹⁵ Implied is the critique that the political Left failed to address the gender specific realities of female white-collar workers and was partially responsible for solidifying their status as outsiders as well as their apolitical mind-set. Without the understanding that her personal situation is part of a larger socio-economic phenomenon, Doris remains trapped in her unsatisfactory position and can only react by pursuing her cinematic fantasies.⁵⁹⁶ The novel therefore objects to the dismissal of women like Doris on the base of their insufficient political awareness and, by doing so, prompts the reader to reevaluate Doris' situation as well as her own in light of the choices available.

⁵⁹⁵ Doris, echoing the famous line "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral" from the ballad "Wovon lebt der Mensch" of Bertolt Brecht's *Die Dreigroschen Oper* (1928), demonstrates repeatedly that having enough food is more important to her than political awareness. Though disappointed that a date did not explain to her "ob Franzosen und Juden dasselbe wären," she appreciates three pieces of cake her *Kavalier* pays for far more than she would any lesson in politics. Her belly has no conscience: "Immerhin hatte ich drei Stück Nußtorte [...] das ersparte mir ein Mittagessen, was eine politische Aufklärung ja hinwiederum nicht getan hätte." (47) Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928; Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001) 105-7.

⁵⁹⁶ It is due to this quality that Heinrich Detering labels Doris a modern picaresque. True to the genre of the *Schelmenroman*, Doris comes from an underprivileged background and provides the reader with insights about different social strata. And even though she will have matured by the end of the novel, she remains trapped in her position as underprivileged outsider. See Heinrich Detering, "Les vagabondes: le retour des héroïnes picaresques dans le roman allemand," *Études littéraires* 3.26 (Winter 1993/94): 29-43.

In addition to lacking *Bildung* or political awareness Doris also lacks the means that would allow her to indulge in consumer activities. She can neither afford to pay for cinema tickets nor can she buy herself items of clothing, which would allow her to derive a sense of validity. She owns a few items of clothing but most are of poor quality or worn: “Mein rotes Kleid, das ich von morgens bis abends trage, [fängt] unter den Armen zu schleißan.” (49) Doris is keen on dressing stylishly but only earns 120 Marks and spends much more than she can actually afford on clothes; she even squanders nearly half of her last salary on a hat.⁵⁹⁷ As journalists like Irma Sernau established, “sich richtig zu kleiden [war] beinahe ein ebenso großes Bedürfnis, wie sich satt zu essen” and Doris cuts down on food as much as possible so she can buy cosmetics or rayon stockings.⁵⁹⁸ She sports little dresses and, like the prostitute Hulla, probably also wears “billige Jumper, eng und ganz aus Wolle.” (78) She wears Mary Janes, and a “dunkelgrüne[r] Mantel [...] – streng auf Taille und mit Fuchsbesatz” as well as a cloche hat complete her outfit. (5) Yet, she is not one of the women, who embraced the look of the New Woman because they believed in the inherent emancipatory values. Doris dresses a certain way because it was *en vogue*; which is why she is obsessed with expanding her wardrobe. At the same time, clothes are more than just thrills for Doris and she subscribes to the fashion industry’s promise that commodities will turn her into a respected woman:

⁵⁹⁷ Doris’ attitude towards fashion and money stays the same. After she loses her job as a nanny she spends the remainder of her salary on a dress that makes her feel pretty and happy but ultimately accelerates her decline: “Und hatte mir von meinem letzten Geld ein braunes Honigkleid gekauft mit gleitenden Falten, so sanft und ernst.” (56)

⁵⁹⁸ Sernau, “Was jede Frau von der Mode wissen muß” 12.

Und es gibt Hermeline und Frauen mit Pariser Gedufte und Autos und Geschäfte mit Nachthemden von über hundert Mark. [...] Verkäufer fallen hin vor Aufregung, wenn sie kommen und doch nichts kaufen. Und sie lächeln Fremdworte richtig, wenn sie welche falsch aussprechen. Und sie wogen so in einer Art mit Georgetteblusen und tiefen Ausschnitten, daß sie nichts wissen brauchen. [...] Und lassen sich manikürte Füße küssen mit Schwanenpelzpantoffeln. (52)

The prospective of mobility combined with the desire for validity is very important to Doris and this explains why she has her eyes set on luxurious items of clothing such as “echt[e] Straußenlederschuhe,” rather than basic pieces that would, for example, keep her warm during wintertime. (86)

As established in Chapter Two, the fashion of the Weimar period erased the most glaring visual differences between women from different strands of society, and pieces of clothing such as stockings were no longer tied to a specific class. Fashion, as critics like Ernst Bloch observed, seemed to allow women to locate themselves in a social sphere other than determined by birth or marriage, and “Ladenmädchen” like Doris could look like “rosafarbige oder gebräunte Dame[n].”⁵⁹⁹ Doris believes that she would be able to adopt a middle-class persona through the mere display of its attributes. But, as Detlev Peukert stresses, “purchasing power was a critical factor” and it determines to what extent Doris can actually live the image.⁶⁰⁰ While affluent women can afford to wear expensive fabrics and valuable jewelry, Doris has to make do with mass-produced, synthetic blouses or fake pearls. In order to get her hands on real silk

⁵⁹⁹ Bloch, Erbschaft dieser Zeit 35.

⁶⁰⁰ Peukert, The Weimar Republic 176.

she must resort to “besondere Hilfsquellen.”⁶⁰¹ She conceives little plots and patiently listens, for example, to a conservative nationalist reading from his tedious *Heimatroman* because it gives her the chance to steal some of his wife’s silk blouses: “Und alle drei Seiten sagt er mir, daß Feinheiten kämen – und alle fünf Seiten nehm ich ein neues Hemd vom Nachttisch.” (54) More women had access to fashion and culture but the exclusiveness of fashion continued to be preserved for the *haute volée*. Doris will always be, as Volker Klotz puts it, “ein *kunst*-seidenes Mädchen, dem echte Seide nicht zugänglich ist” and because class differences remained intact her dream, while constantly being fuelled, cannot be fulfilled.⁶⁰²

While she is Alexander’s “Puppe,” Doris undergoes a crucial realization. (80) Finally, she may indulge in luxuries but while doing so she senses that the fantasies of the silver screen are ambiguous. Doris repeatedly reassured herself that her feeling of unhappiness or displacement was a result of her unfulfilled desires: “Nur wenn man unglücklich ist, kommt man weiter, darum bin ich froh, daß ich unglücklich bin.” (52) As long as Doris had not known what it means to be a *Glanz* she could subscribe to the myth that consumer goods facilitate especially emotional fulfillment. At first she derives pleasure from the clothes she may now wear, such as a “Kimono aus reiner Seide, [...] rosaseidene Pantoffeln

⁶⁰¹ Kracauer’s novel, which is set against the backdrop of the tumultuous early years of the Weimar Republic, was first advertised in the Frankfurter Zeitung in 1928 but was not published until 1973. Siegfried Kracauer, Georg (1973; Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995) 233.

⁶⁰² Janet Ward comes to a similar conclusion: “despite the theft of a fur coat, [...] Doris’ outfit generally remains on the level of artificial silk, never attaining the socio-economic status of real silk.” Klotz, “Forcierte Prosa” 262; and Janet Ward, Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001) 86.

mit Pelz, [...] eine Tasche aus echt Krokodil" or "weiße Seidenschuhe von Pinet zu vierzig Mark" and enjoys the privileges of the rich, such as staying in bed all morning, bathing "drei Stunden hintereinander mit edlen duftenden Salzen im Wasser" or driving around in a taxi.⁶⁰³ (78-81) Enacting cinematic plots, Doris senses that she is playing a role. Looking at herself all dressed-up in the mirror she is infatuated by her appearance but feels increasingly bored and frustrated: "Und ich bin ja sooo schön. Und muß fast weinen, denn jetzt weiß ich mit meiner Schönheit nicht wohin – für wen bin ich schön? Für wen?" (79) The futility of her persona shows her that the entertainment and consumer industries stimulate an artificial and equally unrealizable desire for glamor and commodities. Even when Doris' desire is fulfilled, her need for personal and social integrity still remains latent.

Doris' relationship with Alexander furthermore demonstrates that her relationship to men is strongly influenced by her craving for entertainment and her desire to indulge in consumer goods. Doris has internalized Weimar Berlin's more casual attitude towards sexuality and, always willing to embrace a romantic adventure, interacts freely with men: she flirts with them, goes out with them in the evenings and she has sex with them as she pleases. Doris is in her late teens and therefore not interested in finding a man to marry but she is not looking

⁶⁰³ As mentioned above, driving cars was a signal of women's freedom but also wealth, and various novels integrated the topic into their plots. The novel Ich geh aus und du bleibst da (Berlin: Ullstein, 1930) by Wilhelm Speyer, for example, features a protagonist, who loves cars and frequently chooses her dates according to the make of their cars. Gabi usually drives better than the middle-aged men who own them. She is a salesperson and model in an upscale fashion boutique and was taught how to drive by her boyfriend, who is an instructor at a driving school. Whenever she is not out with wealthy men, Gabi and Georg like to cruise around in the school's car. Wilhelm Speyer, Ich geh aus und du bleibst da (1930; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955) 2-10.

for love either. Similarly, her behavior is not inspired by a desire to rebel “gegen einseitige sexuelle Moral” or explore her sexuality and thereby a modern gender identity.⁶⁰⁴ Instead, she interacts with men because she thinks she can use them to further her goal. Doris selects her lovers according to their economic potential and constantly tries to manipulate them into spending money on her. She gets men to treat her to “Pralinés [...] mit Cremefüllung,” “ein Rumpsteak [...] mit Meerrettich und so Stäbchenkartoffeln” or a ticket to the cinema. (8 and 66)

Significantly, she has little choice but to exploit men if she wants to participate in Weimar’s popular culture.⁶⁰⁵ Herself exploited by her employer, Doris will never earn more than 120 perhaps 150 Marks and, unwilling to be “schön [...] und gepflegt mit Schulden,” she uses her sexuality to accumulate consumer goods. (70) The purpose of seducing men is therefore not her pleasure but the improvement of her financial situation.

Doris’ relationships with men are superficial and without duration.

Particularly striking is her complete lack of affect, emphasized by her disinterest in the names of her *Kavalier*e. She refers to them by their profession – she

⁶⁰⁴ Kollantaj, Die neue Moral und die Arbeiterklasse 42.

⁶⁰⁵ A discussion in Georg further illustrates why women like Doris relied on men. According to an elderly gentleman “der vermeintlich schlechte Lebensstandard der Angestellten gehört ins [sic] Bereich der politischen Fabeln“ because he cannot understand that, unlike himself while a student, they should need more than 120 Marks to live on. However, as a more aware character points out, this amount was worth much more before the war and the inflation and, in addition, only constituted the bourgeois student’s allowance: “Wieviel Lebensmittelpakete hat man Ihnen von zu Hause geschickt? [...] Ferner: haben Sie nicht sämtliche Anzüge, Wäsche und Schuhe mitgebracht? Die Sache ist in Wahrheit die, daß ihr Monatswechsel zur Hälfte Taschengeld war – für Theater, Konzerte, Gesellschaften und was weiß ich. [...] Die Sekretärin dagegen muß mit den 150 Mark wirklich existieren. Rechnen Sie bitte selber nach, ob die davon ein Vergnügen bestreiten kann!” Kracauer, Georg 230-2.

spends an evening with a “Großindustrie” another with a “schwarze[n] Rayon” – which implies that these men are completely interchangeable. (28 and 50) Doris is quick to assess someone’s financial potential or market value. Yet, as her relationship with Alexander demonstrates, she is incapable of interacting with anyone on a genuinely intimate level.

Ich habe es erreicht. [...] Ich habe eingekauft: ein kleines Pelzjackett und Hüte und feinste Zervelatwurst – ist es ein Traum? [...] Meine Fußnägel sind gelackt [...] und ich bin eine Dame. Meine Hemden sind aus Crêpe lavable aus Paris mit handeingestickten Motiven, ich habe einen Büstenhalter, der hat 11 Mark 50 gekostet, und ein Paar Schuhe, die Modelle sind aus echt Straußenleder.
(78-9)

Without any emotional investment at stake, Doris cares little that the relationship does not last. She merely wants the experience to be a worthwhile investment and merely keen to keep as many clothes as possible when her lover’s wife returns prematurely from vacation. In light of her calculation and pretense the idea of artificiality referred to in the novel’s title gains a second and more significant meaning. Doris wears artificial silk blouses and dresses but, in addition to her appearance being synthetic, her personality becomes artificial, too. She has absorbed the superficiality of mainstream cinema and the fashion industry and by imitating it her character becomes equally as artificial as an Ufa-style diva. Doris turns into a commodity with questionable market value herself: she truly is an artificial silk girl.

As a result of her material desires Doris becomes dependent on men and she intuitively understands that she must fulfill men’s erotic desires in exchange for consumer goods. She flirts heavily with a *Kavalier* and, armed with the

“Charme und [...] Chuzpe [eines] weiblichen Felix Krull,” manipulates him into buying her a watch.⁶⁰⁶ It is implied that she has sex with the sales assistant, who gave her a pair of expensive shoes.⁶⁰⁷ The value of the commodity she receives determines how much of herself she has to give, which implies that Doris, of whom Volker Klotz remarks that she has internalized the values of a “materialistische Gesellschaft, [...] die ihr Wertsystem in Kassen- und Börsenziffern notiert,” earns her keep much the same way as the prostitute Hulla.⁶⁰⁸ Doris does not refer to her clothes as presents but “meine sauer verdienten [...] Sachen.” (99) Doris acknowledges that the difference between her and prostitutes becomes increasingly marginal. When mistaken for a prostitute she reacts offended but many of the women she observes walking the streets are also white-collar workers and she senses that they are not in altogether different positions. She intuitively grasps that her situation is hopeless; even if she were employed fulltime she would never earn enough money to live off, especially since she

will auch bißchen nette Kleider, weil man ja sonst noch mehr ein Garnichts ist. Und will auch mal ein Kaffee mit Musik und ein vornehm Pfirsich Melba in hocheleganten Bechern – und das geht nicht alles von allein, braucht man wieder die Großindustrie, und da

⁶⁰⁶ Andrea Capovilla, “Fiktionalisierung der ‘Neuen Frau’ im Kontext der Neuen Sachlichkeit: Frieda Geier, Helene Willfüer, das ‘kunstseidene Mädchen.’” Geschlechter: Essays zur Gegenwartsliteratur, eds. Friedbert Aspetsberger and Konstanze Fliedl (München: Studien Verlag, 2001) 105.

⁶⁰⁷ This episode further demonstrates that objectification tended to go both ways. Doris thinks she, like a filmic version of herself would have been, is able to fool a shop assistant into believing that she is a socialite. When they meet up later that day it transpires that both Doris and he are aware of the fact that they are playing roles and, more importantly, exchanging goods: “Wir haben uns beide furchtbar angelogen und uns aus Gefälligkeit gegenseitig alles erlaubt.” (50)

⁶⁰⁸ Klotz, “Forcierte Prosa” 262.

kann man ja auch gleich auf den Strich gehen. Ohne Achtstundentag. (117)

Implied in her comment is the desire to compensate for her bleak reality but also a wish to withstand exploitation. However, Doris is incapable of politicizing this awareness and rather than challenging the status quo she continues to subscribe to an ideology that sanctions the exploitation of women on the base of their gender. While working in an office she learned that she is worth very little and, not least because she knows Hulla is paid “drei Mark” for her services, she assumes that her sexuality is also of modest value. (84) Doris is stuck in an economically as well as socially inferior position and she senses that her exploitation as well as her feelings of frustration and humiliation would be the same, regardless of whether she works as typist or walks the streets.

Doris' experience of exploitation combined with her failure to become a cinematic *Glanz* explains why she enjoys staying with Ernst as much as she does. She recovers physically and for the first time she also feels emotional contentment: “Ich bin ganz blödsinnig wach mit meinem Glück.” (124) The young woman accepted, even embraced modernity: she worked in an office and spent her free time shopping as well as going to cafés and the cinema and, trusting in the promise of equality and mobility, tried to adopt a modern gender identity. While living with Ernst she begins to take pleasures in altogether different activities such as tidying and cleaning the apartment, shopping for groceries and cooking. Doris, as Stephanie Bender identifies, is suddenly willing to give up “ihr selbstbestimmtes, abwechslungsreiches Leben zugunsten kleinbürgerlichen Alltagstrott” and she enjoys not only the *Gemütlichkeit* but she warms to the

traditional role of housewife.⁶⁰⁹ She would even agree to give up the fur coat, the key symbol of her desire for glamor because Ernst, who gives her a sense of validity, has taken its place. Feeling content, Doris begins to idealize household work because she has been worn down and resigned to the impossibility of independence.

Ich will nicht arbeiten, ich will nicht – bitte, ich will die Gardinen waschen und die Teppiche klopfen, ich will unsre Schuhe putzen und den Fußboden und kochen – ich koche so gern, es ist mir ein Erleben, weil es mir doch selber schmeckt. Ich will alles tun, aber arbeiten will ich nicht. (118)

Doris gives up on white-collar employment and the urban lifestyle that goes with it and she does not consider domestic service an alternative. As mentioned in Chapter One, domestic staff could be easily exploited because they lived with their employer and were frequently harassed by male family members. Doris experienced this herself while working for the Onyx family but her main reason for dismissing this option is her dread of being humiliated: “Soll ich etwa gehn als Köchin, als Mädchen – bei Onyxkindern – gnädige Frau, ist angerichtet – gnädige Frau – Gottogott, man könnte entlassen werden, man muß hinter ihr herkriechen, darum muß man sie hassen.” (118) By dreaming of “eine glückliche Ehe, in der sie selbst versorgt wird” Doris demonstrates that she has internalized what Renny Harrigan calls the “Mythos der Familie, [...] in der man immer noch den Hort menschlicher Wärme und liebevoller Pflege sah; und dies, obwohl die

⁶⁰⁹ Bender, Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns 57.

alte bürgerliche Funktion der Familie allmählich ausgehöhlt [worden war].”⁶¹⁰ She has a sense of her problematic existence, and by rejecting domestic service, she inadvertently welcomes the more modern opportunities that have become available to women. Yet, Doris lacks emancipatory awareness and abilities to translate her observations into action, which explains why she feels that retreating into the domestic sphere and assuming a more traditional gender identity would ease her sense of displacement.⁶¹¹

The experience of Ernst’s wife Hanne demonstrates that female white-collar workers were not the only women who struggled to implement the promises of Weimar modernity. Prior to getting married Hanne led the life of a New Woman: she worked in a dance school, her life was “bunt und lebendig und abwechslungsreich” but frequently she could not even buy groceries. (122) She embraced the relationship with Ernst not least because she was worn down by financial worries and decided to give up her career and become a housewife: “Und als wir heirateten, da war ich stolz und froh, daß ich Pläne hatte und einen Beruf, den ich dir zum Opfer bringen konnte.” (122) As Stephanie Bender points out, Hanne’s “Aufopferung” led “zur Selbstentfremdung, zu Selbstverlust und schließlich zur Selbstverachtung” and, unfulfilled by her role, she left her

⁶¹⁰ Renny Harrigan, “Die emanzipierte Frau im deutschen Roman der Weimarer Republik,” Stereotyp und Vorurteil in der Literatur: Untersuchungen zu Autoren des 20. Jahrhunderts, eds. James Elliott, Jürgen Pelzer and Carol Poore (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 80-1.

⁶¹¹ At the very end Doris dreams of setting up a household with a young blue-collar worker and through she longs for a relationship on terms of equality she also reiterates her desire to retreat into domesticity and traditional femininity: “Karl, wollen wir zusammen arbeiten, ich will deine Ziege melken und Augen in deine kleinen Puppen nähen, ich will mich gewöhnen an dich mit allem, was dabei ist.” (141)

husband to search yet again for excitement and independence.⁶¹² She became the lover and assistant of a dancer only to realize that she continued to face the same problems. Exhausted by the struggle to survive Hanne cared increasingly less about being a dancer but came to appreciate Ernst's role as provider. Eventually, she returns ruefully back home, which implies that she failed to reach financial and therefore personal independence. This explains why Monika Shafi calls Hanne's return a "Heimreise in die alte patriarchalische Welt": the young woman embraced the possibilities presented by the figure of the New Woman but was unable to realize these and, without support or alternatives to consider, she has little choice but to return to her husband and thereby a more traditional lifestyle and femininity.⁶¹³

The introduction of the traditional gender role of the housewife, one who wholeheartedly enjoys mundane tasks such as cleaning and shopping for groceries, towards the end of the novel is problematic. Neither because Keun's text falsifies the reality of female white-collar workers during the late Weimar Republic nor because it propagates a gender identity as favored by, for example, the conservative fraction of the organized women's movement. Like Christa Anita Brück's Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen and Rudolf Braune's Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat the novel acknowledges the challenging working and living

⁶¹² Bender, Lebensentwürfe im Romanwerk Irmgard Keuns 56.

⁶¹³ Monika Shafi, "Aber das ist es ja eben, ich habe keine meinesgleichen': Identitätsprozeß und Zeitgeschichte in dem Roman Das kunstseidene Mädchen von Irmgard Keun," Colloquium Germanica 21 (1988): 319.

conditions of this social group by presenting them in a realistic manner. As indicated by the central metaphor *Glanz*, it focuses even more so on the cultural issues that shaped the lives of female employees at the time. The novel embraces most notably entertainment and consumption because it recognizes their emancipatory potential, the pleasure and freedom inherent in them, but it also exposes the problems that arose as Germany made the transition to consumer capitalism. As Livia Z. Wittman points out, Keun makes the mechanism “einer gnadenlosen Wirklichkeit” visible and shows how a young woman fails to assume a more modern identity and, therefore, meet the challenges posed by Weimar modernity.⁶¹⁴ It is not Doris’ acknowledgement of failure, the lack of a physical or emotional home and the possibility to take control of her life that make the ending problematic. Rather, it is the implication that the retreat into the home and thereby more traditional gender roles was the only choice available to young working women.

Unlike the protagonists of classical *Bildungsromane*, Doris does not complete a process of education or learning. As scholars like Ritta Jo Horsley point out, Doris successively “gains a [...] critical attitude toward the cinematic ideals she once worshipped” but because her critical abilities remain limited she does not succeed in solving the problems that have such a strong impact on her life.⁶¹⁵ It would seem, Doris is not a character the contemporary would have felt

⁶¹⁴ Livia Z. Wittmann, “Erfolgschancen eines Gaukelspiels: Vergleichende Beobachtungen zu *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Anita Loos) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (Irmgard Keun),” *Carleton Germanic Papers* 11 (1983): 46.

⁶¹⁵ Horsley, “Warum habe ich keine Worte?,” 310.

encouraged to model herself on yet, as mentioned above, the female readership was fascinated with the artificial silk girl because they could identify with her. Doris is not supposed to serve as a role model; rather she serves as a means to illustrate what happens if a young woman were to take the promises of the leisure and consumer industries at face value. Das kunstseidene Mädchen explores not only the potential inherent in the New Woman but it also exposes media-generated myths. In doing so it points beyond the individual experience of a stylized, fictional character. In addition, and more so than Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen and Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat because it focuses more on Weimar popular and consumer culture, Keun's novel puts the issue of gender-specific subjectivity formation into a socio-cultural context.

The text neither objects to the idea of a modern femininity as symbolized by the New Woman nor does it try to discourage the reader from turning to cinema as a source for inspiration. It shows how the figure – in particular the fashion associated with the New Woman – was commercialized by the entertainment and consumer industries, which had the effect that her emancipatory potential was undermined. The figure, the locale of many promises in the early years of the Weimar Republic, became artificial and was exploited for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, the text invited readers to use the fictional realm as a site to negotiate their identity. Not least because of the stylistic means of exaggeration the novel, unlike mainstream cinema, does not create illusions but destroys them and its “weitgehend realistische und illusionslose Sichtweise” permitted the reader to reflect on issues such as working conditions or sexuality;

her own specifically female reality.⁶¹⁶ By reading about a character that is faithful to the “Kult der Zerstreung,” women, and especially those with a penchant for consumer goods and entertainment, could get a sense of the complexities that determined their lives.⁶¹⁷ Potentially the novel contributed to politicizing or empowering the reader and put her in a position where she could decide whether to subscribe uncritically to cinematic promises or whether to instrumentalize them and adopt a specifically female identity that is more independent of consumer culture. By demonstrating how this is not done the text points to the possibility that a truly modern woman, who uses clothes and visual imagery to suit her needs, could have emerged. By process of elimination it also shows that women could surrender to modernity’s challenges and retreat back into the home. It failed to offer the contemporary reader inspiration of how to navigate modernity differently, which implies that even true New Women like the author herself were at a loss of how to bridge the gap between modernity and tradition. But at least Das kunstseidene Mädchen provided readers with insights that allowed them to make more informed and therefore better personal choices.

⁶¹⁶ Lorisika, Frauendarstellungen bei Irmgard Keun und Anna Seghers 172-3.

⁶¹⁷ Kracauer, “Kult der Zerstreung” 311.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to reiterate my findings. The work that unfolded above examined the fictional representation of the female white-collar worker in mainstream cinema and popular fiction of the late Weimar Republic and paid particular attention to the depiction of this social group's working and living conditions. Prior to embarking on the discussion of the fictional texts, I situated the figure historically. The female white-collar worker was one of the period's key symbols for crisis and change. She was the single most tangible manifestation of economic developments, which were rooted in the second half of the nineteenth century and reached a climax during the 1920s. Female employees, most notably the residents of Berlin, were perceived as the embodiment of modernization; the economic, social and cultural unsettlement that affected Weimar Germany at the time. Women had been working in offices since the late nineteenth century but after World War One they also embraced a new lifestyle that challenged established values and traditions. The New Woman, as commercial employees were soon labeled by the mass media, became an ubiquitous image that suggested women and female gender roles had undergone a radical transformation. The media-fabricated ideal was an emancipated person who led a fairly carefree life: she worked in an office during the day and went to a café or the cinema in the evening, and since she had few responsibilities, she spent the money she earned on skimpy dresses, which flattered her youthful body.

Reality differed from this media fantasy not least because only a relatively small percentage of the female population held white-collar positions or could afford to embrace the new way of life. Women's experience of the period between 1919 and 1933 was not solely characterized by economic freedom and cultural liberties. The Weimar constitution granted them certain rights but the promise of equality, a key factor facilitating financial independence and emancipation, was not kept. Because economic but also social factors were more powerful than the law, female commercial employees remained stuck in low-level positions and few earned enough money to sustain themselves. They frequently encountered detrimental working conditions, which typically forced them to give up on the idea of a white-collar career by the time they turned thirty. For these reasons women increasingly returned to the domestic sphere from the late twenties onwards and abandoned the possibility of a more modern existence. They rejected a lifestyle that proved to be less liberating than it had first seemed. Especially fashion, a key symbol of change, turned into a marker of restriction. The look of the New Woman had initially symbolized opportunities of personal freedom, but as it was commercialized by the media and consumer industries, women were increasingly pressured into conforming to yet another ideal. While women no longer wore corsets and could move about more freely, the women who lacked, for example, the slenderness of a girl were coerced into dieting or wearing figure-slimming devices. Most women could not afford to become a glamorous and stylized New Woman, and this added to their disenchantment with modern life. They grew weary of the limitations that were

placed on them in the office as well as the fierce criticism that was directed at them from all sides. They sensed, as Alice Rühle-Gerstel observed, that they would never be fully accepted: “Die Pioniere sind müde geworden, weil sie sehen, dass sie die Bastionen allein nicht erobern können, und weil die Hilfe [...] ausbleibt. Darum greifen sie zu, wenn die Vergangenheit, die gute alte Zeit sich lockend anpreist.”⁶¹⁸ Unable to cope with the challenges of modernity, *Büromädels* and *Tippfräuleins*, the social group that seemed to be able to gain the most during the Weimar Republic, resigned and turned their backs on the public sphere.

Against this backdrop I explored the function of literature and film in the lives of young working women. Thrust into a historically unprecedented situation, they turned to popular culture as a source of inspiration. In the past, women had favored *Unterhaltungsliteratur* and they continued to be drawn to entertainment during the Weimar period: *weibliche Angestelltenromane* enjoyed great popularity. The rise of popular culture during the 1920s marked a radical transition. Women stepped into the public realm and, thanks to their disposable income, became powerful consumers as well as producers of culture. As the many blockbusters and bestsellers demonstrate, female white-collar workers wanted to encounter themselves on a fictional level and it was their desire that led studios like the Ufa and publishers like Ullstein to produce and publish texts about female professionals. Women did not favor one medium over the other but drew inspiration from both sources. They were enamored with film and cinema

⁶¹⁸ Rühle-Gerstel, “Zurück zur guten alten Zeit?” 5-6.

because it was an extravagant novelty that radiated glamor. They were equally attracted to literature because it was more accessible. Novels were more inclined to at least acknowledge some of the complex realities of the time and even aspired to taking up the intricate aspects of women's experience of Weimar Germany, and thus satisfied their need for inspiration in a very different way. Female clerks perceived film and fiction as complementary sources of entertainment and knowledge.

Having discussed the purpose of reading and film viewing, I turned to the textual analysis of the films Die Privatsekretärin (1931) and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus (1931) as well as the novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen (1930), Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin (1930) and Das kunstseidene Mädchen (1932). I established that these texts allowed readers to use them as sites to encounter their reality and negotiate their identity. I explored the value of the texts for the contemporary reader, as part of which I investigated the discrepancy between the fictional texts and reality as well as the discrepancy between filmic and literary representation. Mainstream cinema, as the quintessential medium of modernity, chose to portray female white-collar workers unrealistically. The cinema, which started out as an attraction at traveling carnivals, had always aimed at creating a spectacle and this did not change once it became a respected cultural medium. The decision was in part motivated by the intention to inspire consumerist behavior among audiences as Germany was making its transition to consumer capitalism. The result was that working-girl comedies distorted women's experience of white-collar employment, in particular

their working conditions. The heroines of these films resemble the contemporary viewer in that they, for example, do not question why they are working because by the early 1930s it was very common for women to work in offices. Similarly, Vilma of Die Privatsekretärin lives by herself and goes out with men in the evening without being aware of the fact that these freedoms had only recently become available to women. At the same time, the offices of both Vilma and Susie of Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus do not resemble the workplaces of the Weimar period. They are not rationalized and they do not reflect any of the pressures that were put on women. These films contributed to fuelling the public's falsified image of the New Woman, and thereby its resentment against the presumably pleasure-driven and immoral figure. They also falsely present commercial employment as a stepping stone for upward mobility: both Vilma and Susie meet their future husbands, who happen to be the company directors, at work. More realistically, the careers of low-ranking female employees did not end this happily as most women were forced to leave their jobs for health reasons or because they were too old. And they typically married among their anything but affluent peers. The endings are not only problematic because they are improbable but also because the fictional texts endorsed women's sense of defeat and encouraged them to retreat back into the private sphere.⁶¹⁹

In contrast, popular women's novels reflect the figure of the female white-collar worker as well as her experience in an equally accessible but more realistic

⁶¹⁹ Even Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat gave support to this trend because its ending is rather vague and fails to inspire women to pursue an alternative path such as fighting for their place in society by joining the class struggle.

manner. The choice was at least in part a response to readers' preferences and the novels Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat and Das kunstseidene Mädchen allowed readers to encounter the complex set of changes that affected women's lives and unsettled German society at the time in a safe environment. The protagonists resemble their cinematic counterparts in that they also experience employment as normality. At the same time they do not consider white-collar work a vehicle of independence or emancipation because they, educated to a varying degree but all stuck in low-level positions, must put up with deplorable working conditions. This applies in particular to Fräulein Brückner, the protagonist of Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen. She works in physically hazardous offices, struggles with the monotony and strict hierarchies caused by office modernization, is victimized by competitive colleagues, bears witness to discrimination and endures severe sexual harassment. The experiences of Erna Halbe and Doris, the protagonists of Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat and Das kunstseidene Mädchen, are similar: they also work in rationalized environments and must cope with sexual discrimination. Each woman tries to improve her situation to the best of her abilities. Where Fräulein Brückner displays great commitment and does not give up on finding a better-paid and more challenging position, Erna Halbe persuades her colleagues to fight for a salary increase and Doris tries to take control of her life and become a cinematic *Glanz*. The protagonists lack awareness or institutional support and therefore their efforts remain unsuccessful. Teetering on the brink of destitution and hopelessness, they must learn that their gender

prohibits the fulfillment of their desires. Patriarchal society does not tolerate women in positions of authority; it does not grant them independence and disregards their desire for validity or mobility. Ultimately, their only power lies in the acknowledgment of their failure. Fräulein Brückner escapes to the countryside and Erna Halbe, whose vision of emancipation is subsumed under the banner of a class struggle that ignores the complicated issues affecting women, knows that she will eventually marry and start a family. Similarly, Doris considers giving up on the concept of *Glanz* and considers a marriage-like relationship in a non-urban environment instead. The endings of these novels are, therefore, as problematic as those of the films discussed in this work. They portray the working and living conditions of female white-collar workers candidly, yet even though the endings of these narratives are more likely than the filmic ones they neither synthesize the tension between modernity and tradition nor do they supply the reader with alternatives on how to navigate her life.

The shortcoming inherent in mainstream cinema and popular fiction is not all that different. Films like Die Privatsekretärin and Arm wie eine Kirchenmaus celebrated the visual attributes of the New Woman and they encouraged women to engage in consumer activities. In doing so they provided women with inspiration, for example, of how to dress and thereby cinema kept its promise to show and create the latest styles. But they did not champion modern behavior and because the films did not supply women with inspiration of how to substantiate the concept of the New Woman, they contributed to the commercial exploitation of the figure rather than the realization of her potential. By promoting

traditional gender identities the films stifled possibilities of emancipation and contributed to resettling a status quo that had only just been ruptured. Readers, who turned to fiction because the cinematic spectacle did not adequately reflect their reality, found similar answers. Novels like Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen, Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat and Das kunstseidene Mädchen did not distract from reality but they, as critics like Alice Rühle-Gerstel observed, responded to young women's disenchantment with the promises of modernity.⁶²⁰ By affirming readers in their experience they gave a social group the support it was denied by society. However, as a comment by a young contemporary implies, they reinforced women's experience *negatively*: "[Es] müßte [...] im Buch ein Mädchen oder eine Frau geben, die mit den Konflikten, in die wir heute kommen, fertig wird, und zwar so fertig wird, daß uns ein solches Buch mehr werden kann als ein einmal gelesener Roman."⁶²¹ Popular women's novels compounded women's sense of failure or helplessness and inadvertently they also guided readers towards a more traditional existence.

This is not to say that the films and novels I discussed were of no value to contemporary readers because they did constitute a space where women could explore their subjectivity. Due to the harsh political and economic climate of the Weimar Republic women were denied equality and towards the end of the highly volatile period they were pushed back into domesticity. Nevertheless, between 1919 and 1933 women were able to explore historically unprecedented

⁶²⁰ Rühle-Gerstel, "Zurück zur guten alten Zeit?" 5.

⁶²¹ A fifteen year old commercial trainee cited in Norden, Was wir vom Buch erwarten 19.

opportunities. Women's flirt with modernity was short but it constituted a first step towards genuine emancipation, and mainstream cinema and popular fiction should be seen in this context. They explored the possibility of a more modern gender role and this makes them powerful agents: by featuring diverse New Women they acknowledged the advent of something new and, breaking with traditional notions of femininity, destabilized Weimar Germany's patriarchal structures. They empowered women because they enabled them to encounter themselves both as objects and as subjects, and allowed them to situate themselves socially and culturally. For example, the cinema provided them with cues regarding their appearance, and spectators could, depending on personal preferences, decide which visual aspects of the New Woman they wanted to adopt. Similarly, critical readers could adopt those strategies that would have allowed them to cope with their reality or reject ideas that did not suit their needs. As Jean Radford puts it, women manipulated popular texts "rather than being manipulated by them" – regardless of the extent to which women translated ideas and their awareness into action.⁶²² Whether women would have solved the challenges they were presented with remains uncertain. Due to the course of German history – the rise of the National Socialists and the rigorous enforcement of traditional socio-cultural structures – it is impossible to determine which turn women's experiment with modernity would have taken.

Only a selection number of films and novels about the female white-collar workers of the Weimar period were examined here and many more texts

⁶²² Jean Radford, ed., The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction (London: Routledge, 1986) 14-5.

addressing the living and working conditions of secretaries and typists but also sales assistants await scholarship. Mainstream films such as Das Fräulein von Kasse 12 (1928) or Delikatessen (1930) and popular novels like the aforementioned Ich geh aus und du bleibst da (1930) by Wilhelm Speyer or Rot gegen Rot (1929) by Josef Breitbach, to name just a few, feature women that work in sales and, like the texts included in my thesis, they provide the reader with insights into the lives, the dreams and expectations of a specific group of Weimar women.⁶²³ They are not excluded from this thesis because I consider them insignificant but doing justice to these works as well would have exceeded the scope of this project. The same applies to other literary genres; plays such as Papas Privatsekretärin (1930) by Hermann Marcellus and Der Pelz (1928) by Helene Hirsch or poetry by, for example, Mascha Kaleko were omitted because of spatial restriction.⁶²⁴ It is left to future research to bring those to wider attention.⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Das Fräulein von Kasse 12, dir. Erich Schönfelder, perf. Henry Bender, Ruth Feiner, Werner Fütterer and Dina Gralla (Germany: Richard Eichberg-Film, 1928); and Breitbach, Rot gegen Rot.

⁶²⁴ Hermann Marcellus, Papas Privatsekretärin (Leipzig: Gustav Richter, 1930); Helene Hirsch, Der Pelz (Leipzig: Gustav Richter, 1928); and Mascha Kaleko, Das lyrische Stenogrammheft (1933; Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003).

⁶²⁵ The same could be said about an altogether different type of woman, the republic's affluent Lebedamen or socialites. Like the female white-collar worker, this type of woman was fictionalized as well. For example, Marga, wife of industrialist Waldemar Bohlen, the protagonist of Der Herr Direktor (1928), "trug nichts bei zum Unterhalt des Lebens, aber sie führte Gepflegtheit, Kultur und Fortschritt dem übermüdeten Mann vor Augen." Gilgi's birth mother, Frau Greif, rather sacrifices her child than social status and, after putting Gilgi up for adoption, spends her life traveling to fashionable resorts like St. Moritz or Nice. Frau Heinisch of Georg believes she's hosting a *Salon* but lacks refinement and intellect, which means the gatherings at her home are merely inane dinner parties. The middle-aged woman featured in Fabian displays the insatiable sexual appetite of a vamp, thinking this attitude makes her a fashionable and modern woman. Alice Berend, Der Herr Direktor (1928; Berlin: Aviva, 1999) 66; Keun, Gilgi, eine von uns 79-80; Kracauer, Georg 114-41; and Kästner, Fabian 57-63.

In the meantime, these films and novels demonstrate that manifestations of popular culture can inform about a society or period and that they can be as insightful as canonical works of art. They add to our understanding of Weimar realities because they are what Christa Bürger calls “sozialgeschichtliche Dokument[e].”⁶²⁶ As critic Leo Löwenthal emphasized, they provide today’s spectators and readers with insights about “typical forms of behavior, attitudes, commonly held beliefs [...] and aspirations” of a group of women at a specific moment in history.⁶²⁷ They also prove that gender played a key role in the experience of modernity and challenge the assumption popular among male modernists that women were too caught up in the system to criticize it. This group of texts, to cite Marsha Meskimmon, “render[s] visible the blind spot of modernist theory and practice which made the implicit and over-simple equation of ‘woman’ with mass culture and consumerism.”⁶²⁸ The young female white-collar workers of the Weimar Republic were the first women ever to inhabit the public sphere and, as archetypes of female emancipation, they did so both as consumers and as producers. Their experience of modernity, intrinsically “progressive and liberating” but also regressive and constrictive, was unique because it differed from that of other social groups and especially men.⁶²⁹ By

⁶²⁶ Christa Bürger, Textanalyse als Ideologiekritik: Zur Rezeption zeitgenössischer Unterhaltungsliteratur (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum, 1973) 8.

⁶²⁷ Leo Löwenthal, Literature, Popular Culture and Society (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961) xii.

⁶²⁸ Meskimmon, We Weren’t Modern Enough 185.

⁶²⁹ Renate Briendenthal and Claudia Koonz, “Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women in Politics and Work,” When Biology Became Destiny 44.

discussing mainstream films and popular novels that so far have not drawn the attention of scholars but which address these issues, I hope to have contributed to the larger task of broadening our understanding not only of Weimar Germany's rich and vibrant popular culture but also of a specifically female modernity.

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