

ENVISIONING THE NEW WOMAN
Women and Art in Weimar Germany 1918-1933



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Bachelor of Social Science
History 1.11.2004

Submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
History 2004

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Abbreviations

<i>BIZ</i>	Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung
<i>AIZ</i>	Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung
<i>BDF</i>	Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine
<i>GDJ</i>	Grossdeutscher Jugendbund

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Jupp Wiertz

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Vesna Drapac of Adelaide University for her guidance and perspicacity.

And thank you to my mother for all those cups of tea.

INTRODUCTION

Man sees woman...only in terms of surface. Woman looks at woman plastically, indeed, she even sees the dimensions which lie beyond her momentary field of vision.

-Die Dame (1931)¹

The Weimar Republic, as historian Peter Gay noted, 'aroused powerful emotions in everyone. It delighted most, terrified some, but left no-one indifferent, and it induced, by its vitality, a certain inclination to exaggerate what one saw.'² The significance of Gay's observation lies in his emphasis upon the polyvocality of the Weimar period. The Republic was characterized by what social theorist Ernst Bloch termed *ungleichzeitung* or non-synchronicity,³ a split between the 'will to modernity and the fear of the modern, between radicalism and conservatism.'⁴ The new cultural innovations of the twenties struggled to carry the weight of Wilhelmine social structures. And it was the emerging

¹ Martha von Zobeltitz in *Die Dame* in Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 97.

² Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1970), 129.

³ Ernst Bloch in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xvii.

⁴ Rene Block and Erna Haist, *Prints and Drawings of the Weimar Republic*, (Stuttgart: Heinrich Fink, 1995), 12.

figure of the Weimar New Woman that embodied the German's 'selective embrace of modernity.'⁵

Throughout the Weimar Republic the woman question remained one of the most powerfully debated topics in cultural discourse. Women had been becoming increasingly visible in German public life since the turn of the century. Weimar Germany signalled a transitional time for women into newly public and modern roles, however moves that were often fluid and ambivalent. The Republic offered the first German democratic Constitution, giving women the right to vote and be voted into office, while the growing women's movement led to an increasing public profile of women's issues, such as abortion and reproduction. The heightened importance of the reproduction debate is demonstrated by the arrest in February 1931 of physicians Dr Else Kienle and Friedrich Wolf, who advocated and in the former case, performed abortions. Women's groups such as Helene Stöcker's League for the Protection of Mothers pushed for more progressive models of femininity.

However the modern reification of the female was embodied in the figure of the New Woman. She symbolized women's unprecedented levels of autonomy and freedom in the city and contributed to a direct sense of a challenge to male hierarchies and the illusion women were gaining greater access to power. Weimar modernity's 'crisis of subjectivity,' was greatly fuelled in part by a perceived shift in patriarchal authority. The negative, reactionary ideologies of males to the increased presence of women in the metropolis, is perhaps best exemplified in Klaus Theweleit's 1970s publication *Male Fantasies*. He demonstrates woman act as 'other' in the epistemic imaginary of the men of

⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22.

the German *Freikorps*, leading to the conflation of the New Woman into one malicious stereotype that included Jews and communists, indeed all bodies that were seen as a threat to the Fatherland.⁶

Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung



Figure 1. 'Modernity and Male Anxiety'
(*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1923)⁷

⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume One: women, floods, bodies, history*, trans. S. Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xiii-xiv.

⁷ BIZ in Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation*, 35.

The visual arts was also a primary site where these anxieties were played out, for 'no artist of substance could remain aloof from the turbulence.'⁸ In his autobiography Berlin artist George Grosz was to comment of the mid nineteen twenties: 'I felt the ground shaking beneath my feet, and the shaking was palpable in my work.'⁹ Grosz, Otto Dix and Rudolph Schlichter, to name a few, documented the pathological violence and destruction towards women in post-war Germany in such works as *Sex Murder* (1922), *Altar for Gentlemen* (1920) and *After It Was Over They Played Cards* (1916-1917). The gruesome mutilation and often highly sexualized images of women, demonstrated male anxieties towards the increase in the number of women in the public space, as prostitute, worker and consumer.¹⁰

In an analysis of the period, Haist and Block describe the art work of 'Dix, Grosz and Schlichter [as capturing] the face of their time in many nuances, soberly and un sentimentally, with sympathy but without illusions, and above all clearly.'¹¹ Dix and Grosz' anxiety towards monopoly capitalism, as embodied in the images of 'fetishised femininity presiding over the hellish decadence of the street,'¹² hardly serves as sober documentation, rather their images distort and marginalize women's experiences of modernity. Haist and Block's analysis demonstrates it is still possible to write a history of

⁸ Sidney Simon, "The Artist as Social Critic in the Weimar Republic" in *Germany in the Twenties: the Artist as Social Critic*, ed. F. Hirschbach, F. Achberger, S. Bryant-Bertail, T.G. Plummer and W.F. Taraba (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1980), 5.

⁹ George Grosz in John Willett, *The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period 1917-1933*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 42.

¹⁰ For a more in depth discussion of these art pieces see Beth Irwin Lewis, "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis" in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katerina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 202-233.

¹¹ Block and Haist, *Prints and Drawings*, 21.

¹² Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 39.

the Weimar period that effaces female subjectivity for, as Eve Rosenhaft argues, historical narratives are often expanded to include women, yet lose none of their force if they assume a masculine position.¹³ Women's 'otherness' to the male modernist position, has often rendered them in historical analysis as 'theoretically inarticulate.'¹⁴

However as part of a wider *frauenkultur*, women were attempting to gain self-determination in regards to their bodies, sexuality and identities, 'probing boundaries, and shifting the construction of narrative wherever possible.'¹⁵ An examination of female self-perceptions demonstrates a 'gendered non-synchronicity' arises as to the ways in which to define women's subjective experiences of modernity.¹⁶ This thesis will attempt to turn away from hegemonic and canonical versions of modernity predicated on male high modernist authority, in order to analyse the cultural discourses women engaged with and re-developed to make sense of and regulate the emerging images of women and gender in Weimar Germany.

Marsha Meskimmon in *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women artists and the Limits of German Modernism* is instructive in calling for 'alternative models of critical praxis,'¹⁷ in examining female responses to modernity. While this thesis rejects essentialist constructs of gender, it accepts the politics of sexual difference was so heavily inscribed in Weimar society, that a paradigm shift is necessary in order to recognize

¹³ Eve Rosenhaft, "Women, Gender and the Limits of Political History in the Age of 'Mass' Politics" in *Elections, Mass Politics and Social Change in Modern Germany*, ed. H. Lehmann and K. Ledford (Washington DC.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 149.

¹⁴ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 8.

¹⁵ Leigh Clemons, "Serious Fun: Berlin Dada's Tactical Engagement with German National Narration," *Theatre Research International* 28/2 (2003): 144.

¹⁶ Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature and Film in Weimar Culture*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 179.

¹⁷ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 5.

women's alternate subject position to men, both literally and figuratively.¹⁸ In accepting this alternate position, I will focus on women's different forms of spectatorship and consumption of the received visual icons of women in the mass media, specifically the image of the New Woman. Examining the visual art of Weimar women allows it to act as a 'signifying system' in the mobilisation and consumption of meaning, and is a crucial means by which the women of Weimar Germany 'made sense of the social processes in which they were caught up and indeed produced.'¹⁹ Rather than attempting to elucidate a 'feminine aesthetic,' I will examine the responses of individual artists to female imagery. Such an analysis provides us with a multi-layered perspective of the construction and negotiation of modern subjectivities. Looking at women artist's response to the media icon of the New Woman elucidates the relationship between mass culture and identity construction, the ability of media images to mobilize meaning and the ability of art to reconfigure that meaning. In this way, this thesis will attempt to articulate a new narrative of Weimar modernity, one that legitimates female subjectivity as the crucial constellation.

The first chapter looks at the construction of the New Woman as an icon of female identity, and the role of the burgeoning mass media in creating homogenized, commercialised, coopted female 'types'. These types were neither entirely representative, nor were they mere fantasy, they were symbolic of the reconfigurations of changing social boundaries. Female artists re-negotiated these images of women in the mass media to emphasise the plurality and diversity of female experiences, and articulated new ways

¹⁸ For a wider reading of this argument see Patrice Petro "Perceptions of Difference: Woman as Spectator and Spectacle" in *Women in the Metropolis*, 41-67.

¹⁹ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1988), 7.

of engaging with mass media images of women. The multiple images of the period are re-envisioned by an examination of the art work of Weimar female artists, including Grethe Jürgens and Lea Grundig. Chapter one also introduces the cultural theory of Siegfried Kracauer, prominent social theorist of the time, whose writings I continue to engage with throughout the latter chapters.

Chapter two introduces German artist Hanna Höch and her stunning mass media photomontages of the Weimar period. In Höch's work the figure of the New Woman becomes a catalyst for the interrogation of Weimar women's experiences of modernity, her deconstructionist aesthetic challenges the ways in which mass media images discursively constructed female identities. Her use of photo-montage questions the coherency of female representation and the role of the mass media in making and disseminating those images, also making visible the social construction of 'woman' as a commodified sign. Art historian Maud Lavin is instructive in interrogating Höch's Weimar oeuvre, particularly in relation to the dialectical tendency of photomontage to 'affirm and negate' the media image of the New Woman. In renegotiating and refashioning the images of Weimar women, Höch alters its meaning; on both a personal and political level her photomontages create allegories of Weimar femininity.

Chapter three focuses on the art work of Jeanne Mammen, who used realism to demystify and denaturalize popular representations of women. One of the major means by which Mammen explores Weimar womanhood is the reworking and re-articulation of traditional tropes of femininity, such as the iconography of the New Woman, so that it ceases to function primarily as stereotype and begin to function as the embodiment of female experience, as a locus for female subjectivity and the exploration of different

identities. In this way she affirms the image of the New Woman as a site for multiple identifications and gives voice to the marginal or 'otherness' of women in Weimar society.

Deborah Parsons argues women 'living in modern cities, constructed by and around masculine culture, represented, engaged and resisted the narrative for female urban life defined by that culture.'²⁰ We will see that despite aesthetic differences, both Berlin artists Hannah Höch and Jeanne Mammen attempted to define a space for women in the urban metropolis. Both women engaged with the New Woman in the street, the illustrated press and the shop window. Their work remains crucial to the gender debates as they provide us with micro-histories of two women engaging with the multiple visual typologies of femininity during Weimar. An analysis of their images allows us to identify patterns of difference as well as different forms of female agency. In breaking down the invisible fences that have led to women's experiences of modernity to be overlooked or effaced, we are privileged with a necessarily richer understanding of Weimar Culture.

²⁰ Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

CHAPTER ONE

WEIMAR WOMAN: BETWEEN IMAGE AND REALITY

What is the modern woman?

A charming Bubikopf- says the hairdresser

A model of depravity- says Aunt Klotilde

A complex of sexual problems- says the psychoanalyst

Comrade and soul friend- says the youth

Miserable housewife- says the reactionary

Expensive- says the bachelor

The best customer- says the stockings dealer

An unhappiness for my son- says the mother-in-law

The centre of the sanitorium- says the doctor

The same, since the dawn of time- says the wise man.

-Die Dame (1925)¹

The above passage from 1925 exemplifies the fundamental paradox of the modern woman in Weimar Germany. A figure defined as much by her corporality as by her elusiveness, she essentially embodied the fantasy, desire and play of the Weimar era. Situated at the interstices of fashion, science, consumerism and *körperkultur* (body culture), the modern woman or New Woman was very much a product of her time.

¹ *Die Dame* in Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation*, 79.

Katerina Sykora has noted 'the New Woman of the 1920's was the popularized and depoliticized woman version of the New Woman first discussed at the turn of the century.'² However, the Weimar New Woman was in fact paradigmatic of two major cultural developments of Weimar modernity, specifically the changed labour patterns of industrialization and rationalization, which predicated her growing visibility in the urban metropolis, and the growth in monopoly capitalism, consumer culture and the corollary explosion in mass media forms. The New Woman became ubiquitous as a mass media image, and yet embodied salient changes in the material situations of Weimar women. Past historical scholarship, such as Bridenthal and Koonz, has focused on the disparity between the discursive icon of the New Woman and the material conditions of real women under Weimar.³ However, as their discussion demonstrates, to confine oneself to such polarities unavoidably leads to a dead end. The irony of the New Woman lies in her fluidity, multiplicity and inevitable ambiguity.

Anke Gleber argues Weimar Germany was a time when the 'spectacle and consumption of the female image reached a heightened presence, engendering a new stage in the critical evaluation of the female image.'⁴ A burgeoning *frauenkultur* blossomed, whereby German women could consume ideas and images about other women through new forms of consumption. Saturating themselves in the 'daydreams of society,'⁵ women flocked to the cinema to watch Marlene Dietrich in *Der blaue Engel* (1930), actress Asta Nielsen, dance revues such as the American troupe the Tiller Girls,

² Katerina Sykora in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 167.

³ Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche: Weimar Women in Politics and Work," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. R. Bridenthal, A. Grossman and M. Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 33-66.

⁴ Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk*, 180.

⁵ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. T.Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 292.

or the more exotic stars, Josephine Baker and Anita Berber. New magazines sprung up to promote commodities which granted status and distinction to the owner; new fantasy worlds and lifestyles that might be realized through the purchase of commodity items. A nascent consumer culture permeated Weimar society, as Ernst Lorsey demonstrated in his 1926 essay 'The Rise of Chewing Gum': who knew that 'a shelf warmer could become a fashion item?' By his own admission chewing gum was the quickest way to Americanise oneself.⁶



Figure 2. 'The Modern Woman'
(*Die Dame*, 1927)⁷

⁶ Ernst Lorsey, "The Hour of Chewing Gum (1926)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 662.

⁷ *Die Dame* in Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 37.

The Weimar Republic saw the rise of media conglomerate Ullstein Verlag, publisher of highly popular weeklies and magazines such as *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (BIZ), which had a 1.8 million circulation in 1930. Bourgeois fashion magazines including *Uhu* and *Die Dame*, 'an ultramodern social magazine of women's fashions',⁸ and various lifestyle magazines such as *Die Freundin* and *Garçonne*, were all highly successful publications. Maud Lavin speculates that the readership of these magazines would not have been confined to bourgeois women alone, but attracted readers from multiple classes; in Lavin's study of Weimar photo-montage, she notes the circulation for BIZ in 1931 was 1 753 580, just under two thirds of the entire Berlin population between the ages of twenty and sixty-five.⁹ As an institution, Ullstein Verlag exemplifies how mass media of the time depicted images of the New Woman. The cover of *Die Dame* in 1927 (fig. 2) depicted the 'Modern Woman,' outfitted in fashionable riding gear, connoting leisure, commodified status and the energy and effervescence of the New Woman persona. Vicki Baum, novelist and editor at Ullstein Verlag from 1926-1931, demonstrated in 'People of Today' (1927), an article serialised in *Die Dame* and *BIZ*, the role of consumerism in constructing the media image of the New Woman:

So, this is Ypsi (unfortunately she does not look her best today for the Lindbergh-style hat does not become her, but, my god, dear lady, one does have to follow fashion, no?) ... One does have to admire how much she takes on herself. Adultery, cocaine, operations, uncomfortable chairs made of aluminium... plucking her eyebrows, reading boring books, shoes

⁸ Hermann Ullstein, *The Rise and Fall of the House of Ullstein*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1943), 53.

⁹ Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 55.

too small, hats too small... tennis matches in ninety degree heat in July, no children and stomach complaints, nicotine poisoning and slimming diets.¹⁰

With the influx of 'Americanism' the female image continued to gain a heightened commodified status. Although beginning as a 'new European catchword,'¹¹ Americanism soon came to denote the entire German economic and industrial rationality, as a process of Fordist mechanization and standardisation. It brought with it, however, a cultural empire of jazz, Charlie Chaplin, chewing gum and the American version of 'the flapper'. In line with its rationalizing ethos it contributed to the rise of the *Girl*, and *Girlkultur*, a highly commodified spectacle of 'the new female type...boyish, linear, and ruled by lively movement, by her step and by her leg.' The image of *Girlkultur* was developed in the press and was observed to be the 'aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system.'¹² The 1926 cartoon by Paul Simmel in *BIZ*, (fig.3), demonstrates the mass media equation of the *Girl*, in the form of the Tiller Girls, with rationalised mass culture, particularly once Americanism had fallen into discredit as feminised and degenerate.¹³

The rapidly expanding nature of rationalization into every sphere of Weimar society was deemed the most threatening aspect of Americanism. Indeed, the writings of Siegfried Kracauer elucidate the position of modernist critics pertinent to this point. Most of Kracauer's writings took the form of 'below the line' feuilleton editorials for the

¹⁰ Vicki Baum, "People of Today (1927)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 664.

¹¹ Rudolf Kayser, "Americanism (1925)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 395.

¹² Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 79.

¹³ Richard McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature and New Objectivity*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 54.

Frankfurter Zeitung during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴ A proponent of the Frankfurt School and a prolific writer on mass culture of the period, Kracauer noted in a performance of the Tiller Girls, (indices of American distraction factories),¹⁵ that 'when they stepped to a rapid beat, it sounded like business, business; when they raised their legs with mathematic precision ...they joyously confirmed the progress of rationalization.'¹⁶



Figure 3. Paul Simmel 'Ford takes over production of the Tiller Girls' (*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* March 28, 1926)¹⁷

Kracauer felt as rationalized commodity forms the Tiller Girls embodied 'distraction,' a fostering of a false consciousness promoting uncritical consumption and the stifling of the mentality to change the given capitalist order. However in levelling his critique of Americanism and rationalisation, Kracauer also evacuated the *Girl* and *Girlkultur*, equating the figure of women with uncritical consumption, rather than new models of identification and opportunity for Weimar women.

¹⁴ Thomas Y. Levin in Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 5.

¹⁵ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 75.

¹⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, "Girls and Crisis (1931)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 565.

¹⁷ Paul Simmel in *BIZ* in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 85.

With the rise of the illustrated press and 'woman' as machine-made commodity form, the mannequin developed as an ideal female type, rationalized, dehumanized and mass produced. The ubiquity of the machine made woman as something man made, to be desired as well as feared, is demonstrated in Fritz Lang's science fiction film *Metropolis* (1927).¹⁸ Maria, the female robot, is the filmic version of Weimar's 'techno-sexual' woman; 'the desire[d] and feared image of modern Germany's access to the production line of commodity fetishism.'¹⁹ However, rather than merely the embodiment of male desire, the mannequin woman was ubiquitous in women's magazine advertisements of the time which attempted to increase the desire for commodities through an image of the 'ideal'. *BIZ* frequently used an advertisement of the mannequin woman; in the fashion pages the commercialized, commodified and co-opted image of the mannequin homogenized the female image.



Figure 4. 'A machine that measures beauty'
(*Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 1932)²⁰

¹⁸ Janet Lungstrom, "Metropolis and the Techno-sexual Woman of German Modernity," in *Women in the Metropolis*, 130.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

The epitome of the machine-made, mannequin-woman-ideal is exemplified in a 1932 issue of *BIZ*, whereby a woman is shown with her face encapsulated by a mechanical apparatus. This apparatus is described in the caption as a 'machine that measures beauty. With the help of the apparatus invented in America, one can check the facial measurements exactly and determine how far they deviate from the ideal.'²¹

Weimar Women Artists: between image and reality

And every time I see a picture of him, with his cheerful eyes and his mophead, I'm thinking if I ran into him in a café, wearing my coat with fox collar and elegant from head to toe, perhaps he too would tell me that he was in the film industry and had incredible connections. And I would simply tell him: H₂O is water – that's what I learnt from Hubert, and he would be stunned.²²

And so ends Doris's imaginary conversation with Albert Einstein. Doris is the protagonist of Irmgard Keun's popular 1932 novel *The Artificial Silk Girl*. She also embodies the quintessential image of the New Woman: after leaving her job as a typist she joins the theatre to pursue her dream of becoming a famous actress. However after stealing a fur coat, ('I felt like kissing it, that's how much I loved it'),²³ she runs away and thus begins her adventures in the big city. What is compelling about the narration is that we get the perspective of a New Woman from a first person account. We have the

²¹ *BIZ* in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 57.

²² Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*, trans. K. von Ankum (New York: Other Press, 2002), 13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 51.

to the commodity item which offers status and the ubiquity of the movie star fantasy. However, as Richard McCormick observes, in the above passage Doris is demonstrating great skepticism towards men and their use of movie connections to entice women, further arguing 'she speculates the famous Einstein may turn out to be like so many other men: finding her attractive he might use one of the most common lines used by men to impress women.' Throughout the novel Doris remains astutely aware of her status as a commodity, and as such uses her 'Marlene Dietrich face' to her advantage to get ahead.²⁴ As both commodity and consumer she 'exposes these identities to a critical gaze which she herself wields.'²⁵

This 'critical gaze' is employed by female artists of Weimar Germany in producing art as interrogations of the New Woman image. As New Women themselves, commodities and consumers, Weimar women artists were ideally situated to explore the images of 'woman' in the mass media and to re-envision the borders of the image/reality dichotomy. Marsha Meskimmon in *We Weren't Modern Enough* is instructive in discussing women artists as 'embodied' viewers and makers of culture. Situated at the nexus of producer/consumer, women artists had the ability to demonstrate how mass media images of women discursively constructed identities and how, in turn, they could take these images and renegotiate them to break down monolithic or masculine defined stereotypes. As part of an emerging *frauenkultur*, women artists demonstrated female agency in negotiating the many emerging images of women; their main paradigm reveals itself to be plurality and multiplicity, underlying the heterogeneity of women's responses to modernity and Weimar culture.

²⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁵ McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in the Weimar Republic*, 129-131.

In 1929 artist Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn painted *Dancers in a Hall*. It depicts a man and a woman sitting at a table at a revue, where the dancers are portrayed as the aesthetic reality of the mechanically reproduced mannequin woman as discussed above. The piece engages with many stereotypes of women, including the role of the 'dancer' in Weimar culture, which often marketed to appeal to women as a highly desirable lifestyle. What is significant in the piece is the woman is looking away from the image and gazing out to the viewer. She is not engrossed in the image, neither is she elided as part of the spectacle. Rather the image presents us with a monumental image of the New Woman, enjoying the pleasures to be had in the commodified spectacle of women, however resisting 'distraction' and female stereotyping.



Figure 5 Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn *Dancers in a Hall* (1929)²⁶

²⁶ Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 186.

Women artist's ability to recognize, and thus retain, a critical distance or interplay between 'types' or media 'tropes' of women underlies their critique of female images and allows for a critique or affirmation of the discourses in which these images are formed.²⁷ Communist artist Lea Grundig's *Shop Window*, from a series of six sketches entitled *A Woman's Life* (1936), is a powerful critique on the image of the New Woman as mannequin and works to highlight the plurality of women's experiences during the Weimar Republic.



Figure 6 Lea Grundig *Shop Window* (1936)²⁸

The painting shows multiple images of women, critiquing their commodified form, and the capitalist culture that produces such elisions. *Shop Window* depicts several working class women staring longingly at a headless mannequin adorned with expensive garments. The mannequin in the image functions in two ways: in denying the mannequin a head, Grundig shifts the emphasis onto the body in order to demonstrate the

²⁷ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 65.

²⁸ Lea Grundig in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 65.

commodified and evacuated status of the New Woman through consumer culture. In reiterating the distance between the working class women and the mannequin with a glass window, she demonstrates that the New Woman defined as a commodity image was not a model of identification available across class, and was probably only an obtainable ideal for a small group of bourgeois and economically secure women.

The painting does not, however, work to efface the desire for the commodities or the commodity image; It merely serves to demonstrate the clear class distinctions within Weimar society. The mass media representations of the New Woman would have functioned as a fantasy site, often working to align the fantasy to the image of the bourgeois or economically secure middle class woman. Given the clear class demarcations in Weimar society, the New Woman perhaps signified a utopian vision of class transcendence, however it may simultaneously have worked to sharpen awareness of class differences. Even in the pages of the *AIZ* or *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, an editorial designed particularly for the proletariat or working class, the New Woman is depicted as a fashioned image, almost indistinguishable from that of the images reproduced in *Die Dame*.²⁹ As such the New Woman served a didactic purpose, *AIZ* calling for proletarian women not to model themselves on the image of the New Woman; rather 'the working woman does not wear what the propagandists of the fashion industry dictate, instead she wears what is fashionable and appropriate and therefore really pretty.'³⁰

Gerta Overbeck's *Mother and Daughter at the Hairdresser* (1924) emphasizes the distance between the commodified image of the New Woman and the real or ordinary

²⁹ Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 130.

³⁰ *AIZ* in Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 132.

woman of Weimar. The ubiquity and desirability of the New Woman as mannequin (in the image she is a mannequin) and commodity, is embodied by the hairdresser, herself a New Woman outfitted with *bubikopf* and modish makeup. The desirability of the icon is highlighted in that the painting takes place in a hair dressing salon, the place where the transformation to desirable New Woman will take place.³¹ But the image of the mannequin woman is in the background, while the image of the ordinary woman is in the foreground; it is through her our gazes meet and she is the point of identification.



Figure 7 Gerta Overbeck *Mother and Daughter at the Hairdresser* (1924)³²

Shop Window, *Mother and Daughter at the Hairdresser* and *Dancers in a Hall* all demonstrate the critical gaze of the female artist towards the visual icon of the New

³¹ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 67.

³² Gerta Overbeck in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 66.

Woman. It is an empowered gaze that breaks down and re-contextualises the elision of woman as mannequin and commodity form, thus demonstrating the efficacy of women's art in deconstructing and renegotiating images of female identity. Rather than rendering an aesthetic likeness of the New Woman, the work of women artists allow us a closer insight into the underlying reality of women's experiences during Weimar and elucidates who or what the New Woman of Weimar Germany may have been.

The Day Shift

The New Woman was primarily the result of two key developments in Weimar culture. We have discussed the role of consumerism, however the New Woman also grew out of changing labour patterns and industrial production. The female worker was shifted out of domestic work and into factories, accounting for the perceived increase of women in the public sphere, an important aspect in the construction of the New Woman which was often also to lead to her vilification.³³ However as Bridenthal and Koonz argue in 'Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche,' over fifty percent of women still worked in domestic labour, by 1925 there was only an increase of 0.7% in women working over 1907, and those women who were working, due to changes in production, were pushed into low paid, low skilled work, with legislation in place to keep men and women's pay differentials at approximately 30-40%. Far from a female invasion of the workspace, Atina Grossman concurs, rationalization served to tighten and reinforce the sexual

³³ See Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation*, 39-68.

division of labour.³⁴ Indeed as Bridenthal and Koonz conclude, 'beyond social conditioning and the difficulties of combining a family with employment, sex prejudice effectively blocked many a career.'³⁵

If the commercialized and co-opted version of the New Woman was to parallel the lives of working women during Weimar, her counterpart would potentially have lain in the growing *Angestellten*, or white collar worker, where technological changes created employment opportunities which grew most rapidly for women. Most likely to be found as a stenotypist, or receptionist, this figure is probably the closest to the mass produced image of the New Woman. It was more acceptable for these (mostly young, single) women to live in the city on their own, moreover they were more inclined to spend their meager wages on new forms of fashion and leisure.

In Kracauer's 1932 essay 'Working Women' he refers to a text by Susanne Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten*, which summarized the results of a survey by the General Association of White Collar Employees. The survey argues that there were about 1.4 million female white collar workers, approximately a third of the total number, a figure that was gradually increasing. Kracauer argues 'these girls parade much of a superficial nature,' raising themselves up above the level of skilled workers because they are paid in the form of a salary, despite the similarity of their life conditions; 'Both enjoy only negligible chances for advancement...live in fear of cut backs,' low pay and suffer health problems.³⁶

³⁴ Atina Grossman, "Girlkultur or Thoroughly Rationalised Female: A New Woman in Weimar Germany?" in *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change*, ed. J. Friedlander, B.W. Cook, A. Kessler-Harris and C.S. Rosenberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 66.

³⁵ Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, "Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche," 53.

³⁶ Kracauer, "Working Women (1932)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 216-217 The survey by the General Association of White Collar workers stated the rising increase of stenotypists with nervous afflictions, which Kracauer notes could 'almost qualify as a new occupational illness'.

The mass media marketed the image of the white collar working girl as an ideal in movies and magazines; 'they sing a hit tune to the rhythm of their work...and, at the end, they end up marrying the boss or rich American.'³⁷ However, this worked to occlude the actual working conditions of the *Angestellten*, and all working women in general. As Atina Grossman points out, the 'New Woman is a much abused and conflated image of the flapper, young stenotypist and working woman.'³⁸ Indeed Hilde Walter lamented in 1931:

All the consumer goods industries geared to female consumers were very quick to recognize the attractiveness of such catchwords and make full use of them in their advertisements. Even the most poorly paid saleswoman or typist is an effective billboard; in a provocative get up she becomes the very emblem of endless weekend amusements and the eternal freshness of youth.³⁹

In her essay 'Twilight of Women?' Walter illustrated the negative consequences of the mass media appropriation of women's work in order to glamorize and sell new commodities, noting working women had become unpopular as the result of the 'phenomenon of working women...being twisted to meet a variety of propagandistic goals.' She called for German workers to reject the 'united front of working women' and

³⁷ Ibid. 216.

³⁸ Atina Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalisation of Sexuality in Weimar Germany," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. A. Snitow, C. Stansell and S. Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 192.

³⁹ Hilde Walter, "Twilight for Women? (1931)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 210-211.

appealed for women to come forward with their own experiences of work so that the negative stereotype of working women could be removed.⁴⁰

In 1929 Grethe Jürgens painted *The Labour Exchange*. It specifically depicted a group of white collar workers waiting out the front of the labour exchange or social security office in Hanover. Significantly the group included an image of a woman with a perambulator. The representation of an unemployed mother with a child challenged the typecast of the *angestellten* as young, single women, and further resisted the co-opted, sweeping stereotypes of women disseminated in mass media.



Figure 8. Grethe Jürgens *The Labour Exchange* (1929)⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Grethe Jürgens in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 88.

Historian Atina Grossman argues, rather than a distinction between the blue collar/ white collar workers, women of Weimar were perhaps more divided in terms of age and generation. In the 1932 study 'The Young Woman Worker,' Lisbeth Franzen-Hellersberg found young working women resented the idea of the double burden of work and family and were disillusioned with the prospects of marriage. Both white and blue collar workers had reordered their consumption patterns towards self-oriented purchases, and cherished any free time they had before committing to marriage: 'such a life, rather than the fulfillment of female identity, was rejected, at least for the moment, as a hindrance to freedom and personal autonomy.'⁴² The assertion that a generation gap persisted within Weimar is further supported in Elizabeth Harvey's examination of women's participation in Weimar women's groups, including the *BDF* and *GDJ*. She found the age of the participants to be a major issue in the polarization of views in terms of women's roles for the future, and contributed to a fundamental disunity.⁴³

Who was the New Woman?

Weimar women artists succeeded in debunking one dimensional stereotypes of the New Woman, as commodity image, as unthinking consumer, as the inflated commodified vision of the white collar worker. However despite the contradictions inherent in the image, many cultural commentators insisted: 'The Neue Frau is there- she

⁴² Grossman, "Girlikultur or Thoroughly Rationalised Female," 67-70.

⁴³ Elizabeth Harvey, "Serving the Volk, Saving the Nation: Women in the Youth Movement and the Public Sphere in Weimar Germany," in *Elections, Mass Politics and Social Change in Modern German: New Perspectives*, 149-173.

exists.⁴⁴ Else Hermann, author of the 1929 book *This is the New Woman* agreed that in many ways the New Woman was a reality, she was no 'artificially conjured phenomenon...she is organically bound up with the economic and cultural developments of the last few decades.'⁴⁵ Historians Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman and Maria Kaplan assert the New Woman:

Represented a phenomenon both broader and more complex than the images of the flapper or sexy saleslady convey. The "new women"- who voted, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions, and earned wages- were more than a bohemian minority or artistic convention. They existed in office and factory, bedroom and kitchen, just as surely as- and more significantly than- in café and cabaret.⁴⁶

The confrontation with the rationalized workplace, heightened public profile and sexual and procreative options created the visible rise of the New Woman. It was also a state of mind: 'the woman of today is exclusively oriented towards the present. That which is decisive for her, not that which should be or should have been according to tradition.'⁴⁷

The New Woman of Weimar was more than a discursive figure in mass media, a male projection of desire or commodified consumer. Defined by an aggregate of female stereotypes, she functioned within a personal and political economy of meaning that projected the myths, desires and fantasies of the Weimar Republic. As Alice Rühle-

⁴⁴ Alexandra Kollantai in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 173.

⁴⁵ Else Hermann, "This is the New Woman (1929)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 207.

⁴⁶ Bridenthal and Koonz, "Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche," 11.

⁴⁷ Hermann, "This is the New Woman" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 207.

Gerstel described her in 1933, the New Woman represented a new economic figure who went into public economic life, political, physical, psycho-intellectual type- a standard bearer 'who not only cut her hair and shortened her skirt but began to emancipate herself altogether from the physical limitations of being female.'⁴⁸ For a growing *frauenkultur* she acted as a site whereby women could actively thematise anxieties and desires in regards to their new social roles and opportunities. As an image she captured the imagination of progressives and reactionaries alike, was bemoaned and denigrated both by Weimar men and women.

A monolithic or one dimensional understanding of the New Woman does not do justice to her complexity, and the varied and multiple significations she symbolized for women across the political spectrum. If we are to find the New Woman we need to look through and within her multiple images; she functions metaphorically as a palimpsest. In this way the lives of women during Weimar - submerged, apparently overwritten- continue to reveal 'traces of what have been erased... [which] leak through the overlaid surface.'⁴⁹ The image that lies underneath, its hidden contours and colours, house alternate meanings and narratives that compete with or re-envision the surface appearance; it is here we are to find the woman of Weimar.

Women's artwork of the period allows us to interrogate the New Woman as a palimpsest, offering us alternate visions and narratives as to what the New Woman personally and politically symbolized. The work of Berlin artists Hannah Höch and Jeanne Mammen offer us micro-histories through which we can examine the ways the New Woman discursively functioned as symbol and reality or both and their personal

⁴⁸ Alice Rühle-Gerstel, "Back to the Good Old Days?(1933)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 218.

⁴⁹ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 28.

negotiation with her image. As they both worked at the interstices of mass media culture they were ideally situated to examine the multiple images of the modern women in the Weimar media. As women artists, they were also defined as New Women, in their career and urban setting. Their negotiations with her image should allow us to peel back more of the layers of the New Woman icon, offering new alignments between women, city and identity and putting female subjectivity back into the city she so often frequented.

CHAPTER TWO

HANNAH HÖCH: ALLEGORIES OF WEIMAR

FEMININITY

Hausmann and I were trying to suggest, with elements borrowed from the world of machines, a new and sometimes terrifying dream world...

-Hannah Höch (1978)¹



Figure 9. Hannah Höch *German Girl* (1930)²

¹ Hannah Höch in Eduard Roditi, "Interview with Hannah Höch," *Arts Magazine* 34/3 (December 1959): 27.

² Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 89.

In 1930 Hannah Höch (1889-1978) produced the photo-montage *German Girl*. It was the portrait of a young woman wearing a string of pearls; she is smiling however missing a forehead and her eyes do not match. Significantly, her hair is tied tightly in a bun in the form of a traditional Japanese model, implying a distance to the 1920s New Woman, stereotypically characterised with a short *Bubikopf*. Art historian Annegret Jürgens-Kirchoff suggests this image could be read as a grotesque distortion of the traditional German girl ideal.³ The Depression years in Germany witnessed a turning away from the image of the New Woman to more traditional models of German womanhood.⁴ As the eyes of the girl are different sizes, they work to disconcert, while 'the sanctity of the subject is mocked.'⁵ *German Girl* is one of many pieces whereby Höch took images of German women and de-stabilised them through her use of photo-montage. In this way she was able to construct complex interpretations concerning the representation of public identities of German women. By deconstructing images and types, Höch used montage to construct a dialectical negotiation of images of female identity, particularly those of the New Woman. On a personal level these images are negotiated, but also through the use of photo-montage, Höch's viewers are forced to interrogate the images as well, leading to a dialectical exchange and questioning of the New Woman image.

Interwar Germany spawned a new image-based culture of which Höch was a crucial participant. She did not stand outside of mass culture merely as its critic, but engaged with the mass media in multiple and diverse ways. Höch was part of the artistic

³ Annegret Jürgens-Kirchoff in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 123.

⁴ See Rühle-Gerstel "Back to the Good Old Days?" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 218-220.

⁵ Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 123

avant-garde, through Dada and the later artistic movement, International Constructivism, she played a key role in engaging with the nihilistic cultural discourses of the time. In the re-contextualisation of popular images of women, Höch demonstrated the critical viewing strategies of one woman in relation to and from within the realm of commodity culture itself.

Making the Familiar Unfamiliar

In her own life Höch critically engaged with the issues of changing social roles for women, sexuality and the New Woman. Arriving in Berlin in 1912, she studied fine arts at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Berlin-Charlottenburg until 1914. While studying art Höch supported herself by working part time at Ullstein Verlag, Berlin's major publishing House. Employed as a pattern designer, between 1922 and 1925, Höch had at least 12 designs published in *Die Dame*.⁶ While Höch considered this to be her *Broterwerb* (way to earn a living), it was significant that she was also saturated at this time in mass media images concerning the representation of New Woman. In high circulating magazines such as *Uhu*, *Blatt der Hausfrau* and *BIZ*, Ullstein Verlag advocated a modernist position and an embrace of consumer culture.⁷ Women were ideally represented as rationalised, modern consumers, glamorising new technology and the commodification of domestic life.⁸ The mass media constituted one of the most relevant forums for examining new forms of representation and spectatorship. The avant

⁶ Maria Makela, "The Misogynist Machine: Images of Technology in the Work of Hannah Höch" in *Women in the Metropolis*, 108.

⁷ The circulation for the magazines in 1927 was respectively 170 360, 146 400 and 1 563 800. See Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 56.

⁸ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, .

garde, of which Höch was a part, was also crucial in defining new aesthetic techniques, such as photo-montage and New Wave photography, that influenced the production of mass media images.

The potential power and subversiveness of the cultural engagement of photo-montage and mass media is demonstrated by the fact that it had the potential to amplify modern subjectivities. As a burgeoning aesthetic form, photo-montage both helped to construct and represent the process of modernisation;⁹ it revealed the 'haste, hurry, nervousness' of the times.¹⁰ This 'shared visual idiom' demonstrates the reciprocal relationship of the avant-garde to mass media forms, The photoweekly *Weltspiegel*, for example, ran a regular montage page in 1929 entitled *all this happened in 1/100 of a second*.¹¹ Photomontage echoed the pace of the modern environment, the fragmentation and flux, dislocation and the rupture.

It was during her relationship to Berlin Dada that Höch developed the concept of photomontage, an aesthetic she would continue to use throughout her life, and one she developed to great strength. Höch and fellow Dadaist, Raoul Hausmann, were credited for inventing the technique of photo-montage. In an interview in 1978 Höch recalls the appropriation of the form as a borrowed trick from the Prussian army regiments, who, by inserting portraits into landscapes, sought to idealise reality. The difference, Höch argues, was that the 'Dada photo-monteur set out to give the appearance of something unreal all the appearances of something real that had actually been photographed.'¹² In discarding the naturalising and reifying tendencies of the photo, however, it allowed for multiple or

⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰ Edlef Köppen, "The Magazine as a Sign of the Times (1925)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 644.

¹¹ *Der Weltspiegel* in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 48.

¹² Hannah Höch in Roditi, "Interview With Hannah Höch," 1978.

allegorical readings, seeking to represent not only the 'real but also to extend the idea of the real to something not yet seen.'¹³ Höch recalled in 1966 that one of her main strategies in phot-montage was distancing or alienating, 'making the familiar unfamiliar.'¹⁴ In deconstructing and renegotiating mass media images, Höch offered her viewers a chance to oscillate between different forms of ironic identification and distance.

Art Historian Maud Lavin in her work on Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, draws attention to Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck's statement from the Berlin Dadaist Manifesto of 1919. Huelsenbeck declared the anarchic power of photomontage lay in its simultaneous ability to 'affirm and negate.'¹⁵ Thus the strength of Höch's work lies in the affirmation and negation of the New Woman image. This can be read as an allegory of Weimar women's engagement with the New Woman image, as much as Höch's own. The strange juxtapositions were meant to make viewers question media representations of reality, ironically using its very own form to question that reality. Kracauer argued the strength of montage lay in the following paradox: 'the more incorrectly they present the surface of things, the more correct they become and the more clearly they mirror the secret mechanism of society.'¹⁶

In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

The First International Dada-Messe (1920) embodied the confrontation and anarchic expressionism that was Berlin Dada. As part of an international movement,

¹³ Matthew Teitelbaum, *Montage and Modern Life 1919-1942*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press; Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1992), 8.

¹⁴ Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 10.

¹⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 10.

¹⁶ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, 292.

characterised by a 'revolutionary effervescence,' amid a decaying German imperialism, through Dada, Walter Benjamin observed 'the work of art became a gunshot. It struck the beholder. It acquired a tactile quality.'¹⁷ Through Dada, art, (or anti-art), was to embody a powerful cultural and political discourse, interrogating the representation of meaning. Amid the 174 images that lined the walls of the studio, including works by George Grosz and John Heartfield, Höch's elaborate photo-montage *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (1919-1920) embodied the Dada- Messe, satirising the perceived hypocrisy and political vacillations of the Socialist Government. Using photo-montage as 'violent vivisection,' Höch metaphorically suggested art had the 'capacity to cut open the men who represent the German State.'¹⁸

The title of the piece delivers a telling apophthegm- it is the hand of a woman that allegorically breaks open the beer belly of Weimar Germany. Indeed Höch has been credited with crashing the 'patriarchal party of Berlin Dada,'¹⁹ for in as much as Dada's chaos, cynicism and antagonism remained a *zeitgeist* of the times, it also connoted the masculine as a term and a movement.²⁰ However, significant to Höch's oeuvre is the female figure of the New Woman, who acts as a catalytic and dynamic force. The prevalence of the New Woman image in Höch's work, as in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, demonstrates the impact of the figure in Höch's ideology, as a strong political and personal image.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin in B. Doherty, "Figures of the Pseudo-Revolution," in *October* 74 (Spring 1998): 74.

¹⁸ B. Doherty, "Figures of the Pseudo-Revolution," 75-77.

¹⁹ Leah Ollman, "The Lives of Hannah Höch: Artwork from the Feminist Dada Pioneer," *Art in America* 86/4 (April 1995): 101.

²⁰ See Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1998) for a wider discussion of this.



Figure 10. Hannah Höch *Cut With the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beerbelly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (1919-1920)²¹

²¹ Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 20.

In *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* the image of the New Woman is ubiquitous throughout the piece. A perplexing profusion of disparate images, it can be read as an indictment of the politics of Weimar Society. In the right hand 'anti-Dada' corner sit plotting Generals, capitalists and industrialists amid machines of war and a portrait of Wilhelm II. In the right hand 'Dada corner' sits "Dadasoph" Raoul Hausmann, a mosaic of technology bursting from his head. The movement of the piece is driven by the power of Dada and the world of machines and women, however it is the double image of modern technology and women which embody the dynamism of the piece. Höch is creating an implicit dialogue between women, technology and rationalisation, the bodies of women paralleling the image of the machine. The piece appears optimistic and revolutionary, associating the figure of the New Woman with liberation and political change. However Höch's use of photomontage leads to many diverse readings of the piece. The New Woman is not merely cut out from the mass media, she is cut out, broken down and re-negotiated.

Höch later commented she wished to 'sublimate the aesthetic element into what for me are its ultimate possibilities.'²² In *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* she demonstrates the ultimate liberating potential of the New Woman image, acting as various metaphors of movement, technology, and female freedom. However it is the figure of the dancer/star that remains the dominant image of the New Woman. The piece rotates around the cut out image of the popular dancer Niddy Impekoven, other images of female figures include the actress Asta Nielsen and dancer Pola Negri. The bodies of the dancers demonstrate the possibilities inherent in the commodified female form of the New

²² Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 213.

Woman, and enables one to read affirmations of this figure in the text of the piece. The ambivalence lies in that, she is liberated vis-à-vis her commodity status.²³

The figure of the dancer/ 'star' played a primary role in Weimar culture as part of the larger sphere of *körperkultur*. The dancer held an extremely commodified status, however, was also a symbol of unbounded femininity and a signifier of physical pleasure, power and mobility. In her definitive essay *Strategies of Pleasure and De-construction* art historian Maud Lavin argues that the female dancer during Weimar can be read as a:

pastiche, a sign operating in multiple contexts...a woman who could live out fantasies forbidden to bourgeois women; a symbol of post-war modernism with its cult of the machine...existing outside class boundaries. This combination adds up to representation of unbounded, fully expressed female pleasure.²⁴

The dancer was a ubiquitous image throughout Weimar culture, engendering a metaphorical identity, signalling societal transcendence, utopianism. Significantly, many women derived their love of dance through its image, particularly the photograph, which was thought to ideally capture the vitalism of the dancer's movement. In German *körperkultur*, particularly *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance), the idea of the body

²³ Renate Berger, "Moments Can Change Your Life: Creative Crisis in the Lives of Dancers in the 1920s," in *Visions of the Neue Frau: Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany*, ed. M. Meskimmon and S. West (England: Scolar Press; USA: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1995). Demonstrates the dancers who danced for no fee often had to find wealthy benefactors to support them and buy their costumes, which risked the commodity status of prostitution. A new statute which made directors pay for dancers costumes etc merely displaced the problem. *Moments Can Change Your Life*, 81.

²⁴ Maud Lavin, "Strategies of Pleasure and Deconstruction: Hannah Höch's Photomontages in the Weimar Years," in *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems in German Modernism* ed. Irit Rogoff (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32.

developed as an emancipatory force, allowing for the transcendence of the oppressive constraints of identity.²⁵ Wolfgang Graeser observed in his 1927 book *Bodysense: Gymnastics, Dance, Sport* through body culture 'is not the entire wasteland of a diseased and decaying middle class way of thinking disappearing?'²⁶ The figure of the dancer in Höch's photo-montage has the alliterative connotation of the New Woman image, as a symbol for utopianism and cultural transcendence. Niddy Impekoven was described by a contemporary in 1929 as 'she dances what we have all lost,' that is an appealing innocence and idealism.²⁷

Renate Berger argues the dancer, celebrity and actress were part of a 'cultural ethos which did not recognize genre distinctions...theatre, cabaret, stage and film were all interchangeable'²⁸ and marketed as desirable lifestyles. Both dancers Anita Berber and Valska Gert also appeared in film, Berber appearing in as many as 25 films between 1918-1925. She was also a high fashion model for *Die Dame*. The magazine *Querschnitt* published an article in 1927 entitled 'How I became a Revue Girl', which traced the ascent of a working girl to a successful dancer and proved highly popular to the readership.²⁹ Dancers such as Josephine Baker and Anita Berber were marketed, in the former case for her 'exoticism' and in the latter for her notoriously compromised reputation that saw a stream of salacious news items until her death in 1928. This desire

²⁵ Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13. Toepfer catalogues the popularity of theories of körperkultur in the number of journals entirely devoted to it during the 1920's including *Freie Körperkultur*, *Geist und Körper*, *Kraft und Schönheit* and *Freikörperkultur und Lebensreform*.

²⁶ Wolfgang Graeser, "Body sense: Gymnastics, Dance, Sport (1927)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 684.

²⁷ Hans Frentz in Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture*, 183.

²⁸ Renate Berger, "Moments Can Change Your Life," 77.

²⁹ *Querschnitt* in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 188.

for star status, whilst selling consumer products, was also potentially subversive in allowing women to fantasise role models and lifestyles outside of tradition.

Dancer Valeska Gert recalled of her Weimar aesthetic, 'I was able for the first time to lend a form to the characteristic aspect of this age, its lack of equanimity.'³⁰ This could be read as aptly summarizing the work of Hannah Höch. *Cut With the Kitchen Knife* leads to a celebratory but also ambivalent reading of the New Woman in Höch's ideology. Through photo-montage the icon is broken down and thus necessarily interrogated but her re-contextualisation demonstrates Höch's affirmation and pleasure in the image. In exploring the representation of this image, Höch is re-articulating her own subjectivity as being part of the pleasurable consumption of mass media images of women. Her deconstructive aesthetic, in representing the conditions of the New Woman, her modern identities and forms, could be said to capture the New Woman, 'herself a montage, a juxtaposition of allegorical fragments...the uneasy alliance of women with modernity in twenties Germany.'³¹ Photo-montage allowed the image of the New Woman to function as a palimpsest, with allegorical readings leaking through to the surface. It also marked a simultaneous subversion; it used the image to make a statement against the reifying power of the media in commercialising and defining female images.

Allegories of Weimar Femininity

Dada-Ernst (1920-1921) presents an allegory of modern femininity in a jolting clash of female flesh with metal. The iconography of the New Woman is broken down

³⁰ Valeska Gert in Renate Berger, "Moments Can Change Your Life", 90.

³¹ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 4.

into interchangeable commodified signs, themselves situated within a syntax of images of modernity, such as boxing and skyscrapers (used to denote Americanism). The New Woman is depicted in her various guises, such as the gymnast in the left hand corner, a positive image of health and energy; Höch also depicted other images of Weimar womanhood such as a bare shouldered New Woman equipped with *Bubikopf* and a classical nude.

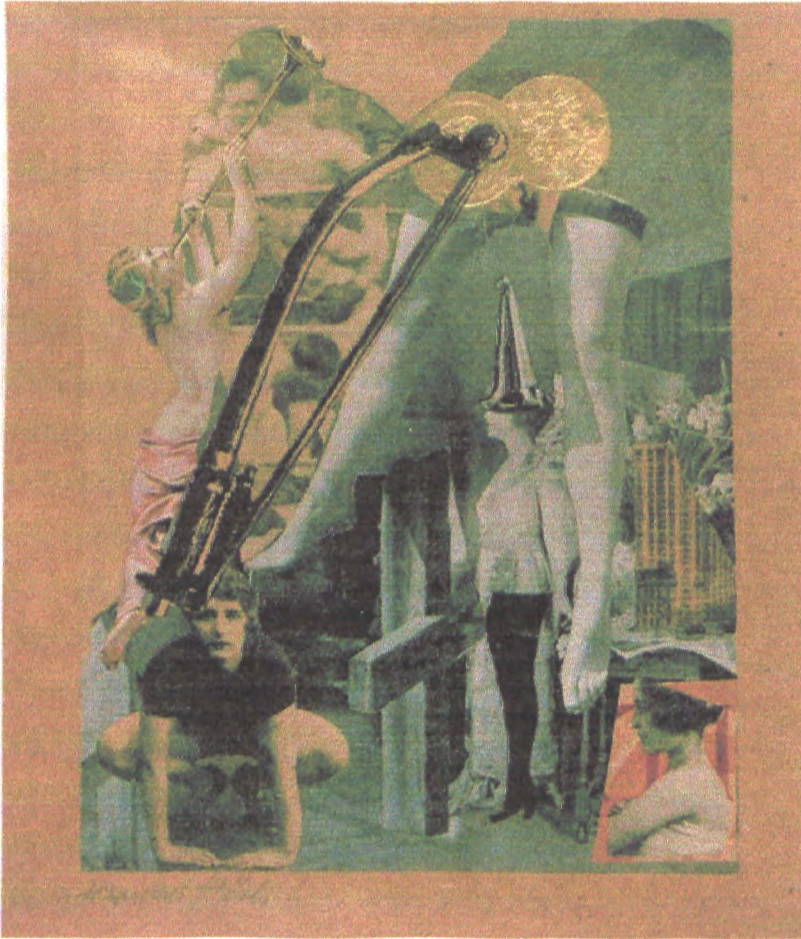


Figure 11. Hannah Höch *Dada-Ernst* (1920-1921)³²

³² Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 7.

This montage addressed the desires and fantasy of the consumer age, as well as its dislocations. A giant pair of female legs dominate the image, signs of female mobility, fashion, rationalisation and the sexual objectification of the female form. A man's eye is directly placed between the legs, overlapped by two gold coins. The dislocated legs and shoulders of the woman signify their place in modern society as commodity parts, mannequin pieces. The link between the trope of the machine woman or mannequin woman is alluded to in this piece. The new consumer culture addressed women less as individuals than as a mass group. In advertisements women were simultaneously presented as modern, machine like and identical 'types'. The form was used for and against itself in the attempt to sell commodities as in the advertisement for Crème Mouson. The advertisement ominously warns if Weimar woman wants to stand out from the crowd she must buy Crème Mouson.³³



Figure 12. 'Working Women!'
(*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1930)³⁴

³³ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 140.

³⁴ BIZ in Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 142.

The achievement of the modern apogee of beauty was simultaneously marketed through the acquisition of cosmetics and labour saving devices. Beauty and efficiency were what were required in order to aspire to the status of the modern female mannequin commodity. Hoch's images engage with rationalization and technology, demonstrating the anxieties and hopes implicit in their images. The images of women encourage female identification, acknowledging the role of technology and rationalization within their lives; appealing to women as consumers.

Höch's continual representation of the New Woman demonstrates how deeply the questions surrounding her representation, issues and anxieties concerned her. Whilst continually *interrogating the image*, her treatment shifted during the twenties from celebratory and utopian images of the New Woman image, to more critical and ambivalent readings. Through the use of montage, however, she was able to continue to emphasise the multiplicity of the New Woman image, and its personal economy of meaning.

The Beautiful Girl (1919-1920) is a critique of this modern woman consumer, defined as she is by the commodified signs of femininity: technology, media and advertising.³⁵ The female figure in the piece appears part human, part-machine, part commodity. The painting depicts a female body in a bathing suit with a light bulb for a head, surrounded by BMW insignias, gears and clocks. Heavily linked with the technology around her, technology becomes overwhelming and constricting, so much so the female figure has actually become part mechanical herself. This may be a critique on the rationalisation of the female body; censuring the concept of woman as machine and commodity idealism.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

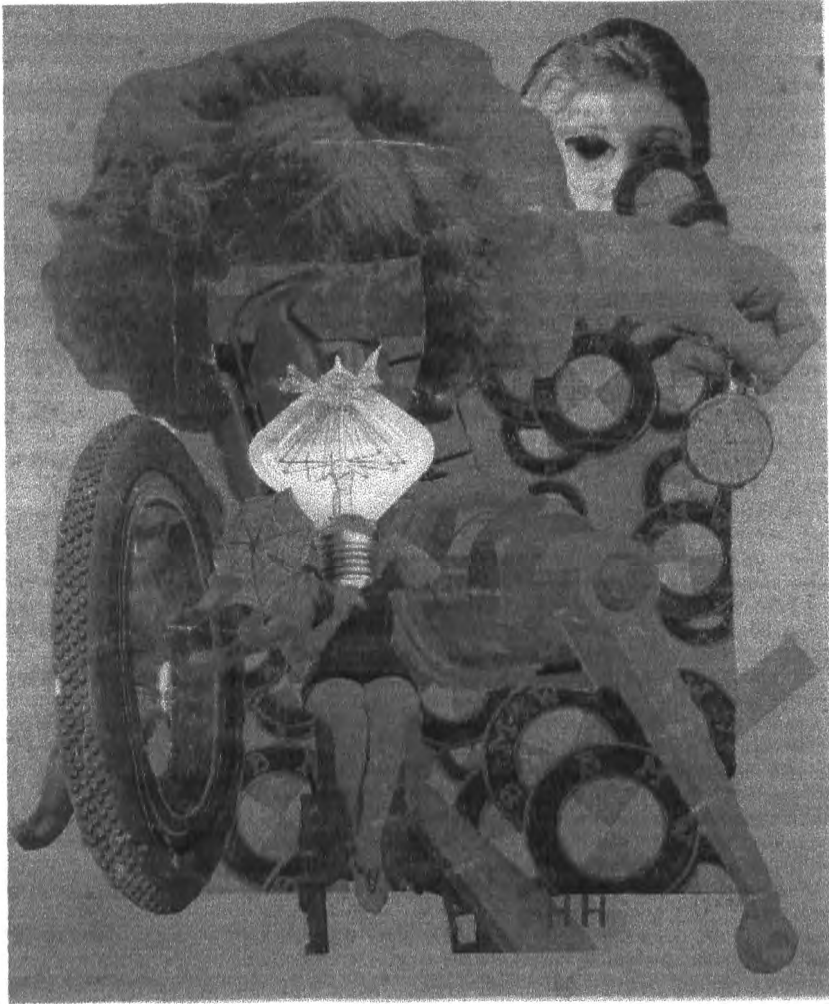


Figure 13. Hannah Höch *The Beautiful Girl* (1919-1920)³⁶

Rationalisation, as embodied in the Sex Reform movement and the Fordist standardisation of the work space, sought to encourage time management and help women to juggle the double burden of work and family, internalising the ethos of efficiency. Höch considered herself to be a rationalised female, in regard to the medium of photo-collage she said 'we regarded ourselves as engineers, we maintained that we

³⁶ Hannah Höch in Makela, "The Misogynist Machine" in *Women in the Metropolis*, 115.

were building things, we said we put our work together like fitters.³⁷ Despite this initial enthusiasm, as the twenties went on Atina Grossman points out, the Sex Reform movement was also to engender a new form of repression.³⁸ With at least 150,000 members, including doctors and social workers, Sex Reformers upheld a commitment to legalized abortion, sex education and women's rights to sexual satisfaction. However in the provision of advice and information, it was undoubtedly science, and men, that dominated the movement.

The convergence of eugenics and Sex Reform led to the phrasing of issues of sexuality in terms of general rather than individual rights. Attempting to address distressing post-war demographic changes, such as the decreasing birth rate, Sex Reformers endeavoured to control and channel sexual impulses and procreative activity into a manageable form of heterosexual behaviour. They attempted to redirect the putative New Woman back into a model of behaviour that encouraged marriage and children. Rationalisation, as the medium for this redirection, saw the female body become the locus for mechanization, technology and scientific management, treating the body as a machine to be trained: 'the thoroughly rationalized female was to be the efficient juggler of the double burden.'³⁹

Rationalisation pervaded all social spheres, including the bedroom. Although the Sex Reform movement called for female sexual satisfaction, women were not given the chance to voice their own models of sexual behaviour. T.H. Van de Velde polemical *Ideal Marriage* (1928) stated 'the husband is the sexual educator and guide through

³⁷ Ibid., 109.

³⁸ Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalisation of Sexuality," 190-205.

³⁹ Grossman, "*Girlikultur* or Thoroughly Rationalised Female," 63.

whom the woman is educated to full proficiency in love'.⁴⁰ For many German women, Sex Reform remained a double bind: although recognizing female sexuality, it situated it within the boundaries of male defined, heterosexual activity only, moreover rationalization placed higher pressure on women to be, amongst other things, sexually proficient.

In *The Beautiful Girl* the bather is not active, as in Höch's other works, and merely sits; in denying the girl an active gaze, and therefore a subjecthood, she is implicitly objectified. This piece raises the point that Weimar women remained controlled and rationalized by a male world that still views her essentially as an object. Höch's cynicism may come from the realization that despite the emancipatory potential of exploring the possibilities of the commodified status of the New Woman, she is merely being implicated deeper within a consumer culture that views her purely as commodity image. However, again the ambiguity of the image is suggested by a woman's face peeking out from behind the 'machine-girl'; Höch may be suggesting that in the realisation of their rationalised position, women can critically engage with the image.

Höch's personal experience within the Dada group may have contributed to the ambiguity inherent in the presentation of New Woman figure, in the least her biographical details substantiate a wider reading of her images. Despite the attempted assertion of her singular identity within the Dada group (Höch was introduced through lover Raoul Hausmann) she remained marginalized. Höch was described by Dada commentator, Hans Richter, as a 'good girl' who made herself indispensable by providing 'sandwiches, beer and coffee she managed somehow to conjure up despite the shortage of

⁴⁰ T.H. Van de Velde in Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalisation of Sexuality," 195. Female desire was mapped out in 'scientific' curves, defined as innately dormant, passive and emotional, a basic difference between the sexes.

money.⁴¹ In an interview in 1978, Höch described the situation of female artists in the 1920s:

it was not very easy for a woman to impose herself as a modern artist...

most of our male colleagues continued for a long while to look upon us as charming and gifted amateurs, denying us implicitly any real professional status.⁴²



Figure 14. Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann at the Berlin Dada Fair (1919)⁴³

⁴¹ Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 132. Maria Makela argues this slight caused a fallout between Höch and Richter, Höch writing to Richter in 1965 saying they could no longer be friends due to his misrepresentation. See Makela, "The Misogynist Machine," 127.

⁴² Hannah Höch in Roditi, "Interview with Hannah Höch," 27.

⁴³ Lavin, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife*, 15.

But it was her relationship with Raoul Hausmann, a tempestuous affair that lasted several years, that was her greatest disappointment. Despite his Dada theoretical writing which called for a Communist revolution that released women from patriarchal oppression, Hausmann demonstrated the disparity between theory and reality by asking Höch to financially support him. He espoused radical views while remaining married to another woman and twice letting Höch bear the responsibility for their sexual life by having two abortions. Sometimes he struck her.⁴⁴ Their affair merely reinforced an oppressive power relationship.

Höch's disillusionment with her professional and personal status within the Dada group is addressed in at least one artwork which attacked the hypocrisy of her fellow male Dadaists. *Da-Dandy* (1919) depicts the fragmented faces of five smiling women, outfitted in New Woman couture. They do not seem to function as subjects, but 'objects of titillation' within a man's head wherein they exist.⁴⁵ Whilst the (Dada) man in question may theoretically support women's emancipation, the New Woman remains essentially an object in his head.

After World War II Höch commented on the Dada male: 'in protest against the older generation...this New Woman was desirable to him. But [the men] rejected rather brutally that a new orientation was also necessary on their part'.⁴⁶ This may well be a critique of Raoul Hausmann. The figure in *Da-Dandy* has a monocle made out of the shape of a women's head; in later years Höch recalled the monocle as a sign for the male Dada dandy- she was noted as saying Hausmann probably came into the world wearing a

⁴⁴ See Makela, "The Misogynist Machine," footnote 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁶ Hannah Höch in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 205.

monocle.⁴⁷ Höch's attack on male chauvinism is further demonstrated in a short story, undated, though approximated as written in 1920. Entitled 'The Painter', it chronicles the life of Gottfried Heavenly-Kingdom, a male artist whose wife thwarts 'the boundless flight of his genius,' and throws him into an existential crisis by asking him to do the dishes.⁴⁸



Figure 15. Hannah Höch *Da-Dandy* (1919)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Hannah Höch, "The Painter," in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 216

⁴⁹ Hannah Höch in Makela, "The Misogynist Machine," 120.

In an Interview in 1978 Höch stated 'my work did not attempt to glorify the modern woman... on the contrary, I was more concerned with the suffering woman'. Makela argues that the implicit equation of the modern and the suffering 'predicated her censure on modernity, shaped by a uniquely female experience'.⁵⁰ Indeed it would appear Höch's identification and embrace of the New Woman icon had come full circle. Höch engaged with the mass media image of woman as commodity form, confirming it as an allegory of Weimar femininity in its increase in freedom and autonomy and negating it in its evacuation of true emancipatory potential. She disrupted the image on a personal level, as her growing disillusionment and ambivalence denoted the very promises and betrayals of Weimar Germany inherent in the New Woman icon.

By 1930, the time when Höch produced *German Girl*, she identified with a rationalised femininity that dehumanised women and a commodity culture that although gave women status, ensured that it kept them commodified and objectified and unable to be truly liberated. *German Girl* of 1930 depicts the turn away from the New Woman to more traditional roles that provided women a secure sense of their social place:

Her old womanly fate - motherhood, love, family - trailed after her into the spheres of her new womanlyness... And she therefore found herself not liberated but doubly bound: There remained only the compromise...it easily appeared as if the new freedom for women had achieved nothing...bobbed hairdos and short skirts have beaten a retreat.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Makela, "The Misogynist Machine," 122.

⁵¹ Rühle-Gerstel, "Back to the Good Old Days?," in *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 218-219.

However Höch's distortion of the *German Girl* ideal reveals her ultimate affirmation of the New Woman image. In making the image 'unfamiliar', she is denying identification with it as a model for Weimar women, and essentially demonstrating her continual hope for a model of femininity that expresses the true potential of women in German society.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BORING DOLLIES OF JEANNE MAMMEN



Figure 16. Jeanne Mammen *Berlin Streetscene* (1929)¹

For urbane cultural magazine *Ulk*, October 1929, Jeanne Mammen (1890-1976) submitted the piece *Berlin Streetscene* (1929). An image of a Berlin boulevard, it depicts tightly packed pedestrians passing by a crowded café. The scene reflects a kaleidoscope

¹ Jeanne Mammen in Annelie Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women: Images of City Life in the Work of Jeanne Mammen," in *Women in the Metropolis*, 97.

of people from all aspects of Berlin society. Men and women shuffle by in groups or in pairs. The ambiguity of women in the public sphere is pronounced, are they prostitutes or merely women promenading the boulevard? In her rendering of Berlin types, such as the wealthy patrons smoking and drinking at the café, *Berlin Streetscene* is reminiscent of the stinging caricatures of George Grosz. However a closer inspection of the image belies Mammen's solidarity with the female figures.

In a metaphor reflective of Mammen's own agency within the city, we are introduced into the painting by a solitary female figure in the right hand corner, it is through her gaze we enter the street. Amidst the stark geographical lines of the image the contours of the centre women are united. A female couple in the bottom left hand corner touch at the knee. Here Mammen uses an 'aesthetics of exotic typology', whenever she wishes to draw attention to the sexual difference of homosexual women.² This painting is symbolic of Mammen's Weimar oeuvre, it is the suggested 'otherness' of the piece that stands out.

Mammen's illustrations for Weimar journals and fashion magazines placed her at the centre of the changing images and models of identity for Weimar women. What makes the art work of Mammen significant to the understanding of women's engagement with the New Woman image is that, in an inversion of the norm, male perceptions and subjectivities are marginalized, and, if presented, act as mere props in the lives of the women she documented. By representing images of female solidarity Mammen gives voice to marginalised subjectivities within Weimar society. Her illustrations offered models of identity that were not merely coopted images but sought to articulate female

² Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 102. This 'exotic typology' is mainly derived from the slanted eyes of her protagonists, and is also demonstrable in *Masked Ball* (1928).

self determination. In doing so Mammen's images become a locus of subjective experience and depict the many and diverse ways women, during Weimar, negotiated the iconography of the New Woman in order to explore their own identities. Her art work provides us with a sensitive, gendered insight into the discursive underbelly of Weimar society, through the eyes of women only.

The Outsider as Insider

Heavily influenced by the art work of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec,³ Jeanne Mammen found her subjects in the chaotic urban life of the city. In cafés and bars, street revues and shop counters, the New Woman, demi-monde and prostitute came to life with uncompromising frankness. Her own experiences with impoverishment, and as a self confessed loner, Mammen's affinity to the ubiquitous undersides of society offered glimpses into the fragmentation and alienation of the modern metropolis. She later recalled:

I don't have many friends. In a way people are foreign to me, because I can't get myself to understand them. I am so terribly different from everyone else...it's a sensation of sadness and wonder. I feel completely foreign. I have a lot of fun but it doesn't touch me. I feel like I don't belong.⁴

³ Annelie Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 91.

⁴ Jeanne Mammen in Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 101.

Perhaps due to her own feelings of difference, Mammen's Weimar images focus on the social relationships of her urban protagonists. The 1928 watercolour *The Red-Haired Woman* depicts a woman in her dressing room, sitting at a makeup table. A man behind her leans hypnotically towards her red hair. The woman's hair becomes a commodity fetish, the man blind to the woman's irritation. Mammen's work is depicting the commodity status of females in a gendered heterosexual economy of meaning. Many depictions of men and women together reinforce this theme, including *The Pearl Chain*, which critiques the patriarchal power structure between a man and a woman, the working class and bourgeoisie.⁵

Depictions of communication, equality and understanding are reserved for images of women together. Mammen empathises with the members of her sex who were struggling to redefine their identities in post-war Germany. Be they barmaids, dancers or sales girls, in Mammen's images they are allied in the struggle, finding support only amongst each other. The image *In Front of the Grate-Behind the Grate* (1930) depicts two sales girls literally fenced in from the crowds, however it is their solidarity with each other that gives them an air of self assurance. It was not only bourgeois images of female solidarity; *Hookers* (1930) portrays two prostitutes standing closely together on the street. With one gazing towards the viewer and one gazing away, together they take in everything. The *bubikopf* of the prostitute links her to the image of the New Woman.

⁵ Katerina Sykora, "Jeanne Mammen and Profile," *Women's Art Journal* 9/2 (Fall/Winter 1989): 29.



Figure 17. Jeanne Mammen *Hookers* (1930)⁶

The philosopher Leonore Kuhn wrote in a 1923 essay *Wir Frauen*, the woman of Weimar:

must conquer, confirm and achieve everything anew- under such circumstances only a girlfriend can prove helpful, the naturally like-minded, possibly more experienced one can assist in carving a path through the wood...In many ways the need to be loved,

⁶ Jeanne Mammen in Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women,"95.

tenderness and understanding...areas that would otherwise be the domain of a man- have today become the greatest areas of support by a girlfriend.⁷

The recurring girlfriend motif appears to embody a utopian element, an alternative to the commodity status inherent in heterosexual relationships. Mammen creates a world apart from the discriminating environment of Weimar Germany, with its normalizing tropes; rather in Mammen's images, scenes of unity and love resided in a world defined by lifestyles that scorned taxonomies.

Mammen portrayed, most fervently, independent women who chose lives without men. She looked at the interactions that took place at female only activities, particularly in the night life that defined Berlin. During the 1920s Berlin had more than thirty women's clubs, functioning as female forums, some with as many as six hundred members.⁸ Mammen provided illustrations for Curt Moreck's 1931 publication *Guide to Immoral (or naughty) Berlin*, which catalogued the gay and lesbian underground of Weimar Berlin. However Mammen's work was also commissioned by popular bourgeois magazines *Die Dame*, *Simplicissimus*, *Ulk*, *Lustige Blatter* and *Uhu* as early as 1924.

Her proximity to the main disseminating institutions of images of the New Woman, and her own illustrations demonstrate her familiarity with the New Woman as icon and commodity form. By the mid-nineteen twenties Mammen had established herself as a graphic artist. Between 1928 and 1933 she was publishing four or more

⁷ Leonore Kuhn in Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 98.

⁸ Sykora, "Jeanne Mammen," 29.

drawings a week.⁹ Her work offers a counter image to the often male defined, one-dimensional stereotypes that sought merely to entice women through the New Women image into the purchase of commodity goods. Instead Mammen offers subjective, female determined images of Weimar modernity.

Her illustrations were very much a part of *Angestelltenkultur*, defined as it was by increasing levels of commodity consumption, which Kracauer deemed symptomatic of the increasing cultural 'homelessness' of the working class.¹⁰ The fact that Jeanne Mammen worked within the commercial industry meant that she did to some extent affirm the mass media as an institution through which to engage with and renegotiate the figure of the New Woman. The New Woman, as defined by advertising and mass media, was a status symbol distinguished by commodity signs, however Mammen conveyed an admiration and sympathy for women engaging with this image and the consumer culture which produced it, as a means of exploring their own identities and possibilities for change.

Directly addressing the New Woman as both consumer and a media defined 'type', Mammen depicted the multiple interactions with the image that was offered to Weimar women. In *Boring Dollies*, (1929), two blasé, bored women with fashionable *herrenschnitts* (men's haircuts), streamlined clothes and bodies, lean languidly against one another, one woman smoking a cigarette. An oddly made-up doll sits in the background, in an outfit characteristic of an American 'flapper'. The images of the two women immediately mark them out as the iconographic type of the New Women, the modish makeup and hair serves to homogenize them, while the title itself blurs the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, " Shelter for the Homeless (1930)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 189-191.

difference between the 'painted doll and the painted doll-like woman.'¹¹ In presenting an image of blatant, one dimensional stereotypes, Mammen critiques precisely the mannequin/woman elision and demonstrates the evacuation of subjectivity in the representation of women as commodity displays.

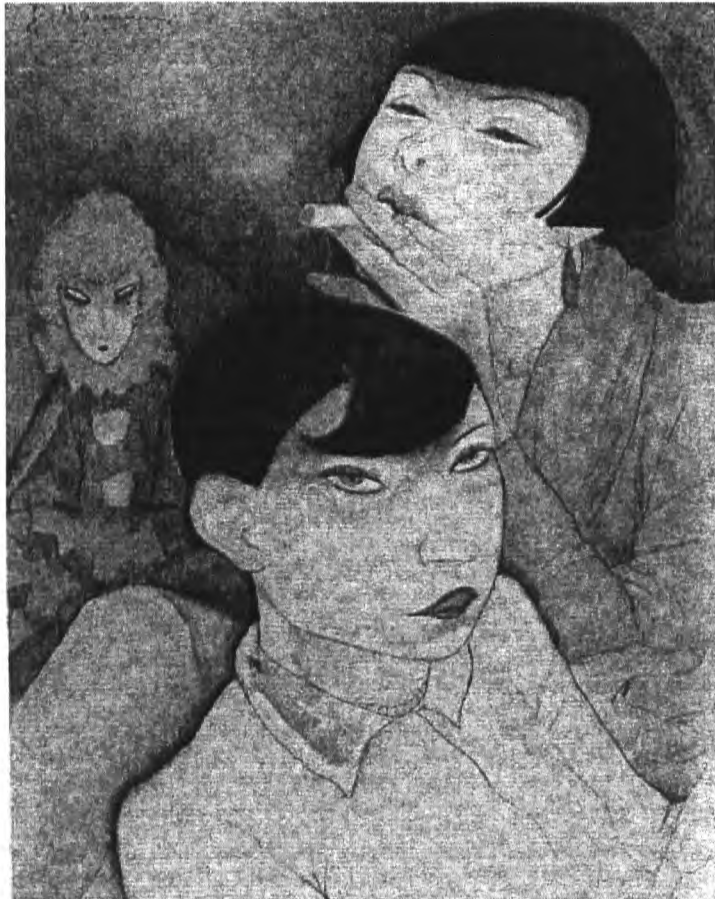


Figure 18. Jeanne Mammen *Boring Dollies* (1929)¹²

As in the case of artist Hannah Höch, Mammen also re-appropriated mass media images by depicting those very stereotypes of women displayed in media forms. In *Boring Dollies* Mammen has created a site whereby female viewers could self-

¹¹ Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 101.

¹² Jeanne Mammen in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 182.

consciously interrogate the New Woman iconography in terms of its personal legitimacy and possibilities for exploration. By ironically critiquing, but not parodying the image of the New Woman, she is prescribing an inherent 'otherness' to the image, one which hints at the New Woman's possibilities and potential for play.

*Before there was a houseboy, but that was yesterday, and instead of houseboys, I have a housegirl today...*¹³



Figure 19. 'What do you say about Fraulein Mia?'
(*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1927)¹⁴

¹³ Marlene Dietrich and Margot Lion "My Best Girlfriend" in Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women", 98.

¹⁴ *BIZ* in Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 108.

1925 was described as 'the year of the pageboy...the time of the short skirt, of flesh coloured stockings.'¹⁵ It was also the time of the Garçonne. The Garçonne functioned as a marker of the times, of identities in flux, whereby the female image came to engender a new discourse as the primary mechanism of identity, with the capacity to be stripped down and reconstructed. Fashion and consumerism played a defining role in shaping the image of the modern woman; in the discursive negotiation of commodities, the fashioned female body became the locus for shifting perceptions of social status, lifestyle and the embodiment of consumer fantasies.

The commodified changes in the appearance of the female image can be explored as 'the most sensitive barometer'¹⁶ for social upheaval. As Kracauer argues in 'The Mass Ornament,' 1927:

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from its surface level expressions.

[These] provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things.¹⁷

In an essay on 'Photography' he further wrote, 'photography is bound to time in exactly the same way as *fashion*. Since the latter has no significance other than as current human garb it is translucent when modern and abandoned when old.'¹⁸ The commodified typologies of women in the 1920s mass media frequently reconfigured social and sexual

¹⁵ Hans Janowitz in Sabine Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion," in *Women in the Metropolis*, 185.

¹⁶ Stephanie Kaul, "Whose Fault is the Long Dress?," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 671.

¹⁷ Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

identities as defined through social categories, signs and symbols. These social categories functioned as performative facades, and could be manipulated to de-stabilise normative assumptions of masculinity and femininity. As woman in particular remained defined through their bodies, by negotiating her body image, Weimar woman could realize her desires through disguise and become aware of the social construction of gender roles and the patriarchal structures that held them in place.

The various responses of Weimar social critics, both male and female, to the changing fashions of the New Woman, demonstrate their awareness of her image as symbolic of social change. She represented many women's desires for different lifestyles and identities, and as such was vilified by reactionary or conservative factions of Weimar society who saw in her a marker of cultural decline. The New Woman who dressed in unisex, androgynous clothing was the topic of intense scrutiny and debate. In 1925 an editorial in *BIZ* entitled 'Enough is Enough- against the masculinisation of women' denounced the masculinisation of women's fashions as an affront to mankind:

What started as a playful game in women's fashion is gradually becoming a distressing aberration. At first it was a charming novelty: that gentle, delicate women cut their long tresses and bobbed their hair; that the dresses they wore hung down in an almost perfectly straight line, denying the contours of the female body, the curve of the hips... even the most traditional of men were not scandalized by this...but the male sensibility began to take offense at this as the fashion that was so becoming to young girls was adopted by all women...it is high time that sound male judgement

take a stand against these odious fashions.¹⁹

The changes in women's fashion were not merely a passing fancy, or commodity fetish. They demonstrated the desires of many women during Weimar Germany to transcend cultural gender boundaries and represent changing social realities through an aesthetic negotiation. The many media images of the New Woman, as thin, sporty and cool, also combined the characteristics of the 'third sex', an intersexual, 'in-between' type as defined by Weimar's prominent sexologist and gay rights campaigner Magnus Hirschfeld.²⁰ The men's haircut, tie and suit were ubiquitous images in the lesbian underground. Tailored suits and ties first appeared in lesbian subculture before they were popularized by Marlene Dietrich in the 1930's and became incorporated into the 'look' of the New Woman. Ypsi, the young lady from Vicki Baum's "People of Today" in *Die Dame* (1927), demonstrates the fashion status of the androgyne, inducing her hapless friend to adopt the image:

Recently Ypsi had the hair on this harmless unhappy being cut and induced her to wear a man's hat, stiff white tie, and a smoking jacket. A riding crop, a present from Ypsi opens the door to wicked thoughts. It is - you know this dear lady? - the latest thing to have a girlfriend that looks like this...²¹

¹⁹ "Enough is Enough! Against the Masculinisation of Women (1925)," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 659.

²¹ Vicki Baum, "People of Today" in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 665.

Patrice Petro's *Weimar Photo-Journalism and the Female Reader* reveals the ersatz masculinity of the New Woman was a popular image throughout Weimar culture. The androgynous, fashionable and erotic figure that sported men's suits and ties could often be found within the pages of bourgeois magazines.

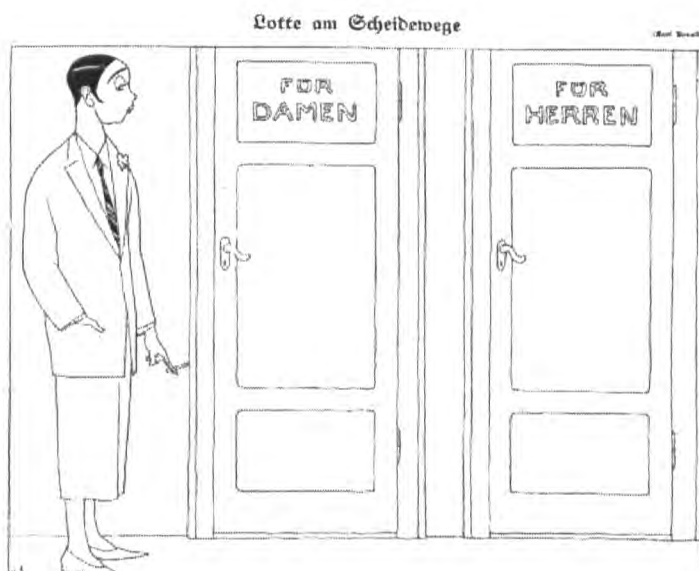


Figure 20. Karl Arnold *Lotte at the Crossroads* (*Simplicissimus*, 1925)

Public anxieties often found a satirical stereotype in the image of the woman dressed as a man, for example in Karl Arnold's 1925 *Simplicissimus* cartoon. *BIZ* also incorporated the manipulation of gender roles, arranging a competition entitled 'What in the world do you say about Fraulein Mia?' It invited readers to contribute with funny captions to the picture of a woman with short hair and tailored suit.²² Patrice Petro argues in asking the readers to engage with the image of the androgynous female, it acts as a playful or ironic

²² Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion," 196. Some of the responses included "Clothes don't make the man; what counts are the naked facts" and "Say who may the little man be?", derived from a German folk song.

interrogation. The New Woman in *Die Dame*, moreover, was often represented as an androgynous figure; in the de-stabilising of male and female iconography, female readers were offered alternative visions of gender identity and a space allowing for desire and identification.²³

For the 1931 publication of Magnus Hirschfeld's *Moral History of the Post-war Period*, Mammen produced the work *The Garçonne*. It depicts a young, modish woman reclining languidly in her urban flat, reading the newspaper and smoking a cigarette. This picture gave explicit visual form to the 'third sex', the homosexual as an 'intersexual' androgynous type.²⁴ Homosexuality remained a critical political constellation throughout Weimar Germany; in 1919 Hirschfeld collaborated on an 'enlightenment' film 'Different From the Others', which helped to provide an easily disseminable visual image of the 'third sex' or intersexual type. Mammen's *Garçonne* goes beyond mere visualisation in its explicit articulation of female identity.

The *Garçonne* remained an eponymous image in lesbian subculture and semi-clandestine clubs that defined much of the night life of Weimar Berlin. The ubiquity of the androgynous image is embodied in the 1931 opening of the Berlin lesbian revue 'The *Garçonne*' and Ullstein Verlag's lesbian journal *Die Garçonne* which was in circulation from 1930-1932. It also made its way into the erotic fiction of the time. In *The Scorpion*, a novel by Anna Elisabet Weirach (1919-1920), a relationship exists between the protagonist Olga, an androgynous young *garçonne*, and Myra, a sophisticated 'scorpion.' These characters are described by Barbara Ulrich as 'masculine women...identified by

²³ Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 111.

²⁴ Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, trans. M. Lombardi-Nash, intro. V. L. Bullough. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000).

their distinctively male fashion choices and haircuts [who] and live exclusively without men in a world of their own creation.²⁵

In 'Eldorado', the nickname for the gay and lesbian underground of Berlin, one could manipulate the androgyny of the New Woman as the exploration of gender boundaries. In the appropriation of masculinity, the Garçonne challenged traditional understandings of gender, indeed as Hake argues, in emphasizing the performative and aesthetic aspects of identity, the image of the Garçonne encouraged the use of irony and self-reflexivity in relation to concepts of gender and identity.²⁶ In drawing *The Garçonne*, Mammen affirmed the potential of negotiating social and sexual identities through manipulating the commodified female image.



Figure 21. Jeanne Mammen *The Garçonne* (1931)²⁷

²⁵ Barbara Ulrich, *The Hot Girls of Weimar Berlin*, (Hong Kong: Feral House, 2002), 82.

²⁶ Hake, "In the Mirror of Fashion," 196.

²⁷ Jeanne Mammen in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 198.

The recognition of lesbianism can be seen as a microcosm for debates regarding the social construction of discourses of female sexuality, and emphasizes the alterity or 'otherness' of the lesbian subject. Unlike male homosexuality which had been specifically prohibited in Germany throughout legal, religious and cultural discourses, an active and female oriented desire did not occupy a dialectical site until 'named' in law in 1910. Women were defined as passive sexual objects in male normative discourse, thus woman to woman sexual activity had not 'even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable.'²⁸ As in the case of lesbianism and female sexuality in general, when it does become named it is subject to masculine terminology, or as sexual titillation for men, such as in the work of German artist Christian Schad *Girlfriends* (1928), whereby two female figures are provocatively displayed naked for the male voyeur.²⁹

Smith and Watson argue 'naming' acts as a subversive challenge to patriarchal definitions, 'thus women have been naming themselves by making art [as] embodied self representation.'³⁰ By entitling the piece *'The Garçonne'* Mammen was actively asserting marginal forms of female identity, emphasizing multiplicity and oscillation as the main paradigm for women exploring their sexuality during Weimar Germany. Mammen constructed a site within a highly influential media format whereby women could voice issues of self identity and sexual orientation.³¹

²⁸ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. D. Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 20.

²⁹ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 203.

³⁰ Smith and Watson, *Interfaces*, 5.

³¹ Hirschfeld's other titles included *Berlin's Third Sex, The Homosexuality of Men and Women*. His Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin was shut down in 1933 due to Nazi intervention. See Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*.

For the maker and viewer of Weimar visual icons, images of the androgynous New Woman, such as those depicted in *BIZ* or *Die Dame*, might have suggested the 'possible realization of a utopia of shifting and anti-hierarchical gender roles.'³² On the other hand such representations may have remained evacuated stereotypes that negated the empowering possibilities of gender and identity negotiation in order to remain commercially viable. However the diverse contexts within which Mammen's *The Garçonne* functioned belies the multiple avenues through which identity was constructed in Weimar Germany, and points to an intrinsic multiple reading.

In *The Garçonne* Mammen defies the strict categorization of a 'type.' The woman in the image is intelligible as both a biological androgynous type, evidenced by the boyish, lithe figure and as a commodity image, demonstrable in the woman's modish clothes and urban apartment. Lying at the interstices of fashion, science, mass media, *körperkultur* (body culture), *The Garçonne* points to diverse definitions, empowering possibilities, particularly in the visualization of female sexuality and identity beyond the framework of masculine, heterosexual desire. Jeanne Mammen, situated at the interstices between woman's spaces and mass media, was able to reconfigure the iconography of the New Woman into a form which encouraged and diversified self-identification.

A piece that further engages with these debates was Mammen's watercolour *Masked Ball* (1928), one of the images produced for "*Guide to Immoral Berlin*". It depicted a scene from the lesbian underworld, 'Eldorado', a female space where women could go without the intrusion of men and was a powerful constellation in the struggle for self affirmation and identity. The work epitomized the variety of strategies lesbian women were potentially engaging with in exploring their sexual identities.

³² Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, 185.



Figure 22. Jeanne Mammen *Masked Ball* (1928)³³

Masked Ball depicts an androgynous, young woman in slacks and a top hat, scarf, cigarette in mouth, posing in a macho and assertive stance. The protagonist is playing the *bubi*,³⁴ an affected masculinity; behind her other female figures are dancing in a kaleidoscopic vision of female bodies. The depiction of a masquerade allows us to locate an active playfulness of Weimar women with gender and identity and the dissolution of fixed social categories. It emphasises the self-determining role of female agency in constructing identity and acts as a metaphor for Weimar women's subversion of exterior, masculine reifications of femininity as 'other'.

³³ Jeanne Mammen in Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 217.

³⁴ Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 216.

Mammen's engagement with the figure of the New Woman articulates a uniquely female perspective towards the shifting images of the feminine during the Weimar Republic. She situates the visual icon of the New Woman squarely within debates regarding female strategies for emancipation of the self, their desires for less constricting gender roles and the call for female self determination in all social spheres. The access to mass media outlets was crucial in enabling Mammen to use art as a dialectical interrogation of female identity. Her explorations of sexuality and gender stressed diversity while giving voice to the marginal, and emphasised the heterogenous rather than monolithic nature of female subjectivity.



Figure 23. Jeanne Mammen in Berlin in the 1920s.³⁵

³⁵ Lütgens, "The Conspiracy of Women," 92.

Both Hannah Höch's and Jeanne Mammen's critical engagement with the New Woman embodied a discourse on power, the body and the creation of meaning. Their art work can be seen as a microcosm for female interventions into the dynamics of *frauenkultur*, and demonstrates the empowering potential of the construction of female identity as monumental and individual. Throughout their respective Weimar oeuvres, the New Woman engendered a site whereby feminine models of identity could be interrogated and redefined, forcing viewers into an active position. In the subversion of masculine voyeurism and objectification, they asserted a *frauenkultur* and female space existing beyond the legitimation of the male gaze. Höch and Mammen inflected their depictions of Weimar modernity with a distinctly utopian dimension; that it was a stage fraught with ambivalence as well as exhilaration is one of the many paradoxes of women's experiences of Weimar Germany.

* AFTERWORD *

The German woman in the truly palmy days of German life has no need for emancipation any more than in those same good days need the man fear that he may be wrenched out of his place by women. Only when there was a lack of absolute certainty in the knowledge of her task did the eternal instinct of self and race preservation begin to revolt in woman, then there grew from this revolt a state of affairs that was unnatural and which lasted until both sexes returned to their respective spheres which eternally wise Providence ordained for them.

-Adolph Hitler (1934)³⁶

The above passage, taken from a speech Hitler made in 1934, succinctly demonstrates the decisive move away from celebratory images of Weimar femininity to a turn towards traditional, essentialist models of female subjecthood. In the final years of the 1920s the mass media began a deconstruction of the female image and its hardworn 'star' myth. Von Ankum demonstrates in 1928 *Uhu* attached a pedometer to the leg of a

³⁶ Adolph Hitler in Petro, *Joyless Streets*, 220. Speech made to the Women's Party Congress at Nuremberg, 1934.

revue girl to demonstrate the hard work and energy put into a single performance. In 1930 it also published a review warning of the downsides of the '*Girl*' lifestyle.³⁷ Just as Irmgard Keun's Doris began yearning for a life away from the concrete jungle of Berlin, representations of the New Woman began to make room for idyllic scenes of motherhood with their insidious racial connotations.

As World War II threatened many German artists embarked upon an 'inner exile'. Hannah Höch moved to a secluded part of Berlin to avoid persecution as a 'cultural Bolshevik'. However, as a sign of her ongoing resilience she kept most of her Dada artwork in a cabinet in her home. Later, in 1978, she was to query 'how I was courageous or foolish enough to keep all this incriminating evidence in my own home during those dreadful years'.³⁸

Mammen also stayed in Germany, but ceased exhibiting under the National Socialist regime. Joining the Communist party in 1930, her art work became more humanitarian in nature, depicting the homeless and the unemployed. She continued her work as a graphic designer, attempting to camouflage: 'a woman working in advertising, that was a good mask; I was looked at as if I was only capable of designing pretty flower arrangements.'³⁹ By the early 1940's she had begun to work in an increasingly abstract form, allying herself to those artists damned as 'degenerate' by the Nazi's.

The indelible uniqueness of the Weimar period was visibly rendered through the brush strokes of its artists. Yet despite the historical specificity of its artwork to the debates of its time, it forces us to question our own perceptions. The art of Weimar women was as much an avowal of private hopes and fears as an envisioning of a better

³⁷ Uhu in Katerina von Ankum, "Introduction," in *Women in the Metropolis*, 2.

³⁸ Hannah Höch in Roditi, "Interview with Hannah Höch,"

³⁹ Jeanne Mammen in Sykora, "Jeanne Mammen," 30.

future. The Nazi's may have stifled their voices, however it merely makes them resound louder.

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