INSIDE THE CITY:
GENDER AND THE PRODUCTION OF INTERIOR SPACE IN WEIMAR REPUBLIC
GERMAN LITERATURE, 1929-1933

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ABSTRACT

Sara Kristina Farner Budarz: Inside the City: Gender and the Production of Interior Space in
Weimar Republic German Literature, 1929-1933
(Under the direction of Eric Downing)


This dissertation examines the interplay of gender and the production of interior space

within the literature of the late Weimar Republic (1929-1933). Reading interior space

through the lens of spatial analysis (following in the tradition of Henri Lefebvre and the

Spatial Turn), I argue that the three spaces examined in this study - the home, the white-

collar office, and the café- are sites in which questions of power, agency, and gender are

renegotiated. While the dominant theorization of the city within the context of the literature

produced during the Weimar Republic has focused almost exclusively on the exterior spaces

of the city and their historical novelty, this research asserts that a theorization of the urban

experience cannot be complete without an incorporation of interior spaces. Highlighting the

drastic changes interior spaces underwent during this era, this project argues that a focus on

interior space allows us to gain a more complex, nuanced understanding of cultural

phenomena witnessed during this era, including shifts in housing as a result of the rise in

urban population, the sharp rise in white-collar female employment, and the establishment of

a famed café culture in Berlin. Within the context of *Das Neue Bauen*, this project asserts

that interior spaces were not only subjected to modernist design, which led to a

reconfiguration of use and appearance, but also underwent drastic changes due to the legal

changes of 1919 which granted women full access to these interior spaces and thereby led to their destabilization. Focusing on the role of gender in the production of space, this work examines how the ideology embedded within space objectified and displaced women in particular, thereby problematizing their conception of self. These issues are explored in the works of Erich Kästner's *Fabian* (1931), Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931), Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi* (1931) and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (1930), and Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun*? (1932).

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REFOCUSING ON THE INTERIOR


<u>The German Pavilion</u>

Two German tourists stand in the middle of the Van der Rohe Pavilion in Barcelona,

Spain, and look around at the space. The pavilion, originally called the German Pavilion, was

built for the World Exposition in 1929.[1] It was designed by Mies van der Rohe, Weimar

Germany's most preeminent architect and director of the *Staatliches Bauhaus* (1919-1933).[2]

Van der Rohe remains to this day an iconic figure associated with architectural modernism

and is undoubtedly Germany's most well-known architect worldwide. This pavilion

represents the pinnacle of Weimar Germany's modernist design aspirations and its fervent

engagement with questions pertaining to the use of interior space.

The two tourists visiting the pavilion do not however know what to make of the space

in which they stand, baffled as to why they paid entrance fees to see what appears to be an

empty room. The single large space in which they stand is separated with one marble wall

and contains only two of Van der Rohe's famous white Barcelona chairs and a red rug. Aside

from that, nothing decorates the space. There are no paintings on the walls, no additional

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[1]For a history of the pavilion, see: Schulze, Franz, and Edward Windhorst. *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, 118-125.

[2]For a complete history of the Bauhaus, numerous excellent works exist. A good overview is given by: Droste, Magdelena. *Bauhaus, 1919-1933*. 1990. Köln: Taschen Verlag, 2010.

furniture, no ornamentation. The pavilion's interior was purposefully left barren, a trademark of modernist aesthetics.

The brochure the tourists read explains this history and yet, the tourists still appear confused—not about the history, but by the space itself. They are bothered by their inability to label the space, not knowing what its function is intended to be. Is it a living room? A waiting room? The lack of codes, which would allow them to correctly read the space, is unsettling to them. Finally, with a shake of the head, one proclaims, "Ach, das ist gar nichts! Es ist doch bloß ein leeres Zimmer."

The tourists' observations are poignant. They are both correct in their assessment of the fact that it is indeed a mostly empty room, "ein leeres Zimmer," and yet they are incorrect in assessing that it is "gar nichts." It is not that it is not anything, but rather, that it is not something that they know how to label. It is not a space that conforms to their expectations, both due to its uncertain use and the blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior space. Their reaction highlights the discomfort (and in their case, ire) that uncertainty in interior spaces can evoke. Eighty-five years after its creation, this modernist pavilion still manages to capture the anxiety inherent in spaces that do not conform to traditional use and design.

When interior spaces are reconfigured, interactions within material space are affected: the expectations regarding what roles the space can and cannot perform become contested. And in no other era in Germany's history were interior spaces undergoing reconfiguration as

extensively as they were during the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), leading to new patterns

of interaction with and within these spaces.[3]

Refocusing on the Interior: Architectural and Cultural Change

  The Van der Rohe Pavilion exists today as a reminder of Germany's modernist

history, which flourished during the Weimar Republic years. The pavilion's design touches

on many of the issues at the forefront of the design discourse: questions regarding the use of

décor, the role of boundaries within a space, and above all else, questions regarding the

functional use of a space. At the core, the movement focused on a reconceptualization of

what purpose the spaces of the city, especially interior spaces, were to play within

individuals' lives, and how they were to function. While the pavilion exemplifies high

modernist design, the questions it addresses regarding the reconceptualization of space were

not questions solely reserved for high design. Rather, it reflects the engagement with all

interior spaces that Van der Rohe and the *Bauhaus*, which he led in its later years,

participated in. The majority of their focus was, in fact, on the reconfiguration of everyday

spaces.

  *Das Staatliche Bauhaus*, often simply referred to as *Bauhaus*, was a school of design

at the forefront of a movement called *Das Neue Bauen*, which collectively sought to radically

reform architecture and living spaces. They advocated for the creation of spaces that were

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[3]Eric Weitz discusses the importance and change of architecture in his work, along with giving a good historical overview of the development of the Weimar Republic, in Chapter Two and Chapter Five: Weitz, Eric. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

sleek, simple, and based on rational principles of use of space. Following the aspiration to combine form and function, *Das Neue Bauen*, often synonymous with minimalism and modernism in the context of design, focused on streamlining interior spaces, stripping them of any excess. They also pushed for the increased use of glass, both in larger windows and glass doors, as a means of opening up spaces and removing visual boundaries between interior spaces themselves, and between interior and exterior spaces.

While modernism's early interest in de-ornamentation was primarily motivated by aesthetic preferences, during the Weimar Republic, ideas advocating sleeker, smaller spaces were not only aesthetic desires—they were also grounded in social reality. Much as *Bauhaus* founder Walter Gropius noted, the change they advocated was motivated by a realization of financial and social need.[4] A lack of space within the city, and a lack of a stable economy, made ornamentation impractical for most. The move towards simpler spaces thus became a social necessity. Furthermore, as I will argue in the context of the home in Chapter 1, the anti-ornamentation discourse taking place during these years can be read as participating in a discourse regarding the memory and trauma associated with World War I. More specifically, the desire to remove any excess décor from space simultaneously expresses a desire to remove the possibility of memory attachment from interior spaces.

As historian Peter Gay discusses in *Weimar Culture: The Insider as Outsider*, the culture of the Weimar Republic was one deeply marred by trauma, which he argues led to a willingness to accept the need to sever ties with the past in order to survive the current

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[4]Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. 1968. New York: Norton, 2001, 100.

circumstances.[5] It was an era of intense social and cultural transformation, and as a result, the spaces of the city were also undergoing rapid change in use and function. Open to "discard[ing] time-honored ideas and institutions," individuals were willing to accept changes in the configuration of space as a prerequisite for participating in the urban existence.[6]

In particular, the interior spaces examined in this dissertation—the home, the office, and the café—were, especially in the context of Berlin, drastically reconfigured, and they departed from their traditional uses maintained even a few years prior. The home, long tied to images of a bucolic family estate, was replaced with notions of sparsely furnished rented rooms or small, dark apartments in the city. Due to the population influx in Berlin during these years, which led to a housing shortage, many individuals found themselves redefining home as a life lived in rented rooms within other people's homes. Such situations further problematized notions previously associated with the home, such as those regarding privacy and comfort. These shifts were particularly significant for women. For the older generation of women, opening up their previously private bourgeois home to renters altered their position in and perception of their space. For younger women who had come to the city in search of employment, living in these rented spaces stood in stark contrast to the traditional idea of women's roles as dwelling and working in the home. These younger women were not only then faced with a change in their conception of the home, but also a change in where they performed their work, namely, the white-collar office. The space of the office was both being modernized aesthetically through renovations or new construction, and was radically

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[5]Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. 1968. New York: Norton, 2001.

[6]Gay, Peter. *Weimar Culture*, vii.

reconfigured through the addition of an entire segment of the workforce that had not previously been a part of the space: female white-collar employees. Transitioning from an almost entirely male workforce prior to the war, the Weimar Republic witnessed a sharp rise in female white-collar employment, which changed the dynamics within the space of the office. Likewise, cafés, long the exclusive domain of men, were suddenly being frequented in large numbers by single, young women, embodiments of *die Neue Frau*, which led to a shift in how these spaces were constructed along gender lines. Cafés became a space of refuge from the cramped homes that individuals inhabited, providing a form of comfort no longer found within the modern home.

Seen in this way, the culture of Weimar was one that was deeply invested in questions of space and gender, with many of the changing social, cultural, and economic developments playing out on a spatial register. Interior space was constantly being redefined and modified, with these changes affecting women in particular. Understanding that space is never neutral, but rather always ideologically charged, questions arising from these shifts in the design of interior space become questions regarding the subjective experience of modernism. Given the importance that interior space held, it is then not surprising to find these themes regarding the interplay between subject and space reflected in the literature produced during this period, in which protagonists struggle to redefine themselves and their roles within these spaces.

Despite the role that interior space played in the construction of Weimar culture and its literature, very little research has been done that reads interior space in literature through the lens of spatial analysis, and it is here that this dissertation aims to contribute to scholarship. Focusing on novels written during the late Weimar Republic (1929-1933), which

portray protagonists, especially female protagonists, negotiating modern urban life and self-identity within these redesigned interior spaces, I aim to illuminate the complex relationship between built space and lived experience. Reading interior spaces as the sites in which questions regarding gender, power, privacy, and agency are renegotiated, I argue that the modern interior spaces of the city are produced by, and in turn produce, individuals, especially women, who are often marginalized and limited in their ability to be active agents within the spaces they inhabit.

Proposing a more nuanced understanding that incorporates interior spaces, rather than focusing on the more traditional, exteriority-based theorization of the city, this project asserts that interior spaces are of greater importance to the construction and understanding of the culture and life of the Weimar era, and of the literary texts produced, than has previously been acknowledged. Furthermore, by moving away from an androcentric theorization of the space of the city, a focus on interior spaces is particularly relevant to the understanding of women's experiences, as these spaces—especially the home—have traditionally been the spaces of female power. Changes in the configuration of interior spaces are thus more likely to have an impact upon women, as it displaces and problematizes their sites of agency. By introducing a more inclusive, gender-based approach to examining how interior spaces affect individuals, this research asserts that Weimar literature is far more in dialogue with interior spaces, and the underlying modernist principles regarding space, than has yet been theorized, and that internal space needs to be understood as a central factor in the creation of city dynamics.

Privileging space as a category of analysis, through close readings of multiple popular novels, as will be detailed in the chapter summaries below, this dissertation examines three key interior sites—the home, the office, and the café—and shows these spaces to be sites in which gender and power are renegotiated. Specifically, I argue that the change in the configuration of the home leads to a blurring of spatial, visual, and aural boundaries, which results in a loss of privacy, loss of ability to imbue these spaces with memory, and loss of the idea of the home as a space of refuge from the exterior world. In regard to the office, I show how the space of the office paradoxically both embraces modernist design ideals and yet remains a thoroughly anti-modern space, which reduces women in the office to the role of décor, thereby undermining their career aspirations. And lastly, examining the space of cafés, I demonstrate how the changes in the home force a displacement of the traditional functions of the home onto other previously more public interior spaces, such as cafés. These then become spaces in which privacy and agency are further renegotiated.

By examining the representation of these spaces in literature, we gain a better understanding of the ideology embedded in the production of these spaces and at the same time illuminate the subjective nature of how we experience space. Our built environment shapes our social experiences, and by bringing attention to interior space, this project demonstrates the interconnected nature of spaces and the necessity of including interior space into a theorization of the city.

<u>The Space of the City: Berlin</u>

In reading interior space within popular novels, and investigating their changes in conceptualization and use in the context of Weimar Germany, I have chosen to focus in large part on interior spaces within the city of Berlin. This choice is grounded in the centrality of Berlin as the site of urban modernity. As historian Eric Weitz surmised: "Weimar was Berlin, Berlin Weimar."[7] Berlin represents all that was modern and en vogue during this period and is the site in which questions regarding changes in the use of space reached their zenith, thereby lending itself well to a spatial analysis. In Weimar Germany, no other city came close to competing with the size, prominence, and vivacity exhibited in Berlin. It was *the* site of modern urban life within Germany. To inhabit interior spaces in Berlin during the Weimar Republic was to engage in new experiences with and within material space.

Unlike the other major cities of Europe, which had long been established and thereby had long standing traditions regarding the configuration and use of interior space, spaces in Berlin were perhaps more open to change, not only due to the consequences brought on by the end of World War I, but arguably due it its young age as well. Only at the beginning of the century had Berlin's growth begun to shape it into a city worthy of comparison with other leading European capitals, making urban life a relatively new concept within Germany. Growing from a modest size of around 800,000 in 1880, within a span of 50 years the population skyrocketed to nearly 4 million inhabitants, in part due to the Greater Berlin Act of 1920, which incorporated surrounding towns into the city and made Berlin the third largest city in the world at that time, surpassed in size only by London and New York.

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[7]Weitz, Eric. *Weimar Germany*, 41.

Almost overnight, Berlin became the epicenter of modern German culture, attracting droves of individuals, mostly young, some single, some married, some ravaged by the war, all desperate to escape the provincialism of the rest of the country. They came to Berlin in search of employment and the dream of a more modern life. The influx of individuals was as varied as the city itself, from laborers to artists to young, unmarried woman looking for employment and independence. Having gained legal equality in 1919 with the signing of the Weimar constitution, women were able to pursue jobs previously closed to them and, even if they did not overtly desire independence, sheer need made employment necessary following the war. Accordingly, secretarial employment rose drastically during these years, with some scholars estimating a five-fold rise between the beginning and ending years of the Weimar Republic[8].

This New Woman, the *Neue Frau*, was both a cultural construction and a reality. The image of the *Neue Frau*—defined as a sporty, sleek, independent, young woman—can be understood as modernism's aestheticization of the female body. As with the architectural design ideals, which stressed lack and simple lines, so too was the *Neue Frau* conceived of as a woman lacking traditional curves and "ornamentation," which were replaced with a boyish, straight frame, and simple bob hairstyle. This image of the modern woman was envisioned as the model of a woman able to partake in the modern city experience. In this way, the term was both an idealized version of reality and at the same time a way of linguistically capturing the real changes taking place both in women's fashion and in acceptable social behaviors.

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[8]Consensus data did not track employment data based on gender until the late 1920s, making it impossible to precisely track the rise in white-collar female employment in the early and mid-years of the Weimar Republic. For a history of female white-collar employment, see: Frevert, Ute. F*rauen-Geschichte zwischen Bürgerlicher Verbesserung und Neuer Weiblichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp, 1986.

Women in Weimar Berlin became as involved in the social scene as men were, frequenting spaces that had previously not been open to them. As German scholar Katie Sutton notes, "the New Woman was not merely a media myth, but a social reality . . . She existed in the office and factory. . . just as surely as in café, cabaret and film."[9] Yet as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the *Neue Frau*, despite having gained legal equality and access to these modern sites, often finds herself in spaces that disallow agency and set her apart as other. Changes in space dis-place women, forcing them to renegotiate their altered roles within these spaces, as traditional roles no longer apply. Clearly, the interior space of the city was changing—and had changed—from the Berlin of only a few decades prior.

Theorization of the City: Scholarship

Understanding these shifts that were taking place during the Weimar era, it is not surprising that scholarship embraces an investigation into the dynamics of urban existence. Yet in surveying the scholarship concerning itself with space and the city, the focus of scholarly investigations has almost exclusively been on questions regarding interactions with the spaces of the *exterior* city—the wide streets, the tall buildings, the advertisements, the crowds and noise, the city as a landscape—and not on the *interior* spaces—the homes, offices, and cafés. Janet Ward, for example, in *Weimar Visual Surfaces*, brilliantly explores the visuality of Berlin and what she deems the growing façadeism of the time, in which the

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[9]Sutton, Katie. *The Masculine Woman In Weimar Germany*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013, 6.

surface becomes the primary way through which individuals experience the city.[10] Likewise,

Sabine Hake's work *Topographies of Class* explores the connection between Berlin

architecture and mass society in order to illuminate the way in which the city functions in the

urban imagination. While this research has certainly been fruitful, the lack of inquiry into

interior spaces is surprising, given the historical evidence supporting their importance as

spaces perceived as equally new to their inhabitants due to the redesign, spatially and

socially, that they underwent.[11]

Matthew Taunton argues in his work *Fictions of the City* that this research trend that

privileges the exterior can in large part be attributed to the lasting influence of cultural critic

Walter Benjamin.[12] Still considered one of the most important critical theorists of the

twentieth century, Benjamin's writings on Berlin during the Weimar Republic largely focus

on the exterior experience and thus, argues Taunton, set the tone for the subsequent direction

of research.[13] Furthermore, Benjamin's theorization of the city privileges an androcentric

understanding of city life, which further influenced the direction of scholarship, often at the

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[10]Ward, Janet. *Weimar Visual Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Berlin*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

[11]Other excellent research pertaining to the exterior city would for instance include discussions regarding distancing mechanisms employed to cope with the chaos of the city. See: Lethen, Helmut. *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. See also: Fritzsche, Peter. "Landscape of Danger, Landscape of Design: Crisis and Modernism in Weimar Germany." *Dancing on the Volcano:Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*. Kniesche, Thomas, and Stephen Brockmann, eds. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994, 29-46, for a discussion on the continuous building and rebuilding of the city.

[12]Taunton, Matthew. *Fictions of the City: Class, Culture and Mass Housing in London and Paris*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[13]Examples would be Benjamin's *Das Passagenwerk* and *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*.

expense of a more complete, nuanced understanding of the role of gender and space within the context of the city.

Along with Benjamin's focus on the exterior, a rediscovery of Franz Hessel's writings, one of Benjamin's close acquaintances, in the last decade has further fueled the interest in the privileging of the experience of the city from the point of view of the street, specifically as it relates to the *flanêur*.[14] The image of the *flanêur*, an individual (gendered male) who casually strolls the city, observing society from the outside, has spurred much research as a topic in and of itself. Anke Gleber's work *The Art of Taking a Walk* is an example of this renewed interested on the concept of the *flanêur*.[15]

In recent years, scholarship has however begun to more purposefully turn towards investigations of the role of women within urban space, such as the work done by Patrice Petro in *Joyless Streets*, which investigates notions of spectatorship in regard to Weimar film and argues for an incorporation of the female gaze in understanding the role of the observer.[16] Likewise, drawing from scholars from many disciplines, the anthology *Women in the Metropolis* is a collection of works aiming to illuminate women's experiences of modernity within the city in regard to mass culture and changing fashions.[17] Yet scholarship,

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[14]Hessel, Franz. *Spazieren in Berlin*. 1929. Berlin: Berliner Taschenburg Verlag, 2012. For more on Hessel as flanêur, see: Neumeyer, Harald. *Der Flaneur: Konzeptionen der Moderne*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999.

[15]Gleber, Anke. *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

[16]Petro, Patrice. *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

[17]Ankum, Katharina von, ed. *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

while beginning to incorporate questions of gender, continues to largely focus on a thematization as it relates to exterior spaces.[18]

While this focus on the exterior has certainly been productive, a theorization of urban life that excludes the interior is strikingly incomplete. It is therefore my hope that by focusing attention on the urban interior, this research will add to the complexity of our theorization of urban space and will add to our understanding of the literature produced during this time period. Reading interior space in literature, both through a historical lens as well as through a lens of spatial theory, allows for an examination of the production of space and its consequences as it takes place in a historically specific moment in Germany's history. As will be discussed in each chapter, each space will be read both through the lens of specific spatial theories, including those of Walter Benjamin and Marc Augé. Yet all chapters, and the understanding of space put forth in this work, draw on theories of the production of space as posited by Henri Lefebvre in his work, which understands space as a product consisting both of material reality and shaped by social interactions. Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space* (1974), was the first to theorize space as both setting and actor and has given us the terminology to think about space as a complex social construction that is constantly produced and reproduced through the interactions with and within that space. Space then not only houses individuals but affects spatial practices and perceptions. Using these ideas will help to understand the complexity involved in reading space and being able to parse out the many factors that all contribute to the production of space.

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[18]For other works, see for example: Rowe, Dorothy. *Representing Berlin: sexuality and the city in Imperial and Weimar Germany.* Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2003 for a discussion of the sexualized landscape and the role women played in the formation of the urban image of the city. Likewise, *Women in Weimar Fashion* explores the connection between fashion and women's self-projection within city life. Ganeva, Mila. *Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008.

Chapter Divisions

In investigating space in this dissertation, the decision was made to arrange the chapters spatially, each focusing on a different interior space, beginning with the home, then the office, and finally the café. Arranging the chapters spatially lends itself to a more methodical close reading of selected texts and, at the same time, is better suited to establish broader patterns that are applicable to the literature of the period as a whole.

Chapter 1 focuses on the domestic interior and investigates the reconfiguring of the home in Erich Kästner's *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (1931)*, Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931), and Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun*? (1932). In looking at these works, I argue that we see three distinct patterns emerge in the interactions within domestic spaces. The chapter begins by identifying a loss of ability to maintain spatial and aural boundaries within the home, which prevents the space from being understood as separate from other spaces. This inability to sustain boundaries between the interior space of one's home, as compared with one's neighbors, leads to a loss of privacy in and control over the space. My research further argues that the home is defined by a void, lacking all sites of memory, as a reaction to past trauma, in which individuals are not willing to inscribe themselves onto the space. This lack within the home leads to a blurring between interior and exterior space, and thereby undermines the home's ability to serve as a space of refuge from the exterior city.

Chapter 2 focuses on the space of the office and investigates the role of female white-collar employees within the space. Through a close reading of Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (1930) and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi* (1932), I argue that the

modern office is an inherently anti-modern space, which devalues the work of white-collar women and instead relegates them to the role of décor within the office. Arguing against a narrative that often explains women's historical exit from the workforce after only a few years of employment as one based on their desire to marry, this chapter aims to illustrate the role that the spatial configuration of the office had in disincentivizing their continued employment.

Chapter 3 turns towards an examination of the space of cafés and returns to close readings of Erich Kästner's *Fabian* and Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*, as well as the addition of Irmgard Keun's *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* (1931). Having asserted in the first chapter that the home no longer serves as the site of privacy and comfort, I assert that we see these functions displaced onto the space of the café. This chapter also argues that gender and educational status are greater determinants in an individual's ability to produce the space of the café than has heretofore been theorized. Accounting for socioeconomic and educational disparities helps explain why the café is at times constructed as a space that silences individuals and does not allow them to be active participants within the space.

All together, this dissertation aims to reassert the centrality and importance of reading interior space as spaces that significantly contribute to the theorization of the city. Understanding the interplay between these sites, and how changes in one affect another, links this research to that done on exterior space, by showing how changes in the interior will change individuals' interactions in exterior spaces as well.

In asserting the centrality of interior design to private life, my research aims to broaden our understanding of the role that interior spaces play in subject formation and how it pertains to city dwellers' ability to cope with life in a metropolis, both specifically in Weimar Berlin and also more broadly across time and countries. By pursuing an inquiry into frequently overlooked but highly relevant interior spaces, I demonstrate the importance and usefulness of coming to understand interior spaces as a valuable category of analysis in the field of literature.

CHAPTER 1: THE SPACE OF THE HOME

Introduction

> Das Zuhause ist ein modernes, möbliertes Zimmer, winziger Käfig—vom Bett aus konnte man die Wäsche aus dem Schrank nehmen. Das Zuhause ist ein schlecht zu heizender, altmodischer Raum, viel zu voll oder viel zu leer, ohne jede Gemütlichkeit, mit häßlichen Lampen.[19]

It is with this quote that Gabriele Tergit, a successful journalist for the *Berliner Tageblatt*

begins one of her many *Reportagen*. Categorized under the heading "Berlin 1920–1930," her

report describes what the "modern" homes of Berlin were like: tiny cages, furnished, poorly

heated, too empty or too full, and utterly unwelcoming. In her estimation, the "Zuhause," the

modern home, had become little more than a furnished, outdated rented room. The space she

describes does not conjure up images of warmth or coziness, but rather, it is purely

functional. Yet these homes that she describes are not homes of the poor, as one might first

assume based on the bleak portrayal given. Rather, when Tergit gives an account of the

"Zuhause," she is including herself and her home in the image. These unwelcoming spaces

are the homes in which journalists, artists, and most young individuals found themselves

residing at one point or another during their Berlin existence. By describing the "Zuhause" in

this manner in her *Reportage*, Tergit succinctly captures the radical shifts that the home had

undergone in Weimar Germany. During this era, the home had transformed from a

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[19]Tergit, Gabriele. *Atem einer anderen Welt: Berliner Reportagen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994, 87.

nineteenth-century ideal of a cozy, bucolic space filled with lavish furnishings to a modern

configuration in which the home, even among the educated, was little more than a cold, badly

furnished room.

Tergit's observations about the home and the change in housing culture in general are

also echoed in the literature of the Weimar Republic. For example, in Irmgard Keun's novel

*Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), a novel discussed in Chapter 3, the protagonist, Doris,

spends much of her time trying to navigate the housing market of Berlin, often finding

herself having to sleep on acquaintances' sofas due to a lack of better options and financial

hardship.[20] In Christa Anita Brück's novel *Angestellte hinter Schreibmaschinen* (1930), a

novel discussed in Chapter 2, we are told of individuals who live in such close quarters that

conversations can no longer be deemed private, as everyone is privy to any information

spoken louder than a whisper.[21] In Gabriele Tergit's novel *Käsebier erobert den*

*Kurfürstendamm* (1931), a novel that will be discussed in this chapter, one of the many

subplots of the novel revolves around the building of a new apartment complex. Many

disagreements arise in the planning phase because those funding the project see the smaller

apartments as an affront to their idea of how the home should be conceived and fear that their

design signals a societal descent towards "Proletarierwohnungen."[22] And in Erich Kästner's

novel *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (1931), a novel that will be the central focus

of this chapter, we are told of a moment in which the protagonist, Fabian, sits in his rented

room after reading a letter from his mother and wonders:

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[20]Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. 1932. Berlin: List Verlag, 2008.

[21]Brück, Christa Anita. *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1930.

[22]Tergit, Gabriele. *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*. 1931. Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2004, 138.

Warum saß er hier in dem fremden, gottverlassenen Zimmer, bei der Witwe Hohlfeld, die das vermieten früher nicht nötig gehabt hatte? Warum saß er nicht zu Hause, bei seiner Mutter? Was hatte er hier in dieser Stadt, in diesem verrücktgewordenen Steinbaukasten zu suchen? . . . Den Untergang Europas konnte er auch dort abwarten, wo er geboren worden war.[23]

These musings about his living situation in many ways bring together elements that will be at the heart of the questions posed in this chapter. They address the relationship between a precarious living situation (his "gottverlassenes Zimmer", his godforsaken room) and a broader sense of social and economic uncertainty ("den Untergang Europas", the downfall of Europe). To him, it is not a question of *if*, but rather *when*, Europe once again collapses, and this perspective highlights the role of trauma and memory in one's perception of domestic space, in which individuals read their current situation through the lens of the past war.

This foregrounding of the home as a spatial site of relevance in the literature of the late Weimar Republic (1929–1933) can be seen as a reflection of actual historical alterations in the configurations of domestic space that were taking place during this period. These changes in the conception and spatial reality of the home during these years were a consequence of economic and social changes, in which, following the first World War, individuals moved to cities, especially to Berlin, in unprecedented numbers. This population shift led to housing shortages and forced individuals into living spaces that they previously would not have occupied, such as rented rooms within other people's apartments, for prolonged periods of time, often years. Uncertain employment kept them living in smaller, simpler spaces, as they were unsure of what the future would hold. This uncertainty led to a

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[23]Kästner, Erich. *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*. 1931. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009, 46.

mentality that necessitated preparing for the worst by staying as mobile as possible, ready to move at any given moment. Furthermore, concurrent with shifts in employment patterns, as will be discussed in Chapter 2 regarding female white-collar employment, Berlin witnessed a sharp rise in the number of young, unmarried women living on their own without familial support for the first time in Germany's history. These changes in living conditions, along with the legacy of trauma that permeated all aspects of life in the aftermath of the war and the economic instability that characterized the Weimar Republic, became defining aspects of life in Weimar Berlin. The home became the space in which these changes were addressed and played out. An investigation into the space of the home as portrayed in the literature of this period is thus historically warranted.

Scholarship's theorization of urban life during this period most often places the emphasis on questions as they relate to the changes in the experience of the exterior city, with very little scholarship existing that places the home at the center of inquiry. Yet, based on the historical and cultural shifts taking place, and the frequency with which homes are problematized in literature, the lack of inquiry into the space of the home appears to be an oversight warranting rectification. The research in this chapter therefore intends to contribute to literary scholarship by investigating how the space of the home was materially, functionally, and emotionally reconceptualized, and by examining what effect this change had on its inhabitants.

Through close readings, the aim of this chapter is threefold. First, I will show how the move towards living in rented rooms leads to a loss of privacy and a loss of control within the home, as will be discussed in the context of Kästner's *Fabian* and Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* (1932). Second, I will discuss the role of décor as sites of memory and

suggest that the move towards minimalism in design is a psychological response to past trauma. This phenomenon will be illustrated through readings of Kästner's *Fabian* and Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*. And lastly, I will argue that the lack of décor, as discussed in the works above, leads to a blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior spaces. This blurring effectively renders the space of the home a liminal space, as defined by Walter Benjamin as a space in which boundaries are constantly in flux and unstable. The overarching argument of this chapter, then, is that changes in the configuration of homes lead to new patterns of interaction within these spaces, thus causing a radical break with past conceptions of the role of the home. Furthermore, through the change in perceived function, homes fail to act as spaces of refuge from the exterior world.[24] As the modern home ceases to resemble traditional homes physically, and as individual perceptions of domestic space undergo changes as a result of trauma, I argue that the home becomes a contested space in which questions regarding safety, comfort, and privacy are played out.

Through a closer examination of domestic interior space, this chapter then aims to contribute to this project as a whole, by developing a more inclusive, complete picture of how interior spaces shape and are shaped by their inhabitants. Furthermore, through an investigation of the home, I hope to illustrate the interconnected nature of interior spaces by showing how a change in the production of one space (e.g., the home) has the potential to change the way that other spaces (e.g., the café) are produced, and this point will be picked up again in the third chapter.

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[24]The idea of the historical functions of the home in this context refer to the roles that they played immediately prior to this reconfiguration. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the role of the home throughout history has varied greatly, but for the purpose of conceptualizing the home here, only a more narrow timeframe and function will considered.

Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the literary works that thematize the city and urban experience of the Weimar era. The dominant narrative regarding the literature produced during these years often looks towards the overwhelming nature of the urban experience as the key source of malaise that characterizes this period. This includes the size and chaos of the metropolis, or the brightness of advertising and noise with which one was confronted. My research, however, asserts that an investigation into the role of the home will allow for a more complete understanding of the processes taking place in literature and disallow a reading that would place the source of distress on any one factor, instead pointing towards recognizing a complex interplay of factors at work. This chapter then underscores the idea that our understanding of urban life, both within the context of Weimar Berlin literature, and as a topic in and of itself, will not be complete without a problematization of the home.

To this end, I will begin by tracing the history and development of the home, with a focus on the architectural changes taking place during this period, in order to provide the historical context for a reading of the domestic interior in literature. Following this, I will provide a brief overview of the spatial theories that will be used in this chapter. And finally, we will turn to a close reading of the novels detailed below.

Erich Kästner's *Fabian* will be the main novel focused upon in this chapter, along with an emphasis on Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm,* and Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun?*. These works were selected for this chapter for a variety of reasons. It was the unique interaction with domestic space depicted in Kästner's *Fabian* that first inspired this project, and as such, this text became the cornerstone of this first chapter. In selecting texts to further support and add complexity to the argument, Tergit's novel *Käsebier*

*erobert den Kurfürstendamm* emerged as the other primary focus because of Tergit's extraordinary ability to capture the essence of the time in a more depersonalized manner. Tergit's approach lends validity to the argument that the themes discussed in this chapter are broader trends that were witnessed by many and not just an individual's dilemma. Tergit, who was an established and well-respected journalist in Berlin already prior to the publication of her first novel, attained instant success with *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm,* published in 1931. Her novel differs from Fabian's single protagonist storyline insofar as *Käsebier* is a story that has many small, intersecting plots and no true protagonist. Rather, it focuses on Berlin society and the world of journalism and marketing itself. However, the novels' similarities far outweigh their differences.

Commonalities between *Fabian* and *Käsebier* include their focus on daily life and a writing style often associated with the *Neue Sachlichkeit,* which aimed to portray life in as neutral, accurate terms as possible, eschewing dramatic plots for a focus on what was felt to be "real". This style, which foregrounds the everyday, lends itself well to investigations of the home. The characters in the novels are also from similar backgrounds: often well-educated and from bourgeois backgrounds but struggling with uncertain employment due to the economic crisis. The characters focused on in this chapter are all young, with most of them being in their late twenties or early thirties. The decision was made to only focus on this younger age group because members of the older generation had grown up prior to the war and were accustomed to a certain standard of living in their adulthood that had to change during the Weimar period. They therefore had drastically different experiences of space than those who had come of age during the war and had never experienced adult life in any other context. While a look at the older generation would certainly also warrant investigation, this

was not possible within the constraints of this chapter, and so the decision was made to only focus on the younger generation. Moreover, in order to help limit possible changes in depictions that could be attributed to changing trends, it was necessary to limit novels to a relatively short timeframe, which made it advantageous that both *Fabian* and *Käsebier* were published in the same year. Adding Tergit to the reading also provides a female perspective to the chapter and helps show that these depictions are not based on the gender of the author, as overlap is seen between both works regardless of gender.

Because of the strong link between the space of the home and the space of the café, these texts will also reappear in Chapter 3 in order to more convincingly demonstrate the changes in behavior that occur across different spaces. Kästner and Tergit were also among the most popular authors of the Weimar Republic, and thus, in choosing to focus on works that were well received and widely read novels at the time, I hope to add validity to the argument that the themes within these novels found resonance within the readership and can thus be read as relatively *wahrheitsgetreu* depictions of the times. In order to strengthen the argument in the first section on privacy, I will also present a close reading of a scene in Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* both for the additional insight it is able to provide and because the novel as a whole fits both thematically and chronologically into the project.

Historical Background: the Modern Home

The history of domestic life is in many ways a history of human life, spanning time and cultures, and it is a field of research in its own right. However, for the purpose of this chapter, and within the German context specifically, the notion of the home as we have come

to view it can be seen as a creation of the nineteenth century. The concept of the home as the

domicile of the nuclear family emerged as a result of the industrial revolution, which

drastically reconfigured individuals' roles within the family. With changing roles came

changes in the use of the home as well. Prior to the industrial revolution, places of work and

home were frequently contained in the same space. Yet, with the move away from small

business and towards industrialization, men's place of work migrated out of the home and

into a separate sphere no longer connected to the home. This shift transformed the home into

a space imbued with the sole task of sheltering and nourishing the family. By separating the

space of employment from the space of the home, the home also became a more gendered

sphere that was relegated to the domain of women. Separated from the spaces of men's work,

the home became the site of women's work, the space for which they were most often

responsible, in terms of upkeep, if not in terms of control. With this change, the home also

took on new importance as a space that was seen as a reflection of the family and the family's

status.

Architectural theorist Hilde Heynen notes that because tasks that were previously

completed at home in the private sphere were now carried out in the public sphere, "a whole

set of ideas developed in reaction to the division between work and home." These ideas

created an ideology that "prescribed rather precise (be it changing) norms regarding the

essential requirements of family life, the needs of children, the proper ways of arranging

foods, clothes and furniture, . . . and the need for cleanliness and hygiene."[25] Historian

Nancy Reagin reaffirms this idea in her work *Sweeping the German Nation*, in which she

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[25]Heynen, Hilde and Gülsüm Baydar, eds. *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 7.

argues that the home, no longer simply the shelter for an extended family, became an indicator of status and of learning, a place in which privacy was guarded, and proper contact with the outer world was taught, and thus, a place in which order and cleanliness were needed as markers of status.[26]

Because the home emerged as a status symbol, and as such, a means through which one could evaluate others, it also became critical to delineate private and public spaces in order to protect oneself from constant scrutiny. Accordingly, most of the home was designated as private, only ever to be seen and used by the family. In this way, the family guarded its privacy and all activities associated with private life, with only a limited number of rooms open to the viewing gaze of non-familial guests. By limiting access only to certain rooms, often the parlor or the library, these spaces were more effectively controlled. The décor of these rooms stood in as placeholders, whispering truths about their owners—about their status, their tastes, and their politics. While it was important not to exaggerate one's standing, the proper décor was meant to be elaborate and expensive, showcasing one's wealth (or confirming one's lack thereof). The décor spoke for and of the owner.

Accordingly, beginning in the late nineteenth century, publications began to emerge that focused on educating individuals on matters of proper taste and décor within the home. The art history work *Imagined Interiors* notes that "[t]he 1870s and 1880s witnessed a significant increase in prescriptive texts dedicated to informing readers in what to purchase and how to arrange the home. . . . The interior came to be represented as a primary area of

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[26]Reagin, Nancy. *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870–1945.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

aesthetic and moral concern."[27] The style, called the *Gründerzeit Stil*, was one of excess and

elaborate décor, with layers of fabric, paintings and ornate furniture praised as the ideal, as is

evident in the photograph (Figure 1) below from 1905, which depicts a salon decorated in the

typical *Gründerzeit* manner.



Fig1: Salon der Gründerzeit (um 1905). Salon Wilhelm von Bodes in Charlottenburg. (Photograph)

As we see in the image, status could be showcased with intricately carved furniture,

as seen, for example, in the chair. Ornamentation was time-consuming to produce and was

therefore indicative of the fact that these pieces of furniture were painstaking to create, and

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[27]Aynsley, Jeremy, and Charlotte Grant, eds. *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance*. London: V&A Publishing, 2006, 195.

thus expensive. The heavy curtains and portraits were also very typical of the time, in that they both spoke of wealth and served as anchors of memory, forever capturing events, as in the above example, the childhood of their children. Décor was thus not only able to capture personal taste and the status of the inhabitants but also to serve as placeholders of memory. Objects like portraits, table settings, and knick-knacks told stories of years past, alluding to personal memories. Homes were there to showcase what one had, with the focus always on more—more lavish curtains, more figures, more intricately carved furniture—and never less.

By the early twentieth century, changes in fashion were slowly beginning to emerge, with the taste in décor beginning to move away from what was perceived as antiquated, stuffy models of décor and towards cleaner, but still decorative, forms. Designers turned towards geometry and studies of color and light in order to achieve these visions, as is shown in the sketch (Figure 2) below.
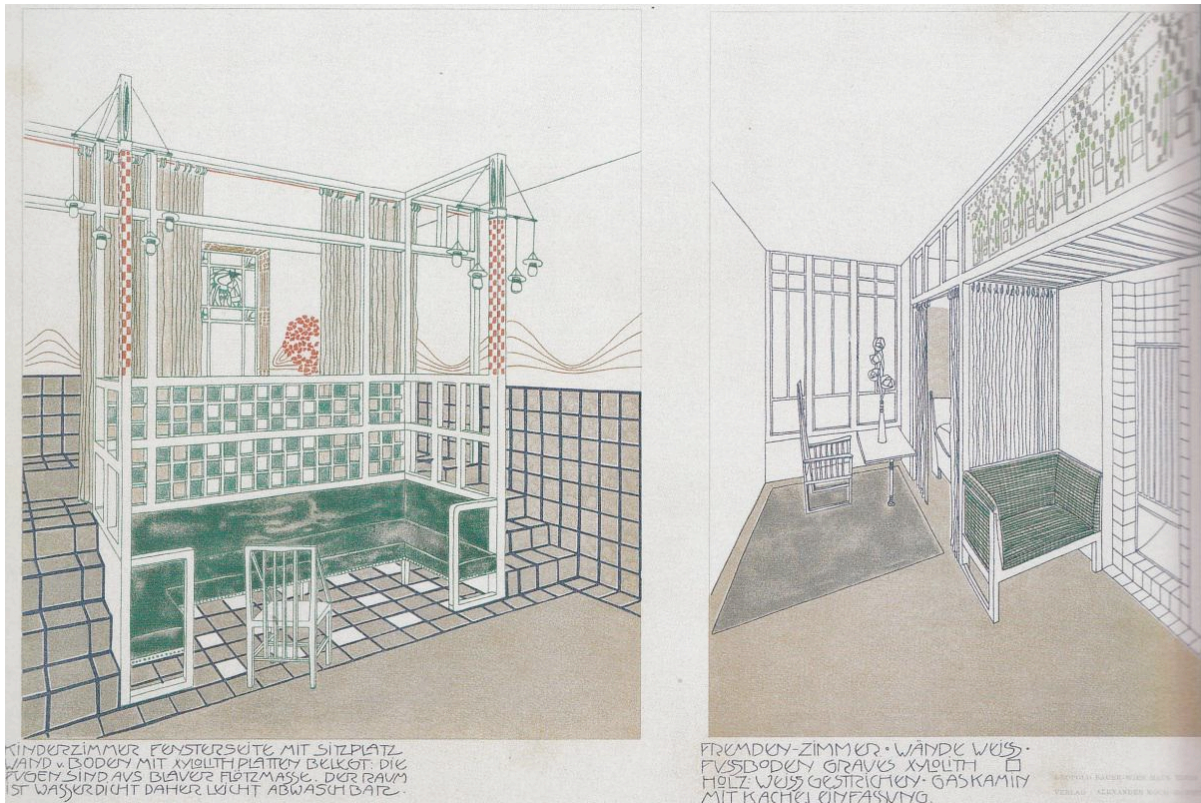
Fig2: Rendition of a Jugendstil living room. Sketch.

This new *Jugendstil* style aimed to create a more unified living space, opening up walls and simplifying color patters, as is seen in the image with the repetition of the color green. Yet, while designers were drawing up sketches such as the one above, few of their designs were actually being implemented, in large part due to the fact that their primary target was the middle and upper class, who still relished their ability to flaunt wealth and model their homes on the elaborate, decadent models to which they were accustomed. Thus, while many designers had already begun envisioning simpler interiors in the 1910s, few of these designs were actually implemented until the 1920s.

Yet the First World War changed the younger generation's way of thinking, making elaborate designs both impractical and unattractive to many. For many, the trauma of the war

made all ties with the past burdensome, and the focus became on living in the present,

modern moment. Erich Kästner's Fabian laments, "Was sollte ich bis dahin tun? Bücher

lesen? An meinem Charakter feilen? Geld verdienen? Ich saß in einem großen Wartesaal,

und der hieß Europa. . . . Und jetzt sitzen wir wieder im Wartesaal, und wieder heiße er

Europa! …Wir leben provisorisch."[28] In many ways, the anti-ornamentation discourse that

had begun among architects prior to the war was adopted and intensified, but within a new

context. Now, the stripping of ornamentation and the removal of décor were no longer solely

motivated by aesthetic concerns; they also hinted at underlying psychological motivations.

The move towards an aesthetic design that mandated the removal of bric-à-brac,

photographs, and other souvenirs, along with all furniture that reminded individuals of the

luxury once believed to be attainable, can be read as a drive to remove all sites of memory.

Even the term "souvenir" embodies this connection with memory, literally taken from the

French verb "to remember." Much as Fabian notes in the above quote, the uncertainty of the

future lingered in the minds of many, and they turned towards an understanding of life that

would have resonated with Fabian's remark, "wir leben provisorisch." This new makeshift

existence had no room for reminders of the past, nor did it allow for the accumulation of

possessions, as the homes of their parents' generation once had. The psychological trauma

caused by the war thus expressed itself, among other avenues, through architectural design

and through the ways in which individuals interacted with their spaces.

Following the end of the war, the 1920s thus became the decade in which modernist

design concepts met with a receptive audience. In search of employment and entertainment,

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[28]Kästner, Erich. *Fabian*, 62.

people flocked to cities, which led to a housing shortage that made simpler, smaller homes not only an idealized aesthetic vision, but also a practical necessity. In Berlin in particular, the housing shortage took many forms. On the one hand, there was a push towards building more streamlined, smaller living spaces, which were both easier and cheaper to build. On the other hand, there was also an attempt to aestheticize lack, even within old structures, and publications advocated for a redesign based on a purging of sentimental excess. Financially, excess was thus not only no longer a viable option for many, but lack was framed in a way as to become a sign of modernity rather than a sign of financial shortcomings. A 1927 ad for the *Werkbund* exhibit (Figure 3) in Stuttgart, featured below, is indicative of this shift.

Fig3: Poster for the Deutscher Werkbund Exhibit, 1927. Print.

The poster, entitled "wie wohnen?," shows an image of what would have been an

idealized parlor at the beginning of the century, complete with intricately carved columns,

chairs with curved, decorative legs and upholstered with ornate fabrics, tapestries covering

the table and floor, and the much-loathed scenery painting on the wall. Crossed out with a

blood-red X—evocative of wartime violence and blood—the question "wie wohnen?" (how

to live?) clearly implies that there is a correct answer, and that the *incorrect* answer is to follow a model like the one shown, which would have been the ideal of the younger generation's childhood.

In some ways, then, these sorts of campaigns were a brilliant way of demonizing a design style that individuals would no longer be able to attain even if it was hoped for. The connection between living spaces and the blood-red X also reinforces the idea that the answer to the question of "wie wohnen?" is tied to the experiences and aftermath of the war, and that how one chooses to live is predicated on what that X means to the individual. How one lives and interacts with domestic space is then a question of how much of an impact X—in other words, the war—had on one's own life.

Another aspect of the changes to which the home was subjected, at least in theory, was a move towards trying to create spaces that were "freed from traditional conceptions of space within the domestic interior" by "collapsing conventional distinctions between interior and exterior … [and challenging] conventional definitions of the interior and its boundaries."[29] Fascinatingly, this move towards a loss of boundaries is reflected in the literature as well, even when the buildings in question are not new constructions and when the individuals voice no interest in design. This shift attests to a further connection between design ideals and the underlying pulse of the time, as we will discuss later in the chapter. The overlap between design trends and their appearance in literature also suggests that the underlying source of these design concepts was psychologically motivated: that is, that these boundaries between the interior and exterior were already in flux in the minds of individuals,

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[29]Aynsley, Jeremy, and Charlotte Grant, eds. *Imagined Interiors*, 205.

and the designers simply gave expression to what was already taking place in everyday reality.

Following this minimalist trend, possessions were to be reduced to the bare minimum, because it was believed that "the removal of the superfluous will free man from oppression and immobilization through possessions."[30] Even in the wording, we can read the desire for the "removal of the superfluous" as a symptom of trauma. Items that are imbued with memory are also items that can be oppressive and can immobilize, and these two adjectives have strong ties to the post-war discourse surrounding ailments and disabilities. "Immobilized" evokes images of the war and the wounded and disabled men lining the streets of Berlin who were often missing the limbs that would allow them to be mobile. Removing the superfluous was thus a way of attempting to remove trauma from the spaces of the home.

Reinforcing this idea, Bruno Taut, one of the leading German designers of the era, stated in his work *Die Neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin* (1924) that all "überflüssige Kissen, Decken, Nippes, Vasen, Bildchen, Fächer, Haussegen, Sprüche" and similar décor should be removed from the home.[31] For him, it was not only that these items visually disturbed the space, but also that they are indicative of a too sentimental character.[32] Sentimentality was to be banished in favor of the rational inhabitant, who would live in a clean, rational, functional home, free from the irrational desire to try to possess or individualize a space. His focus on ridding the home of items most likely to be holders of

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[30]Heynen, Hilde and Gülsüm Baydar, eds. *Negotiating Domesticity*, 130.

[31]Taut, Bruno. *Die neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin*. Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1924, 61.

[32]Taut, Bruno. *Die neue Wohnung*, 87.

memory—knick-knacks and, above all, the photographs that were commonplace in the *Gründerzeit* style as depicted in the image above—is tied to his desire to rid the space of emotion. This keen insight, not only of connecting décor to memories, but also of understanding the emotional response that memories provoke, suggests a fear of emotion. Likewise, it acknowledges the fact that the emotions that would be provoked here are not positive emotions that one would desire to feel. By limiting memory, one could thus limit the extent of negative emotions. In an era when life was defined by uncertain employment and an unknown future, and continued to be marked by the effects of the war, emotions were a liability. This understanding of décor as a danger to emotional well-being will be pertinent to this chapter, as we will discuss in the close readings.

This idea of striving towards a depersonalized space is illustrated in the living room from 1925 depicted below, in which suggestions were given for how to simplify interior spaces even if one lived in an older home. The illustration presents before-and-after scenes of an old apartment remodeled by Taut.[33]

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[33]During this era, a distinction was not made between architect, interior designer, interior decorator, and furniture designer. Oftentimes, one individual would serve as all four or as a any combination of these.
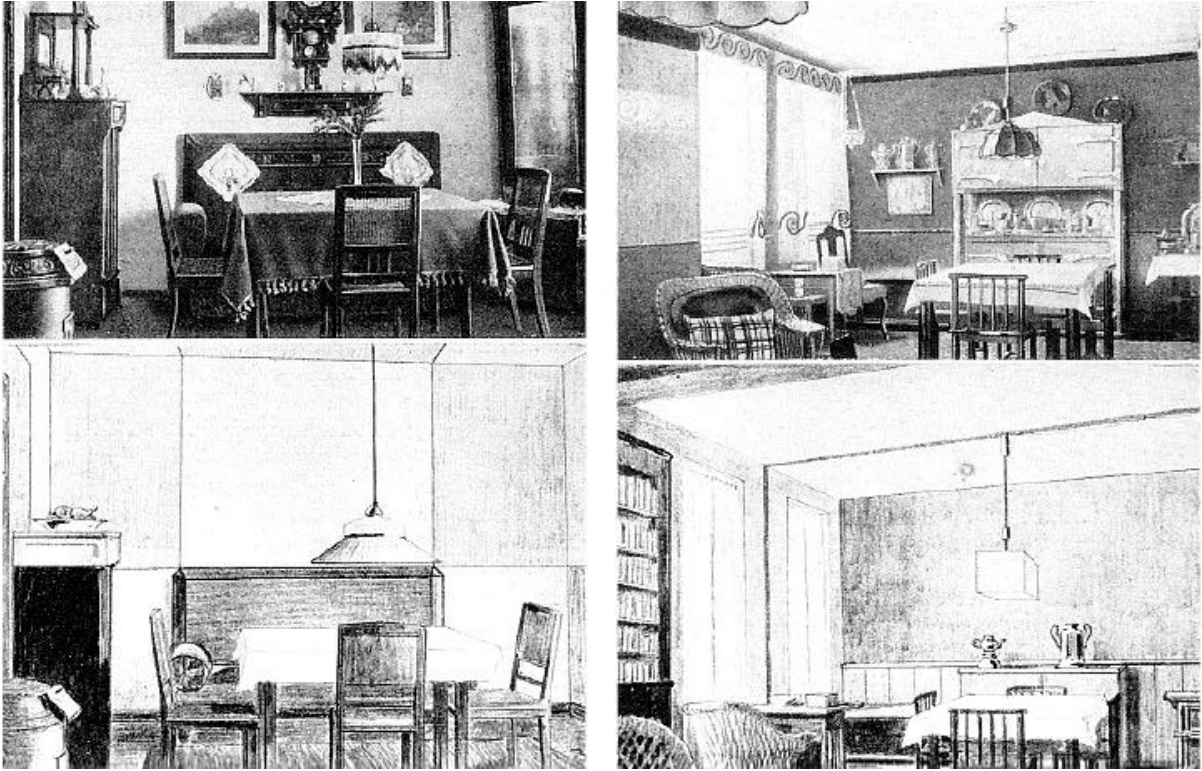
Fig4: Umgestaltung eines Wohnzimmers, from *Die Neue Wohnung*, p.56. Sketch.

With these before-and-after sketches, Taut highlights the need to reduce clutter, which for him included removing everything that previously hung on the walls, including the sentimental landscape artwork, as well as the decorative plates and the clock, which reminds of passing time and, as with the other decorative elements, is intricately tied to memory. As the sketches show, all ornamentation should be removed from the room, which includes going so far as to remove the decorative etching on the stove. Furthermore, Taut even advocates cutting apart the furniture, removing the hutch from the buffet for instance, in order to create cleaner lines, but also because Taut often cited a distrust of spaces in which one could hide, or store, things. Everything in the room was supposed to be open to be seen, and nothing was to be hidden away—no spaces in which one could store keepsakes or

memories. The removal of the curtains indicates that even the room itself was not supposed to be hidden, but rather, it was to be open and visible from the outside. Likewise, the outside was to be visible from the inside, and anything that could reinforce a sense of boundaries between the interior and exterior spaces was discouraged.

Illustrations such as the one depicted above were commonplace in Weimar culture, and without a doubt were known by the literary authors of the time. Question of changes in living conditions and questions of privacy and memory vis-à-vis décor were all intertwined, as is affirmed by German scholar Ines Lauffer her in work *Poetik des Privatraums*, in which she states that,

> die Entstehung der Großstadt und der Wandel des städtischen Zusammenlebens führte zu radikalen Veränderungen des Privatraums und des unmittelbaren Wohnumfelds, das von den Architekten der zwanziger Jahre als Bauaufgabe entdeckt und gestaltet wurde. Unzählige Publikationen, Mustersiedlungen und Ausstellungen widmeten sich dem Privatraum, generierten einen Wohndiskurs, dessen Aktualität und Bedeutsamkeit von den neusachlichen Autoren sehr wohl beachtet wurde.[34]

At its core, the discussion centered on the purported function of the home, with a reconceptualization taking place that moved from a desired luxury to desired minimalism. Yet, on a more basic level, this reconceptualization justified the desire to rid oneself of all aspects of the home that could contain memory. Alongside minimalist aspirations, there was also a devaluation of privacy, which can be read as a glamorization of an economic reality in which most individuals were either living in close quarters or in rented rooms, which did not, as will be discussed in this chapter, provide the level of privacy that the traditional bourgeois home did. Furthermore, by defining *Schönheit* in the minds of individuals, as Taut did, as

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[34]Lauffer, Ines. *Poetik des Privatraums: der architektonische Wohndiskurs in den Romanen der Neuen Sachlichkeit*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011, 13-14.

that which is revealed when "aus einer Wohnung nach strengster und rücksichtslosester Auswahl alles, aber auch alles, wenn nicht direkt zum Leben notwendig ist, herausfliegt, . . . [dann] stellt sich von selbst eine neue Schönheit ein," *Schönheit* becomes that which has effaced all memory.[35] Yet, as will be seen later in the chapter, it is often precisely these elements that give homes their comfortable, personalized feeling, and without them, homes become interchangeable and depersonalized and no longer function in the way that they were originally envisioned to function in the nineteenth century, as a place of refuge from the outside world.

In turning towards a reading of literature in this chapter, three aspects of these changes in the configuration and design of the home will be discussed: the loss of privacy, the connection between décor and memory, and the diminishing boundary between interior and exterior. Lauffer discusses the interplay between the changes that the concept of the home was undergoing and the literature produced during this era by stating:

> Ist es die Stärke der Architekten gewesen, neue Räume zu entwerfen, so ist es diejenige der Autoren, die in diesen Räumen beheimateten Subjekte in den Romanen zu imaginieren, neue Subjektkonstruktionen zu erproben und Protagonisten zu entwerfen, die mit den Räumen in einen Dialog treten und auf diese Weise am Wohndiskurs partizipieren.[36]

This idea of literature entering into a dialogue with the "Wohndiskurs" and the space of the home is at the heart of this chapter. However, unlike Lauffer, whose work focuses strictly on the materially grounded physical aspects of the rooms, I believe that understanding the

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[35]Taut, Bruno. *Die neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin*. Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1924, 31.

[36]Lauffer, Ines. *Poetik des Privatraums*, 14.

dialogue as one between the ideas surrounding the design and use of the home and the character's perceptions of their domestic spaces provides a more fruitful and nuanced reading of these texts. It is not my intention, then, to solely focus on the actuality of the space, but rather to examine how the spaces are perceived by and interacted with by the characters. This study then focuses less in solely reading for signs of physical design changes and instead focuses more on the way that space is produced by the characters, as well as how the characters, in turn, are produced by the spaces they inhabit.

Theoretical framework: Inscriptionality

To date, little attention has been paid to the importance of interior domestic spaces in the literature of the Weimar period. Only one work, *Poetik des Privatraums*, published in 2011 by Lauffer, is dedicated to the investigation of the interior. In this work, her first publication, Lauffer reaffirms the importance of the focus on interior space, stating that the authors of the 1920s turned their interest not towards a world dominated by "Schaufenstern, Straßenschluchten und Schlachthöfen," but rather towards one filled with "Schalter und Klosett, Nivea-Crème und Feldbett, kurz: Gegenstände des modernen, großstädtischen Alltags, die . . . ihren genuinen Ort nicht mehr draußen auf der Straße, sondern drinnen im Privatraum, im Wohnzimmer oder gar intimen Badezimmer hatten."[37] Unlike the work in this chapter however, Lauffer's focus on the domestic is not so much on the interplay between production of space and characters, as much as it is on a need to redeem the *Neue*

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[37]Lauffer, Ines. *Poetik des Privatraums*, 13.

*Sachlichkeit* movement, which she feels has been unduly devalued. She aims to incorporate

an understanding of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* into our modern understanding of the city. While

similar in vantage points, my research is not concerned with the reconceptualization of this

movement, but rather places its focus on a reevaluation of the importance of interior

domestic space in contributing to the dynamics involved in one's ability to participate in the

urban experience.

   While Lauffer is the only scholar to dedicate herself to the Weimar era, there are

excellent scholarly investigations into interior spaces that focus on other periods of German

culture, particularly for the nineteenth century. Kirsten Belgum, in her work *Interior*

*Meaning: Design of the Bourgeois Home*, examines the construction of the private, apolitical

sphere in the realist novel of the mid- to late nineteenth century and offers a compelling

argument for how the interior was created to provide emotional stability in times of societal

upheaval.[38] Additionally, she argues that the stabilizing function of the home is performed in

part through décor, which serves as a signifier of cultural connectedness. Her work serves as

a counterweight to this project, as it highlights the implications of the loss of this emotional

stabilizing function.

   Likewise, Susan Bernstein's work *Housing Problems* has also been critical for

reflecting on the relationship between architecture and the home. In particular, one of her

arguments is that, customarily in the nineteenth century, the house served as a site for

containing and preserving bourgeois values and traditions. She understands housing as an

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[38]Belgum, Kristen. *Interior Meaning: Design of the Bourgeois Home in the Realist Novel.* New York: Peter
Lang Publishing, 1991.

inscriptional space in which individuals can define themselves against the outside world.[39]

These questions of inscriptionality and preservation will be addressed later in this chapter

and re-evaluated in the context of purging possessions and memories, for it suggests

consequences for individual identity if inscription is purposefully avoided. Inscriptionality, as

defined by Bernstein and as is used in this chapter, refers to an individual's ability to leave a

mark—a memory, a personalization—upon a space. It encompasses the ability to personalize

a space both through the adding of physical items, such as photographs and knick-knacks,

and through the ability to attach memories to a space and claim that space as one's own. An

inscriptional space is a space that is able to reflect and mirror the inhabitant.

Moreover, situating this research within the framework of the spatial turn helps

ground it in a tradition that highlights space as a useful category of analysis. While the

subsequent chapters will more directly draw upon Henri Lefebvre's ideas as discussed in his

1974 publication *Production de l'espace* (*The Production of Space*), this chapter will utilize

the terminology of producing space as it is understood in Lefebvre's work.[40] Acknowledging

that space is never a neutral concept, this chapter will focus on its ideological and emotional

aspects and discuss how space, as both stage and actor, is perceived and produced through

the interactions with the individual in that space. Furthermore, since this project

conceptualizes space as socially constructed, it also incorporates issues of gender and class

into the analysis, as space is perceived and interacted with differently by individuals based on

these categories of identification. Thus the production of space cannot be adequately

[39]Bernstein, Susan. *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 22.

[40]Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

understood if we do not take into account intersecting aspects of identity. Questions of identity are vital to any study of the Weimar era, a time when gender roles in particular were in constant flux and under- and unemployment were commonplace, all of which led to a destabilization of traditional modes of identification.

The idea of a non-place as it is presented by French anthropologist Marc Augé in his work *Non-Places* will also be discussed.[41] His theory of non-place offers a way of theorizing an extreme version of Bernstein's concept of lacking inscriptionality. For Augé, a non-place is defined as a place that does not allow for individual augmentation or adaptation. While his work *Non-Places* is primarily concerned with what he terms "supermodernity," that is, the idea of a surpassed modernity existing only in fragmentation, his notion of non-place holds great relevance for understanding issues regarding the inability to imbue one's surroundings with lasting memories. Augé stresses the self-projected nature of human experience and the idea that spaces are constantly being rewritten and are consequently never fully place or non-place, but are, rather, "like opposite polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed . . . the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten."[42] This idea of the ever-changing, vacillating nature of our spaces is vital to an illumination of the volatile relationships between occupants and their homes.

And finally, I will employ the idea of liminality, as defined by Benjamin, who understands liminal spaces as thresholds between other clearly defined spaces. Liminal space in the context of this chapter is therefore a kind of space whose function is in flux, because it

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[41]Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. 1992. Trans. John Howe. New York: Verso, 1995.

[42]Augé, Marc. *Non-Places*, 79.

exists in a space between conventionally delineated spheres. Most important in this context are the liminal spaces between the public/private and interior/exterior, as will be seen as we now turn our attention towards the close readings of the novels.

A Loss of Privacy

*Fabian*: Fabian's Home

Erich Kästner, who is best known to us today for his children's stories and poetry, published his satirical novel *Fabian: Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (1931) to great acclaim. Set in Berlin of the late 1920s, *Fabian* is often considered the quintessential *Zeitroman* of the Weimar Republic, as it addresses issues of war trauma, un/employment, the role of new marketing strategies, and depictions of Berlin life and nightlife. The novel tells the story of its protagonist, Herr Dr. Jakob Fabian, a *Germanist* who has moved to Berlin for the "lächerliches Bedürfnis, anwesend zu sein" (46). In describing his desire to live in Berlin—as opposed to the small town that he came from—he reinforces the notion that Berlin is the place where life happens. Even linguistically, the word "anwesend" (to be present) reinforces this idea, as the root of the word, "Wesen" - a being, a creature, a human – emphasizes the idea that to be a person is to be present in space, to be "anwesend"; and in these times, for Fabian, only in Berlin was one truly present.

Fabian is, in essence, the prosaic, prototypical narrator of *Neue Sachlichkeit*: he purports to watch society from a distance, while feigning participation and documenting what he perceives to be the continual "Verfall" (decay) of society. Originally titled *Fabian: Der*

*Gang vor die Hunde*, *Fabian* is indubitably framed as a cautionary tale, as Kästner points out in the preface: "damit sollte, schon auf dem Buchumschlag, deutlich werden, daß der Roman ein bestimmtes Ziel verfolgte: Er wollte warnen" (9). While scholars have long pointed to the political content of *Fabian* as the element warned against, this is perhaps an overly simplistic interpretation of Kästner's work. In reading *Fabian,* almost all aspects of life, from falling in love to earning a living, prove to be much more dangerous than one might imagine, and in the end, even fatal. The novel ends with Fabian's suicide by drowning after having been laid off, left by his girlfriend, and finally, having witnessed his best friend commit suicide due to what turned out to be a prank by a jealous academic.

  *Fabian* is of particular interest to this research because much of the story unfolds in the interior and is able to reveal unique elements of his relationship with space that lend themselves well to an investigation of interior domestic space. For, although the descriptions of the interior domestic spaces are often as minimal as the décor, this sparseness of description itself already lends itself to a reading of the spaces. That is, it signals that, in contrast to the long descriptions of rooms often found in works only a few years earlier, such as those by Thomas Mann in *Der Zauberberg* (1924), these descriptions are lacking in detail not because they are purposefully omitted, but because there is little to describe.[43] The lack of description signals a lack in the configuration of the home and thereby warrants investigation. Fabian and his girlfriend, Cornelia, both also live in rented rooms and therefore provide insights into the challenges that this new, but very common, living situation presented.

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[43]Mann, Thomas. *Der Zauberberg*. 1924. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991.

In turning to a reading of Fabian's domestic space, I will discuss questions about the

privacy that this space can offer and I will argue that we witness a loss of privacy based on

the space's configuration. This configuration leads to a loss of a sense of control over and

safety within the domestic sphere and thereby situates the space of the home as a liminal

space.[44] To support this argument, we turn to the first description of Fabian's apartment given

in the novel, which very much resembles a rental advertisement:

> Als er sein Zimmer—achtzig Mark monatlich, Morgenkaffee inbegriffen, Licht
> extra—am Spätnachmittag betrat, fand er einen Brief von seiner Mutter auf dem
> Tisch. Baden konnte er nicht. Das warme Wasser war kalt. . . . Der Straßenlärm
> trommelte wie ein Regenguß auf die Scheiben. In der dritten Etage übte jemand
> Klavier. Nebenan schrie der alte eingebildete Oberrechnungsrat seine Frau an. (44)

Strikingly, Fabian's description of his home begins not with a description of the features of

the space, but rather, it details the room in economic terms, listing what he pays in rent and

which services he does and does not receive in return for this rent. His description also

suggests a fragile balance between a sense of *Gemütlichkeit*—represented by the hot morning

coffee and the letter from his mother awaiting him—and the lack of hot water that should be

available but is not. Along with this we are told of the menacing noise from the street, which

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[44]Privacy, in this context, is to be understood within its historical context as the right to not be intruded upon within one's home without consent and the ability to conduct private affairs without others present. In many ways, current ideas of privacy within our home are not significantly different from nineteenth and early twentieth century understandings, as they relate to the desire to be able to withdraw to the privacy of our homes. Yet, while the concept of privacy is culturally determined and constantly being renegotiated and reconceptualized and is an area of study in and of itself, the aim of this research does not lie in defining and detailing the precise meaning of privacy. Rather, it endeavors to show how the concept of privacy itself became a site of conflict. Much secondary literature exists that details the development of the home and the notions of privacy. See: Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. London: Penguin Books, 1987. Also: Ariès, Philippe and George Duby, eds. *A History of Private Life: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. And: Cieraad, Irene, ed. *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Syracuse: Syracuse Univeristy Press, 1999. For for a non-academic but historically sound and entertaining read, see: Bryson, Bill. *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

is pounding on the windows and threatening to enter his space and break the boundary between inner and outer world at any moment. It also situates his apartment within the chaos of the city, in which the loud noises, while bothersome, have become as commonplace as the rain, "der Regenguß." Just as a downpour can penetrate the apartment's interior with its sound, disturbing the inhabitant and reminding him of the threat of nature on the other side of the glass, it is now the city noises themselves that have become the "natural" disturbance, serving to always remind Fabian of the world outside, even when he is inside. Yet, unlike rain, which only appears on occasion, the noise of the city is constant, never vanishing, and thus never lets him forget its presence.

However, while the noises from outside do not necessarily change his perception of space as it regards privacy, the description of the room does include a violation of aural boundaries within the apartment that can be seen as much more intrusive when discussed in the context of aural control and the home. In her article "Hearing Spaces: Architecture and Acoustic Experience in Modernist German Literature," German literary scholar Kata Gellen addresses the intersection between hearing and space in modernist literature and concludes that "sound can appear as a product of architectural space, or it can reveal or even generate that space."[45] Sound, then, is a vital element in the production and perception of space and its functions. Gellen describes the "the thin walls, flimsy doors, and porous concrete buildings of modernity and modernism [that] transmit either a jarring acoustic mélange or an isolated indecipherable tone" found in the works of Musil, Rilke, and Kafka, and the description of Fabian's domestic space in many ways parallels these architectural elements and acoustic

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[45]Gellen, Kata. "Hearing Spaces: Architecture and Acoustic Experience in Modernist German Literature." *Modernism/modernity* 17.4 (2010): 801.

traits. For instance, sounds transmitted between the building's many apartments force him to

incorporate foreign sounds into his understanding of his own space.[46] Due to the acoustics of

the building, Fabian is in the position of easily being able to hear one neighbor playing the

piano and another yelling at his wife, all the while firmly situated within the enclosed space

of his own room. This contrast between the two noises (music and yelling) that permeate his

domestic space mirrors the tension that exists between attempts at coziness and the persistent

coldness, as discussed above as the contrast between the coffee and the lack of warm water.

On the one hand, the porosity of his space allows him to hear beautiful music, a soothing

sound, and on the other hand, it exposes him to his neighbor's foul temper and puts him in a

position of discomfort as he witnesses his neighbor's aggression towards his wife. This lack

of aural boundaries produces a domestic space that defies spatial boundaries and disallows a

sense of control over his space and his ability to safeguard privacy. Due to the porosity of the

walls, Fabian is forced to be part of a domestic dispute, much as he is a partaker of the

musical experience, and he cannot, within his space, choose otherwise; he lacks control over

the sounds that produce the space of his home. It is a room that aurally emphasizes his

inability to conceive of his home as a private sphere, separate from the domestic spaces of

others. Because he can hear his neighbors, he is also aware of the idea that they, too, can hear

him; his home is not a place where private affairs can be private.

Because he is not spatially in the same room as the source of noise, it also has an

isolating effect: there is noise of what familiar life can sound like all around him, barging

into his space, but it does not include him in the activity that is the source of noise. They are

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[46]Gellen, Kata. "Hearing Spaces," 802.

sounds that simultaneously include and exclude him. Already from this short description of his room, we are given a sense of how little control over privacy Fabian has in his home in regards to his ability to maintain aural boundaries. This intrusion of sound, from the street and from other rooms, is an intrusion that he cannot control.

Moreover, the description of Fabian's room as one in which aural boundaries are permeable already hints at the fact that spatial boundaries are also open to transgression. He alludes to this when he mentions the letter on the table, which states that, "[als er sein Zimmer] betrat, fand er einen Brief von seiner Mutter auf dem Tisch." This observation indicates that the letter had not been there earlier and thus speaks to the fact that someone has been in his room while he was out. As we are told that he is renting a room from the widow Hohlfeld, the safe assumption is that she was the one who delivered his letter to him, which still potentially falls under acceptable behavior between landlady and renter. Yet, it also already situates Fabian's existence in a domestic space enclosed within someone else's home. His space is thus, from the outset, one in which boundaries are potentially unclear. One the one had, he has a private room that he expects to not have to share with anyone else and over which he expects to have control, but much of what defines his home is the shared nature of the other spaces, such as the bathroom, which he shares with other renters. Adding to the complexity, all of these rooms are enclosed by the exterior walls of the house, and thus, all interior space technically falls under the domain of Frau Hohlfeld's domestic space.

Frau Hohlfeld is described as a woman who "hatte früher das Vermieten nicht nötig gehabt" (46), which situates her and her home in a precarious position as well. Prior to the war, her home was defined by a much more traditional, bourgeois use of the space, as it was only she and her family who resided in it. However, following the war, and with the death of

her husband, the economic realities of Weimar Berlin have forced her to rent out rooms, thereby redefining the space as one that no longer meets the traditional description of domesticity to which she was once accustomed. It is then not only Fabian who must contend with fluctuating boundaries, but Frau Hohlfeld as well. In this way, the tensions that arise between her and Fabian can be read as misreadings of the new spatial rules of conduct: Fabian treats his room as a home unto itself, where he desires privacy, while Frau Hohlfeld continues to operate on antiquated principles that lead her to assume the entirety of the space is still her space and therefore violates boundaries because she does not consider them to be true boundaries.

This tension surrounding the notion of a home within a home becomes increasingly problematic for Fabian because of Frau Hohlfeld's inability to respect the boundaries between her and Fabian's material space, leading to a further loss of privacy for him. As a character, Frau Hohlfeld feigns constant indignation at the immoral behavior of her tenants and worries about how their behavior will reflect upon her status. As she comments to Fabian regarding a tenant who often has several female visitors a night, "meine Wohnung ist doch kein Absteigequartier" (47). Yet, we quickly realize that her moral objections are not so much true objections as they are reactions to a lifestyle from which she is excluded and a loneliness that she cannot overcome. Fabian comments that "nachts stand sie vermutlich, auf bloßen Füßen, vor dem Zimmer des Stadtreisenden Tröger und nahm, durchs Schlüsselloch, seinen Orgien Parade ab" (47).

While her lack of sexual fulfillment is at first a mere humorous observation by Fabian, it becomes less amusing as she begins to make sexual advances towards him. As she does so, the spatial boundaries of his room, and thereby also his privacy, are constantly

violated. "Da klopfte die Wirtin Hohlfeld, trat ins Zimmer und sagte: 'Pardon, ich dachte, Sie wären noch nicht da.' Sie kam näher" (46). The sentence structure makes clear that no time was given between knocking and actually entering and that, as such, the knock must be read as a mere pretense of common courtesy rather than an actual inquiry into whether it is appropriate to enter Fabian's space. This gesture of knocking is further shown to be devoid of meaning by the fact that, upon realizing Fabian to be home, she does not leave, as one would expect. Rather, she actually draws closer to Fabian—"she kam näher"—further violating not only the boundaries of his room but also his personal physical boundaries as well. "Sie stand knapp hinter ihm. Er sah sie nicht, aber vermutlich wogte ihr unverstandener Busen" (47). Her behavior in this scene highlights Fabian's lack of control over his spatial boundaries, in that he can neither control whether Frau Hohlfeld enters the room, nor is he able to maintain spatial boundaries as they relate to his person. Her actions reinforce his space as a shared space that she feels entitled to inhabit and destroy any illusions of privacy Fabian may have had.

While we are able to imagine that Frau Hohlfeld does not sense her intrusion as a violation of privacy—it is her home, after all—what is noteworthy is that Fabian does see her behavior as inappropriate. Frau Hohlfeld's behavior intensifies, "das wurde von Tag zu Tag schlimmer" (47), which shows that, not only is her violation of his privacy a repeated offense, but it becomes unbearable due to her sexual advances: "manchmal blickte sie ihn an, als wolle sie ihm die Hosen ausziehen" (47). It is a violation of his space that, to him, would not have happened previously, and he observes that "früher wäre diese Sorte Damen fromm geworden" (47). Despite his use of the word "fromm" (pious) within the context of the story, we have few reasons to believe it is actually her lack of piety that bothers him as much as her

lack of regard for his spatial and relational boundaries. This is evidenced by his strong negative reaction to her that he does not display towards others who make equally undesired advances, such as the wealthy socialite Frau Moll. Thus, it is not so much the idea of an older woman making unwanted advances that seems to disturb Fabian as much as it is the fact that these advances are happening within the confines of his home. This situation also highlights the problematic nature of the home, in that it has become both a space in which Fabian still expects privacy and in which he expects his door to function as a marked boundary between the public outer and private inner worlds. However, as the reader learns, these boundaries are no longer intact. Even a closed door is not able to delineate and create a boundary that would be respected, and because Frau Hohlfeld does not respect his idea of boundaries, she undermines the space's ability to act as a place of safety and refuge for Fabian.

For Fabian, the boundaries of his home are thus constantly in danger of being violated, both aurally, through the permeation of sound from both outside and inside of the house, and spatially, through Frau Hohlfeld's disregard, or misreading, of the spatial boundary that the door should represent but does not. Because boundaries are constantly transgressed, the space of the home is not able to provide Fabian with a sense of impermeability that would be vital for privacy and a sense of control over the space. Lacking these elements, the home thus no longer functions as a safeguard or a space of refuge and comfort.

*Kleiner Mann: was nun?*: Lämmchen and Pinneberg's Home

This idea that rented rooms are devoid of both privacy and safety is also addressed in Hans Fallada's novel *Kleiner Mann, was nun?*, which follows the lives of Johannes Pinneberg and his wife, Lämmchen. At the beginning of the novel, Lämmchen discovers that she is pregnant, and she and Pinneberg quickly marry. This situation sets up the motivation for Pinneberg's attempts to provide for his new family amidst unstable employment conditions. A young couple, he and Lämmchen start out by living in a rented room within the home of the widow Scharrehöfer, a woman who does not seem to be fully cognizant. For instance, she is often confused about where all of her money has disappeared to but does not listen when Pinneberg attempts to remind her of the inflation and consequent devaluation of currency. On one of their first evenings after having moved in, upon returning home and on their way to their room, the couple encounters Frau Scharrehöfer sitting in the dark and crying. She attempts to engage them in a conversation about her lack of money, making the couple incredibly uncomfortable, not only because of the delicate subject matter but also because of Frau Scharrehöfer's confusion. She seems to be talking only to herself and barely reacts to their comments. Desperate to escape the situation, Pinneberg and Lämmchen excuse themselves and head to their room in a rush, so confused by this interaction that they barely know how they managed to return to their room: "Sie wissen nicht recht, wie sie in ihr Zimmer gekommen sind, durch all die dunklen übervollen Räume, angefaßt an der Hand wie Kinder, die sich ängstigen" (29). This image of them as children who are scared, holding hands while trying to navigate dark hallways, sets up Pinneberg and Lämmchen's living situation as one in which they do not appear to have power or control. Rather, they behave like scared children, attempting to flee to the safety of their own room.

Having reached their room, for a moment Lämmchen and Pinneberg feel like they have reached a space separate from the domain of the widow, and simply stand there, holding hands, speechless and scared. Out of breath, Lämmchen then breaks the silence and stammers, "das war schrecklich" (29), to which Pinneberg replies in the affirmative, agreeing that the old lady is "verrückt" (29) for allowing worries over money to ruin her mind. Lämmchen's use of the word "schrecklich" to describe the atmosphere of the home, as a space that can inspire "Schrecken" (terror), is physically confirmed by Lämmchen's heavy breathing, in which her interactions within the home have been worrisome enough to have a physical effect on her. Still standing in the room and holding hands, "die beiden stehen noch immer angefaßt im Dunklen" (29), they are unsure of what to do or say. Amidst their childlike fear of a "scary" old lady, Lämmchen suddenly realizes that even in their private room, she is not protected, is not safe, from the old widow: "Und ich soll den ganzen Tag hier allein in der Wohnung sein, und sie kann immer zu mir hereinkommen. Nein! Nein!" (29). This realization about her lack of control of her space proves to be greatly disturbing to Lämmchen, emphasized by her repeated "Nein! Nein!" and exclamation marks in the text. Lämmchen's description of their rented room, which they call a "Wohnung" and not a "Zimmer," emphasizes too that, to them, this is a space that should function as a private sphere to which they should be able to withdraw to, and most importantly, feel safe in. Yet this passage shows that this is not the case, as Lämmchen does not believe that the widow will respect the boundaries of their space and realizes that she cannot secure her domicile. She is incapable of keeping the widow out of her "Wohnung".

However, Lämmchen's fear is not simply that she does not have control over her own domestic space, but also that, because she does not have the ability to control who is allowed

entrance into the space, the room is also no longer a place of safety. Safety is often considered the basic function of the home, and its absence effectively renders their room a space that cannot function as true shelter. Neither fully public, nor fully private, as is evidenced by Lämmchen's concerns, it is now a liminal space. A loss of privacy leads to a loss of a sense of safety, and by extension, a loss of a sense of comfort. In this way, their rented space may provide a place to sleep, but it does not function in the way that Lämmchen would need it to in order to feel comfortable in this space.

What is interesting to note is that Lämmchen's concern over her space and the lack of privacy transform into a fear about her future, as she pleads with Pinneberg to tell her that she will not end up like this old lady. "Du, du, Junge, ich will nicht so werden wie die! Nicht wahr, ich kann nicht so werden wie die?! Ich hab Angst" (29). While the configuration of the hand-holding scene set Lämmchen and Pinneberg up as children scared of the adult world, the problem is not just that they fear the parent-figure of the older lady whose house they are living in. Rather, what scares Lämmchen is that she could end up like this old lady, placed in her situation of having to "lose" her home by having her home reconfigured into a space which houses renters, thereby no longer being a space of traditional domesticity. It is then not simply a matter of a power differential, in which the old lady has the power and authority to enter Lämmchen's space whenever she chooses to, but rather, that Lämmchen does not perceive this power that she holds as something worth attaining. In this way, it breaks with the parent-child model in which children aim to be the holders of power, to be the parents, someday.

The "Angst" that Lämmchen shows is then both a very real fear over her inability to control the boundaries of her space and it is also a more abstract fear about the future and the

fact that the models of domestic life that she sees are frightening to her. She does not want to be in the landlady's position, even if that is a position of power. In that way, her fears about her domestic space show that what is at stake is not only a short-term worry about safety and control, but also a long-term concern about what domestic life will be like and what options will be available for people like Pinneberg and herself. Her fear of the future can be read as a fear of realizing that the domestic sphere is no longer appealing to her, in large part because it is no longer fully domestic. While the home was long considered the realm of female power, this scene illustrates that it no longer functions as such. Lämmchen does not hold power within her home to secure its boundaries and thus feel "at home," nor does the elderly landlady hold much power, as her home has become vulnerable to theft and loss by having renters she does not know well inhabiting it. In this way, neither of the women are in positions of control, nor does the home function in a traditional domestic sense as a place of security. Lämmchen's fear of the future is thus related to her realization that she will potentially never have control over *any* space. As a mother—rather than someone interested in embodying the modern, working woman—the realm where she was expecting to find her space of command was the space of the home. Yet, seeing this possibility vanish, by seeing that the old woman has lost control of the only space that she ever controlled, rightfully scares Lämmchen. Furthermore, her lack of control over her own domestic space mirrors the lack of control she feels over her life in general. She, and the landlady, have both been displaced; while Pinneberg still has his place of employment in which he is able to exert control, the women in this story no longer have such a place. They are without a domain of their own.

Looking at these two texts illustrates how reconfigured homes no longer provide the

privacy that they once guaranteed, whether in the form of doors that keep individuals out, walls that maintain aural boundaries, or an image of the space as one that can be controlled. Violations of the boundaries of the home, and thus a loss of power and control over the space, are not singular in nature, but rather representative of a pattern seen throughout these novels. A loss of privacy, both through interruptions and intrusions, becomes the norm and undermines the notion of the home as one of private space. The modern home's configuration mirrors that of a liminal space, vacillating between spheres. Though not quite public, these spaces can also no longer be categorized as intimate, private spaces. The realm of domesticity is no longer domestic, but rather, one in which all individuals have to contend with an understanding of the space of the home as a shared space. Especially for the women in these novels, this change in control over the domestic sphere is keenly felt, because it undermines their traditional roles as the keepers of the home. Whether as landlady or as renter, these homes are no longer spaces in which any of the individuals can claim control over their boundaries. The domestic no longer shelters from the outside world. This theme of a loss of boundaries will be further expounded upon later on in this chapter as it relates to the transgression of visual boundaries. But first, we turn towards a discussion of décor and inscriptionality in order to set up the framework for the later reading of domestic space as liminal space.

The Danger of Memory: When Mute Things Speak

Walter Benjamin argued that the (for him) excessive layering of fabrics, curtains, and objects found in nineteenth-century homes primarily serves as a way to capture and preserve

traces of our own existence. "Wohnen heißt Spuren hinterlassen. … Die Spuren des Wohnenden drücken sich im Interieur ab".[47] Leaving traces, through paintings, photographs, and other mementos, is a way to embed memories into daily life. Décor functions as a reminder of past events and past selves and also allows the present moment to be given significance. The more one fills space with items of any kind, the more these spaces become places to which memories can be attached. Through possessions, then, homes become imbued with emotions and memories of personal histories. Décor in the home thus intimately connects the individual to the space and personalizes the space as a space of memory, because only that person will have the associated memories that the items evoke. For Benjamin, possessions serve a far broader purpose than to simply beautify: they bind individuals to space and space to individuals, with each leaving a mark on the other. While Benjamin sees this desire to layer and leave traces as a primary marker of the nineteenth-century home, in one way or another, the desire to leave traces, and thereby affirm one's own existence and create lasting memories within the home, has continued, and is arguably still a hallmark of contemporary western decorative culture today.[48]

The desire to inscribe oneself onto spaces is also at the crux of Marc Augé's argument about the distinction between place and non-place. For Augé, "spaces which are not concerned with identity" cannot be places, but rather, they are relegated to a category that he calls "non-places." These are spaces which exist but do not allow for individuation or the

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[47]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften V·I.* 1982. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 53.

[48]Examples of this in today's terms would for instance explain the distaste towards long-term renting and the desire to own a home, thereby being able to personalize it to a greater extent. Much of the décor that we accept as standard in homes today (photographs, souvenirs, etc) further reinforces this theory of a desired imprint.

ability to leave one's mark on the space.[49] While Augé's theory never considers the possibility of the home representing a non-place, reading his idea of non-places alongside the literature surveyed in this chapter shows that this is precisely what is taking place in these novels. The spaces of the home presented here do not allow individuals the ability or even the desire to imprint themselves on their living environments, effectively rendering the home a non-place. Without any trace of the individual beyond the bare minimum, the homes become spaces void of personal inscription.[50] While Augé does not discusses the motivation behind the desire to imprint oneself onto a space, reading non-inscriptionality as a psychological mechanisms used to protect against the effects of trauma, as was discussed in the section on design history, helps to explain the motivation behind this move towards having homes function as non-places.

In order to support this argument, we turn first to a close reading of Cornelia's home as it is describes in Kästner's *Fabian* and then to an examination of Fräulein Kohler's home in Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*. Additionally, by reading these spaces as gendered spaces, we can see the complexity that arises when a traditionally female space becomes a non-place to which one cannot, or does not want to, remain emotionally attached.

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[49]Augé, Marc. *Non-Places*, 78.

[50]Augé primarily analyzes spaces such as airports, hotels, and banks for their non-place characteristics.

In contemplating the question of one's ability to leave traces and layer memories within the home, an examination of Cornelia's home in *Fabian* will prove fruitful, as it will help illuminate Cornelia's relationship with her domestic space by showing her conflicted beliefs about how a home should function. However, to ground the close reading, an examination of another scene is needed in order to first establish an understanding of Cornelia's character and her reasons for being in Berlin. Being able to expand upon Cornelia's motivations for having come to Berlin is important for the later analysis of her interactions with domestic space.

Within the first few pages, Cornelia is established as an individual who only recently arrived in Berlin and who did not come to the city in search of the bohemian, spirited lifestyle often sought out by the *Neue Frau*. Rather, she came to Berlin because it was the only place that allowed her anonymity. As she tells Fabian upon meeting him, she was living in her hometown with a man who one day walked out to check the mail and never returned. "Ich wartete drei Monate darauf, daß er vom Briefkasten zurückkehre. Komisch, nein? . . . Meine Mutter sagte: 'Du bist eine Dirne!'" (91). It is this story, of her shattered dreams and the realization that, in her mother's eyes, and in the eyes of the small community in which she lived, she was stigmatized for her relationship with a man who left her, which motivated her need for change. Her broken heart and her lost dreams of traditional domestic bliss are the factors that explain why she came to Berlin, although it is Fabian who is left to make this inference, twice asking, "Sind Sie deswegen nach Berlin gekommen?" (92), as Cornelia, unable to answer, simply sits there, crying. Yet, through her tears, she confirms his questions.

While Berlin is the city that allows her to live as she wishes, it is not a position in which

Cornelia wishes to find herself. While many women relished their newfound freedom and

independence during this time, Cornelia, much as Lämmchen, is not one of them. She had

wanted a home in the traditional sense, and instead finds herself in a rented room in a city in

which she does not want to be, displaced because her notions of a traditional home are no

longer attainable. The domestic sphere, in which she had hoped to find herself at home, has

eluded her. Even though she lives in Berlin, she is not out to experience the hedonistic world

in which Fabian participates, a fact that Fabian readily notices upon meeting her: "Fabian sah

ihr ins Gesicht und fand, sie passe nicht in das Milieu" (89). Cornelia is depicted as the

traditionalist, whose innocence stands in stark contrast to the world around her. She goes on

to explain,

> Ich bin fünfundzwanzig Jahre alt, und von zwei Männern wurde ich stehengelassen.
> Stehengelassen wie ein Schirm, den man absichtlich irgendwo vergieß. … Früher
> verschenkte man sich und wurde wie ein Geschenk bewahrt. Heute wird man bezahlt
> und eines Tages, wie bezahlte und benutzte Ware, weggetan. (90-91)

In this first conversation between her and Fabian, Cornelia describes how vulnerable and

unvalued she felt after realizing that she had been seen as an object, something to use and

leave behind as easily as one might leave behind an umbrella. Her existence in Berlin is thus

predicated on her view that Berlin is the only place in which a woman can live after having

failed to do what she most sought to do: set up a home for herself. Cornelia's idealized view

of the domestic space and its perceived function as one that harbors a traditional relationship

and, accordingly, a family, is then juxtaposed with the reality of her situation, in which her

home contains neither of these elements. Realizing that her dreams are outdated ideals,

Cornelia tells Fabian, "Ich bin kein Engel, mein Herr. Unsere Zeit ist mit den Engeln böse" (89). She thereby not only self-identifies as an angel, emphasizing her innocence, but also highlights her realization that angels are no longer in demand and that, in order to survive, she has chosen to relinquish her dreams of a traditional home. Further, she refuses to be vulnerable from here on out, stating "Oh, das geht zu weit! . . . Wenn wir euch nicht behalten dürfen, wollen wir euch auch nicht lieben" (91-92). Her resolve is, however, immediately put to the test upon meeting Fabian, to whom she instantly feels drawn.

The contrast between her domestic space in Berlin and her ideal notions of love and the home resonates with an observation that Susan Bernstein makes in *Housing Problems*. Bernstein argues that the constructed interior is often perceived by the inhabitant in a manner that reveals their emotional interior.[51] This emphasis, which acknowledges that the perception of and interaction with space is predicated on both the individual's perception of that space and the spatial configuration itself, is useful for thinking through Cornelia's interactions with her rented room in Berlin. By acknowledging that Cornelia's perception of her domestic space is one in which she does not want to be living, because it is an inferior version of the home that she had once dreamed of, allows for a better understanding of her perception of her space. Her emotional interior becomes projected upon her material domestic space, as we will see in the close reading below.

When we are first introduced to Cornelia's room, which is in the same building as Fabian's and thus identical in its sparsity, she asks Fabian to come up to her room because she does not wish to be alone in this space that is "fremd" (foreign) to her. "Werden Sie mich falsch verstehen, wenn ich Sie bitte, für eine halbe Stunde zu mir hinaufzukommen? Mein

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[51]Bernstein, Susan. *Housing Problems*, 37.

Zimmer ist mir so fremd. Kein Wort klingt nach und keine Erinnerung. . . . Nichts ist da,

woran es mich erinnern könnte" (101). She goes on to describe the space as one punctuated

by the repetition of the word "allein"—"wenn ich allein bin" (102) and "das macht, weil ich

sonst allein bin." (102). These statements speak to her feelings about being separated not

only from other individuals, but also from the room itself, as she is isolated from anything

that would allow her to feel like the room is hers. Shortly after she and Fabian enter the

room, we realize that her earlier statement regarding the fact that "nichts ist da" in her room

is factually incorrect, as there is plenty in the room: "Fabian legte Hut und Mantel aufs Sofa,

sie hängte ihren Mantel in den Schrank" (102). Already from Fabian's actions, we see that

the room, much as his own, has a sofa and an armoire. Furniture is to be found there, as

expected, which suggests that her use of the word "nichts" is not referring to furniture.

Cornelia even later comments on the "Engelsköpfe aus Stuck" (103) that crown the ceiling,

which also implies that this is not a rundown room that would perhaps be uninviting in and of

itself.

Rather, the problem for Cornelia is that that which is not there, the "nichts", are the

lacking memories or her unability to form memories and begin to leave her imprint on the

space. The "nichts" signals a lack of emotional attachment. This is stressed twice: first when

she states that the room is "fremd" because "keine Erinnerung [klingt mir nach]"—no

memories resound in the room; and then again when she states that nothing is there "woran

es mich erinnern könnte"—that there are literally no objects in the room that could remind

her of anything, because she has not put anything personal into the room. Her space is

"fremd" to her because of its void. Yet, conversely, it is she who has chosen to not allow

there to be anything to which memories might be attached. By choice, she has kept it empty

and therefore "fremd". Her home thereby functions as a non-place, which does not contain any traces of individuation. Her unwillingness to embed meaning within the space can be read as a testament to her resolve not to allow herself to be hurt again, an emotional survival mechanism. Yet, in doing so, she has created an interior space that is utterly isolating: her home has become a space that does not hold memories. While the lack of memories protects her from further heartbreak, it also isolates her from her space, disallowing any sense of comfort or coziness to exist. It is a space that is not layered with memories but is instead as devoid of individuality as any non-place that Augé discusses in the context of non-place. Feeling incapable of creating a home, Cornelia projects this inability onto the spaces that she inhabits in Berlin, prohibiting the spaces from becoming sites that hold memories, and thus, remain cold and "fremd" to her.

This underlying motivation helps illuminate why, for a brief moment after falling in love with Fabian, it appears that she might be able to claim the space of her room as a home after all. She begins asserting her individuality and attempting to make the space cozier: "Cornelia hatte ein paar Tassen, Teller und Bestecke aus ihrem Koffer geholt, etwas zum Essen besorgt und den Tisch hübsch garniert. Sogar eine weiße Decke und ein Blumenstrauß waren vorrätig" (116). This detail, that she took the dishes out of her suitcase, indicates that these are dishes that she brought to Berlin, dishes that are already personal and hold memories. Up until this moment, she had not been willing to place these objects of memory within the space of her new room and had kept them tucked away, hidden in her suitcase.

Yet now, having fallen in love with Fabian despite her desire not to, she takes out the dishes from her past life and allows them to give the space meaning and memory. In this

moment, she also connects the plates, a site of previous memory, to Fabian, thus allowing

them to become both holders of her past and present experiences. As is indicated by the word

"sogar" in the second sentence—"sogar eine weiße Decke und ein Blumenstrauß waren

vorrätig"—she has even added items to those she already had in her possession. The fact that

she has found a white tablecloth and purchased flowers speaks not only to her sudden

willingness to add new holders of memory to the space, but it also highlights the complicated

nature of this act. The "sogar" can be read as an indication that these items are out of place in

her apartment and surprising to find there. White tablecloths and flowers belong in the

bourgeois home of the past, but they are not items typically found in rented rooms. However,

for Cornelia, the dishes of her past are tied to an image of the home that includes a nicely set

table with a tablecloth and flowers, and so she attempts to recreate this image of domesticity

in her rented room. Through the addition of these items to the table settings that she has

retrieved from her suitcase, she reveals her continued desire for a more traditional home. This

desire, however, is at odds with the reality of her situation: while the room can become a site

of memories for her, it cannot become the traditional home that she envisions because the

material reality of this space—a rented room within a house—cannot allow for it. Cornelia

thus misreads the spatial possibilities and begins to layer memories in this space. Yet this

layering is indicative of an attempt to produce a space which cannot function, given the

spatial parameters, and she is thus layering a space with memories which do not belong there

and which ultimately will not be able to be sustained.

It does then not come as a surprise that her ability to gain control over her space and

reassert her desire for a traditional home ultimately fails, since both the space and her

economic situation deny her this option. Rather, for financial survival, she leaves Fabian and

becomes the mistress of a film producer and hurriedly moves out of her room, leaving no traces of her existence behind beyond the signs of her exit: "der Schrank stand offen. Er war leer. Die Koffer fehlten" (161). After her departure, the elements that remain in the room—the armoire and the sofa—are also the pieces of furniture first mentioned when Fabian entered her room. In that way, the room itself does not appear to have changed. Cornelia does not leave any trace of her existence behind within that space. The room is left the way it was when she first entered, empty and void of any reminder of her, save for the now-wilting flowers. Her only attempt at inscribing traditional domesticity onto the space is represented by these flowers, which she had originally purchased for the dinner with Fabian. They now sit there, waiting to be disposed, "die [warteten] aufs Wegwerfen" (161), and with their disposal completing the erasure of her time in that space. Cornelia's inability to produce a space within her home that would serve as a place failed, then, because of her previous emotional pain and consequent psychological determination to forego the personalization of her space. Moreover, when she changed her mind and attempted to inscribe herself, she misread the limitations that the space held. It is not that the space itself is entirely unable to be layered and inscribed, but the extent to which it can become the site of memory is limited based on its spatial configuration as a rented room. A rented room can never fulfill the same role as the traditional home once did, and it is her failure to acknowledge this disparity which leads to her misjudgment of the space's potential. Cornelia's isolation from her room and her sense of being "allein" is thus the result of a complicated interplay between her reluctance and fear towards creating spaces that can harbor memory as well as a misreading of the changes that have taken place within the interior domestic sphere and the extent to which

these new spaces can and cannot resemble the homes of the past.

### *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* : Fräulein Kohler's Home

If Cornelia's relationship with her domestic space is marked by a lack of attachment and lack of memory, the space of the home in Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* provides a counterpoint to this, as it shows the consequences of living in spaces with too many layers, spaces too cluttered with memories, and the anguish and sense of isolation this can lead to as well.

Fräulein Dr. Kohler is introduced to the reader as the sole female journalist working for the *Berliner Rundschau*, a feisty woman treated very much as an equal by her all-male peers. At thirty years old, she is unmarried, although she longs for a solid relationship, as her colleague Herr Miermann notes, "Sie sind ja eine altmodische Person" (82). This statement is true both in terms of Fräulein Kohler's appearance, as her long hair contrasts with the *Bubikopf* hairstyle popular among young women, and in terms of her desire for a more traditional romantic arrangement than the affair in which she finds herself involved.[52] Yet, much like Cornelia, despite her desires, she is a realist who knows that her wants are not in keeping with current fashion, and she has thus given up hoping for them. Also similarly to Cornelia, she is a highly educated woman and is pursuing a career with which she can support herself. However, unlike Cornelia, who was originally from a smaller town, Fräulein

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[52]It is also telling that unlike Cornelia, Fräulein Kohler is almost exclusively referred to with this formal address, and the text mentions her first name only on rare occasions. Even then, it is only in connection with her full name; not once is she ever simply referred to as Lotte or Charlotte. This reinforces her proper nature and perhaps hints at the fact that, much as with Fräulein Brückner discussed in Chapter 2, she likely has no friends who are close enough to warrant a first-name basis.

Kohler has lived in Berlin her entire life. We are told that this is because there has not yet

been any pressing need to move out, and, due to the lack of housing options available to her,

she still lives with her mother in her childhood home. The only child of a wealthy family,

with a father who was a *Geheimrat* (privy councilor), we are told that her father passed away

ten years earlier, leaving behind a large home in which they continue to reside.[53] Yet, due to

the economic crisis, and his death, the family has fallen on hard times and has been forced to

rent out several of the rooms in their ten-room home in order to help pay the 5000 Mark rent

each month. Fräulein Dr. Kohler lives in one of these rooms.

That Fräulein Kohler does not enjoy living in her childhood home is stressed many

times throughout the text. For instance, in one passage she has been happily strolling through

the city on her day off, observing the world around her, when she suddenly realizes it is time

to turn back and return home. She gets on the train and cries. "Sie weinte, während sie in die

Stadt zurückfuhr. Zu Hause in Blumeshof erwartete sie ihre Mutter, Frau Geheimrat Kohler"

(85). Her sadness about returning home can be attributed to many factors. One the one hand,

it can be read as an expression of disappointment in realizing that the person waiting for her

at home is her mother, Frau Geheimrat Kohler, and not the family or the private space that

she desires. On the other hand, it can also be attributed to the contrast between her day

appreciating the loud, bustling city, and her return home to Blumeshof street, a quiet area of

town called the *Geheimratsviertel*.[54] This was an area of town where, prior to the war, the

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[53]A *Geheimrat*, a privy counsillor, was an advisor to the head of state in the context of a monarchy. A high position of power, this position and title ceased to exist after the fall of the German Empire in 1918. Thus, even his position reinforces the outdated nature of their home and lives.

[54]The *Geheimratsviertel* was west of *Potsdamer Platz*, between today's *Kulturforum* and *Nollendorfplatz*. Blumeshof was a private street close to the *Schöneberger Ufer*, popularized through Walter Benjamin's description of it in *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, in which he describes the home of his maternal

rich and powerful had resided, and, yet, in the novel we are told that after the war, many of those families moved to new, trendier areas of town, such as the area along the *Kurfürstendamm*, leaving the *Geheimratsviertel* behind as a relic of a bygone era. Thus, Fräulein Kohler not only finds herself single at thirty and still living with her mother, but moreover, she lives in an area of town defined by void. It is an area that exudes a sense of living in the past, where vibrancy and life are no longer to be found, and this feeling only further intensifies her sense of isolation from her peers and the life she wishes she were leading.

When her home itself is described, the choice of words that Fräulein Kohler uses further emphasize this idea of a home that was once at the height of class but is now representative of a past era: "Die Wohnung war sehr elegant gewesen. Sie hatte mehrere alte Stücke. Der Vorplatz war 40 qm groß, 'genau so groß, wie eine Wohnung sein müßte, in der ich glücklich wäre', dachte Lotte Kohler immer" (85). This phrasing, stating that the home had once been elegant but is no longer so, reappears verbatim three more times when the space is described in the following paragraph. This repetition emphasizes that the home had served its purpose as an elegant space for a family prior to the war, yet the repetition also implies that the space no longer functions as such. It has lost elegance, as it has not kept pace with the change in what is deemed elegant and fashionable, and is no longer the appropriate design or amount of space for her and her mother. It is a pre-war elegant home, out of place in the post-war modernist world. As Fräulein Kohler notes, the "Vorplatz" alone is precisely the size of an apartment in which she would be happy, "in der ich glücklich wäre." Not only

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grandmother, who resided at 12 Blumeshof. See: Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften VII·I.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 411 – 414.

does this remark underscore that she is not happy at home, but it also emphasizes her desire for less, both less space and fewer items. It is also interesting to note that the addition of "dachte Lotte Kohler immer" is one of the only times in which her first name is used, which, along with the "immer" in the sentence, stresses the fact that she has long thought that she would be happy with less space, and in a space of her own, even before she was Fräulein Dr. Kohler. Even back when she was still just Lotte Kohler, she was already dreaming of living in a smaller apartment by herself, and yet this dream has not come to fruition.

Throughout the novel, Fräulein Kohler urges her mother to consider downsizing, as their house has become more of a financial burden than she believes it is worth. However, her mother, though willing to accept that it would be more convenient to live in a smaller home, does not consider this a real possibly, because all of their belongings would not fit into a smaller space. She is not willing to part with these, as they are the last remnants of her pre-war life of wealth and traditional domesticity. Fräulein Kohler, however, finds this to be a ridiculous notion, exclaiming, "aber man kann doch nicht wegen der Wäsche und des Silbers und Porzellans in Not geraten! Wegen der Schränke braucht man eine große Wohnung! Das ist zu irrsinning!" (239). For Fräulein Kohler, a home full of large, heavy possessions no longer represents status, as it does to her mother, nor do these items seem indispensable. Rather, they weigh her down and are seen as a burden, as holding onto them will lead to financial instability or ruin. Far from being a sign of privilege or wealth, to her, they represent "Irrsinn" (lunacy) and a need to cling to the past far longer than she considers sensible. For Fräulein Kohler, holding tight to the past and to the expectations of how life should be lived, and in this context, how homes are to be decorated, is a sure way to sabotage the future.

Yet, it is not simply that she has disdain for these items because of the risk she perceives them to pose, but rather, it is because of the pain they represent as daily reminders of a failed life; they are keepers of memory where the associated memory is one of trauma and loss. Much as the items were considered "elegant" before the war but are no longer so, so too does Fräulein Kohler realize that everything her family spent their life working towards and acquiring has lost its value in the aftermath of the war. Its worth was based on a pre-war aesthetic that has been completely devalued in the post-war world. Their furnishings and décor have not kept up with the changing trends.[55]

Their home, draped and filled with memories in the form of objects, is then both perceived as "empty" and full. It is both full of possessions, and thus memories, but these memories make Fräulein Kohler feel empty and alone because they remind of a time when she thought she knew where life was going. Now, seeing how life has turned out, the cluttered home is a home of lost dreams. This is underscored when, towards the end of the novel, the family's investments fail and Fräulein Kohler and her mother lose the remainder of their inheritance, as well as many of their renters, and can no longer make ends meet. Because of this, they look into liquidating their household and hire an individual from an auction house to evaluate their possessions. Upon entering, he declares that most of the items are worthless, as nobody wants this style of furniture or décor any longer. As he walks through the house, he systematically evaluates and devalues all of their possessions:

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[55]It is interesting that Walter Benjamin's description of his grandmother's home on the same street, Blumeshof 12, mirrors this scene. He describes how, after her passing, all of the furniture that appeared so heavy, solid, and stable proved to not have durability over time. Because of being out-of-date and unfashionable at the time of her death (as opposed to the fashionable Jugendstil), all of her possessions, which were supposed to guarantee and reflect her upper-bourgeois existence, went straight to the *Trödler*. See: Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften VII·I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 412.

[Er] ging durch die Wohnung und mähte alles mit Blicken nieder. . . . Die samtenen und seidenen Gardinen, die Wolken rouleaux, die brüchigen Filetgardinen, die Vitrine im Eßzimmer, gefüllt mit Kristall, die vierundzwanzig verschiedenen bunten Römer, die Sesselchen mit grünem Seidenbezug, die Vitrine mit Meißner Figuren im Musiksalon, die Ledersessel mit Kastanienblättern, die eichene Standlampe. (241)

The rooms that he walks through and deems worthless are all rooms that very much fit with Benjamin's description from the beginning of this section, which discussed the layering of fabrics and items that allow for traces to be left. Every room of Fräulein Kohler's home is layered in this way, both literally and figuratively. The text talks of the "samten und seidenen Gardinen," the velvet and silk curtains, two fabrics that perhaps more than any other fabric represent both an antiquated idea of wealth as well as delicacy; these are materials on which one easily leaves traces. The rooms are also filled with "Vitrinen," display cabinets, which were not only out of fashion as discussed in the introduction, but which also hold items such as figurines and crystal, which further violate the aesthetic principles of modern décor.

Yet, the problem in this scene is not just that the house is filled with items that are not modern and thus impossible to sell, but rather, that both the mother and Fräulein Kruger failed to see beforehand just how worthless these items had become. Fräulein Kruger knew that she felt it was foolishness to maintain a large house simply to have possessions from earlier times, but even then, the foolishness lay in not wanting to downsize. What she did not see was that the items to which they were clinging were no longer even a symbol of wealth. In this sense, they were holding onto an antiquated idea of how to represent success without realizing it had become obsolete and outdated. Their foolishness was in failing to see just how out of style, and thereby worthless, what they were clinging to had become.

Fräulein Kruger comments on these feelings, asking, "Hat nichts Bestand? . . . Ist

alles Mist, was wir gemacht haben?" (241). She laments the fact that nothing has "Bestand,"
nothing is able to withstand the passing of time and changing of trends, not even the pieces of
furniture that were expensive when they were new and expected to last. The rhetorical
question she poses, whether it was all in vain, does not require an answer, as she is already
aware that the answer is clear. Yes, everything that they did was for nothing, as she notes,
"der große bürgerliche Reichtum elend vertan! Wo war ein, auch nur ein schönes Stück?"
(242). It is interesting, however, in the second part of her question, when she asks, "Wo war
ein, auch nur ein schönes Stück?", that she has the distance to see that these pieces have
indeed become worthless and are no longer considered beautiful, not to the world of buyers,
and not to her. In this way, she reinforces her earlier comment that she would be happier to
live in a small space and sees no need for these items. Her mother, on the other hand, clings
desperately to their worth, believing that society is judging incorrectly and expecting that
someday they will be valued again. Fräulein Kohler makes no such assumptions, for even in
this moment, she does not value them. It is just that she had hoped others would, and her
shock comes more from a misreading of their value to others.

 The realization that these objects lack value saddens her, but so does the idea that
these now worthless things are sites of memories. And while the past that they speak of
contains positive memories, the contrast with her reality in this moment is disheartening.
This loss of value, and loss of status, is reinforced when, after having been told that an
auction would not be worth the cost of staging, she simply sits in one of the rooms, dejected:
"So saß zehn Jahre nach dem Tod des Geheimrats Kohler, einem Mann von 12 Millionen
Vermögen, seine Tochter in der Zehnzimmerwohnung" (243). All that is left of a family
history of immense wealth is the ten-room apartment in which she sits, and even this they

will have to give up. In this way, the mute items in the rooms speak, but what they speak to is failure and regret.

Being confronted with the contrast between a home that seemed so rich and elegant and exuded success, and a home that has now been deemed utterly worthless, is too much for Fräulein Kohler to manage. Emotionally overwhelmed, she looks around the room and every item speaks of a past event. "Die braune Brozelampe brannte. Zu irgendeinem Jubiläum hatte sie ihr Vater bekommen. … Die Römer waren zwar häßlich, aber hatten sie nicht vergnügt Wein daraus getrunken? Es ging ihr alles durcheinander" (243). The items are not only tied to her father, which makes the loss more tragic, but they also force her to attempt to reconcile her past and present selves. Did she not drink wine out of these glasses happily? Should she have realized the foolishness back then? Could and should she have acted differently? These are thoughts that lead to confusion, "alles [ging] durcheinander." Each item she views has been imbued with a memory, but the memories seen through the lens of the present moment have all merged together and become saturated with regret and pain. Thinking back to her childhood, she notes,

> Als Kind, dachte sie, habe ich in den Katalogen von Herzog und Gerson und Grünfeld immer die Gardinen und Tischwäsche angestrichen, die mir am besten gefielen. Ich habe gar kein Gefühl mehr für Besitz! So beweglich sein wie möglich! Nur keine Sachen, die einen beschweren! (239)

In contrast to her desire as a child to follow the example with which she was raised, to decorate with elaborate curtains and tablecloths, she now realizes the danger that these items hold. They weigh her down, literally, because they make moving more difficult, but also emotionally, because they provide the object to which memories can be attached. Feeling the

pain associated with all of the items in her home, she thus remarks that she has lost all feeling, or "Gefühl," for possession. This insight is punctuated by an exclamation mark, and it reinforces the reading that the weighing down, the "beschweren," is both physical and emotional, through her use of "Gefühl." It is not that she, for examples, no longer has any "Interesse" in the items, or even that they no longer please her, "gefallen," as they did in her childhood. Rather what she has lost is the feeling for them. She no longer feels inclined to have possessions, because having a feeling about possessions has proven to be catastrophic to her emotional and financial self.

Instead, she tells herself that what she needs is to have as few possessions as possible and to stay as mobile and light as possible. Several times this resolve is repeated. "Leicht sein, beweglich sein!" becomes her new mantra (242). While their circumstances and the paths to this realization greatly differ, Fräulein Kruger and Cornelia nonetheless reach the same realization—that possessions pose a threat. Benjamin's idea of layering proves to be true. The reading of Cornelia's situation highlights the potential danger of having too few markers of memory, and the way that this lack transforms the home into a liminal space, while the reading of Fräulein Kruger's space shows that layers of memories can also be detrimental and isolating, for memories recalled can often cause more pain than memories forgotten. These two characters' interactions with their domestic spaces, and the fact that these two spaces are so different but equally detrimental, suggests that the women are not dealing with questions of décor, but rather, with emotional duress playing itself out on the canvas of the home. For the happy individual, décor might be a matter of pure aesthetic appeal, but for all of those wrestling with their pasts, décor becomes the mute things that

speak. If that which they speak of is of loss and pain, then they pose a danger to those individuals—a danger that they would not pose to others.

## The Blurring of the Interior and Exterior

In *Das Passagenwerk*, Benjamin argues that "das zwanzigste Jahrhundert machte mit seiner Porosität, Transparenz, seinem Freilicht- und Freiluftwesen dem Wohnen im alten Sinne ein Ende."[56] For Benjamin, this new sense of porosity and transparency, understood as a blurring of the distinction between the interior and exterior, was a welcomed change. In his eyes, it encouraged individuals to more fully integrate into society, in large part because they had no other place to retreat to. The home, the retreat of the nineteenth century, and with it the idea of what it meant to live in a home, "Wohnen im alten Sinne," was to be done away with. As he envisioned it, homes were to become "Wohnen als Transitivum"—a transitional existence, not predicated on comfort, individuation or stability, but rather, a space in which the boundaries between inside and outside were constantly in flux.[57] A result of this was a production of space in such a way that the inhabitant never perceived it as fully private. In other words, it was never a space in which the existence of the outside world could be forgotten. The home was not to be a space of retreat. In essence, Benjamin argues for the validity of crafting homes defined as liminal spaces, in which one can exist, while also constantly aware of the fact that the space lacks permanence and clear boundaries.

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[56]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften V·I*. 1982. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 292.

[57]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften V·I*, 292.

Benjamin's discussion of "Wohnen als Transitivum" gives a framework through which one can think about the blurring of boundaries and its true effects. As we have already discussed earlier in this chapter, the blurring of boundaries, as seen in the renegotiation of private/non-private material space and of aural boundaries, leads to a loss of a sense of control and safety within the domestic interior. Returning to this idea of boundaries in flux, we can now turn to our final reading of *Fabian.* Here, I argue that it is precisely this idea of seeing an end to "Wohnen im alten Sinne" that is taking place, with the boundaries between the interior and exterior weakening. The literature examined in this chapter suggests that this change is taking place because of a lack of memory inscription. Yet, unlike Benjamin, who sees this shift in the home towards a liminal space as positive, my research does not align itself with his conclusion. Instead, I offer a reading that shows the problems inherent in spaces which lack definition.

## *Fabian*: Cornelia's Home

In order to support this stance, we return to an examination of Cornelia's interaction with her home. Her problematic relationship with her space was detailed above, and is further emphasized in the text when Fabian first accompanies Cornelia to her apartment and she comments, "Wenn ich allein bin, wirkt dieser Salon noch viel häßlicher. Wollen Sie sich mal die schaurigen Bäume anschauen? Sie traten ans Fenster" (102). This passage not only confirms what has already been established, namely that she is ill at ease within her home, but more tellingly, it draws an instant connection between entering into an interior space and associating the space not with aspects of interiority but with exterior elements, namely the

trees outside of her window. The seamless sentence equates the ugliness of her space with the "schaurigen Bäume," trees that have taken on an eerie presence and are seen as menacing, more bothersome to her when she is inside than when she is outside. Trees, after all, belong to the exterior space and thus pose no threat when she herself is outside. However, they do not belong to the interior description of a room and, because they are out of place, they are perceived as threatening. Not only is the outside finding its way inside, then, but the outside world is described as something that scares her. The exterior world of Berlin is not only a space that is portrayed as fear-inducing—"diese fürchterliche Stadt" (103)—but worse yet, it cannot be contained. It makes its way into her interior living space, literally defining her space; in fact, the reader is given almost no other description of her room aside from this.

This configuration of Cornelia's room in her perception as a liminal space, one that is neither fully interior nor exterior, gains complexity when Cornelia and Fabian walk over to the window to examine the fear-inducing trees and Cornelia notes, "Heute sind sogar die Bäume freundlicher. . . . Das macht, weil ich sonst allein bin" (102). Cornelia thus links the liminal nature of her living space with the quality of being alone: as soon as Fabian is there with her, the outside world is no longer as menacing, perhaps because the boundaries of her space now feel more defined. With Fabian there, the space itself is still intricately connected to the outside, with the trees still at the forefront of the description, but they have become friendlier and less hostile and scary. The fact that her perception of the space changes depending on who enters the room suggests that the configuration and production of space is constantly in flux. By design, then, her room is not always unwelcoming; instead, the interactions she has in it and her perception of her role within the space change the space itself. Her description of the trees as friendlier because of the company she is in confirms the

sense of alienation and isolation that she usually feels as a single woman living in Berlin, which is stressed by her use of the word "allein." She remarks that most of her time is indeed spent alone, but she also has control over her relationship with space because she is able to change it by changing her state of being "allein" or not.

If we follow the trajectory of discussion from earlier in this chapter, in which Cornelia's space was described as "leer"—empty, devoid of any memories or physical items that would tie her to the room—inviting Fabian into the space has shifted it from one of liminality to one that can begin to approximate the qualities of a private sphere, albeit moderately. This appears to happen precisely because she is allowing the space to serve as a site of a memory formation, much as she did in setting up the table for dinner, as was discussed earlier. That this is a unique experience for her is confirmed when she states, "aber mit dir mach ich eine Ausnahme" in response to the question of whether she wants to continue to keep people and emotions at bay (103). In general, she still believes that one can only survive in Berlin if one adopts a cool persona, but in Fabian's case, she is willing to make an exception because she already feels a strong connection with him. Her room thus does not change because just any human is in her room with her, but rather, because it is an individual of importance to her, one whom she has made the choice to emotionally let in. By allowing herself to be emotionally open and thus vulnerable, she has also opened up her space to become a site of inscription, and it is this inscription which then changes the atmosphere of the room.

This scene highlights the complex nature of the home as a liminal space, and it would seem to speak to the idea that the interiority of a space and the boundary between interior and exterior are subject to change and can be reinforced or undermined through an individual's

actions. When all traces of personal use are lacking in a space, the space functions as a vacuum; devoid of anything that could capture and hold one's gaze, the exterior world is drawn inside, and the boundaries are blurred. Yet as soon as Cornelia's space becomes visually or emotionally imbued with meaning, it begins to uphold its boundaries more forcefully, thereby allowing her to begin to view her space as a place of comfort. As long as Fabian is there, the transparency between the interior and exterior worlds seems less menacing.

It is also interesting to note that, prior to Fabian's entrance into the space, Cornelia's home was one in which she constantly felt "allein," and yet, in some ways, her understanding of "alone" is in conflict with the general definition of the word. Normally, it would imply a state marked by too many boundaries, too enclosed, shut off from the rest of the world. Yet, for her, this is not the case. She is not alone because of a wall separating her from others, but rather, alone despite the fact that the exterior world, a space filled with people, is intruding upon her space. She is not alone because of too many boundaries but rather because of too few boundaries; she feels alone because she feels unsafe. Her home cannot not function in the traditional sense, by providing a space apart from the menacing outside and protecting her. Being alone means being in a space that is not functioning as she expects it to; the expected role and the actuality of her situation at odds.

In many ways, this can also be read as a confirmation of Cornelia's perception of the world and the home itself. Her idea of the home is much more in keeping with the older idea of the home as the place of family and social connections, which is why Fabian's entrance into the space is able to reaffirm, while he is there, the function she expects the space to have.

When he is there, she is able to feel safe, and thus his presence is able to help reestablish a boundary between the interior and exterior world. Cornelia is alone not because she is too isolated from the world; she is alone because her home is not constructed as a space of safety and of familial life.

*Fabian*: Fabian's Home

When examining Fabian's home, this lack of boundaries between the inside and outside is repeated. Fabian arrives home and realizes he has time on his hands before meeting up with his friend Labude later in the day. He turns towards his bookshelf, selects one of his old philosophy books, and sits down to read for a few minutes. "Er setzte sich und schlug das Heft auf. . . . Fabian blickte auf die Straße hinunter, sah den Autobussen nach, die, wie Elefanten auf Rollschuhen, die Kaiserallee entlangfuhren, und schloß vorübergehend die Augen. Dann blätterte er und überflog die Einleitung" (49). Fabian's act of reading is one in which his gaze wanders between his book and the activity on the street outside of his apartment, with a fluidity that speaks to the lack of clear boundaries between the two spaces. The interior and the exterior are visually connected, in that he is able to look down at his book and then, from that same position and without having to get up and walk to the window, is able to see the activity on the street outside. For Fabian, the exterior world is even more visually present in his interior space than it was for Cornelia, who had to approach the window in order to view the trees outside. Yet, beyond the visual, the two spaces are also mentally intricately connected, as Fabian does not readily distinguish the images provided by these varying sources, but rather, in one sentence, connects both. His mind wanders from the

book to the street and back to the book again without any hindrances or indications of a clearly demarcated boundary. For him, it is the act of seeing that matters, and not as much what it is that he is taking in.

In the passage above Fabian's behavior demonstrates a lack of both mental and visual boundaries between the home and the street outside, which confirms the configuration of the space of the home as a liminal space. And yet, his perception of this lacking boundary does not carry with it the angst that it had for Cornelia. For him, while the outside world might be present inside, it is not a world defined by the eerie trees of Cornelia's existence. Rather, it is represented by long boulevards and traffic, which are loud and perhaps annoying, but also endearingly comical at times. For instance, the buses are likened to elephants on roller skates, with nothing threatening about that image. If anything, it conjures up an image one might find in a children's book: a clumsy elephant trying to do its job, getting individuals to where they need to be, but proving to be a bit noisy in fulfilling the task, especially as such a large animal in a crowded space.

The question then becomes what factors are at play that allow Fabian's perception of the lacking boundaries between interior and exterior spaces to be so different from Cornelia's? I would argue that there are at least three elements that allow for this variance in perception. First, we see a difference in their familiarity with and thus understanding of the exterior world of Berlin. While for Cornelia the city is new and frightening, Fabian knows Berlin well. He likes the city, has come here by choice, and has, at the time of the novel's action, already been in Berlin for several years. This familiarity with the city may account for the difference in perception, with his focus being on the busy streets and the lively action taking place outside of his apartment. The excitement of the city is, for him, captured by the

image of public transportation, the big buses rolling along the grand boulevards. It is an image of movement and modernity, but it is not a threatening view of the city. If anything, quite to the contrary, it is a city that is alive and is drawing him out and adding life and motion to his otherwise empty apartment.    Second, after years of living in the city, Fabian has also developed a coping mechanism for dealing with the noise and bustle of the city. For, as his gaze moves from the book to the street, after being visually confronted with the image of a city street within his apartment, we see that the next act is one in which Fabian "schloß die Augen"—he closes his eyes. The very next visual act that follows this is the note that he "blätterte ... und überflog die Einleitung." In this way, through closing his eyes, he is both able to block out the view of the street and also refocus his attention on the interior space and the action of reading that he had chosen to undertake. By closing his eyes momentarily – a way of controlling his visual stimuli – he is able to return to reading upon opening them, having guided his attention back to the task at hand. This shows that while boundaries in the traditional sense may not be set, with the interior and exterior worlds more closely linked than one would expect, this sense of living in a liminal space that is open to the outside world does not affect Fabian as much. He has found a way to reassert these boundaries within himself; by closing his eyes, he is able to shut out all that is happening outside of his immediate interior space, thereby reasserting a boundary, physically and visually, if only temporarily.

Third, it is also vital to the reading of this passage that unlike Cornelia, whose space is completely empty and void of anything that would hold her attention, Fabian's space is sparse but does have a shelf with books on it.[58] And as we see in this scene, he not only

[58]The fact that Fabian has books in his room also confirms his more traditionalist views, as the books stand in

enjoys reading, a pastime he has maintained throughout his years of being in Berlin, but importantly, it is an activity that links him back to his earlier stages of his life. Books are his sites of memory, as we see when he reaches for a particular book: "Er griff zu. Es war Descartes' 'Betrachtungen über die Grundlagen der Philosophie', so hieß das kleine Heft. Sechs Jahre waren es her, seit er sich damit befaßt hatte" (48). Even before he begins reading the book, he has already established a link to his past, noting that it has been six years since he has read it last. The book ties him to the past, and by doing so, allows the space of his home to be a space of memory, as long as he has the book in hand. For him, then, reading is a way to create boundaries. It creates a mental boundary by allowing him to escape his present situation and lose himself in the reading, and at the same time, reading firmly ties him to his interior space because his books have imbued meaning upon it. This is no longer simply an empty room, it is a space where one reads and thinks.

In her work *In the Place of Language*, Claudia Brodsky argues that architecture serves as a referent, creating a place to which perceptions return in order to revisit memories.[59] Brodsky echoes Benjamin's sentiment when she says that "mute things speak," serving as symbols of earlier events.[60] As seen in the reading above, books have become the objects that are able to speak to Fabian of the past. This notion of architectural purpose as discussed by Brodsky and Benjamin also highlights the problems involved in interior spaces

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contrast to the modernist design ideas discussed in the historical section, by which books were seen as clutter to be disposed. Books are his source of entertainment, and their presence highlights the more modern medium that he does not have in his space: a radio. This further supports the view of him as a traditional intellectual who was not willing to completely adopt and support modernity's whims.

[59]Brodsky, Claudia. *In the Place of Language: Literature and the Architecture of the Referent*. Bronx, NY: Fordham Univeristy Press, 2009, xv.

[60]Brodsky, Claudia. *In the Place of Language*, 220.

that do not have many items to which memories can return. For Cornelia, there were none until Fabian entered the space, and even for Fabian, aside from his one refuge, books, there are not many other items in his home, implying that very few memories are attached to his space.

When perusing his bookshelf, Fabian is reminded of his university days, because it was then that he last read Descartes. But aside from the books serving as a referent, when he attempts to call to mind any other memories, from only a few years back, to his surprise, he notices that despite his best efforts, virtually no memories have survived from this time. "Sechs Jahre waren mitunter eine lange Zeit. Auf der anderen Straßenseite hatte ein Schild gehangen: 'Chaim Pines, Ein- und Verkauf von Fellen'. War das alles, was er von damals wußte?" (48). Having lived in a space in which no décor and no tangible objects of value aside from his books are around to be imbued with meaning, it is the memory of a single tangible sign that has become the referent for an entire era of his life. Moreover, it is not only a sign that has become the only object to which his memory can return, but a sign that hung outside of his window. This again reinforces the idea that, when living in spaces of void, the exterior world is drawn in and becomes part of the interior, blurring the boundaries between the two spaces. The sign, which was firmly situated in the exterior world, became visually linked with his home because it was the one sign that he was able to see from his apartment, and thus he perceived the sign to be an element of the interior. Lacking any other visual stimuli, it was this sign that became the site of memory. The realization that this is indeed all he can remember reinforces the reading of his domestic interior above, in which the boundaries between his reading of a book and looking out onto the *Kaiserallee* are interwoven and confirms that this interwoven nature of the interior and exterior is not an

isolated incident. Rather, it is representative of Fabian's interactions with his domestic interior spaces, which is shown to have a long history of behaving as a liminal space.

In returning to the question of what it is that makes Fabian more at ease with living in a liminal space as compared to Cornelia, a last answer can perhaps be found by returning to the scene in which Fabian is reading Descartes. In reading, Fabian criticizes Descartes for his attempt to stage a revolution while being far removed from the place of revolt, which Fabian describes as an attempt at a "Revolution in der Einsamkeit" (49). He notes that Descartes was advocating for change while living isolated from the world, writing from the comfort of his small rural home in the Netherlands: "In Holland. Tulpenbeete vorm Haus. Fabian lachte" (49). Fabian's laughter provides perhaps the strongest clue as to why the exterior world's intrusions do not bother him much: he sees writing about something from far away as a laughable endeavor. He believes that one needs to be at the site of action in order to change anything. And without a doubt Fabian, living in a Berlin that is so powerful it even intrudes on the interior space of the home, is definitely living in the place where action is taking place. This observation also resonates with the earlier reading of Fabian's room and his comment that he had come to Berlin out of his ridiculous "Bedürfnis, anwesend zu sein" (46). Arguably then the blurring of boundaries does not affect him because it conversely allows him to know and feel a heightened sense of being present in the city. Fitting with this reading, after only a brief moment of looking over his book, we are told that, "Fabian legte den Philosophen beiseite und zog den Mantel an" (49). He heads out the door, deciding to vacate his interior space altogether in favor of being part of the exterior world.

Conclusion

If we began this chapter by discussing the idea of the home in the nineteenth century as one defined as a space of privacy and safety, with clear boundaries between the spaces of familial life and the outside world, then this research has aimed to show that, for all of the characters found in the novels discussed here, homes are no longer fulfilling these functions. Their homes are not places of safety or privacy, nor do they tell stories of the past, or when they do, the stories are of pain and loss. Due to a lacking desire for new memories on the part of the inhabitants, and due to the lack of visual, spatial and aural boundaries, the homes seen here are not spaces that provide a sense of belonging, comfort, or safety.

Literary scholar Philippa Tristam argues in her work *Living Space* that, embedded within western culture is the understanding that "houses are fictions of how life ought to be," and it is perhaps exactly this core belief that stands in stark contrast to the configurations of homes in Weimar Berlin.[61] As Lämmchen surmises, if her current home is an indication of how life is to be, it offers a scary image of the future—and certainly one which does not allow for the existence of a female domestic space of agency.

Reading domestic space as a category of analysis allows us to capture these tensions between what was and what was hoped for. By examining the characters' interactions with their spaces, we see how they define not only themselves in relation to their homes, but also their relationships, their views on life in the city, and their understanding of the future. Oftentimes, we see that homes that no longer fulfill their historically expected functions prevent the characters from coping well with the city at large; instead, the city becomes an

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[61]Tristam, Philippa. *Living Space in Fact and Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1989, 265.

endless boulevard, or a swath of menacing trees, a disparate place to live that offers little

hope. But at other times, we see characters, such as Fabian, who exit their space and go in

search of those aspects no longer found in the home—and discover spaces that might be able

to, at least in part, fulfill these roles, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: THE SPACE OF THE MODERN OFFICE

Introduction

The new roles women adopted in the Weimar era, especially when entering into the white-collar workforce, have long been a topic of fascination, both for then contemporaries and for many Weimar-era German scholars today. The emancipation of women and their decision to work outside of the home have often been seen as a symbolic representation of a host of other social and moral issues, ranging from questions regarding the valuation of family, motherhood, and men, to the role of the state, the economy, media influences, and leisure pursuits, to only name a few.

Clearly, the appearance of *die Neue Frau* on the scene of Weimar-era cityscapes warranted both general interest and scholarly investigation due to the sheer novelty of the historical moment that these women represented. During the 1920s, as women entered the white-collar workforce in unprecedented numbers they became, for the first time in history, a presence in the offices of Berlin and beyond and partook in city life in a way that was previously unimaginable.[62]

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[62]The definition and origin of *die Neue Frau* was discussed in the introduction to the dissertation as it is relevant to all chapters. As a reminder: the *Neue Frau* was a new phenomenon, defined as a young, modern, attractive woman who was employed (often in a large city) and thus no longer reliant on a man. Seen as having greater freedom than previous generations of women, she is often depicted as a "woman about town", going to the cinema, drinking with men, and partaking in the general frivolity of (city) life

The fascination with these new working women, termed by the media *die Neue Frau,*
and the perceived social upheaval that they caused, has not been relegated to the realm of
current scholarship alone as earlier mentioned. Already during the Weimar Republic,
contemporaries, ranging from cultural critics to journalists, writers, and everyday observers
of city life, were mesmerized by this shift in the perceived role of women and work. They
wrote extensively on the phenomenon, with opinions ranging from unbridled enthusiasm to
stern dismissal. Perhaps the most prominent of these texts is Siegfried Kracauer's *Die
Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, first published in installments in the feuilleton
section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and then reprinted in book form in 1930. With this piece,
Kracauer purports to act as an ethnographer of sorts, setting out to investigate and document
the "new species" of workers suddenly overrunning German cities—most prominently,
Berlin.[63]

This "new species" of white-collar employees interested Kracauer and his
contemporaries then, and the topic of white-collar employees continues to inspire research by
German scholars today. Yet, oddly, almost all of the research to date concerning female
white-collar employees of this era has focused its inquiries on other aspects of city life
associated with these women, such as their roles as viewers of cinema or as consumers of
new products and fashions, rather than their relationships with the space of the office itself.[64]

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[63]Kracauer, Siegfried. *Die Angestellten: Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*. 1930. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
Taschenbuch Verlag, 1971.

[64]Regarding class, see Hake, Sabine. *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar
Berlin*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008; for a discussion of fashion see Ganeva, Mila. *Women in
Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918-1933*. Rochester, NY: Camden House,
2008; for women's changing roles, see Ankum, Katharina von, ed. *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and
Modernity in Weimar Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; for an investigation of the idea of

Despite the continued preoccupation within German Studies surrounding the so-termed "Spatial Turn," which elevated space beyond a mere setting to the level of actor, the space of the office has been wholly overlooked.

The research presented in this chapter thus aims to contribute to scholarship by filling this gap. In this chapter, I intend to look at the interplay between white-collar female workers and the space of the office, understanding the space both as setting and actor. To this end, the chapter will both draw on ideas of space, many borrowed from Lefebvre's seminal *The Production of Space,* and will discuss space in terms of gendered experiences.[65] In doing so, this work intends to expand upon and complicate the dominant narrative of white-collar female employment. This narrative most often asserts that women willingly left the paid labor force because of their overriding desire to marry or because they had become disillusioned with work, finding it less glamorous than expected. My work suggests that this perspective overlooks the importance of the space of the office in these decision-making processes.[66]

Recognizing that women did indeed often leave their white-collar positions of employment after only a few years of working, my research asks why this was the case and repositions the nexus of inquiry to examine what systemic and spatially dictated factors directly contributed to their exodus and disillusionment. I do this through a close-reading of two popular *Angestelltenromane* of this period, both of which were written by women about

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love and work, see Biebl, Sabine, and Verena Mund, eds. *Working Girls: Zur Ökonomie von Liebe und Arbeit.* Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2007.

[65]Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. 1974. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

[66]This argument is espoused for example in: Fiege, Nora. *Berliner Mode und Konfektion in den 1920er Jahren: Neue Kleider für Neue Frauen*. München: Grin Verlag, 2013, 34.

women at work. Through an investigation of space, my research thus aims to reinforce the centrality of the normative, instructional forces that a space creates, while also highlighting the complexity that results when the actors within a space engage in unconventional behaviors that reflect back onto the space. In short, these literary texts reveal how normative behavior is often dictated by space and yet simultaneously also reinforced (or subverted) by the actors in that space. A productive discussion on the space of the office thus requires an attempt to tease out these forces—whether emanating from the space itself or the inhabitants of the space—while also keeping in mind that they are always in interplay with each other.

My aim within this context is threefold. First, I intend to show how the dominant attitudes of men in the office relegated women to the status of mere accessories within the space of the office, to a form of décor. This view was largely condoned by society and contributed to ageism because a woman's value to the company only lasted as long as her value as décor did. Second, I will show how the space of the office was dominated visually and acoustically by typewriters and will explore the impact that this had on the value of women vis-à-vis machinery that constantly produced the sound of efficiency. And lastly, I examine how the space of the modern office by design lacked the traditional structure of established, codified behavior. Without established boundaries, the space of the modern office enabled new codes of conduct between women that were manipulative and highly detrimental, often verging on self-negation. All together, then, I hope to make an argument for the importance of incorporating an understanding of the space of the office into our understanding of the *Neue Frau* as *Angestellte*. Ultimately, I hope to show that the modern office was, paradoxically, a thoroughly anti-modern space. The negative reactions often

detailed in literature, however, do not bespeak an anti-modern attitude on the part of the protagonist as much as they serve as a testament to the negative effects that the construction of the space of the office had upon its female employees.[67] More broadly, this research also aims to show that a space devoid of socially established rules of behavior can be as problematic as a space that is laden with normativizing codes of conduct; for, without a forced mode of interaction, the space lends itself to arbitrary and potentially manipulative behavior.

The Office: A Changing Space

From a historical vantage point, the space of the office was greatly in flux during the Weimar years, and what is often overlooked when discussing female employment in this period is that this was not actually the moment in which women first entered the workforce as paid laborers outside of the house. Rather, it marked a shift in the types of positions that women held and thus also the spaces that they occupied as employees. In fact, as German historian Ute Frevert points out in her work regarding the history of women in the workforce, the percentage of women in the paid workforce had remained surprisingly constant since about 1882, with about 35% of women working outside of the house both then and during the Weimar Republic years of 1919 to 1933.[68] Likewise, Frevert details statistical data that

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[67]"Modern" will be used in this chapter as a descriptor for a socially progressive attitude, as opposed to anti-modern, in which traditional, antiquated forms of social ordering were preferred. The latter viewed women primarily as homemakers and caretakers of children. Along the same lines, "anti-modern" is used here to refer to a position against female liberation and female employment.

[68]Frevert, Ute. *Frauen-Geschichte zwischen Bürgerlicher Verbesserung und Neuer Weiblichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, 171.

shows that employment did not vary much between the years immediately prior to the first World War and during the Weimar Republic. These findings contradict the traditional narrative that it was the war that launched women into the labor force. However, while the percentage of women in the workforce remained the same, the novelty of the Weimar era— and thus the cause of much tension and attention in the media—was the type of employment that women held during these years, namely that of the white-collar office employee. It was then not so much the shift from unpaid to paid labor that caused the furor, but rather the shift in *where* women performed their work that aroused attention. The shift in women's work spaces thus lies at the heart of many of the conflicts portrayed in the literature of this period and thus warrants further attention. As women entered into the white-collar settings of offices, often located in large cities, the power negotiations within those spaces were in flux and became the spaces in which women's emancipation efforts would be fought out.

In order to analyze the interplay between the space of the office and the white-collar female employees who worked in these spaces, as depicted in Weimar-era literature, an understanding of the historical shifts involving women and employment is vital. This will provide the basis for subsequent literary analysis and argumentation, particularly because the two literary texts examined in this chapter both position themselves as fictionalized accounts of either autobiographical experiences or depictions of historical reality. I will thus begin this chapter by providing a socio-historical background of female white-collar employment and will then move on to a close-reading of two texts by female authors from this era. Both texts enjoyed immense popularity at the time of publication and were also published in close proximity to each other, namely, Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*

(1930) and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi* (1931).[69][70] These two works were chosen for a closer,

contrasting analysis because they both present us with protagonists who are young women

trying to navigate the environment of the office, and yet, they are often read as presenting

different understandings of the world of white-collar employment. The majority of the focus

will be on *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, both due to its content and because it is all

too often overlooked despite being a hugely popular and highly relevant work of literature.

Even more important is its singularity as one of the only works of literature in which the

focus of the novel is on the space of the office itself. The reading of *Gilgi*, a much more often

studied work of Weimar literature, will be used as a counterpoint to illustrate how the

perceived differences between the two works are actually just varying reactions to the same

underlying, systemic problem inherent in the structure of the Weimar-era white-collar office

environment. As such, it will help reinforce the universality of my claims about white-collar

office environments of this era. Additionally, *Gilgi*, as a representation of

*Angestelltenliteratur*, can actually be read as a much more anti-modern work of fiction than

is often espoused, and this will be discussed in depth later on in this chapter. While the

category of *Angestelltenliteratur* encompassed many works, for the purposes of this chapter,

an emphasis is placed on selecting works by female authors, in order to help amplify voices

not often heard within this context. Unfortunately, however, this meant excluding many of

the most popular works of the era such as *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat* by Rudolf

Braune, *Das Fräulein vom Spittelmarkt* by Adolf Sommerfeld, Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, Hans

Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun?*, and Martin Kessel's *Herrn Brechers Fiasko*. While works

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[69]Brück, Anita. *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1930.

[70]Keun, Irmgard. *Gilgi: Eine von uns*. 1931. Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2013.

such as Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* and Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* fit within the timeframe—which, consistent with other chapters, were written by women and focused on the latter years of the Weimar Republic—thematically they did not lend themselves as well to readings of the office. In order to support the claims of this chapter, it was also important to select works of literature which were widely read during this era, and thus obscure texts were not considered. Christa Anita Brück followed up the great success of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* with another novel, *Ein Mädchen mit Prokura* in 1932, but because *Schicksale* is singular among all of these works with the focus it places on the office as plot, the chapter could not be written without its inclusion. Likewise, Irmgard Keun followed up her success of *Gilgi* with *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen*, but her first novel was chosen for this chapter because it more directly focused on questions of employment within an office setting, as opposed to *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen*, which will be discussed in depth in the third chapter.

Historical Background: White-Collar Employees in Weimar Germany

When considering the historical novelty of the female white-collar worker and attempting to situate her within Weimar Republic history, it proves valuable to begin by examining available census data in order to illuminate the shifts that took place between the turn of the century and the end of the Weimar Republic. A nationwide census was conducted in 1925, and showed that, of the 12 million women of working age, 4 million women (34%) worked outside of the home. Of these 4 million, 1.2 million women (30%) worked in white-

collar professions, as typists, secretaries, clerks, and other such professions.[71] Any population

occupying 30% of the workforce is a sizable percentage of the overall workforce and thus in

many ways justifies the attention these white-collar female employees received. Yet, what

makes this number all the more astounding is that it represents a population that, heretofore,

and especially prior to the First World War, was almost entirely male-dominated. While we

have today become so accustomed to the idea of secretarial employment being defined

stereotypically as a domain largely dominated by women, this is, from a historical

perspective, a relatively new development, with its roots only tracing back to the turn of the

century. Its shift to a female-dominated realm solidified during the Weimar Republic years.[72]

Prior to this, secretarial functions were largely performed by young apprentices and other

men who did not come from a higher social sphere or did not posses the education required

for more advanced positions but who, nonetheless, could find respectable and secure

employment within the white-collar offices of small businesses. However, due to the

changing nature of business, with its ever-increasing focus on efficiency and productivity, as

well as the advent of the typewriter and, finally, the changing nature and needs of the

population as a result of the war, these jobs lost value and were increasingly relegated solely

to the realm of the female white-collar employee.

Historically situating white-collar employment as it was found in the Weimar

Republic is, in many ways, an attempt to expound upon concepts we no longer have with

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[71]Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte*, 157.

[72]While this shift is discussed in this chapter in the context of the Weimar Republic, it is of course not a trend specific to Germany, but rather something that we see taking place across Europe and the United States as well. Although it is outside of the scope of this chapter, for a more transnational discussion, see for example: Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

regard to job titles and their associated job responsibilities. While even the term "'white-collar worker'" is generally the standard English translation for *Angestellte,* it does not adequately capture the wage distinction inherent in the German term. Historically, the term *Angestellte* was used to differentiate between those employed in the private sector, sometimes also referred to as *Bedienstete*, and those working as civil servants, referred to as *Privatbeamte*; both terms always carried a level of respectability and prestige.[73] Yet, following the rise of industrialization, which intensified during the years of the Weimar Republic, the term ceased to indicate who one's employer was and, instead, became a term denoting whether one received a salary (a fixed amount independent of hours worked) or a wage (per hour pay). With wage-work typically reserved for manual labor employment (blue-collar employment), any employee who received a salary rather than a wage fell under this new system of classification and was referred to as an *Angestellter*. Thus, while the term as it was used in the Weimar Republic largely carried implications regarding pay and the location of the work—primarily in city centers—it is sometimes translated as "white-collar salaried employees" even though it no longer implied the historically respected social status that the term "white-collar" once denoted. As Inka Mülder-Bach points out in the introduction to *The Salaried Masses (Die Angestellten)*, "in the very process in which the salaried employees grew to mass proportions, they massively forfeited what had been used to justify their privileged position: higher earnings, relative autonomy, chances of social advancement and security of employment."[74]

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[73]Kocka, Jürgen. *Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte 1850-1890: Vom Privatbeamten zum angestellten Arbeitnehmer*. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Ruprecht, 1981, 116-126.

[74]Mülder-Bach, Inka. Introduction. *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. By Siegfried Kracauer. Trans. Quintin Hoare. London: Verso, 1998, 6.

Despite often receiving an abysmally low salary as *Angestellte*, the expectations were to live a lifestyle in keeping with the previous ideal of what that terms implied, which was often entirely outside of these workers' financial reach but was to be striven for and imitated nonetheless. Individuals went to great lengths to feign a lifestyle of comfort and fashion that they did not have but wanted to appear to have. The desire to appear wealthier than one was even became a trope of sorts in Weimar literature, inspiring the title of Irmgard Keun's hugely popular *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), which alludes to the continuous attempts women made to seem richer than they were, such as wearing fake silk in the hopes that it would pass as real silk.[75] This idea of continuing to associate the lifestyle of *Angestellte* with comfortable wealth, despite all evidence to the contrary, is relevant to the literature examined in this chapter. The novels often reveal how male white-collar employees often assume their female colleagues to be financially secure and working purely for pleasure, ignoring the economic necessity most often motivating their employment.

From a gender perspective, this shift in terminology also caused friction within the white-collar world of work because it threatened to undermine the positions of men within the office, who oftentimes did not wish to be placed on equal footing with women and felt that an extension of the title *Angestellte* threatened to do so.[76] Thus, female white-collar

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[75]Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. 1932. Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2008.

[76]It should be noted that, while much of the anxiety regarding women as equals in the workforce truly was due to misogyny and a persistence of antiquated ideas regarding both women's roles as homemakers and men's roles as breadwinners, a lot of the unease must also be read as a reflection on the dire employment situation and the overall fear of potentially losing one's position, or, through wage cuts, one's ability to provide for oneself and one's family. It must be kept in mind that, despite an often prevalent desire by modern scholars to depict this era as modern and progressive, this view is often not supported by the literature, in which one finds the desire to marry, have children and support a family as the predominant wish of most young individuals. This desire was also backed up by law: it was legal in times of high unemployment to dismiss all *Doppelverdiener*, as women's work once married was seen as purely superfluous and done out of enjoyment, not need (which was often not

employees were more commonly referred to by their more specific, gendered titles, the most

common of these being *Kontoristin*, *Stenotypistin*, and *Privatsekretärin*. There was much

overlap between these employment classifications, and they were often used arbitrarily,

especially in the distinction between a *Kontoristin* and a *Stenotypistin*.[77] Technically, the

*Kontoristin* was an individual responsible for taking dictations, and she had to be able to

write quickly and legibly and manage correspondence. Such employment thus required both

good language and grammar skills, as well as the ability to work well under pressure. The

*Stenotypistin* carried out many of theses same tasks but performed much of her work on the

typewriter and was also often tasked with copying documents. For both of these employment

categories, a good understanding of the business was also important, as it was often

necessary to rephrase that which had been dictated. Furthermore, because of the intense

competition for employment, co-workers were not always forthcoming in offering assistance

to one another, which meant that the first weeks of employment were often stressful for new

employees trying to decipher the office protocol and proceedings without help from others.

This power play between those employees with a good grasp on office procedures and those

still too new to have garnered an understanding becomes the basis of many of the novels.

This topic will be discussed at length with regard to *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* later

in this chapter.

    While most offices employed numerous *Stenotypistinnen*, the position of

*Privatsekretärin* carried more prestige, as each department usually only had one private

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the case). See Muller-Matits, Aranka. *Glamor and Gloom: The Female-White Collar Worker in Mainstream Cinema and Popular Fiction of the Late Weimar Republic*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2007, 30-31.

[77]Suhr, Susanne. *Die weiblichen Angestellten: Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse. Eine Umfrage des Zentralverbands der Angestellten*. Berlin: Zentralverband der Angestellten, 1930, 7.

secretary responsible for the needs of the highest ranking boss. While most of the women

entering white-collar employment in the early years of Weimar were from the middle class,

that gradually changed as more and more young women from traditionally working-class

backgrounds attempted to escape their mothers' fates of working in factories. Instead, they

chose the more luxurious-sounding office life, despite the fact that these jobs often paid

women less than they would have earned in blue-collar jobs.[78] For lower-class young

women, white-collar employment also seemed like an opportunity to come into contact with

a finer world glamorized by films and magazines. Thus, their own fantasies and visions of

what city life entailed further justified their desire to eschew blue-collar work. Their fantasies

about what office work involved stemmed not only from advertisements and magazines, but

also especially from depictions in films, such as *Die Privatsekretärin* (1931) by Wilhelm

Thiele. The movie poster (Figure 1) below depicts a beautiful young woman, well-dressed

and coiffed, sitting not at the desk but on it, confidently and happily talking on the phone. It

is also worth noting that the poster not only highlights the perceived glamour of the office

setting, but also already elevates the *Privatsekretärin* above all of the other *Stenotypistinnen*

in the back. Too busy in their work at the typewriter (yet equally well-dressed and beautiful),

the latter group does not have the luxury of looking into the camera.

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[78]Muller-Matits, *Glamor and Gloom*, 28.

Fig1: Die Privatsekretärin movie poster. 1931. Print.

However, especially for the employment of private secretaries, a middle-class background was crucial, as they were often considered housewives of the office and performed many duties associated with the middle-class housewife, such as: greeting incoming visitors; providing food and tea during these visits; knowing how to chat with visitors in a casual, yet professional, manner; maintaining the boss's schedule; and even tidying up his office space. Proper manners and a well-groomed appearance, along with a modicum of propriety and

civility, were needed, and they were also seen as the *Kulturgut* of the middle-class.[79] Thus,

being a *Privatsekretärin* was, in many ways, the pinnacle of white-collar employment for

women.

Within the office environment, female employees were quickly separated off, both

physically and by title, in order to reestablish power dynamics between male and female

*Angestellte*. Further, with the increasing omnipresence of the typewriter within offices

following the war, women quickly became associated with this new, modern machine; it thus

became common to refer to all female employees as typists, whether or not that actually fit

their job description.[80] The association of the typewriter with women can in many ways be

traced back to a marketing strategy by Remington, one of the largest typewriter

manufacturers, who not only offered to let businesses try out their typewriters, but supplied

them with a highly qualified and often very attractive typist.[81] This strategy proved hugely

successful for the adoption of the machines within the office, but it also cemented in the

minds of employers the connection between the typewriter and attractive female typists. This

connection was further stressed by marketing claims that women had a finer touch—

presumably from years of playing the piano—and smaller hands, both of which were

qualities that naturally lent themselves well to typing.[82] This marketing strategy not only led

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[79]Bénet, Mary Kathleen. *Die Sekretärinnen: Frauen im goldenen Käfig*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1975, 108.

[80]Kittler notes how in English, this connection was linguistically reinforced, with the term "typewriter" used for both the person typing and the machine itself. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* 183.

[81]Lorentz, Ellen. *Aufbruch oder Rückschritt? Arbeit, Alltag und Organization weiblicher Angestellter in der Kaiserzeit und Weimarer Republik*. Bielefeld: Kleine Verlag, 1988, 43-44 & 60.

[82]The connection between playing the piano and typing was another example of the fantasy marketed by portraying typists as coming from well-bred, middle-class upbringings. Although this did not reflect reality, it

to a rise in the use of typewriters and female typists, but it also feminized both the machine

and the act of typing. Typing was thus quickly seen as too effeminate of a task to be

performed by men, thereby leading to a strong separation between male and female job tasks.

This gender divide all but prevented women from being able to move up the business

hierarchy, as their skills were seen as best suited for typing and little else. By 1930, 90% of

all typists were female, which further solidified men's fears that typing would emasculate

them and, in turn, relegated it solely to the domain of female white-collar employment.[83]

This shift associated with the typewriter also meant that there was little incentive to

educate women, either for the employers or for their families. The role of the typist, after all,

did not require higher education, and further advancement was becoming more and more

closed off to them with the increasing segregation of male- and female-appropriate domains

of employment.[84] Even women who attended vocational schools, which had been founded by

female occupational associations in an attempt to help improve women's chances of being

employed, were often no better equipped to prepare them for better positions. These schools

pandered to the labor market and exclusively focused on employable skills, such as improved

typing, stenography, and office organizational skills. They did not, for instance, offer any

classes in accounting or management, as the male vocational schools did, and thus did not

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was more alluring to the buying powers within the company. See Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 194-195.

[83]Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte*, 178.

[84]Muller-Matits, *Glamor and Gloom*, 39.

help provide the skill set women would have needed to pursue upper-level positions in large numbers.[85]

This solidification of the connection between women and typing, along with the debasement of this form of employment, is best exemplified by the terms most often used for these women, including *Tippfräulein*, *Tippmädel*, *Tippmamsell*, and *Buromädel*. The nature of these terms points towards many important phenomena that will be discussed later in this chapter, including the ageism implied by these terms, whose suffixes -lein and -mädel all refer back to a young, unmarried woman. They also devalue women's work by marginalizing their contribution as white-collar professionals with titles that conjure up images of dainty, unassuming, naïve, childish young women rather than that of trained, adult professionals.

This characterization of female employees as *Tippfräuleine* also bespeaks the underlying, socially-acceptable ageism, which was both rampant and condoned; from this perspective, anyone above the age of 30 was already considered too old to be employable in white-collar labor.[86] This form of discrimination was based on an antiquated notion of womanhood, which condoned female employment in the years before marriage but assumed that, by their mid- to late twenties, women should cease to work in offices and return to the home where they belonged, even if this stereotype did not correspond with their desires or their economic realities. Pseudo-scientific studies also pointed towards employment as

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[85]Because women were not expected to stay in the labor market for as long, these vocational schools often only lasted about six months, compared with 2-3 years for men, and thus also explains why many subjects, such as accounting, were not included on the curriculum. See: Rössiger, Max. *Die Angestellte von 1930*. Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1930, 18.

[86]In fact, oftentimes a woman in her mid-twenties was already considered approaching the upper-limit of what was acceptable, as is seen in this quote from Braun, Lily. *Frauenarbeit und Beruf*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979, 341: "Dreißigjährige, ja fünfundzwanzigjährige und noch jünger weibliche Arbeitslose konnten wegen 'fortgeschrittenen Alters' nicht mehr vermittelt werden."

detrimental to one's reproductive health and thus suggested that it was only suitable to be

performed for a few years before doing irreparable damage.[87] The other justification for

ageism in the office was economically based and involved the cost of employees to the

employer, as employment laws crafted in 1919 stipulated annual pay increases and greater

benefits for employees according to age. While these laws were enacted to protect workers,

for many women they had the opposite effect. It soon became obvious that firing older

employees who had been with the company for many years and hiring new, younger women

could often reduce salary expenses by half, which was, during challenging economic times, a

great incentive for employers to only keep women employed for a brief period of time before

replacing them. Lastly, bringing younger, inexperienced women into the office was also a

practical way of reaffirming the gender hierarchy, as young women were more easily

controlled and less apt to complain about sexual harassment encountered.[88]

As mentioned earlier, despite this shift in the meaning of *Angestellte* from a worker

with a more lucrative income to a more indiscriminate usage that disregarded actual salary

earned, the term *Angestellte* still, in the minds of most people, implied a financially

comfortable, well-groomed existence and thus necessitated attempts to live up to such a

standard of living, especially in terms of wardrobe and leisure activities, which the salary

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[87]These "scientific" studies also pandered to the perceived drop in birth rate and thus fueled the debate on questions of nationhood and women's responsibilities towards the nation in terms of birthing and raising up the next generation, a fascinating debate that is sadly outside of the scope of this research.

[88]In almost every work of literature surveyed, not only does sexual harassment take place, but in almost all works there are also scenes of explicit violence against women, often in the form of rape or other physical attacks. While these scenes are striking and deserve attention which scholarship has not yet given them, they fall outside of the scope of this chapter.

earned most often could not support.[89] Questions of wardrobe and personal care were particularly important for female employees, whose appearance mattered greatly, and whose continued employment often depended on looking youthful and attractive, especially as an attempt to ward off the ageism at play in the office. While appalling by our standards today, routine discrimination against women was the norm and often took the form of discrimination based on appearance and age. Especially in the latter years of the Weimar Republic, where employment was scarce although a large population of young women desired and needed employment, this form of discrimination became even more rampant. In efforts to retain one's employment, clothing and personal care took on greater importance. Historians calculate that base salaries would have had to have been around 175 Marks to cover these expenses, and yet 146 Marks, before taxes and insurance, was the average earning of a white-collar female employee in 1930, with many (around 33%) earning far less than that, often even below the set subsistence level of 120 Marks.[90] This situation clearly put many working white-collar women in the precarious situation of having to prioritize wardrobes, in order to not lose their income, and this was often at the expense of food or use of heating and electricity beyond the bare minimum.

In addition to already low wages came the added burden of often having to work overtime, especially on weekends and evenings, which lowered the per hour wage

[89]Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten*, 45 and Muller-Matits, *Glamor and Gloom*, 54-55.

[90]By comparison to the 33% of women earning below subsistence level, only about 9% of men earned less than 120 Marks a month, which is admittedly not a negligible percentage, but still a far smaller fraction of the working population. For data, see Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten*, 35 and Kasten, Anneliese. *Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Angestellten.* Berlin: Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1931, 104-109 & 193.

considerably because the salaried workers often did not get compensated for overtime.[91] Overtime was at times necessary in order to complete the tasks required of them, but often, female employees were also subjected to the whims of their supervisors and were forbidden to leave the office before their boss did, regardless of the time of day and regardless of whether their work had already been accomplished or not. Having to work overtime also meant that the image of the New Woman, working during the day and out at bars in the evening, shopping on Saturday and lounging in cafés, was in large part a hyper-fictional image and did not represent how the majority of these working women actually spent their lives.

But if these women had hopes of enjoying entertainment outside of their working hours, there was one place to do so more than any other place in Germany, and that place was, of course, Berlin. Berlin, both in reality and in terms of fictional works set there, had a rate of female employment much larger than the national average (at about 40% compared to 34%) as well as a far greater representation in media and literature.[92] The attention and prominence garnered by this new category of employees can perhaps best be understood based on their visibility and presence within the cities. Because most office employment was located in the center of towns, the workers often had to travel by public transportation and then on foot to work and were thus highly visible during the morning and evening commutes to any interested and attentive onlookers. While patrons sitting at cafés in the morning had long been accustomed to seeing hoards of men in suits making their way to the office, now

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[91]Dorner, Maren, and Katrin Völkner, "Lebenswelten der weiblichen Angestellten: Kontor, Kino und Konsum?" *Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten*, eds. Petra Bock and Katja Koblitz. Berlin: Hentrich Verlag, 1995, 89.

[92]Suhr, *Die weiblichen Angestellten*, 7.

being visually confronted with a steady stream of women in office attire alongside the men intensified their sense of the quantity and ratio of women in the workforce. By contrast, while many women still worked in factories and other blue-collar jobs as well, these were often located on the outskirts of the city, outside of the view of the daily gaze of journalists and writers, who were thus less prone to publicize their existence.

Theoretical Background: The Production of (Office) Space

My first chapter on the space of the home concerned itself more heavily with what Henri Lefebvre would call representational space, in which the motives of the designers are heavily factored into my argument about the creation of and interaction with the space of the home. However, in this chapter on the space of the office, my argument draws less from discussions concerning theories of design. Instead, I find it more productive to discuss the space in terms of Lefebvre's notion of social space. In this context, the idea of social space helps illuminate the interplay between different elements of the space of the office, namely that as with all spaces, space is never a neutral setting but rather laden with ideology that is reinforced by the actors in the space. As Lefebvre points out, "social space is a social product, … a double illusion, each side of which refers back to the other, reinforces the other, and hides behind the other" (27). The complexity of social space is therefore hard to pinpoint to an origin of behavior; rather, it follows a cyclical pattern in which people react in a codified, socially-acceptable way to their space and, in reacting in this manner, perpetuate the codification of behavior, without necessarily realizing their role in the process. Importantly for our argument, Lefebvre insists that the idea of social space attempts to bring together

aspects of the *social relations of reproduction*—that is, the relationships between the sexes, between age groups, and between the acceptable organizational structure of the space—and the *relations of production*—that is, questions about division of labor and its organization into a hierarchical structure. While Lefebvre often discusses social space in terms of family structures, the theoretical underpinnings are also highly applicable to an analysis of the office, because it both helps show from the outset of this research that there cannot be one simple answer to why and how the space of the office functions. This terminology also allows us to attempt to parse out the interplay between the *social relations*—that is, the relationships between individuals—which will be discussed here in terms of the relationships between men and women and, most importantly, in terms of how the structure of the office allows for overt ageism. It also allows us to see how the *relations of production*, in this case exemplified by the hierarchical relationships between different positions of employment, further reinforce behaviors that lead to the creation of the space of the office as we come to understand it through the novels discussed in this chapter. This focus on the creation of space and the roles of the actors within that space helps us understand not only the continuously changing nature of the space depending on who is acting within it, but it also illuminates the idea that individuals are different kinds of subjects within different spaces. Therefore, as much as the space changes according to the actors present, so too do the actors change their behavior, depending on the space in which they find themselves. For example, the women we encounter within the space of the white-collar office within the novels are in fact different from the women we encounter at home, or in cafés, even if these are all the same people. To expound upon this argument and move from theoretical to specific, we will now turn to a close-reading of the novels.

Turning towards Literature: Angestelltenliteratur

*Angestelltenliteratur* as a category of stories became immensely popular in Weimar Germany, capitalizing on peoples' fascination with the change in working culture, especially among women, who were both producers and readers of these novels. These novels were, furthermore, also often set in large cities—most notably in Berlin but also in Köln, for example. They thus also provided inspirational tales to young readers around the country, nourishing their desires to escape provincialism and the small towns in which much of the population still lived and instead pursue what was often heralded as the modern woman's dream of financial and emotional independence. However, from a historical point of view, it must be noted that the vast majority of the novels and stories produced under the rubric of *Angestelltenliteratur* glamorized and romanticized white-collar employment to such a great degree that they cannot be trusted to provide an accurate picture—fictionalized or not—of what work-life entailed. Rather, they most often need to be understood as fantastical portrayals of working conditions and life. Aranka Muller-Matits also supports this understanding of *Angestelltenliteratur* in her work *Glamor and Gloom*, in which she reads most novels and films featuring white-collar female employees as marketing tools that were created to help disseminate a fashionable idea rather than to present a realistic representation.[93] More strikingly, the vast majority of novels that fall under this rubric barely detail life in the office at all. A female white-collar employee is much more often used as the

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[93]This is to not say that these books no longer have scholarly value; quite to the contrary, they are able to provide great insights into questions of mass marketing and the enforcement of norms and values, among other aspects of culture, which other scholars have explored. However, for the purpose of this research, they are not pertinent.

setting upon which traditional stories concerning love, fashion, and generational conflicts play out. *Gilgi*, Irmgard Keun's first novel published in 1931, which became an overnight sensation and launched Keun's brief yet successful career, is often discussed in terms of being one of the most popular *Angestellenromane* of this era, and yet it proves to be the quintessential example of how little even the most popular *Angestelltenroman* depicts actual work. Rather, the protagonist Gilgi's desire to work is problematized more in terms of how to balance this desire with her love for her partner and her wish to settle down with him. This was, of course, part of the dilemma that these *Neue Frauen* faced, yet in essence, the novel can be whittled down to a story about love and partnership, leaving very little that actual pertains to work and the space of the office. However, while her musings on *Angestellte* and the space of work do not comprise a large number of pages, what is said in these pages is highly relevant to this chapter and will thus be interwoven into the close reading of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen.*

  *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, one of the other most popular works of *Angestelltenliteratur* at the time of publication, is the noticeable exception to this trend of privileging other topics. Its unwavering focus on the space of the office itself thus deserves attention in this chapter. The author, Christa Anita Brück, born in 1899, was one of the most prominent female authors during the Weimar Republic, who, unlike many of her other contemporaries, spent many years working in white-collar employment before becoming a writer. Her novel, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, published in 1930, therefore holds an interesting position because it exists on the brink between fiction and autobiography, with many scholars pointing to similarities between the main character and Brück herself. This

overlap extends from their career paths to even minute details, such as the similarity of their names: the protagonist, Frau Brückner, is a not-so-subtle reference to Brück's own last name. With many aspects of the novel based on personal experience, it is a rather startling, and one might say, thoroughly negative portrayal, of white-collar employment. Moreover this quality lends validity and impetus to a closer reading of an often overlooked novel, above all for its potential to give more accurate insight into the work-lives of female employees and the way in which space functioned in the context of white-collar employment. While my close-reading of this novel does not attempt to read the work as autobiography, few scholars would argue with the fact that *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* provides a more historically accurate, and thus for the purpose of this chapter, a more relevant, rendition of working conditions than many of the other novels from this time. Accordingly, it will be read as a work of fiction that can provide helpful insight into the working conditions and the construction of the space of the office. Furthermore, both interestingly and disappointingly, while there has been a renewal of interest in female authors of the Weimar Republic beginning in the 1970s, most general attention and scholarly interest have focused on a relatively small number of authors, most prominently the works by Irmgard Keun, Gabriela Tergit, and Marieluise Fleisser.

Brück, by contrast, has received little to no attention, perhaps in part due to the fact that this work has been out of print for years and can hardly be found in libraries today, despite its relative popularity immediately following publication. This omission is perhaps in part due to the fact that Brück's sole focus on the working conditions of female white-collar employees makes her book less relevant to the current topics often discussed in this context,

such as fashion or romance. However, this omission is perhaps more accurately attributed to a peculiar, yet widespread, misreading of the final pages of the novel: namely, many scholars tend to dismiss Brück's work as anti-modern due to her negative portrayal of the workplace environment and thus find it irrelevant to their research into the *Neue Frau*.[94] They thus mention the existence of the book, but virtually no current scholarship includes this work of literature. Yet, beyond providing insight into the lives of white-collar workers, I argue, that Brück's novel should in no way be read as anti-modern. Rather, I believe that the novel itself argues that the space of the office is anti-modern and excludes women, despite all signs to the contrary, and it is thus in need of radical change.

My hope then in focusing primarily on Brück's novel is to show the relevance it continues to hold to scholarship regarding the ideas of work and the *Neue Frau*. Implicit in that argument is the view that it would be a mistake to limit our scholarship to a few chosen female authors, especially given the prominence Brück held during the timeframe in question. However, in order to balance my argument and show that the themes that Brück problematizes regarding space are in fact universal, my reading of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* will be contrasted with a reading of one of the other most positively received novels regarding white-collar employment, namely, Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi*. By incorporating *Gilgi* into this chapter, and thus comparing a relatively obscure novel with one still often read today, I aim to show how both novels exhibit a very similar understanding of how the space of the office functions. The differences that do exist are not related to the way

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[94]Due to the striking similarities of this argument, and the fact that most scholars only mention the work in passing, summing it up with the same sentence that says it is anti-*Neue Frau* and leaving it at that, makes one wonder if most scholars choose to dismiss this book as irrelevant without actually having delved into the book.

space itself functions, but rather, they arise more through the protagonist's acceptance or dismissal of these spaces based on whether they are open to negotiation or not.

Introduction: *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*

The cover page of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* begins with a quote by Danton: "Wahrheit, die bittere Wahrheit." This epigraph already makes clear to the reader that the *Schicksale* described in this book will not entail success and great adventures, as one might first hope for based on the vagueness of the title. Before ever getting to the first page of the story, we are thus already attuned to two facts: that in Brück's mind, this novel is both a "wahr" (true) one and a bitter one. With that foreboding warning, the book immediately jumps into a story mid-discussion and describes a scene from an office in which an older colleague of Frau Brückner's, Urschl, has just returned from a longer stay at a "Kur" (medical resort/sanatorium) intended to treat her debilitating headaches. Interestingly, the entirety of *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* is narrated by Frau Brückner and follows her *Schicksal,* and yet, even though she is the protagonist, she is never given a first name or referred to by her first name by any of the other characters. This is an interesting decision on the part of the author that both distances her from the reader, by disallowing closer identification, but also illuminates her position in life. That is, there is not one person whom she encounters in her story who knows her well enough to justify being on a first-name basis with her, a telling sign for someone in her twenties. This might be more understandable within the context of an office environment until we return to the very first sentence of the book, "Wir stehen im Halbkreis um Urschl herum," (7) and realize that she refers to her colleagues, such as Urschl,

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by their first names, while none of them return this intimacy by calling her anything other than Frau Brückner, despite the fact that she is only 22 years old at the onset of the novel. Any attempts at closeness on her part are thus unacknowledged by the others, leaving her, and the reader, acutely aware of her isolated status. This status is both unique to her and also indicative of an atmosphere of distrust, especially towards younger employees, the reasons for which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Brückner's position as a woman attempting to enter the world of white-collar employment is unique in that she is neither solely motivated by a desire to be the modern working woman nor solely working to survive financially, but rather, a combination of the two. We are told that Brückner comes from a wealthy middle-class family and thus was never expected to have to support herself. However, tragedy struck one rainy evening, in which her parents carriage crashed into a river, and both of her parents perished by drowning in the river. She was left to fend for herself, as the money her parents left behind diminished in worth after the inflation, leaving her without any form of monetary or familial support. Brückner's higher social class both benefits her insofar as she, unlike many of the other women encountered in the novel, has had a good upbringing and education, and is well-versed in literature and foreign languages, among other things, which make her a more desirable hire. Her higher social status, however, has also made her self-confident and ambitious, two traits that might seem positive but end up leading to her demise in the end. For, although she needs to work to survive because of the loss of her parents, Brückner believes in her own worth and decides that if she is to work, she wants to climb the corporate ladder and be successful: "Ich will vorwärtsstreben, ich will nicht mehr arbeiten, bloß um zu

verdienen, ich will Freude in der Arbeit suchen und über das Elend der einfachen Angestellten hinaus mir ein menschenwürdiges Leben zu gestalten versuchen" (24-25). The placement of this statement at the beginning of the novel is interesting for many reasons. First, it clarifies her goal of wanting to both earn more money, in order to have a "menschenwürdiges Leben," and escape the "Elend", the misery, of being a white-collar employee. Thus, we see that from the onset she is already aware of the fact that for many people, white-collar employment is not profitable enough to sustain a comfortable style of living and, even more tellingly, she correlates being an *Angestellte* with a life of "Elend." In the short time in which Brückner has purportedly been working at this point, any illusion she may have had about the glamour and freedom of the new working women as a white-collar employee has clearly already vanished. Instead, it has been replaced with a dread of ending up like them, miserable and poor. What does make Brückner in some ways the quintessential representative of the new woman, however, is her desire to work in order to find enjoyment, not simply to make a living. Yet, one could argue that while the book purports to be a story of "die Wahrheit, die bittere Wahrheit," Brückner's desire for self-actualization and better employment has to be read as a naïve sentiment that is clearly based on the fantasy sold in books, films, and magazines and that lacks any real understanding of how the office functions. At the same time, the epigraph by Danton suggests that the reader should have reasons to believe that Brückner's desires cannot be realized. This contradiction thus sets up the conflict of the novel, in which dreams and desires are juxtaposed against a harsh reality.

<u>Introduction: *Gilgi: eine von uns*</u>

With regard to characters, Gilgi, the protagonist in Keun's novel by the same name, *Gilgi: eine von uns*, has many similarities with Brückner at the onset of the novel. Gilgi is 20 years old and an only child, comes from a solidly middle-class family, enjoyed a good education and is in the process of learning more languages. She is also, much like Brückner, described both as beautiful and as the quintessential *Neue Frau,* possessing the young, boyish figure made popular by the media. In fact, the novel even notes that she looks like she stepped directly out of an advertisement, describing her as: "ein schlanker Junge, ein lebendig gewordenes Gainsborough-Bild. … Die Beine gerade in die richtige kleine Nuance zu hoch angesetzt, in den Schultern breiter als in den Hüften" (94). Much like Brückner, she also dreams of having a career, as she tells her best friend Olga, "Ich will arbeiten, will weiter, will selbstständig und unabhängig sein—ich muß das alles Schritt für Schritt erreichen. Jetzt lern' ich meine Sprachen—ich spar' Geld—vielleicht werd' ich in ein paar Jahren eine eigene Wohnung haben, und vielleicht bring' ich's mal zu einem eigenen Geschäft" (70). Yet, even in her description of her ambitions, we already see the biggest difference between her and Brückner, namely that Gilgi dreams of independence, while Brückner is already on her own, not by choice but by necessity based on her misfortune in life. Gilgi on the other hand still lives in the comfort of her family's home in the beginning and later, rent-free with her boyfriend; as such, she has no financial responsibilities and is clearly able to afford herself luxuries, such as owning her own typewriter and buying herself nice clothing. Thus, their motivations for success differ, with Brückner wanting to get ahead because her survival depends on it, and Gilgi wanting it more because she values work and

wants to be a modern woman with goals and dreams. Yet, in Gilgi's case, even her description of her goals suggests greater ambivalence than we saw with Brückner, with the term "vielleicht" (maybe) repeated several times: maybe she will have her own apartment, maybe she will have her own shop. In articulating her dreams in this way, Gilgi already betrays her own ambitions and allows the reader to see that her dreams are not based on a concrete idea of success or of why she desires for success. Rather, they are reflections of her wish to be a modern woman, and for her, work is part of this image; however, it is also one that is already stated as a *vielleicht* proposition.

At the same time, Gilgi, a meticulously organized and regimented individual, strongly believes in the value of work, and correspondingly, has very little understanding for those who do not work, as the narrator states: "Leute, die nicht arbeiten und so idiotisch, albern, verschlafen durch die Tage trotten, kann Gilgi nicht leiden" (64). These people that Gilgi despises, the unemployed, are often revisited in the book, and each time, even when she sees the hunger and poverty around her, she attributes it to a personal shortcoming, to the fact that these individuals are not trying hard enough to find employment: "Wenn einer so'n Dreckpamps aus seinem Leben macht, ist's seine eigne Schuld" (56). Gilgi's lack of empathy is indicative of her naïve and sheltered life, in which she has never been at risk of lacking the means to survive. Because she does not have to provide for herself, as Brückner does, I would argue that Gilgi's views of work and the workplace are already set up to diverge from those of Brückner, because she knows that she could choose to stop working without suffering any consequences. Yet, Gilgi wants to work because she does not want to be one of those women that she deems too lazy to be of worth, and also because she wants to be part of

her era. For her, especially the latter entails being employed in an office environment, as that is the representation of modernity to her.

Despite the title of the book, which asserts that Gilgi is "eine von uns" (one of us), within the first few pages, we already see that this title does not reflect how Gilgi views herself. For, while Gilgi dreams of working and success, she sees herself not as part of the larger group of female white-collar employees, but rather, as set apart and unique in her abilities. This is most apparent in a scene in which she is in the *Straßenbahn* on her way to work and takes note of all of the other *Angestellte* present:

> Die Trostlosen da im Wagen—nein, sie hat nichts mit ihnen gemein, sie gehört nicht zu ihnen, will nicht zu ihnen gehören. Sie sind grau und stumpf. Und wenn sie nicht stumpf sind, warten sie auf ein Wunder. Gilgi ist nicht stumpf und glaubt an kein Wunder. Sie glaubt nur an das, was sie schafft und erwirbt. Sie ist nicht zufrieden, aber sie ist froh. Sie verdient Geld. (15)

Much as Brückner describes her desire to get ahead as a motivation to escape the "Elend" of the white-collar world, so too does Gilgi describe the *Angestellte* as "Trostlose," as cheerless, dreary people who have become gray and dull from work and who spend their days waiting for a change, an escape, that will never come. Yet, Gilgi does not believe she is one of them, because she is too rational to be waiting for a miracle and only believes in what she does. It is not a fulfilling job, but she is at least happy because she has money and free time on the weekend to spend it. Gilgi clearly does not glamorize white-collar employment for most because, when she more closely examines the other employees on the train, she describes them as,

> Müde Gesichter, verdrossene Gesichter. Alle sehen einander ähnlich. Gleichheit des Tageslaufs und der Empfindung hat ihnen den Serienstempel aufgedrückt. … Ein Tag gleicht dem anderen. … Achtstundentag, Schreibmaschinen, Stenogrammblock, Gehaltskürzung, Ultimo—immer dasselbe, immer dasselbe. Gestern, heute, morgen—und in zehn Jahren. (14)

Despite loving the daily routines she has set for herself, she acknowledges that the monotony of daily life becomes numbing, and it is for this reason that she plans to have a career. She states with confidence that, because of her ambition, she will be successful: "[ich werde] es schaffen" (16). Yet, while both Gilgi and Brückner set out at the beginning of their respective novels by asserting similar desires, and while both fail in their tasks, the question at hand remains: why do these women fail at finding employment that is both fulfilling and able to support a comfortable lifestyle? I believe that the answer is in part to be found in the structure of the office itself.

### *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*: Women as Décor First, Employees Second

That fashion played a pivotal role in Weimar culture cannot be understated, as evidenced by the flood of recent scholarship on the issue. Weimar fashion, and the flapper style associated with it, is arguably among the most important elements that continue to define the imaginary construct of the *Golden Twenties* today—a "golden age" of music and fashion and debauchery. Likewise, the associated image of the *Neue Frau* was and is highly stylized and normativized in the popular imaginary, with magazines and department stores all catering to, and pushing for, a very specific image of what the *Neue Frau* was to look like. In the context of white-collar employment and the office, office cultures have of course always

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had their own, unique codes of appropriate fashion, and this continued to be true in Weimar Germany. It would thus be in keeping with historical precedent to expect women joining the white-collar workforce to dress according to certain office standards, with an understanding that these standards would change according to popular fashion over time. However, the prescriptive standards evident in the literature regarding white-collar female employees of this era did not merely apply to women's dress, but also to their appearance as a whole.[95] That is, the image of the *Neue Frau* as it was branded by the fashion industry—akin to much of our marketing today—did not market an outfit or even a lifestyle as much as it marketed a prescriptive image of beauty and acceptability. This is not surprising, for much of marketing rests upon these principles. But what is surprising is the adoption and enforcement of these standards of beauty and youth within the office environment. As such, the office becomes a space in which the objectification and commodification of women becomes codified and normativized, thereby effectively devaluing women's worth as employees in favor of a higher valuation of women as a form of visual décor. Accordingly, the *social relations of production* present a situation in which discrimination of women based on appearance becomes the accepted organizational structure of the office space. As the novels will show, a woman's primary marker of worth did not lie in her capabilities, but rather, in her appearance, and this attitude was both socially acceptable and codified through hiring and firing practices. If women were to be in the office, the thinking seemed to go, then they should at least serve to beautify the environment. Their failure to do so would lead not only to a great variation in their treatment but also to the question of whether or not they could

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[95]Specifically in Brück's work, there are many mentions of men's fashion, with some men being described as more antiquated and some following modern styles. Yet, none of this appears to have any bearing on their employment or changes in position within the office environment.

maintain their employment. Intimately connected with this valuation of women based on appearance was also institutionalized ageism. Within this paradigm of ageism, young women were tolerated within the office but were expected to leave the workforce once their use-value as décor diminished; this allowed for the socially acceptable firing of employees based on age. In many ways, this institutionally condoned ageism was ironically closely bound up with the understanding of female employees as symbols of modernity and fashionability. Insofar as old age was antiquated and out of date and thus no longer "en vogue," these older employees did not fit into the image of the modern office space that also aimed to be fashionably modern. Old, anti-modern, and anti-fashionable, these employees were seen as a threat to the image of the office. Thus, the dismissal of older employees was justified in the same way that the removal of other outdated décor was justified, as simply keeping up with the trends of the moment. In essence, the aesthetics—even the survival—of the modern office stipulated the removal of all décor that appeared outdated, even if that décor was of human form.

To illuminate and support this argument, I will begin by examining the most extreme example of ageism at work, as seen in the treatment of the character Urschl, the eldest of the female employees working at the company Dudenmeyer. Dudenmeyer is a nondescript office in Berlin, presumably connected with the automotive industry, as there is mention of an "Autoabteilung," yet very little information is given beyond that fact. Urschl, a 42-year-old *Stenotypistin* originally from Vienna, has worked for Dudenmeyer for years; yet her status, as the oldest employee with the longest tenure, does not appear to confer upon her any greater level of respect from her fellow colleagues. Quite to the contrary, Urschl is most often the

target of their workplace jokes and teasing, much of which is based upon her appearance, which is outdated: she is round and voluptuous at a time when sleek and boyish figures are fashionable. Upon her return to the office after a period of leave, her colleagues come together to greet her and are standing around in a circle, inquiring about her experiences during her "Kur." It is at this moment that we learn that her colleague Krüger, a jovial bookkeeper of only nineteen, is impatiently waiting for a break in her story, "um Urschl eine Pflaume zu verpassen" (7). He knows that this will be met with great laughter by others, and he succeeds in doing so, with "brüllendes Gelächter" (7) following his mockery of her. Building upon his ability to make others laugh at Urschl's expense, he continues to tease her about her appearance, making the ample size of her breasts the focus of his mockery: "Und einen Busen haste dir zugelegt! Da kann man einfach nur sagen: ekelhaft fein" (8). Once Krüger has established this mocking atmosphere, others, even the shy bookkeeper Stockmann, begin to join in: "Und Stockmann, verheiratet, Familienvater, von häuslichen Sorgen verfinstert, räuspert sich und meint auch, er wäre ganz enorm" (8). Urschl, however, is clearly used to jokes regarding her appearance, and is not as perturbed by them as we might expect. Instead, she plays along and embraces her motherly role, replying, "Hört auf, Kindersch, es ist zum Verzweifeln" (8). Her use of the word "Kindersch" is interesting because it points to two aspects of how she self-identifies: she acknowledges both that she is older than they are and that she is thus the mother-figure to them, the children. Much as it was the young women who embodied the idea of the *Neue Frau*, Urschl, as a mother-figure, embodies an antiquated ideal of femininity. Yet in her reply to their mocking, Urschl also uses a dialect, "Kindersch," instead of the standard word "Kinder," showing a familiarity and comfort with her cohort. Thus, we can infer that, while the jokes are inappropriate, they are

not truly disturbing to her. Although this scene does suggest an accepted objectification of her body—which should not be acceptable within an office space—it also reveals how the same space can foster different levels of acceptable discrimination based on the hierarchy of importance. Because her cohort does not hold the power to strip her of her position, their teasing does not hold the same weight as it would if it had come from upper management, which would have the ability to terminate her employment. Interestingly, it is also important to note that, while Urschl's body is the object of scrutiny, we do not see this same objectification taking place among other colleagues of equal rank. Instead, it appears that Urschl's position as the eldest actually singles her out as the only person towards whom these sorts of jokes are acceptable, or it at least highlights the fact that her age and her unfashionable body make her a ready target. Even her name, Urschl, a diminutive and often negatively connoted a version of Ursula, suggests both "inferior" and "unfashionable," as it was by this time mostly used in Austria and thus associated with provincial life. Urschl, even in name, is not able to compete with the modernity that Berlin strove to embody.

More problematic than how her colleagues treat her, however, is the treatment she receives from Scheider, a *Korrespondent* and *Abteilungsleiter* at the company who is also her immediate supervisor. Whether or not the supervisors are present makes a difference in how the colleagues interact among each other, and this is made clear when the group immediately disperses as Schneider enters the room. His entrance thus changes the space itself: "Schneider [kommt] durch die Glastür und alles stiebt auseinander" (9). Once he enters, the space can no longer function in a way that allows the colleagues to sustain the cohesion and collegiality that they had before the boss entered. This indicates that the space of the office in

the presence of supervisors is not one in which conversation and friendships are meant to be fostered. As soon as the space contains markers of hierarchy, as represented by Schneider, the space transforms and becomes a colder and more impersonal space that more closely embodies the ideals of the modern office. Equally telling is the subtle but powerful mention of the "Glastür" (glass door) through which Schneider enters, signaling that this is a modern office that has embraced new designs. But one also needs to contemplate what a glass door indicates about the expected structure of the work environment in this case. Glass, being transparent, stands in stark contrast to traditional wood doors, which hide the activities taking place behind them: they provide privacy. With the modernization of offices in the 1920s came the introduction of glass doors to replace wooden ones, signaling both a loss of privacy and a sense of openness. What was once happening behind closed doors was supposed to now be open and accessible to everyone. Even today glass doors are often incorporated into office spaces to create at least the impression that superiors are more accessible to the lower workers and that their own acts are more transparent as well.

Yet, at Dudenmeyer, this is clearly not the case. As we are later told, the bosses continue to hide in offices closed off by walls and solid wooden doors. Instead, it is only the large room used by all of the lower-level white-collar employees that is open to be seen. This indicates that, while those in higher positions are still entitled to privacy, those on the lower end are not only denied privacy, but they also work in a space that is specifically designed to make it easier to monitor them and their work at all times.[96] The image of the glass door also

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[96]This idea of observation clearly resonates with the Foucauldian idea of the panopticon, which describes the power inherent in being able to observe others at all times and the behavioral changes such surveillance will bring about. See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

purports to be a symbol for a level of easy access between employees and their supervisors, and so it is further telling that Schneider enters through a glass door, into their work space, instead of calling the employees into his office. Thus, even though it is a glass door, it is a one-way street. He can enter their space, but they cannot enter his. The transparency is only an illusion pretending to have made hierarchies obsolete which actually still exist. In this way, the glass door also reinforces the idea that female employees are not only there to be seen and monitored, but precisely because the architecture allows them to be seen, they need to adhere to standards of fashion because they are a highly visible representation of the office itself. They must thus convey fashionable norms and comply with and reinforce the modernity of the office itself. In this way, the glass door not only reinforces the justification of treating women as décor, but we see how the architecture of the space, in following current design trends calling for glass doors, creates and justifies the demands made upon women to be fashionable and pleasing to the eye as well. The glass door in essence, then, is a symbol for modern building styles and modernity itself; at the same time, its mere existence forces and reinforces discrimination against those aspects of the environment which are not deemed modern, regardless of whether human or architectural in nature and regardless of what form their antiquated style takes.

Returning to the moment in which Schneider enters their space, and causes the group to disperse, he immediately walks over to Urschl and asks if she is healthy again, but he does not wait for an answer. He is clearly not actually interested in her well-being, but rather, is only interested in her ability to perform her work functions, and accordingly, he immediately requests that she take down a dictation. Urschl, not yet having a chance to settle into her desk

after her time away, cannot find pen and paper, as her desk has been plundered by other employees during her absence. Schneider shows no understanding for this. While Urschl nervously tries to find something to write on and with, Schneider simply sits there, watching her "mit verbissener Gelassenheit" (10) and enjoying the power he has over her to make her nervous. Despite the fact that it is not her fault that she does not have the correct supplies at hand, he loses his patience and suddenly snaps at her, saying, "nun lassen Sie schon den Unfug! Scheint mir nicht viel besser geworden zu sein mit Ihnen. Ich sage ja, Weiber über vierzig gehören nicht mehr ins Büro" (10). Although he has put her in a situation in which she was guaranteed to fail and has refused to show any understanding for her dearth of supplies, Schneider is willing to write her off as someone unfit for the job. Tellingly, he does so not on the grounds of performance alone, but by blaming her performance on her age. Yet, from the text, we are given no reason to believe that her performance has in any way declined due to her age; certainly, Schneider's indignation in this moment is not age related, but rather, circumstantial. He does not, however, want to acknowledge his own role in her failure to perform her work and, instead, chooses to attribute all failure to age. To add insult to injury, his use of the pejorative term "Weiber" rather than the more neutral term, "Frauen," is demeaning, and it stigmatizes her by taking away her titles of *Frau* and *Angestellte*, which would be deserving of respect. Instead, his words completely devalues her as a "Weib" and as someone too old for employment. Urschl, who was readily able to brush off the teasing by her colleagues, understandably cannot do so with Schneider's comment. Instead, she has to hold back tears, "Sie ist dem Weinen nahe" (10). This does not in the least soften Schneider's reaction towards her, but rather, intensifies his stance. Not only does he utter his belief that older women do not belong in the office, but when faced with one, he then chooses to ignore

her completely: "Schneiders gesundes Auge blickt fast so starr wie das gläserne über sie hinweg" (10), further validating the connection between vision and power that was physically suggested by the glass door. Schneider's ability to supervise Urschl and literally oversee her, that is, monitor her and visually overlook over, both solidifies his position of authority and her position of one who is to be seen. Accordingly, she must be styled according to the norms, which would involve attracting Schneider's attention. In looking past her in word and action, he obliterates her standing as a capable employee, and it does not come as a surprise that, only a few pages later, we are told that Urschl is let go from the office. This is a decision that validates Schneider's belief: women above 40 do not belong in the office because they have lost their décor value. The entire space of the office is designed to reinforce ideas of modernity visually, and anything that fails to adhere to this design concept and fails to be fashionable is no longer worth keeping, even if that means dismissing a very capable employee. Yet, inherent in Schneider's belief is also the idea that women, in general, barely belong in the office, but they can be tolerated as long as they hold value. Because Urschl was still a capable employee, it must be argued that the value she lost was not related to her capability as a *Stenotypistin* but to her aesthetic value as an object able to beautify the office. Her bouts of headaches, and subsequent weight gain, disqualified her as an object of fashionable décor, especially when many younger women were available to take her place and were much more likely to embody the current aesthetic demands of the space.[97]

That age and appearance were of importance in the white-collar world is not only a recurring theme in the novel, but this phenomenon was also noted by Kracauer in *Die*

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[97]Headaches, in this context, are cited as the source of a pallid complexion, wrinkles, and a general downtrodden appearance. I leave it to the reader to decide on the medical viability and acceptability of these statements.

*Angestellten*. Relaying a conversation he had with a job center official in Berlin, in which he remarks, "Aus der verminderten Absatzfähigkeit von Runzeln und angegrauten Haaren macht der Beamte kein Hehl" (23). Kracauer comes to his own conclusion that, "in Berlin [bildet sich] ein Angestelltentypus [heraus], der sich in der Richtung auf die erstrebte Hautfarbe hin uniformiert. Sprache, Kleider, Gebärden und Physiognomien gleichen sich an. …. Aus Angst, als Altware aus dem Gebrauch zurückgezogen zu werden, färben sich Damen … die Haare, und vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu erhalten" (25). Urschl's story is, then, to be read not as the exception, but the norm—a norm that is perpetuated because the space of the office demands it.

While Urschl is the target of overt ageism, Brückner's own interactions with her colleagues also reinforce the idea that employment should be limited to those in their youth who are beautiful and fashionable, after which one is expected to leave the space of the office to marry and return to the home. Interestingly, Brückner, at this point in the story only 22 years old, receives this advice both from a male colleague and from Urschl herself, who is all too aware of the reality of the situation and clearly does not believe that it will improve. In their last interaction, Urschl tells Brückner,

> Es ist schade um Sie. Sie sind jung und hübsch und viel zu schade für unser Gewerbe. Sie werden es doppelt schwer haben. … Hören Sie auf die arme Urschl! … Suchen Sie sich einen Mann. … Heiraten, Fräulein Brückner, heiraten, heiraten! … Denken Sie an mich, heiraten um jeden Preis! (22)

Urschl shows that she is clearly aware of the fact that marriage, regardless to whom, would have been more advantageous for her, for she now finds herself in the precarious position of being both unemployable due to age and yet also single. As she says, "Wenn heute ein

Ungeheuer käme mit sechs Beinen und acht Armen und fünf Mäulern und wollte mich haben, ich überlegte es mir nicht, ich würde es nehmen" (22). For her, her only hope of survival, that which she actually dreams of, is limited to finding a monster, "ein Ungeheuer," willing to financially support her. She realizes that, if she had instead found a partner earlier on in life, when she was still deemed more attractive, she would have been able to avoid part of the dilemma in which she now finds herself. Tellingly, her statements as they relate to Brückner shed light on her understanding of the work environment, in which youth is rewarded, and beauty is sought after, but only to the degree that the women exhibiting these qualities do not challenge their status as décor or attempt to inhabit other spaces not open to them. The challenges that Urschl feels Brückner will encounter will be harder than for most, and the subtle implication is that Brückner is too pretty to be as driven as she is. Being pretty but simple does not pose a threat, but pretty and career-oriented—that, in Urschl's estimation, is what will get Brückner in trouble, for any attempt to move beyond the space allotted to her is sure to cause strife.

While it would perhaps be easy to dismiss this argument as an irrational fear, Brückner's other colleague, Herr Warius, makes a very similar argument. Warius, a *Prokurist* in the automotive department who is responsible for matters regarding hiring, is the only employee besides Urschl with whom Brückner appears to have any sort of friendship. Their friendship, however, seems based on a flirtation on Warius's part, which Brückner does not reciprocate, describing herself instead as "das kleine Tippmädel … das unter seiner Liebkosung nicht aufstrahlen wollte, sondern regelrecht böse wurde" (34). This attitude earns her a nickname from him, "Fräulein Rühr-mich-nicht-an*,*" which already sets the stage for an

abusive friendship in which Brückner is mocked for refusing to enter into a sexual

relationship with a colleague of higher standing. The fact that Warius cannot comprehend her

refusal is indicative of the idea that women's main goal in the office was still to attract the

attention of men and thus of potential husbands, not to follow a career path; here the idea of

women's temporary status within the space of the office is once again reinforced. Despite

Warius's failed attempts with Brückner, however, they seemed to have developed a genuine

friendship, "eine verläßliche Kameradschaftlichkeit" (34), in which they often chat about the

office. Because of their frequent chats, we learn that Warius is well aware of how good

Brückner is at her job. For instance, she has been writing all of the correspondence for her

supervisor on her own for quite some time, which she is not supposed to be authorized to do,

but she and her supervisor have a unspoken agreement that this works best for both of them

because she is clearly better at correspondence than he is. When Brückner's supervisor is

hired by another company, his position becomes vacant, and she decides she wants to apply

for it. Such a promotion would entail a shift in the spaces of the office that she would be

allowed to inhabit and would permit her access to the realm of closed-door offices—a space

still considered the domain of men. Brückner, oblivious to the implications that this change

in access would present, thinks about the job more rationally—that is, in terms of the skills

required—and she knows that she would be fully capable of handling the responsibilities the

position would entail. Excited about the prospect, she tells Warius about her plan to apply,

expecting him to be supportive and endorse her for the position, as he also knows that she is

qualified. But, much to her surprise, he laughs at the idea, "er klopft sich vor Vergnügen die

Schenkel" (35), finding it not only ridiculous but actually wrong: "Es ist eine groteske Idee"

(35), he proclaims. He does not deny that she would be capable of the job and says, "davon

ist gar keine Rede. Selbstverständlich würden Sie es schaffen" (35). But while it may to him

seem "selbstverständlich" (self-evident) that her abilities would suffice, what is not self-

evident to her is why her desire to be promoted should provoke such ridicule. She cannot

understand why he would go so far as to describe the idea as grotesque—so unnatural or

bizarre that it does not even warrant serious thought—especially from someone not much

older than Brückner herself. Warius goes on to explain his reasoning:

> Stellen Sie sich bloß einmal vor, daß Sie morgens im Konferenzzimmer zur
> Postbesprechung erscheinen könnten. Zwischen all den verstaubten und vermoderten
> sorgenvollen Familieväter, die die Geschicke des Hauses Dudenmeyer lenken,
> plötzlich ein niedlicher blonder Bubikopf. Wenn Sie eine alte Heuschrecke wären mit
> Hornbrille und Lehrerinnenblick, dann wollte ich nicht einmal etwas sagen. (35)

What Warius is stating, in essence, is that the space of decision-making should belong to the

concerned "Familieväter," men who have proven their ability to head a family and who are

thus also most capable of leading a business. Furthermore, the space in which these decisions

are made, the "Konferenzzimmer," is a space within the office that Brückner would

normally, in her position as an *Angestellte,* not be allowed to enter. Thus, by intending to

apply for the position, she is not only aspiring to a level of responsibility and prestige

heretofore closed off to women in the organization, but she is, moreover, attempting to enter

a space that has always been restricted to and defined by men and is therefore understandably

resistant to change or modification. Interestingly, the space of power within the modern

office continues to be a space of tradition, both in appearance and in terms of who is allowed

into this space. Importantly, it is a space resistant to any change that would allow for the

incorporation of women into its domain.

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The way that Warius describes the men in charge is also telling: it is not only that they should be responsible family men, but that they are a group of men who are "verstaubt" and "vermodert," antiquated and out of touch with the current world of trends and fashions, old and decaying. Describing these men as "verstaubt," literally covered in dust, also reinforces their status as objects within the space and objects of furniture that have been there for an extended amount of time, long enough to have gathered dust over the years to the point of being "verstaubt." This is a space in which little changes over time, unlike the surrounding spaces of the office and the world beyond. Describing these men as objects within the room also suggests that it is not that they as men are resistant to being objectified, but rather, that their value as objects simply continue to be more highly regarded within the modern office. The stability of the modern office thus incongruously and ironically depends on having an exclusive space within it that is protected from the trends of fashion. It is the space of tradition that continues to control the modern office, even though it is inherently anti-modern and continues to welcome only those who are dusty and old and therefore considered stable. By contrast, Warius uses the stereotypical terms associated with current fashion and the *Neue Frau* to describe Brückner, reducing her to a cutesy blond *Bubikopf*. Thus, while the new modern woman might appear ready to take the white-collar work world by storm, the space of decision-making—symbolized by the "Konferenzzimmer" furnished with stuffy, old men—is not ready to accept women into their midst; nor is even the younger generation of men willing to give up this normative standard, presumably hoping to become the old stuffy men themselves one day. Warius's argument about Brückner's unsuitability for the job is then not based on her capabilities, but on her attractiveness: she is *too* cute, *too* modern. If

she were an unattractive older woman, he argues, then she might be able to infiltrate the space of power and decision-making.

Being beautiful and fashionable, in other words, is what is excluding Brückner and making it harder for her, just as Urschl argued it would. This reality is reinforced when she is turned down for the position and when Herr Dudenmeyer, the owner of the company, states with no uncertainty, "Adolf Dudenmeyer macht die neue Mode mit den Weibern nicht mit. In meinem Hause sind derartige Posten nur für Männer da" (31). Not only does his statement confirm his position of banning women from the spaces of power, but by referring to the office as his house, "in meinem Hause," also underscores his position as the perceived patriarch, who allegedly leads the company with the firm hand of a father. The fact that he sees the company as his house, and not as the neutral space espoused by the rhetoric of the modern office, also hints at the inherently antiquated nature of the company. For, while certain aspects of the space of the office are thoroughly modern, such as the glass doors and the treatment of women as décor, it is also a conflicted space because it exists on the brink between older, traditional notions of the office as house and that of the new and modern office, which is supposed to be a space of equity.

The irony of Warius's earlier statement is that it contradicts reality and his treatment of Urschl. By arguing that pretty, modern women don't yet belong in positions of authority and simultaneously acknowledging that Urschl had become too old and sickly to work, he inadvertently exposes the double standard that exists: one should not be too old or too sick, for that is not appealing, yet not too pretty or too modern either, because that might be too sexually enticing and distract the men from getting work done. In the end, his message is a

clear statement of the fact that women do not belong in any position other than that of the *Stenotypistin*, regardless of skill level or ambition. They also do not belong in any room of the office that is not visually open and able to be supervised. Privacy and the privilege of performing work away from the gaze of others is not possible for them, because it would call into question their treatment as décor and the assumption that they can only perform menial work tied to machinery and to the typewriter specifically. From this, we see that the range of women who are acceptable as white-collar employees in the office is a narrow one: one needs to be young and attractive and modern but also uninterested in advancement. And women are furthermore expected to leave the office at a certain point before their beauty value has faded, to go off and marry and leave the "real" work to the "verstaubte" men.

That Warius is supportive of this line of reasoning becomes evident when he urges Brückner to abandon her ideas of career advancement and instead focus on finding a husband.

> Vergessen Sie doch um Gottes willen nicht, daß jede halbwegs annehmbare Ehe Ihreeinzige Rettung ist. Man braucht Sie ja doch nur anzusehen. … Das Herz würde mir bluten, wenn ich denken sollte, daß Ihre Jugend, verzeihen Sie, Ihre gottbegnadete Leibesschönheit—und wäre es in der erfolgreichsten Karriere—hinter Aktenmappen und Schreibmaschinen verwelken sollte. (37)

It is interesting that he does not even attempt to argue for pursuing a life of love, but rather, simply argues that any "halbwegs annehmbare" marriage would be more beneficial than attempting to remain employed, even if a successful career were theoretically possible. However, his argument is not based on what Urschl argued for—a need for financial stability—but rather, on Brückner's beauty, which he likens to a flower that should not be left

to "wilt" behind folders and typewriters. His comparison of her with a flower further illuminates his view that women are primarily there to beautify the world, whether at work or at home. They should not attempt to disturb the perceived natural order of the work environment, lest they risk both disturbing the managerial world of men and at the same time risk ruining and wasting their beauty, which Warius sees as women's primary asset. What breaks his heart, then, is not Brückner's stunted career, or the thought of her ending up in a loveless marriage, but rather, the idea that her beauty might vanish without having been of use to her, and implicitly, to men. Her wish for a successful career seems irrelevant and misguided to him and is something he believes she will later regret. Women belong in the office only for a short time, and only to beautify the space; a wilted flower is no longer appreciated. And much like the flower Warius likens Brückner to, flowers by their nature only belong in spaces where they will be seen and appreciated by others for their beauty, and not behind the closed doors, especially since that is where the power in the office has its nexus. Flowers, however beautiful, are delicate and thus not suited for the brutal world of decision-making and status. Any opinion to the contrary is easily laughed off by Warius, since he grounds his argument in the idea that women are delicate and beautiful and can thereby justify the limitation on the spaces in which they belong.

He ends their conversation by telling Brückner that he will not endorse her for the position, for all of the reasons already listed, but lastly, also because the world is not ready for a female in a position of power. Who, aside from Urschl, he asks, would she be able to find who would ever be willing to be her *Stenotypistin* and accept a dictation from another women? "Aber suchen Sie sich doch mal zwei Stenotypistinnen, die sich von Ihnen Post

diktieren ließen?" (36). The implicit answer is that nobody would. It is, in other words, not only men who are not ready to accept women into positions of power, but it is also other women themselves who are resistant to the idea. Yet Brückner refuses to accept Warius's assessment of reality, and instead, full of confidence, states that "[j]eder Mensch soll das Recht haben, vorwärts zu wollen, und ich danke meinem Schöpfer, daß er mir die Befähigung dazu gab" (37). What she still fails to realize at this point in the novel, however, is that the question of ability is not going to be her problem, but rather, other people's stubborn resistance to women's advancement. She is also blind to the fact that the space of the office allows for rote discrimination because its structure normativizes and endorses these forms of interaction as natural and normal.

### *Gilgi*: The Body as Social Space

Irmgard Keun's novel *Gilgi* also thematizes the valuation of women based on their aesthetic appeal within the sphere of the office, yet the novel does so in a decidedly different manner than *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. While Brück set out to create a protagonist who encounters and actively fights against oppression within the world of white-collar employment, Keun created a protagonist, Gilgi, who appears to have no qualms about the objectification she encounters within the space of the office. Rather, Gilgi is more than willing to capitalize upon this aspect of the office culture, using it to her advantage by garnering preferential treatment based on her aesthetic appeal and beauty in the eyes of others. Yet, I would argue that by engaging and supporting the objectification of the female body, Gilgi's body itself becomes a social space unto which modernist design ideology is

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both forced and reinforced by others and by Gilgi herself. She thus unknowingly but actively works towards undermining the individuality that she mistakenly believes to be fostering by aligning her body with current modernist trends. In doing so, she not only reinforces the normative standard that values women's contributions in the office primarily as modernist décor, but she also reinforces her own role as an objectified space.

The first lines of the book already introduce Gilgi's attempts at self-fashioning in order to be appealingly modern. "Sie hält es fest in der Hand, ihr kleines Leben, das Mädchen Gilgi. Gilgi nennt sie sich, Gisela, heißt sie. Zu schlanken Beinen und kinderschmalen Hüften, zu winzigen Modekäppchen, die auf dem äußersten Ende des Kopfes geheimnisvollen Halt finden, paßt ein Name mit zwei i" (5). By presenting Gilgi in this manner at the onset of the novel, Keun already introduces her as a character who is primarily defined by her body and her desire to be fashionable. Her body is described in a manner fitting with the current beauty standard that makes desirable décor: thin and prepubescent, with narrow, childlike hips and thin legs. Furthermore, it is not only her physical shape that conforms to current dictums regarding fashion; her choice in dress, symbolized by the little cap, also reinforces the idea that she is actively attempting to style herself to stay in accord with current trends. Yet, the description of her hat, as precariously perched on her head, also serves as a subtle hint at the fact that it is an unstable position in which Gilgi exists. For, keeping up with fleeting trends demands constant upkeep and this ability could easily slip away, much as the cap could slip off and, in an instant, take away the status she gains by wearing it. That Gilgi is aware of the idea of changing trends is also reinforced by her choice of name: as if trying to seem casually young and innocent, Gilgi decides to go by a nickname

instead of using her given name, Gisela. Someday, she muses, she will go by Gisela, "aber vorläufig ist es noch nicht soweit" (5). The space that she is attempting to style—namely, her body—does not fit with a Gisela, it only fits with a Gilgi. Through this introduction of Gilgi, a connection is thus already being drawn between Gilgi's ability and willingness to style her body and her ability to hold life "fest in der Hand," to hold onto life tightly, to be in control of her life. But, importantly, echoing back to the discussion of beauty and ambition in *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, the life that Gilgi is in control of is a "kleines Leben," a small life. This is a life in which she has dreams, but they are not radical dreams and they are not dreams that will push boundaries in the way that Brückner wanted to. Gilgi is in control of her life insofar as she is willing to live within the boundaries of what is acceptable for a beautiful, stylish young woman, and this suits Gilgi just fine.

Gilgi's focus on fashioning herself as a sleek women can be read as the female gender counterpart to the minimalism in architectural modernism. While architectural modernism demanded that the physical space of the office be stripped of excess ornamentation and streamlined in design, so too was the female body as a space of modernity expected to be streamlined and thinned down in order to fit into this space stylistically. Seen from this perspective, Gilgi's focus on fashion and beauty need to be read not as a preoccupation with fashion, then, but rather, as an attempt to fashion herself into a space that is able to fit, literally and aesthetically, within the space of the office itself. Thus, in an attempt to align herself with modernist minimalism, she becomes preoccupied with staying as slim as possible. This is often reiterated throughout the novel, both through a detailing of the daily fitness routine she performs when first waking up, for example, and through descriptions of

her food intake, such as, "Gilgi [trinkt] eine Tasse Kaffee, ißt ein mager gestrichenes Brötchen—man will doch nicht dick werden—, zündet sich eine Zigarette an" (12). This insertion, that one does not want to become fat, is indicative of Gilgi's understanding of the rules surrounding the space of the office; she is aware that her success within this space depends upon her willingness to fashion herself to take up as little of the shared space of the office as possible. Yet, through her focus on enacting and inscribing modernist ideas onto herself, Gilgi works to support and enact the *social relations of reproduction* that validate women's roles in the office as machine and décor. By allowing her body to become a space that is arranged and socialized according to modernist ideology, she undermines the career path that she believes to be opening up for herself. In *Gilgi*, it is no longer just the men who objectify and dehumanize women by treating them as office furniture or décor; the women willingly style *themselves* as office accessories, and they do so with the understanding that this is precisely what the role of the *Neue Frau* is. Being successful as a white-collar female employee is no longer a matter of work, but rather, of being a space onto which others can inscribe their modernist, minimalist expectations and desires.

An example of Gilgi's awareness of the need to style herself according to these expectations is made evident in a scene in which she interviews for a second, part-time job and is immediately hired. When walking out of the interview, another applicant who was turned down turns to Gilgi, saying: "Sie haben Glück gehabt, sagt die Blasse zu Gilgi" (82). What is striking here is that the other applicant is described merely as "die Blasse," the pale one, which already implies the reason for her failure. Namely, she did not make the effort to

apply enough make-up to hide her paleness and thus was not able to compete against Gilgi's

meticulous styling of herself. Following this, Gilgi does not reply but thinks to herself,

> natürlich habe ich Glück, denkt Gilgi und macht lange, selbstbewußte Schritte. …
> Daß sie ihre eigene Maschine mitbringen wird, hat sie über die anderen
> Bewerberinnen siegen lassen. Vielleicht auch, daß sie so ein bißchen verheißungsvoll
> mit den Augen gekullert hat. So niedlich von-unten-nach-oben-Blicke wirken bei
> Männern über fünfzig fast immer. (82)

As seen in the quote, Gilgi is well aware of the fact that her ability to be hired was weighted

in her favor by many factors. For one, she has the luxury of owning her own typewriter,

which she knows shows a willingness to be equated with an instrument of work in the eyes of

employers. It is not Gilgi alone who is hired, but rather, Gilgi and her machine. Moreover,

not only does Gilgi show a willingness to use her beauty and sex appeal to win her favor, but

she also goes on to say that "ferner ist's gut, an Beschützerinstinkte zu appellieren, im

richtigen Augenblick solides Selbstbewußtsein durch kleidsame Hilfslosigkeit zu ersetzen"

(83). Her choice of the word "kleidsam" is striking because it illuminates the fact that her

behavior is akin to putting on a "Kleid," a dress, which she does in order to win favor. Much

as with a mannequin, she styles the space of her body, both in gesture and behavior. Only by

following strict behavioral codes and performing an inauthentic behavior is she able to garner

their interest; she is able to appeal to their desires by presenting what they wish to see in a

female employee and not what she really is. Furthermore, in this brief interaction, we see the

same norms at play that we saw in *Schicksale*, insofar as women in the office are to be

beautiful and subservient to men. The difference here is that Gilgi mercilessly exploits this

situation to her benefit, as is succinctly summarized by the narrator, who says, "Man muß das

alles verstehen. Gilgi versteht es" (83). In order to succeed, one has to play by the rules and

actively objectify oneself, and it is interesting to witness Gilgi doing so without any hesitation. And yet, because she is given the job that others did not receive, she is also rewarded for negating herself through acts of self-styling to meet the demands of others. This is thus a perfect example of the moment in which the rules governing the space of the office and dictating who should be hired are exposed for what they are. At the same time, these rules are also shown to be reinforced by those upon whom they are being exerted.

Gilgi's position within the office is one that is defined by her ability to fit into the office, whether as a machine or as office décor. This is reinforced by a scene in which Gilgi is for the first time in the novel presented as being within the office space itself. The scene starts out with a description not of Gilgi herself, but rather, of the sounds of work that Gilgi produces: "tick-tick-tick—rrrrrrrr—bezugnehmend auf Ihr Schreiben vom 18. des ….. tick-tick-tick—rrrrrrrr" (16). This passage highlights first and foremost the negation of any human element of her personality or work and already introduces her vis-à-vis the typewriter. The passage then goes on to say, "Sie schreibt schnell, sauber und fehlerfrei. Ihre braunen, kleinen Hände mit den braven, kurznäglig getippten Zeigefingern gehören zu der Maschine, und die Maschine gehört zu ihnen" (16). Gilgi's hands belong to the typewriter, have become a part of the machine, and have literally become worn down through typing. Yet, this passage not only makes an explicit connection between Gilgi's body (her hands) and the typewriter, but it also assigns her hands a positive value, describing them as "brav," well behaved hands that have learned to do as they are told. They are not interested in acting as the hands of Gilgi as much as parts of a machine in the service of the office. Her hands, and by extension, her body, have become part of the office space.

But as much as Gilgi's body has become a piece of equipment within the office, she also has learned to effortlessly transition into embodying the role of office décor, as we see when she takes her written letters to be signed by her superior. "Tick-tick-tick—rrrrrr...... die Stenotypistin Gilgi geht zum Chef und legt ihm die Briefe zur Unterschrift vor. … 'Machen Sie immer so ein böses Gesicht?' fragt Herr Reuter. So fängt es an" (17). Within a moment, Gilgi has transitioned from being a typing machine to being one who is expected to look beautiful and pleasing to her boss. However, she does not immediately transition as effortlessly as he would like her to, and he points this out, commenting on her unfriendly face. Yet, her remark that this is how it always starts, is also already an indication that Gilgi knows where this is heading. It is not that her boss wishes her to be a mere object of décor, but rather, an object of décor that can also be used according to his desires. In fashioning her body as an object that belongs within the space of the office, her success of fitting into the space of the office also means that she is seen as belonging to the space and, by extension, to those in positions of power. Belong to the space of the office, then, means being a space that is open to use and open to the projection of desires.

Gilgi immediately realizes that her boss is interested in having an affair with her, and although she is only 20 years old, she is not at all surprised by this request: "Gilgi ist ein erfahrenes Mädchen. … Wenn ein Mann und Chef wie Herr Reuter mit unsicherer Stimme spricht, … will er was. …Bekommt er nicht, was er will, ist er erstaunt, gekränkt und ärgerlich" (17). This passage indicates that this is not the first time in her career path that a boss has wished to have an affair, and she also appears well aware of the consequences of turning down the offer. Yet, it is perhaps more telling that his expected reaction to being

turned down is one of being "erstaunt," surprised. This suggests that, in his mind, not only is the request legitimate, but perhaps even justified, because this is the perceived role that women are expected to play. The fact that his astonishment leads to anger also indicates the great extent to which female employees, and in this scene Gilgi in particular, are considered objects in the office to be used as needed. By having fashioned herself into a social space upon which others are able to project their needs, she has inadvertently opened herself up to harassment and, simultaneously, exposed the perceived role of women as objects. Gilgi realizes, however, that turning him down puts her at risk not only of his anger, but also of actually losing her job, which she does not want to do, since, aside from his interest in her, he is described as "ein guter Chef. Er bezahlt überstunden, nutzt seine Angestellten nicht aus, ist freundlich und angenehm" (18). It is an interesting commentary that he is described as someone who does not use his employees, since that is exactly what he is attempting to do in this situation. For Gilgi, propositioning does not fall into this category; but rather, it is simply seen as a normal occurrence, something which is just part of the treatment that can be expected when one accepts one's role as object.

This idea of discrimination as normal behavior is explicitly stated later on in the novel, in which Gilgi is speaking of her new boss and says,

> Der Herr Mahrenholz? Ausgesprochen klebriger Mann. … Ich find', die Männer sind gar nicht so schlimm, wie sie immer dargestellt werden. Die meisten versuchen natürlich ihr Glück, wenn ihnen ein hübsches junges Mädel in die Quere kommt— kann man ihnen doch nicht übel nehmen. Oder? Ich find' das ganz normal und natürlich. (101)

Gilgi's repetition of the words "natürlich" and "normal" reinforce her acceptance of the gender-based harassment that takes place in the office, which has become so normal and routine that she doesn't even see it as a problem, but rather, just something that men do. It's just natural to try your luck with a woman after all, she argues, when you come across them, "wenn [sie] dir in die Quere kommen," but this phrasing also bespeaks her understanding of women in the workforce as being both object and outsider. For, while one could understand the idea of "die Quere" in the sense of happening to stumble upon a beautiful women in the streets, this is the space of the office she is discussing, where encountering employees of the opposite sex should not be a matter of surprise but the norm. By describing it as a moment of happenstance that naturally will be taken advantage of, Gilgi reinforces the idea that the office is still the domain of men. Women are still the novelty and are thus still a surprise to be found there by the men, who then, "natürlich," cannot help but proposition these women. This justification is as worrisome as it is revealing of the way in which Gilgi has accepted the idea that in order to be a *Neue Frau* within the world of white-collar employment, one needs to fashion oneself to fit in with this space and thereby relinquish any rights to one's own space and one's own body. In having internalized this belief, and in having enacted it by becoming a social space open to use by others—as a machine and as an object of décor to be used and appreciated at whim—she not only rationalizes this behavior, but actively enforces its continuation.

Strikingly, later on in the novel, Gilgi makes a remark that becomes central to this idea of accepting the role of object and relinquishing the right to complain about it. She states, "Hauptsache: man versteht, ihnen geschickt auszuweichen. Bloß keine große

Beleidigungstragödie à la «Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen»!" (107). In a moment of

dialogue between these two literary works, Keun's character Gilgi mocks Brück's novel for

being a "Beleidigungstragödie," a tragedy about being insulted. In doing so, she reduces all

of the conflicts that Brückner faces to the idea that she was simply not skilled enough to

know how to subtly get out of them. Furthermore, she places the blame for women's inability

to get ahead and the troubles arising from harassment in the workforce squarely on the

women themselves, not men.[98] In saying this, she confirms what Warius made clear to

Brückner when he said that her career dreams would be hindered not only by men, but also

by women unwilling to let go of the current schemata through which they understand their

work environment. Gilgi is not willing to accept any woman who does not accept the idea

that, in order to fit into the space of the office, one must become the space of the office,

regardless of how degrading that is to women as individuals.


*Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*: When Typewriters are More Valuable than Humans

    Perhaps even more discouraging to women entering the white-collar workforce than

the realization that advancement is by and large impossible is the realization that, even as

*Stenotypistinnen*, they are of little value because they are so easily replaced. As such, they are

of less value than the machines on which they perform their work, which were increasingly

seen as indispensable. Much like the idealized shape of the female employees, so too had the

typewriter designs of the 1920s been streamlined over the years to take on a sleeker and

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[98]This comment also goes against current scholarly readings of *Gilgi* as a story of emancipation and *Schicksale* as anti-modern, and if anything, forces a reevaluation of that categorization, with the opposite more likely being the case.

lighter look. Yet, they were also built in such a manner as to easily last for decades.

Interestingly, in much the same way that female employees came to be equated with their

typewriters, so too were the typewriters feminized, with most brands giving them women's

names, such as the "Gloria," the "Olympia," and, most popular among them, the "Erika"

(also called the "Bijou," from the French word for jewel). The photo (Figure 2) below shows

the "Erika" from 1931, which was often also marketed for private use and is the model

mentioned in the novel when Gilgi is said to be the proud owner of her own "Erika" (21).

Fig2: Erika Typewriter. Photograph.

The advertisement (Figure 3) for the Erika featured below further elucidates how it was not

only the naming of the machines that drew the connection between woman and machine and

thus feminized the instrument, but even the description of the typewriter refers to the model

as the "Königin," the queen, of small typewriters. Furthermore, as discussed earlier in the

chapter in the case of Remington, the sellers offered a free demonstration of Erika's skills.

These typewriters were then not only marketed as practical instruments, but as "women" that

one wanted, and needed, to have in the office.

Fig3: Advertisement for two models of Erika typewriters. Print.

The devaluation of a typist and her relative value compared to the machine on which she types is a topic discussed in *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. Urschl points out that the typewriter has more value than the person using the machine, saying, "Sehen Sie, Fräulein Brückner, so eine Schreibmaschine, wenn sie ruiniert wird, kostet Geld. Aber eine Angestellte setzt man an die Luft, wenn sie reparaturbedürftig ist und holt sich eine unverbrauchte neue. Ein Tippmädel ist billige Ware" (20). She thereby equates humans and typewriters as objects in the service of the company, with the reality being that the typewriters are more valuable and justify the cost of repairs. However, typists, when needing repairs—a use of language echoing the mechanical nature of the work—are more easily replaced than fixed. Typists are, in her estimation, cheap wares, as Urschl herself experienced.

Brückner later vocalizes her perception that machines are more highly valued than women in her discussion with Warius when she notes that, "die eine geht, die andere setzt ihre Arbeit fort" (36), and that her desire for advancement is to become less disposable. Here, she points out that,

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

Brückner is well aware that, aside from becoming less desirable with age and thus less welcome in the office, the system, once designed to be advantageous to employees by mandating pay raises with age, actually works against them, because it makes older employees more expensive to keep on. While it may be true that being in higher positions for a longer time justifies a higher salary because of the value one has in the eyes of the company, for typists, this is clearly not the case, as younger employees are just as capable of fulfilling the duties, often even more efficiently and for lower pay. Brückner shows a keen understanding of this dilemma and correctly realizes that the only way to avoid being let go later on in life is to have made oneself indispensable to the company, something that a typist alone will never be.

Reinforcing this is a scene in which Brückner, after leaving Dudenmeyer in search of a company willing to give her a chance at career advancement, is walking down the street. She glances over at the newspapers advertising job openings and sees an ad that states, "nur erste Kräfte wollen sich melden. Durchschnittsware findet hier keine Berücksichtigung" (48).

Amazed, she steps closer and re-reads the sentences, uttering to herself, "tatsächlich, es steht da: Durchschnittsware" (48). The depersonalization and dehumanization of work as a result of the mechanization of labor is often thought of solely in the context of factory labor; however, from this text, we see that this dehumanization also took place on the level of lower-level white-collar employment. Typists, especially in the latter years of Weimar, when unemployment was high and typists were many, were no longer even referred to as humans but rather as "Waren." Employers had the luxury of being able to request that only the best need apply and, even then, they only kept employees on as long as it was beneficial to the company.

Yet, compared to blue-collar working conditions, in which humans as employees were devalued but often developed a strong sense of camaraderie among each other, what we see among female white-collar employees is, paradoxically, quite the opposite. Namely, the office becomes a place of isolation for women, with women not only foregoing close ties with one another, but often working against one another in hopes of ensuring their survival. Thus, while onlookers, such as journalists or other social commentators writing about white-collar employment, often described the "sea of women" and discussed them as a group, what they failed to take into account was that the space of the office, by design, isolated female employees from each other, and did so, in part, through the control of sounds within the office.

Silencing through Sound: Typing

       I have established the space of the office as a place in which the social relations of reproduction normativized the male assessment of female white-collar employees based upon their value as décor. I have also discussed how this relationship was reinforced by most female employees themselves, who thereby created immense hurdles to women's career ambitions. We will now turn to another aspect of the space of the office that complicated women's interactions within this space: namely, the sounds of the office, specifically the sound of typing. As discussed in Chapter One, the theme of sound also played a important role in apartment life, insofar as the permeation of sound through porous walls led to a sense of isolation and loss of privacy. Within the space of the office, sound becomes a way to further monitor employees and proves to be equally isolating, yet through a different mechanism than was discussed in the previous chapter. If the space of the office is understood as a social product—an interplay between the physical space and the relations and modes of interaction of the individuals within that space—then an investigation of the nature of sound helps illuminate how office sounds co-create and reinforce the dominant codes of interaction within the office. By privileging the sound of typing over the sounds of human interaction, and by associating the sound of typing with that of productivity, the space of the office becomes one in which women are able to be monitored through the presence or absence of the sound of typing. This focus on the sounds of the typewriter does not allow or incentivize female employees to bond and connect with one another, because any halt in the sound of production becomes a liability. The result is an environment marked by isolation.

To ground this argument, we begin by turning to a conversation between Urschl and Brückner, the devious nature of which emerges when Brückner says, "Pst, mache ich, pst, pst, und sofort klappern die Maschinen. Irgendwo hat eine Tür gequietscht. Schritte sind hörbar im Korridor" (12). To prevent reprimand from their supervisors, they must not only abruptly end their conversation but also replace it with the sounds of typing, a "klappern" of the machines. This illustrates that it is not only conversations between female employees that are looked down upon, but also, that the sounds expected to be emanating from them are those of the typewriter, not of speech. Even silence would not suffice as proof of productivity. Rather, the space of the office requires certain sounds to be present, first among them the sound of typing. Yet, in this space, Brückner and Urschl show an understanding of the requirement of filling space with the sound of typing, and are able to circumvent this by keenly listening for the other audible clues telling them that these sounds need to resume, such as the squeaking of the door or the footsteps of approaching supervisors. By having cultivated an increased ability to hear peripheral noises, they are able to secretly foster a friendship and communicate with one another. They are simply aware of when the sound of typing needs to be present and can fake this in order to avoid trouble. In this way, the audible space of sounds proves to be more open to power variables than the visual space of sight. Female employees are easily monitored through the glass door and open workspace, and it is hard to find a way around this; however, within the space of sound, female employees are able to use the porosity of the space to their advantage, because they can hear others approaching, but also because they can more easily create a way around their domination by manipulating the sound space. The space of sound then presents a way to control employees, and but it also offers female employees the ability to control it in return.

Yet, once Brückner leaves Dudenmeyer to work for another company in a different office environment, her ability to forge human connections is severely limited, as the other female employees do not seem to be willing to take this risk of halting the sound of productivity in order to try to connect with her, a new hire, on a personal basis. This becomes evident in a scene in which Brückner enters her new place of employment for the first time and attempts to greet everyone. She describes her words as "merkwürdig hallend in diesem kahlen … Bürozimmer" (158), and her greetings are only responded to with an "unverständlichen Gemurmel" from the other employees (158). The description of the room as "kahl," as bare, can then be read as a descriptor not only of the room's modernist design but also of the atmosphere of the office, thereby linking design and behavior. Brückner's words echo back to her not only because the room itself is designed to be cold and empty in order to be deemed modern and fashionable, but equally so because the room is devoid of what one might otherwise expect to find there, namely human speech.

The environment is one of lack in every sense: lack of conversation, lack of warmth, lack of collegiality. For these employees, unaccustomed to talking, whether with newcomers or among each other, are no longer willing or even able to respond in a socially appropriate manner when addressed, only giving off a mumbled response when greeted. Yet, their lack of speech does not mean that there is a lack of noise. Rather, the only acceptable noise is that of the typewriter, as is reflected when Brückner attempts to address one colleague directly: "Fräulein Müller sieht verstört von der Arbeit auf, als ich sie begrüße. Neben ihr klappert ein älteres Mädchen auf der Maschine" (160). Interestingly, the new colleagues whom she greets are not only distraught when actually greeted—an activity that should seem commonplace—

but it is also worth noting that the choice of verb "klappern", to describe the action connected to the typewriter, is the same verb that Brückner used to describe the noise that she and Urschl knew to make when the supervisors were approaching. "Klappern," however, is not the sound of "tippen," which would imply a standard use of the typewriter. Instead, "klappern" is a verb usually associated with sounds that would be made by accident, by something that is broken. Items are blown about haphazardly and "klappern" in the wind, for example, but to use this word in connection with the typewriter implies something very different than simply the sound of productivity. Rather, it is an indication that employees have learned that their perceived productivity is tied to the noise of typing. Furthermore, they know that ensuring that this noise is present, and that speech is not, is what is most likely to be rewarded within the office environment, and not necessarily the quality of work produced, if any work is being produced at all. It is, in other words, this noise of "klappern" that distinguishes and demarcates this space as a space of work and nothing else. Making the sounds of typing, careless as they may be, is what matters most because it reinforces the idea that the space of the office, and the behaviors exhibited therein, demands to be distinct from other spaces that may allow other behaviors. The sound of typing is what makes this space an office space more than the work performed here, because sound is a more easily measured and perceived sense that, at least in theory, appears to be more able to being monitored.

This idea of measuring productivity through sound instead of other means is, in many ways, in keeping with what has so far been established in connection with the idea of female white-collar employment. This work was oftentimes not a very diverse or intellectually demanding form of employment, and also not one in which different levels of performance

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could be easily distinguished. Thus, the space of the office became one in which the sounds of typing became the marker of success. Those who were best at creating these sounds, at the expense of forgoing conversations with other female employees, were those most likely to succeed, since the actual value of their work as compared to one another was not easy to assess. The space of the office was, therefore, one in which the *relations of production* justified the division of labor into separate ranks, in which men's performance was assessed through the results garnered, and women's work, as typists, was assessed based on the noise it produced. Yet, the higher valuation of the sound of production invariably also devalued human interaction and thus led to a sense of alienation. This phenomenon resonates throughout many of the novels of this era. For, if women's worth was based solely on their value based on their visual and acoustic contributions to the space of the office, and not as intellectual equals, it becomes hard for women to not begin to react to this standard of appraisal with deceit.

### *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*: The Modern Office, Spaces without Precedent

This understanding of the space of the office necessitates a re-conceptualization and re-evaluation of the space of the office not as a place of collegiality and modernity, as one would expect, but as an anti-modern space insofar as it is designed to isolate women from each other and to discourage them from pursuing a career. This is deeply paradoxical, as it is precisely the modernist aspects of the office—the glass doors, the minimalist female bodies, the valuation of being fashionable, the foregrounding of new technology and machinery— that produce this anti-modern social aspect. Yet, by designing modern offices for efficiency,

specificity of tasks, and easy employee replaceability, the modern design became anti-modern by enacting these values, as we have seen in this chapter's analysis thus far. In further support of this argument, we will now turn to the site of Brückner's final employment within the novel *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*.

Brücker, having left Dudenmeyer in search of better career possibilities, spends the next six years toiling away at jobs that prove to be extremely problematic, all for different reasons. In one, working in the *Filmverleih* industry, she is given more autonomy but is forced to deal with a boss who attempts to swindle and cheat both his customers and his employees out of money, and who is caught opening lying to her on several occasions. She then moves on to what appears to be a better position, in which she is offered more money and a better title, in the same film industry. Here she discovers only too late that the boss is a sadist who takes great pleasure in physically abusing and sexually exploiting his female employees, and she leaves after he attempts to rape her. She then finds employment in a small family-run flour business in a smaller town that is a safer, but duller and dirtier, environment to work in. At this point—towards the end of the novel—she has almost given up hope of success, admitting that "der wahre Wille zum Aufstieg ist ja längst in mir zerbrochen" (255). She finds herself depressed and alone, dreading the future and the ever-so-rapid passing of time: "so verrinnt das Leben, rieselnder Sand, der lautlos die Wege verschüttet. Ich habe Augenblicke grauenhaftes Erwachens. Da schaut die Seele um sich und erkennt ihre Verlassenheit in der Wüste" (256). She even goes so far as to describe her feelings as "the Wahnsinnsverstellung des Lebendigbegrabenseins" (256), feeling that she

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has failed at life.[99] Yet, despite her gloom, she secretly still holds out hope for a satisfying

career, telling herself that these jobs all ended in failure because they were still being run in a

very old-fashioned way, by old men disinclined to accept women as their equals in the

workforce and unwilling to allow modernity to enter the proverbial "Konferenzzimmer."

Thus, when she one day spots an advertisement looking for "eine intelligente und gebildete

Sekretärin, nicht unter fünfundzwanzig Jahren, erste Kraft, an selbstständiges Arbeiten

gewöhnt, mit guten englischen und französischen Sprachkenntnissen" (266) and promising

that for those who are "zielbewußt" (266), it is both well-paid and offers many chances for

advancement, Brückner can barely contain her excitement. Brückner's enthusiasm cannot be

understated, as this job reawakens all of her dreams. She feels that it could be the one

available job that would offer her a chance to demonstrate her skills, aspire for promotions,

and finally pursue the career path she had been dreaming about. In addition, this is one of the

few jobs that is specifically looking for an older employee, a rarity in those times, which only

adds to its appeal, making her feel that her advancing age would, for once, not be a hindrance

to getting hired. Brückner rushes back home in order to apply for the position, putting all of

her hopes into it and saying, "ich habe seit Wochen, Monaten gefleht, gebetet, gerungen um

Erlösung aus meiner Unterdrücktheit. Hier ist sie. ---- Ich atme auf" (268). Her choice of

words emphasizes the importance that she places on this opportunity, which she sees as a

possible "Erlösung," a salvation from her misery. She endows it with almost religious

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[99]The psychological effects that her employment has had on her are clearly immense, ranging from depression
to panic attacks to sleeplessness and loss of appetite. Yet unfortunately, it is outside of the realm of this research
to focus on these aspects (or side-effects) of employment, although it would make for a fascinating study.
Suffice it to say here that being employed and attempting to be self-sufficient has not had positive results for
Brückner, especially as it relates to her mental health.

significance, which is further emphasized by her explanation that it comes after months of pleading and praying for help.

When she receives an invitation for an interview, all of her hopes are suddenly renewed and strengthened, as she believes this to be the fulfillment of her destiny: "es ist mein Weg, der sich hier vollenden soll" (281). She even expresses the feeling that this is owed to her for having suffered so much and muses that life could not be so cruel as to offer her this possibility but not let her have it: "das Schicksal kann einfach nicht so grausam sein, mich so nah an die Erfüllung aller meiner Wünsche zu führen, um sie vor meinen Augen einer anderen zuzuwenden" (281). It is all she has ever dreamed of, and after years of struggle, it suddenly seems possible to find a position as a white-collar female employee where one is taken seriously and allowed to be career-driven. Brückner believes that this position will be different because it is a modern company that is willing to embrace the new ways of the world and even work internationally, a sign to Brückner of their forward-thinking ways. Fitting with her image of the company is her description of the building when she first approaches it. It is described as being different than all other places she has ever worked, and thoroughly modern. Unlike the offices of her other jobs, which were situated in old buildings, this office is a new construction and, in every way, signifies modernity:

> Kühl, reserviert bis zur Ablehnung erhebt sich über flachen Rasenquadraten das Gebäude der Internationalen Studentenfürsorge. … Schnurgerade, mit harten, symmetrisch gehauenen Steinen gepflastert, über denen Schritte merkwürdig hallen, führt der Weg durch den Vorgarten nach der stilvollen Eingangstür. Das Haus ist neu. (277)

It is interesting to note that modernity is "kühl," and therefore rational and not controlled by the irrationality and heated emotions such as anger and lust found in the other spaces in which she had worked. While similar, this use of "kühl" clearly sets this building apart from Brückner's use of "kahl" in describing the other offices. To be "kahl" implies a memory of having once been something else—more ornate, more decorated, more traditional—and thus hints at the history of the spaces. These offices were thus attempting to reinvent themselves as modern offices but were still, in essence, spaces of the past, demarcated by what they lacked: privacy and warmth. Yet, "kühl" does not carry that baggage and does not imply any history other than the current state of being neutral and cool. This office building, before she ever sets foot into it, promises through its architecture to be a place of sanity. It is a building designed logically, with everything strictly ordered, from the flat, perfect quadrants of a lawn to the perfectly symmetrical cobblestones leading up to the door. Its symmetry and uniformity bespeak an inherent equality of space, in which no aspect is valued more than the other for arbitrary reasons. This is clearly a new environment for Brückner, and it is radically different from all others. Even her footsteps sound different when walking over the new stones; even the audible world has changed. While in earlier scenes it was only the footsteps of her superiors that were heard and served as a warning of their approach, here, she can now hear her own footsteps, which fill her with a sense of power and the belief in a work environment that is built upon equality. It is already upon approach a space in which all footsteps echo equally, which implies that it is also a space in which power can be shared by many. Her description of the sound of her steps as "merkwürdig" further reinforces the novelty of this moment, in which she, for the first time, is the one who is the producer of sounds, independent of the machinery of the typewriter. Almost redundantly, after describing

so many markers of modernity, she leaves no room for misinterpretation, and reinforces the

modern aspect by saying that the house is "neu," new, leaving no other interpretation open

but to understand this as the space of the modern office. It is the new office in which the new

woman works, the woman that she dreams of being. Immediately after entering the

fashionable door, she is overwhelmed by the certainty of her desire to work in this space,

saying,

> Wenn ein letzter Rest von Unschlüssigkeit noch in mir vorhanden ist, es schwindet, als die dunklen Spiegel der blankpolierten Eichentür sich rückwärts in Helle und Schönheit eines gewährten Raumes öffnen. Nichts anderes ist mehr in mir, als der Wunsch, hierher zu gehören, ein Teil dieses gepflegten Hauses zu werden. (277)

Long before she interacts with any other people, it is alone the design of the building, the

simple, polished doors, the darkened mirrors, the light and perceived beauty of the room, and

the higher class it exudes, that make her know she wants to work here. These qualities alone

represent a radical shift from the antiquated world of white-collar employment in which she

has found herself thus far. The modernity of the building becomes the confirmation to her of

the fact that the office environment will also be run on modern, rational principles, which

will allow her to advance and finally find fulfillment in her work. She even goes so far as to

admit that, when she dreamt about the ideal work environment in the past, what she always

imagined was something akin to this building: "Etwas wie dies schwebte mir ja vor, wann

immer ich von einer idealen Arbeitsstätte träumte" (278). Perhaps most telling about this

proclamation of hers is the fact that it shows that she is in tune with the fashions of the day,

having conjured up an imagine of the modern office long before she ever entered it, but

instantly recognizing it for what it is. This is the modern office that will allow the modern woman to succeed.

During her interview, the modernist design is further emphasized, for instance, when the interviewer, Herr von Killar, casually leans back in his "Klubsessel," playing with his shiny silver pen in his hand while talking to her. The bareness of the space and the openness, as well as the inability to hide behind anything, is also described in physical terms when Brückner describes herself in this moment as feeling "ein wenig nackt und bloß auf meinem Stühlchen" (279). This can be read both as a reaction to the modernist aesthetic of the space, which shines light and exposes everything, but also as a reflection of her feeling of being exposed, "nackt," in her blatant desire to win Herr von Killar's favor and thus also the job. Accordingly, as soon as he praises her abilities and her creative ambitions, all of her feelings of being exposed are forgotten, "vergessen ist das bescheidene Stühlchen!" (281). She is swept up into a state of sheer enthusiasm and hope for the future, which is further elucidated by her description of the next room she enters, which has "fünf breite Fenster, [durch die] Sonne über die Wände [stürzt]" (283). The sunshine is flooding in, unstoppable in its desire to shine its light into the room. Yet, during the interview, despite all of the positive aspects, she also senses that something is slightly off and notes, "ich bemühe mich krampfhaft, ein heftiges Mißbehagen zu unterdrücken" (284). This is especially the case with regard to Dr. Maßmann, the second interviewer, who appears more reserved than the situation appears to warrant. However, her desire to have found the perfect employment allows her to rationalize her feelings, and she attributes her oversensitivity to the minute details of his behavior to wanting the job so badly. She leaves the interview, less worried about her "Mißbehagen" and

more focused on analyzing whether the interview went well and why Dr. Maßmann was

perhaps acting a bit strange. When she is offered the position a few days later, she is

"närrisch vor Freude und Dankbarkeit" (286) and attempts to overlook any reservations she

may have by acknowledging that, if this position doesn't work out, none will. After all, she

reasons, this is her last chance at success in her career, and so she decides that, "ich will alles,

alles tun, um meinen Posten befriedigend auszufüllen" (288).

But already within the first minutes on the first day of her new job, she is perturbed to

discover that, while she was told that she would be working in a large group and having

many responsibilities, she will actually only be working in the company of one other woman

and Dr. Maßmann himself. It is already here that the signs of modernity and novelty, initially

so promising, start to transform themselves into something negative. For instance, there is a

shelf on which "ein paar Leizordner [sich] verlieren" (289). These folders "lose themselves"

on the shelf despite it being relatively empty, and this seems to foreshadow the pair of

employees who will lose themselves in the empty space as well. The two new typewriters are

"unwahrscheinlich im Lackglanz ihrer makellosen Neuheit" (289), too shiny and perfect to

be real and too new to have left any indication of work ever having been performed on them.

Moreover, she notes that "aus einem geöffneten Rollschrank strömt der strenge Geruch von

frischem Holz und Tischlerleim" (289); the room's overpowering smell of newness is thus no

longer is positive, but rather, strict and uninviting, almost verging on nauseating. Other

folders are also described as "verloren," not only in the process of losing themselves on the

shelves, but already lost. Clearly, something has by now changed in Brückner's perception of

the space, and even though she is not yet able to pinpoint the root cause of these changes, it has begun to be transformed into a space that is no longer welcoming to her ambitions.

Despite her bad first reaction to the new office, Brückner attempts to see the positive in the space again and decides to focus on her work. Upon being told that their boss will not be in until 11am, she tries to get settled into the space. Yet, her interactions with the other secretary, Gretchen Hultzsch, are immediately strained and prevent Brückner from asserting herself in carving out a workspace of her own in the office. Much as the office has begun to emerge in a negative light, so too have Brückner's feelings towards Gretchen become tainted. Gretchen is described as being beautiful, with long blond curls and large eyes with long eye lashes. Her habit of slowly, almost theatrically, opening and closing her eyes to emphasize her lashes, and slowly moving her head from side to side to bring attention to her hair, does not sit well with Brückner, who at first thinks Gretchen is jokingly behaving in this matter.

> Ich denke erst, daß sie Scherz treibt mit dieser gezierten Art sich zu drehen, laut und melodisch zu lachen, sanft und liebreizend zu sprechen, daß sie plötzlich diesen Allotria lassen und ein vernünftiger, natürlicher Mensch sein wird. Aber da irre ich mich. "Einfach süß ist Dr. Maßmann", schwärmt sie, "ich nenne ihn im geheimen Baby". (290)

It is interesting to note that what Brückner craves most from her work environment is to work with someone who is "vernünftig," rational, much as the building is rational. Emotions and exaggeration do not have a place in the modern office, and especially not in this one, which she hoped would be "kühl" and ordered. While it would perhaps be easy to write off Brückner's reaction to Gretchen as jealousy, as the description of Gretchen is objectively not actually all negative, arguably the initial problem for Brückner is more related to what

Gretchen represents, namely the cute, young, unintelligent woman, and not at all the modern, driven woman Brückner considers herself to be. Not only does Gretchen's comment come across as vapid, but even her mannerisms are described as "geziert," which implies an ornate, exaggerated nature that stands in further contrast to modernism's stress on anti-ornamentation. If Gretchen is already employed in Dr. Maßmann's office, and is therefore the model of how work is to be done in this office, it is arguably reasonable for Brückner to feel uneasy, as Gretchen is, in essence, the antithesis of what Brückner is striving to become.

But it quickly becomes apparent to Brückner that Gretchen is more of a force to be reckoned with than her appearance or manners may suggest and that, to the contrary, Gretchen is well in control of her work environment and knows how to exploit it to her benefit. For example, on her first day of work, her new boss, Dr. Maßmann, calls Brückner into his office to discuss the situation in which they find themselves. Dr. Maßmann describes Gretchen, saying "sie ist etwas zartes Gemütes, was ja durchaus kein Fehler ist, und hat ihre Eigenarten. Sie weint leicht" (290). He then argues, "Sie werden zugeben müssen, daß eine gewisse Härte darin liegt, wenn wir Fräulein Hultzsch plötzlich eine besserbezahlte Arbeitskraft zur Seite stellen" (291). Thus, on her first day of employment, Brückner is already demoted from the position that she was supposed to have, in which she would have been responsible for assessing scholarship applications and determining the recipients of grant money. Moreover, this demotion occurs because of Gretchen's sensitive nature, which harks back to antiquated notions of women as overly delicate and prone to emotional outbreaks and crying. Instead, Brückner is instructed to not let Gretchen know that she is working in any capacity other than that of a secretary. That Gretchen has her employer

wrapped around her figure and knows exactly what she is doing becomes increasingly obvious as the days go on, and this is compounded by the fact that Dr. Maßmann also clearly has no interest in allowing Brückner to advance to any higher level of authority. Being of an older generation, he does not believe that women are fit for these positions, unlike the younger Herr von Killar, who had interviewed and hired her.

When, for example, she has no other tasks to perform and decides to take the initiative to start reviewing application files and making recommendations on her own—the task she was hired for—Dr. Maßmann takes note of her work and becomes indignant, dismissing her efforts by arguing that, "Sie schreiben sich gleich auf, was Sie denken? Eigentlich hat das ja wenig Zweck" (299). He is astonished that she would have the audacity to write down what she is thinking, her opinions and evaluations. Furthermore, her ability to work independently is not met with enthusiasm, but rather, the folders are immediately taken away from her and placed in Dr. Maßmann's office, where Brückner no longer has access to the work she is supposed to be doing. "Die Gesuche werden mir unter den Händen fortgenommen, und schon sitze ich wieder untätig allein" (299). Her choice of words—that her work is being snatched from her hands—emphasizes both the feeling of having something taken from her that should belong to her and having it happen in an unexpected manner. Her realization that she once again finds herself sitting there without any work to do becomes a repeated theme: despite Brückner's willingness to work as a secretary, even though that is not actually her job, Gretchen will not allow her to take on any of the workload at first, arguing that Dr. Maßmann doesn't like to have to deal with two different handwritings or that he prefers for things to be done in a manner which only Gretchen knows

how to do. It is through these comments that we begin to see the motivation behind her

actions, namely, to stay indispensable. By preventing Brückner's access to the workings of

the office, Gretchen is trying to protect her own employment.

That this job is quickly revealing itself as anything but the dream of the modern

woman's employment is mirrored in the language that Brückner uses to describe the room

that was once thought of as light, new, and luxurious. In a matter of days, it has transformed

into a room that "ist immer noch hallende Weite und unausgefüllte Leere eines ungemütlich

großen Zimmers. Die Wände sind gelblich gestrichen und entbehren die Wohltat jeglicher

freundlichen Unterbrechung" (296). Expansive space, once seen as open and inviting, is now

empty and "hallend," echoing the sounds of her misfortune and echoing back the emptiness

she feels. The room is uncomfortable, and even the cheery yellow walls are unable to bring

any sense of friendliness into the space. This modern office is not a space of rationality and

efficiency as much as it is a space of emptiness. It is the void that is most noticeable: the void

of collegiality, the void of work itself for Brückner, and the void of normative behavior. A

lack of established rules and procedures to follow turns out to be just as disorienting and

disheartening as having too strict rules, as was the case in the other, older offices.

Strikingly, however, Brückner also describes a large desk that was carried in for her,

and she remarks that even the new desk is "nicht imstande, Wohnlichkeit zu schaffen" (297).

Her choice of "Wohnlichkeit," livability, which is based on the root verb w*ohnen*, to live,

makes the reader pause for a moment and wonder whether her discomfort in the space might

after all be more related to her inability to understand the configuration of the modern office.

Namely, it is not supposed to be a space that feels livable and homely, not a space where one

should want to live, but rather, one that is streamlined and efficient. Perhaps, one could posit, Brückner is only imagining the space to be uninviting because she does not understand the rules of the modern office? Perhaps as much as she wishes to be a part of the modern office, her expectations are still much more in line with the atmosphere of places like Dudenmeyer, her first place of employment, in which Herr Dudenmeyer went so far as to describe the office as his house, "in meinem Hause."

And in a way, both are true, but for different reasons. She does not understand the rules of the modern office, but not because they are not based on the *gemütlichkeit* she is seeking, but rather, because there are not any set rules to follow, which opens up the space to manipulative behavior to which she is not accustomed. This idea is captured by Lefebvre's idea of the *Illusion of Transparency,* in which he states that space appears as "luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free reign", but that these are mere illusions.[100] Rules are always at play, but they may be so visible as to be invisible. In a slightly different manner, I would argue that this space of the office is not intelligible to Brückner precisely because the rules of conduct are not set and, yet, at the same time are created by each individual to try to ensure their own survival and continued employment in the office space. That is, there are two conflicting sets at play, allowing the space to be both one in which individuals can act according to their own wishes, and one in which they act because the larger structure of the office necessitates it.

This becomes evident when Gretchen's behavior escalates from simply preventing Brückner from taking over tasks to actively sabotaging her work and reputation. The first of

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[100]Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 29.

these incidents takes place when their boss goes away on business. Neither he nor Gretchen

informs Brückner of this, so that when Brückner answers the phone, she embarrasses herself

in the eyes of the caller, Herr von Killar, for not knowing that Dr. Maßmann is away.

Conveniently, Gretchen is able to step in and return his call to provide the information he

needed. When Brückner confronts Gretchen about this, she calmly replies, "Dr. Maßmann

scheint doch der Ansicht zu sein, daß es genügt, wenn ich Bescheid weiß" (302). Yet, simply

keeping information from Brückner is only a minor infraction compared with the many

things that follow, including hiding a folder that Herr von Killar is requesting from Brückner,

only to then secretly return it to its proper location while having sent Brückner on a wild

goose chase around the building. When Brückner returns and Herr von Killar appears in

person, Gretchen tells Herr von Killar, "Was kann ich dafür, wenn Fräulein Brückner nichts

findet!" (305). Brückner then describes how she witnesses the completion of the fraud, "ich

sehe sie auf den Rollschrank zugehen, wo die Akten stehen, sehe sich die Tafel mit den

Nummern zur Hand nehmen, sehe sie mit ruhiger Hand in die Reihe der Gesuche greifen und

ohne Zögern die Bewerbung siebenundzwanzig herausziehen" (305). The repetition of "ich

sehe" is noteworthy for its ability to convey the sense that in this moment, seeing is all that

Brückner can do. She is an onlooker, forced to watch her reputation as a capable employee be

destroyed, bit by bit, and she is not capable of doing anything but seeing. She sees the

deception, witnesses the crime, takes note of how calm and unhesitating Gretchen is when

she pulls off this deceit. In this moment, Brückner is not able to yell as she wishes she could,

"ich habe nicht geschrien" (305). She is also not able to physically avenge herself, "ich bin

nicht aufgesprungen und habe ihr die Faust ins Gesicht geschlagen, wie sie es verdient hätte"

(305). Rather, she stays quiet, "ich bin zitternd sitzengelieben auf meinem Platz und habe

lange Zeit nichts sagen können" (305). Despite trembling, she is stuck in place, "auf meinem Platz," within that office, having realized that this is the position that she occupies and that she is unable to stand up and take control, or even exist, in any space of the office aside from the place, the seat, in which she finds herself.

It is perhaps in this moment that she first realizes that she does not understand the rules that govern this new space and does not know how to play by these rules. She cannot assert herself because the space is not hers, not yet one that she has grasped, unlike Gretchen, who is in full control and can calmly walk through the space and interact as if no wrongdoing were taking place. Furthermore, Brückner, stunned by what she is witnessing, is not only confined to her place, but she cannot even say something, anything, to make herself heard. It is not that she does not want to say something, but it is a matter of being unable to produce any sounds. Her inability to vocalize her astonishment and to be heard is a further indication of her inability to assert herself in the space of the office. Instead, the void of noise produced by Brückner is filled with the sound of Gretchen's typing after she returns to her desk. Unlike Brückner's initial encounter with the office building, in which her steps were able to create sound and be heard, in a matter of weeks, her ability to create noise and be heard has vanished, and with it, her ability to be an equal in the eyes of her colleagues. What the space initially promised has not become a reality; instead, she finds herself once again silenced. In the moment in which Brückner is so defeated and confused by the office that she cannot even speak, Gretchen emphasizes her superiority at performing her job through the most clear indicator of productivity: creating the sounds of typing. Yet, this too already foreshadows the complex ending that is soon to come, for while her ability to create the noise associated with

productivity demonstrates superiority over Brückner's silence, the sounds are nonetheless those of typing, which validates the bond between women and the typewriter. This connection is indicative of the fact that, while Gretchen may be able to undermine Brückner, she herself continues to be objectified and categorized as a typist, a position that women, regardless of their ambition, cannot move beyond, even in the most modern of offices.

In a moment of possible regret, Gretchen stops and sits there silently, and it is precisely this silence, the lack of the constant noise of typewriters, the hallmark of the modern office environment, that signals a change in mood. The mood of the office suddenly also darkens, "es dämmert stark. Wir sehen uns nicht mehr genau" (306). It is this darkening of the space, the loss of the brightness that has so far typified the modern office, that allows Brückner to find the courage to address Gretchen and attempt to connect with her on a personal level, asking "Sie sind auch Waise?" (306). Gretchen begins to answer, but then nervously attempts to walk over to turn on the light, to bring clarity back to the office, but Brückner stops her, "Nein, bitte, machen Sie jetzt kein Licht" (307). We then learn that Brückner tells Gretchen her whole life history, "Ich lasse nichts aus. Ich ende bei dem Erlebnis des heutigen Tages. Dann schalte ich meine Schreibtischlampe ein und arbeitet weiter" (307). Any human touch, such as a personal history, can only be shared in this space when it is not functioning as the office that is was designed to be. Only in the dark, away from the unspoken rules of the office, is Brückner able to speak honestly with Gretchen. Not until she is done speaking, and ready to return to the cool, unattached, depersonalized realm of the office, is she able and willing to switch the light back on and return to work. And for a moment, it works. Gretchen lets her guard down for a moment and admits to her frustrations,

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saying "ich komme nicht vorwärts! … Immer sind andere älter, gebildeter und erfahrener.

Und wenn ich noch dreimal soviel Überstunden mache, mich dreimal irrsinniger anspanne,

aufpasse, nachdenke, ich bleibe doch nur ein Tippmädel und andere dürfen Karriere machen"

(307). What Gretchen has already learned through experience is that hard work will not

actually lead to job advancements, that despite what one may have been promised,  once one

starts as a typist, that is the profession one will stay in. Yet, what Gretchen does not say but

Brückner realizes, is that it is not only a matter of not advancing, but also of merely

maintaining the position that one has without being replaced by a younger and cheaper new

typist. "Der Ehrgeiz zerfrißt sie wie eine Krankheit. Vielleicht ist er nichts weiter als der

verzweifelte Wille, unentbehrlich zu bleiben, denn auch sie kennt aus härtesten Erfahrungen

Unsicherheit und Willkür unseres Berufes" (308). When Brückner, early on in the novel,

described her own desire to advance, she used this same phrase "unentbehrlich zu bleiben,"

to be indispensable, since that is the only way to survive the uncertainly and capriciousness

of the white-collar world. Yet, for all of her insights, what Brückner fails to see in this

moment is that it is precisely this capricious nature of their office that cannot allow Gretchen

to truly transform. If she did, she would be giving up on her only hope of staying on by

making herself "unentbehrlich" to Dr. Maßmann. Thus, while it is easy to hate Gretchen for

her manipulation of situations, she is, in many ways, no different from Brückner insofar as

she wants to survive and stay employed using whatever means it will take to do so. She just

happens to understand the rules of the office, or lack thereof, better than Brückner does.

Thus, while things appear to get better for a short time following this conversation,

the more that Brückner becomes a productive member of the office—being allowed, for

instance, to type more and more correspondence—the more Gretchen returns to her devious

ways by sabotaging Brückner. For example, she hides the mail that Brückner was supposed

to reply to and keeps other vital information from her, bringing about the hatred of Dr.

Maßmann. Gretchen also secures his favor and concern for herself by threatening suicide,

saying that she feels so useless at the office now that Brückner is there. She also takes it upon

herself to work at an unprecedented speed, "sie arbeitet um so rasender, mit keinem anderen

Ziele als dem, mich zu übertreffen. Sie schreibt ein Tempo, das ich nie zuvor und nie nachher

vor einer Stenotypistin gehört habe" (310). In doing so, she makes herself ill but refuses to

slow down and relent. In keeping with the sounds of the modern office, it is telling that

Brückner does not say that she had never before seen, but rather *heard*, that speed of typing.

It is, in other words, the sound of typing that has replaced all other stimuli as the one by

which one can gauge productivity. Here, the sound is just as present as in all of the other

offices, which reinforces the idea that, even in this modern office, the value of female

employees is much the same as in those run in older spaces.

At first, it is perhaps confusing as to why Gretchen goes to such great lengths to

prove her worth, since she is clearly, both in the eyes of Dr. Maßmann and, begrudgingly, in

the eyes of Brückner, very good at what she does. One thus wonders if her fear of losing her

job might be based more on paranoia than reality. Is the modern office really so cold so as to

fire an employee who is so hardworking simply because cheaper labor is readily available?

The answer comes when Brückner is finally physically and mentally worn down by these

deceptions and manipulations: after months of trying to perform her job despite Gretchen's

best efforts to keep her from it, her body finally gives out on her and she falls ill only days

before her *Probezeit* is over. Looking in the mirror, she notes with resentment and a sense of despair, "Mein Gott, wie sehe ich nur aus. Das also bin ich jetzt. Dies hier haben sie aus mir gemacht! Ich bin alt geworden. Vielleicht ist Hoffnungslosigkeit Altsein. … Im nächsten Monat werde ich dreißig Jahre alt" (335). Before her thirtieth birthday even arrives, the world of work and the deceptions and cruelty through which she has had to suffer have deprived her of all energy and youth. After many attempts at continuing the work despite being feverish and ill, she finally wakes up one morning so sick that she cannot even make it to the office to notify them of her absence. Instead, she sends her landlady to do so. They, to Brückner's surprise, react kindly and send their greetings, "Dr. Maßmann läßt grüßen. Frau Hultzsch läßt grüßen. Ich solle um Gottes willen mich erst auskurieren, ehe ich wiederkäme" (343). Yet Brückner is experienced enough not to fully trust them and is intent on being present on the day that her *Probezeit* officially ends. Thus, after a week of high fever, she returns to the office on February 15th, the day that her *Probezeit* ends, despite still being quite ill. "Keine zehn Stunden später und ich bin der glücklichste Mensch unter der Sonne oder der unseligste" (344) she muses, fully cognizant of the importance of making it through the day. If she can succeed in still being employed by the end of the day, her position will offer her a greater security and thus validate the hard months she has had to endure.

Yet, disaster awaits her at the office, as one suspects it will. After arriving at the office early in the morning and getting situated at her desk, a young woman, "ein junges Mädchen," enters and announces that she is the new *Stenotypistin*. Brückner, slow to understand, first assumes the girl to be in the wrong office, but the girl assures her that she was hired to work here. "So, ja, ich war krank" Brückner explains (344), still hoping that

there is some confusion and that the girl was perhaps just hired temporarily to cover her position. When she inquires about when she was hired, she replies "Am ersten Februar. Ich sollte eigentlich nicht vor dem ersten März eintreten. Aber der Herr von nebenan meinte, die Dame, für die ich herkäme, würde bestimmt gleich gehen, wenn ihr gekündigt würde" (344). And with that, all of Brückner's dreams come crashing down as she realizes that she has not only been replaced, but that the replacement had long since been planned. She never stood a chance. Gretchen's efforts won in the end.

The story ends on an even more complicated note, since the girl, without being solicited for more information, points out that she has just completed the "Handelsschule" and will be earning 120 Marks a month, a statement that elicits confused, and then hysterical, laughter from Gretchen. This laughter then transitions into anger and scorn.

> "Überstunden", schreit sie, "Sonnabend nachmittags, Sonntags, jeden Tag bis in die Nacht hinein.... und dafür habe ich zwei Jahre lang das Gehalt einer Anfängerin bekommen. Er hat mich ausgenutzt. Ja, meine wahnsinnige Dummheit hat er ausgenutzt bis zur letzten Möglichkeit. … Ich habe immer toller geschuftet, meine Nerven ruiniert, meine Gesundheit. Und jetzt bekommt eine Anfängerin dasselbe Gehalt wie ich. Fräulein Brückner" schreit sie, "Sie sollen bleiben. Ich will, daß Sie blieben! … O, was habe ich getan, was habe ich getan!" (346)

Only too late does Gretchen realize that, despite her attempts at securing her employment by sabotaging Brückner, she was never going to be able to halt the tide of new employees, always younger and willing to work for the base amount. At least in Brückner, she had a colleague who was well-educated and thus deserving of a higher pay grade.[101] With the

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[101]Brückner was more traditionally educated, having enjoyed the privilege of good schooling before the death of her parents and thus, among other skills, spoke many languages. This is contrasted with the *Handelsschule* that the new hire has attended, where her education is more skill-based and not a form of *Bildung* in the traditional German sense.

arrival of the new girl, fresh out of training and thus completely inexperienced, yet earning as much as Gretchen earned after years of service, it becomes clear to her that no promotion will ever happen because the structure of the white-collar office and what it values will not allow for it. Even though Gretchen was far more skilled than Brückner at understanding the new rules, or non-rules, and the configuration of the office environment, in the end, even she underestimated the callousness of a space designed to devalue female white-collar workers and inhibit their advancement by privileging efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and décor in regards to female employees.

After this incident, Brückner admits to having been broken by a system in which she originally had placed so much hope, realizing that, "ich habe alles verloren, was sich auf dieser Welt wohl verlieren läßt.... Ich habe keine Arbeit … ich habe kein Vertrauen mehr und meine Arbeitskraft ist gebrochen" (352). While she still believed only a few years earlier that, with enough hard work and natural talent, she would be able to secure a job that would help her live a comfortable life and stop worrying about becoming destitute, she now realizes the improbability of this dream. Emotionally and physically downtrodden, she escapes to the countryside where she grew up, feeling called back there, "die Heimat ruft mich: mächtig, drangvoll ruft sie ihr verirrtes Kind" (354). Her self-description as a "verirrtes Kind" emphasize her sense of confusion and loss; she is no longer the capable woman she was at the beginning of the novel, but rather, a child desperate for a home which she no longer has to return to.

I would argue that if the book ended there, it would indeed, as other scholars often argue, necessitate a reading in which the novel primarily serves as a damning critique of the

white-collar world. As many comments throughout the book suggest, marriage seems to be presented here as a more favorable option for women, both explicitly and through Brückner's reflections on other people she has encountered, such as her former colleague who left work to marry and whom she later spotted on the street: "ich habe sie am Arm ihres Verlobten getroffen, leicht dahinschreitend, plaudernd, lachend: ein anderer Mensch, ein neues Geschöpf, von dem ich bis dahin nichts weiter gesehen hatte als die Maske, hinter der sie sich verbarg" (359). Work, for her colleague, was the mask behind which she hid until she was able to be freed by finding a husband, at which point she became "ein neues Geschöpf," a new creation, happy and easy-going, casually walking through the city. It is also indicative of the way in which characters shape space, but the space shapes the characters as well. It is not that her colleague only appears to be a different creature when met on the street, she actually is a different person because she is in a different space that allows for different behavior. Interestingly, this description of her former colleague is noteworthy then, not only because it illuminates the power that space plays in people's lives, but also because the description of her on the street oddly mirrors a description of what the *Neue Frau* was supposed to become—a free, happy, carefree creature meandering through the streets of Berlin. For Brückner now, this sort of woman is not one who is working in an office setting, but rather, one who has found new freedom within the bonds of marriage instead of within the bonds of employment. For, as it turned out, both institutions, marriage and white-collar work, bonded people in Brückner's view; yet, her experiences in the office turned out far worse than even her worst nightmares could have predicted. Understandably, this leads to her musing on whether marriage might not have been, as Warius suggested at the beginning of the novel, a better choice. However, the novel does not leave us with this inherently anti-modern reading

of life and the choices women face, but rather, in the last two paragraphs, it offers us two glimmers of hope. The first moment of hope arrives when she attempts to answer a question that she posed earlier after being dismissed, "aber wie wehren wir uns, wir ewig Abhängigen, Bedrohten und Gefährdeten vor der Zerstörung durch das Böse?" (351). The answer, she realizes, is that women need to come together and fight against the systematic oppression.

> Auch ich dachte einzig und allein nur an mich und scheute alle Gemeinsamkeit. …
> Und doch gibt es nur eine Zuflucht vor zerstörenden Gewalten: der Zusammenschluß,
> die kameradschaftliche Hilfe. … Aber uns fehlte der Mut. Allzuängstlich geklammert
> an die wirtschaftliche Sicherheit, wagten wir nicht, einer glücklichen Fügung zu
> vertrauen. (360)

Realizing that she was part of the problem for being too scared to fight back because of her dependence on employment for survival, she now realizes that, even in attempting to refrain from causing trouble, she nonetheless finds herself desolate and unemployed, without having changed the system. The future, she believes, will be survivable if, and only if, women realize the power of banding together and fighting as a unified group.[102] The other possibility she offers appears to be a veiled allusion to the connection between the author, Brück, and her character, Brückner, who also shows interest in writing in the novel. She ends the story with Brückner in the countryside, relishing in its beauty, but knowing that her time there is coming to an end and that she will need to return to the city in order to find work. Yet, after weeks of being away from the white-collar world of work, Brückner has found new optimism and no longer fears the return to the city, instead noting, "aber ein Stück blauen Himmels steht über der engsten Großstadtstraße, Blumen gedeihen auf schmalstem Fensterbrett, und

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[102]This was also the era in which unions were gaining strength and their movement was undoubtedly an influence and inspiration for Brück.

die Stimme großer und reifer Menschen findet den Weg zu uns durch die Bücher, die sie geschrieben" (361). In the end, she seems to be pushing for writing as a means for women to find a voice and to expose the inequality of the office, so that others will be able to hear without having to fear unemployment for doing so. Writing, for her, is a way to regain the voice that work in the modern office did not allow her to have. Yet, at the core, what her voice intends to speak to is not that women do not belong in the workforce, as others have suggested, but rather, that the reality of the situation is much bleaker than we would like to believe: that being employed as a white-collar worker does often lead to women's demise. This demise should not be read as a problem inherent in work itself, but rather, with the structure and design of the office. In much the same way, I would argue that Keun's novel *Gilgi* serves as a great counterpoint to *Schicksale* precisely because the novel attempts to situate Gilgi as an individual who is different than others and will be able to succeed because of her skills at navigating the office environment. Yet, in the end, she too fails miserably, and I would argue that in an interesting turn, the subtitle of the book, "eine von uns," a designation that Gilgi attempted to fight, becomes the true title of the book. Gilgi is just one of them, one of the many white-collar employees in Weimar Germany who believed they would be able to get ahead by being cunning, yet underestimated their own role in the perpetration of the space that would not allow for success. By ignoring the constructed nature of these rules, she became one of the many who were laid off and left struggling to survive.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Reading these novels through the lens of gender and space allows us to create a better understanding of how the various layers of space, be they economic concerns or the relations among genders, all contributed to creating a space of the office that was largely detrimental to female white-collar employee. The space of the office, whose inscribed power relations were often reinforced by the actors within that space, prevented women from truly pursuing a career and incentivized, or mandated, their dismissal and return to the home; it also failed to acknowledge the role of social space and naturalized the institutionalized discrimination. By emphasizing the complex nature and interplay between space and actors and outside factors, such as the pressures of fashion, we see that the current understanding of the *Neue Frau*, and her "choice" to leave the workforce after only a few years, is incomplete if we do not account for the space of the office. An examination of the different ways in which space, and sounds, were used to shape and control the environment also necessitates a re-examination of the idea of space itself, and the Lefebvrean idea that less produced space is always superior. For in the end, it would appear that a workspace lacking clear spatial and social hierarchies is equally problematic; for without forced modes of interaction, the use of space becomes more arbitrary and is open to manipulation, as human nature appears to dictate that an individual's desire for survival will always outweigh civility if put to the test against each other.

In this chapter then I hope to have shown how the space of the office was both something new that female employees stepped into that already had codified sets of acceptable behavior which most did not question, but also how these women partook in the continued creation of this space. Only when some, such as Brückner, began to fight against

the normative behavior, did the hidden rules become more apparent. Reading these novels

through the lens of space theory allows us to see the centrality that the space of the office had

in shaping Weimar society and in shaping decisions regarding work, which often appear so

normal so as to not be noteworthy, but bespeak a web of spatial practices. When teased out,

these practices reveal a wealth of insight into the working lives of female white-collar

employees.

CHAPTER 3: THE SPACES OF CAFÉS

<u>Introduction</u>

"Fabian saß in einem Café namens Spalteholz und las die Schlagzeilen der
Abendblätter" (11). It is with this sentence that the novel *Fabian* (1931) by Erich Kästner
begins. Kästner immediately situates the protagonist within the space of a café, thereby
highlighting the space as one worth mentioning by name. The café is thus demarcated as the
unique site in which the reader is first introduced to Fabian as the protagonist and to the
world that he inhabits—a world that is laid out before him in the *Schlagzeilen* of the evening
papers. Yet, this occurrence is by no means singular in nature. Time and again throughout the
novel, the protagonist Fabian finds himself in cafés, at times alone, at times with others. In
fact, just as the novel begins in a café, it ends in one as well: right before Fabian's death at
the end of the novel, we are told that "Fabian saß im Café Limberg, trank einen Kognak und
machte sich Gedanken" (234). The entirety of the plot is thus bookmarked by these moments
spent in cafés. Kästner's novel *Fabian* is certainly not unique in the emphasis that it places on
situating the narrative within spaces of cafés; rather, it is only one representation of a broader
trend within Weimar literature that demarcates cafés as spaces of relevance. In almost all
literary works written during the Weimar Republic years and set within cities, scenes can be
found in which the plots routinely lead protagonists into the spaces of cafés. These scenes are
to be found in all of the novels discussed in this dissertation: Kästner's Fabian, for instance,

often spends his afternoons contemplating his future, using his *Stammcafé* as the likeliest

place to track down his best friend, Labude. In Irmgard Keun's novel *Das Kunstseidene*

*Mädchen* (1932), Doris spends many of her evenings in the Romanisches Café, as will be

discussed in the close reading below. Similarly, we are told that Gilgi of Keun's other novel

*Gilgi* (1931)*, often finds refuge and solace in the spaces of cafés when she is overwhelmed

with her home life. In Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931),

frequenting cafés punctuates the daily routine of the office, allowing an escape from one

routine through another routine, and thus allowing individuals to use the space to decompress

from the pressures of work. While these comprise only a few examples, they serve to

illustrate the central role cafés played within Weimar literature. After the spaces of the home

and the office, the space of the café was arguably the interior space most privileged and

utilized as a space of narrative action in the literature.

This literary focus on cafés should not come as a surprise, as it is in keeping with the

historical developments taking place in Weimar Berlin, a city quickly rising to notoriety for

its avant-garde café culture. Within Berlin's strong progressive culture, cafés became sites of

artistic and intellectual exchange, and they were central to social life. Historian Eric Weitz

notes when describing the Romanisches Café scene in Berlin that "it was the meeting ground

for all the elements of Berlin's intellectual life, yet each moved to its own wing, its own table

within the café, the perfect symbol of Weimar politics and society – lively, democratic,

engaged, and divided and divisive".[103] The spaces of the cafés became venues in which

young people met and spent much of their time, and from a historical perspective, these

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[103]Weitz, Eric. *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 77-87.

spaces were also undergoing significant changes during this era. For, while cafés were historically male-dominated spaces that did not allow women to be present and participate in the discourses taking place, this situation changed at the beginning of the Weimar era, when women gained equality before the law. Their new rights included full access to public spaces. As women took advantage of these new rights, the *Neue Frau* became a standard feature of public spaces, thereby forcing a change in the gender dynamics.

Cafés already played an important role in Berlin prior to the First World War, as is evidenced by Walter Benjamin's observation in *Die Berliner Chronik,* in which he states that "[d]ies war die Zeit, in der die berliner Cafés für uns eine Rolle spielten".[104] However, Benjamin's description differed insofar as the only women present were the "Huren", the prostitutes who had traditionally been a part of the café scene.[105] Thus, while the Berlin café scene had already begun to flourish and gain importance prior to the war, it was only afterwards that the role of women within the space drastically changed. Accordingly, the culture and use of the café changed as well.

Despite the prominence that cafés held within Weimar culture, and despite the frequency with which they are mentioned in Weimar literature, currently little scholarship exists that examines these spaces through the lens of spatial theory. The research in this chapter thus seeks to contribute to scholarship by beginning to fill this void with an examination of the role that cafés played in the literature of the late Weimar years. A more

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[104]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften VI: Berliner Chronik*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, 480.

[105]The poet Else Lasker-Schüler is mentioned by Benjamin as a women who did indeed frequent the cafés, but she is seen as the exception to the rule, a privilege granted to her because of her status as an independent artist in her own right and thus set apart from other "ordinary" women.

in-depth analysis of these spaces is also vital to this project as a whole insofar as it provides a greater understanding of the role that interior spaces played within Weimar culture. The aim is to both problematize and offer a more complex and complete understanding of how the dynamics of these spaces marked the experiences of this era. As I will show, cafés were significant, yet overlooked, spaces that formed and informed the inhabitants' experiences of city life.

If the first chapter of this dissertation investigated the loss of privacy and comfort within the home, and the second chapter discussed the ways in which women, when functioning outside of the realm of the home, were objectified and discriminated against within the space of the office, this final chapter now turns to cafés and reads them as unique interior spaces that existed at the interface between the public and private spheres. This research aims to examine how the café's position as a liminal space affected its production of space from a gender perspective; it will also investigate the role that an individual's level of education had on how they were able to interact with these spaces.[106] The goals of this chapter are, then, threefold. First, to show that women's ability to produce and participate in these spaces was highly dependent upon their educational background; this argument will be asserted through a close reading of Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. Second, a reading of a scene from Kästner's *Fabian* will both reinforce the argument laid out with *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* and illustrates how the spaces of cafés were also configured to approximate private spaces. And lastly, Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* will

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[106]Liminality, as it will be understood and applied in this chapter, will be defined and discussed in more detail in the theory section of this chapter that will follow after first laying out a history of café culture.

discuss how Tergit's model of the café becomes a substitute for the privacy and comfort lacking in the homes of the era, as was discussed in the first chapter.

Close readings of these specific works of literature were chosen for this chapter for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, they were all incredibly popular and widely read novels at the time of publication, and this popular reception reinforces their legitimacy in representing an era. Secondly, they were all published within a year of each other and therefore fit into the time span of this research, which also means that they can speak to the use of cafés without representing changes in the use of space over time. Further, in keeping with the previous chapters, they highlight female authors, with two out of the three authors being women. Given the focus of my research on gender dynamics within the space of cafés, it is important that these female authors' points of view are included. And lastly, while I introduce Keun's novel here for the first time, I have reintroduced Kästner's and Tergit's novels—which I also discussed in the first chapter on the home—in order to establish continuity between these chapters. The argument that we witness a privileging of the café over the home as the new site of privacy, as it will be argued in this chapter, is greatly strengthened through a reading of the same text for both spaces, as it will be able to show the interplay between these distinct spaces in the same work of literature.

In order to be able to accurately discuss the environments of the cafés, I will first present the historical developments that led to the formation of cafés as they existed in Weimar Berlin. Following that, I will give a brief overview of the spatial theories as they will be applied in this chapter, after which I will turn to a close reading of the novels, beginning

with Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, then Erich Kästner's *Fabian*, and lastly,

Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*.


Historical Background: The Café Scene

The culture and behaviors associated with Europe's café milieu seem so embedded in

our modern understanding of the European way of life that it is at times hard to imagine how

relatively new this phenomenon is. Yet, prior to the 1650s, coffee was virtually unknown to

Europe and indeed to most of the world outside of a small region of Ethiopia.[107] Around this

time, explorers began discovering the invigorating properties of caffeine and realizing the

potential market for this beverage. They introduced it first to London, with its popularity and

notoriety then rapidly spreading to continental Europe (as well as to the Americas via

Boston). The first café opened in London in the late 1650s and instantly won favor among

the city inhabitants, not because of the coffee being served, but rather, in spite of the

beverage, which was described as tar-like and acidic in taste. But its novelty was greater than

its shortcomings in flavor, and as brewing methods were refined, coffee, and its cafés,

cemented their position as an integral aspect of European society. However, it was not purely

a matter of the new beverage's properties and the desire to consume it that led to its success;

rather, historians agree that it was the space of the café that found favor among London's

elite. The newly created spaces of cafés were praised as places in which men were able to

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[107]For a history of coffee and the development of cafés in Europe, see for example: Ellis, Markman. *The Coffee House: A Cultural History*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004. Also: Thiele-Dohrmann, Klaus. *Europäische Kaffeehauskultur*. München: Piper, 1999. For a history with an emphasis on space, see: Grafe, Christoph, and Franziska Bollerey, eds. *Cafés and Bars: The Architecture of Public Display*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

meet and discuss the topics of the day. These were settings that transcended the boundaries of employment and, to a lesser extent, social standing. Most importantly, they were not burdened by tasks related either to work or the home, since women and children were strictly excluded.

Over the next two hundred years, cafés spread throughout the major and minor cities of Europe, becoming a feature of all metropolitan areas, and they remain so to this day. Yet, for many divergent reasons, the adaptation of café culture varied across Europe, and by the turn of the century, those cities most famed for their cafés were Paris and Vienna, and to a lesser degree, Prague and Budapest. As is argued in the historical account of cafés in *Cafés and Bars: The Architecture of Public Display*, cafés in these cities in particular had flourished as spaces of leisure because they were spaces associated with reason and alertness (read: caffeine), in contrast to the loosening of behavioral scripts that marked tavern experiences.[108] This idea found receptive audiences in these cities, where intellectual, controlled discourse was valued culturally. The creation of a space that allowed for discourse marked by reason and leisure became the hallmark of cafés and was the feature that would set cafés apart from other interior social spaces. The image of cafés in Paris and Vienna as the place where great minds meet greatly contributed to the spread of cafés elsewhere, and "this demand for a place of civilized, yet convivial sociability . . . materialized in sophisticated interiors emulating the models of Paris and Vienna".[109] Thus, while taverns and

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[108]Grafe, Christoph, and Franziska Bollerey, eds. *Cafés and Bars: The Architecture of Public Display*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

[109]Grafe, Christoph. *Cafés and Bars*, 2.

bars undoubtedly continued to play a role in the social scenes of Europe, they lost importance in comparison to cafés as spaces of intellectual discourse.

Historians Allan Janik and Stephan Toulmin also point out the connection between Vienna's housing shortage around the turn of the century and the flourishing of its cafés in their work *Wittgenstein's Vienna*: "Viennese working-class housing has always been inadequate, both in quality and quantity. Its apartments were dreary and impossible to heat adequately, so there has always been a need to escape these dingy and cold living quarters, and it was satisfied by the warmth and cheer of the ubiquitous cafés".[110] Cafés, much more so than taverns, were spaces to which one could escape in search of a warm place, and one could easily spend the entire day drinking a single cup of coffee or a glass of wine without violating any rules of propriety. This connection between inadequate housing and the importance of cafés will later be discussed in the context of Weimar Berlin, where housing conditions and arrangements underwent radical changes following the end of World War I that reconfigured how and where people lived.

Cafés came to be seen as places where reasonable, rational discussions about politics and society could take place, and as such, they far exceeded their role of simply providing a beverage or even a casual setting for relaxation. Rather, they became sites of power within the city. For most of their history, they were centers for male intellectual life, and accordingly, the place where deals were negotiated and futures were decided. As such, "they came to be ubiquitous features of the modern urban landscape, indispensable centers for

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[110]Janik, Allan, and Stephen Toulmin. *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973, 34.

socializing, for news and gossip, and for discussion" among men of high social standing.[111] Linking the urban landscape with that of the café, and understanding this space as one in which power, prestige, and maleness were of utmost importance, can help illuminate the radical shifts that took place within these spaces in Weimar Berlin. Specifically, the café, a space integral to urban modernity, was renegotiated along lines of power and gender.

This idea of the café as the site of the development of modern public discourse also harkens back to Jürgen Habermas's idea put forth in his *Habilitationsschrift* (habilitation thesis) *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* in 1962, in which he investigates the structural transformation of the public sphere and matters of public participation in the political process. His thesis argues that the space of cafés played a major role in the formation of an active political discourse within the public sphere after their creation and led to an involved public. Yet, in his opinion, as discussed by art historian Charlotte Ashby in *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, Habermas felt that "this role declined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century into a passive culture of mass consumption rather than public discourse".[112] While my research does not align itself with Habermas's conclusion regarding the loss of public discourse, I do agree with his emphasis on the historical relevance of cafés as spaces of intellectual exchange and discussion. Accordingly, I would like to underscore the historical imperatives of the space and draw attention to the importance cafés had as social spaces. Habermas's discussion of cafés also highlights another aspect of the history of cafés that is relevant as we turn our attention towards Weimar Berlin's café scene—namely,

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[111]Ellis, Markman. *The Coffee House: A Cultural History*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004, ii.

[112]Ashby, Charlotte, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller, eds. *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-siècle Culture*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013, 11.

the question of class and who was allowed to participate in these discussions. In Habermas's description of café culture, cafés were once primarily frequented by members of the bourgeois, educated class. This description reinforces the idea that the space is both educational in nature and intended for the educated population.

This idea that cafés were open only to a specific segment of the population, with education at the forefront, remained constant throughout the history of the café, even as the look of its clientele changed. For, while some cafés originally existed to serve many varying social classes, the café culture that flourished (and, arguably, that continues to flourish today) was dominated by bourgeois society. By contrast, other socioeconomic classes found their social spaces of acceptance, for example, in taverns or *Wirtshäuser*, but not in cafés. Keeping in mind the defining characteristic of cafés as spaces of leisure, intellectual discourse, and as predominately male-gendered spaces, allows us to better parse out the novelty and change that these spaces underwent throughout the 1920s, both in Germany and abroad. For, as Ashby surmises, "the café is a space intimately associated with the development of modern urban culture: a site of spectacle, consumption and sexual license on the one hand, and on the other a site for the gestation of new political, social and creative ideas".[113] These new social ideas were put to the test within Weimar Berlin's café culture.

Berlin, being a relatively new metropolitan area, was already home to some larger and smaller cafés prior to the Weimar Republic. However, it was only during the early Weimar years that they began to flourish, rivaling the other great cafés of Europe in terms of their importance within the social scene. They became emblematic of an era, firmly

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[113]Ashby, Charlotte, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller, eds. *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-siècle Culture*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013, 1.

embedded in the imagery of the Berlin urban landscape. Weimar Berlin was already a center of artistic creative output, but due to a renewed interest in politics and social issues during this era, as well as a large population of underemployed individuals with time on their hands, cafés in Weimar Berlin became important sites of intellectual discourse and creative energy. Art historian Emily Bilski and others have argued that the importance of cafés was closely linked with the changes that World War I brought about, such as a large population of young individuals now living in small rented rooms and thus needing extended living space.[114]

As with the famed cafés of the 1920s in Paris, the crowd frequenting cafés in Berlin during this era began to change as well. Consequently, cafés moved away from the Viennese ideal—which was now perceived as a stuffy place of modest conversations among family fathers—and towards a younger, more avant-garde social space. They became the spaces of artists and writers and revolutionaries of all kinds. In his work *Dichter im Café*, Weimar author Hermann Kesten famously described Weimar Berlin cafés as "Wartesäle der Literatur," viewing them as incubators of thought and literature waiting to be penned.[115] And of all of the cafés in Berlin, few were as celebrated as the Romanisches Café, located across from the *Gedächtniskirche* in Charlottenburg. Described by art historian Julianna Kreinik as "a well-known gathering place for vanguard Weimar artists, poets, and others", the Romanisches Café was the preeminent meeting place for Berlin's artistic and intellectual

[114]Bilski, Emily. *Berlin Metropolis: Jews and the New Culture, 1890-1918*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

[115]Kesten, Hermann. *Dichter im Café*. 1959. Berlin: Ullstein, 1983, 7.

elite.[116] Its frequent guest list includes every name associated with Weimar art that comes to mind, among them Otto Dix, Christian Schad, Fritz Lang, Joseph Roth, Kurt Tucholsky, Gottfried Benn, Gabriele Tergit, Irmgard Keun, and Erich Kästner. This café, as we will see in the literary analysis later in the chapter, was also often mentioned in the literature by name, further testifying to the centrality of the café as a institution of cultural life.

The image (Figure 1) below shows a stylized rendering of the Romanisches Café from 1930, from which we get a sense of the size of the rooms, which are marked by high ceilings and large windows. Many contemporaries pointed out that, unlike the earlier cafés designed to evoke a cozy atmosphere, the Romanisches Café had none of that, but rather, evoked the atmosphere of a large, cold, train station. This idea, of the juxtaposition of warmth and cold, is also reflected in the close reading of the literature as discussed later in this chapter.

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[116]Kreinik, Julianna. *The Canvas and the Camera in Weimar Germany: A New Objectivity in Painting and Photography of the 1920s*. Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008, 135.

Fig1: Das Romanische Café, 1930. Sketch.

Interestingly, the drawing of the space gives a very different feeling compared to how

the space was captured through photography, as seen in this photograph (Figure 2) below

from the same year (1930). Due to the angle from which the photo was taken, it already

imparts a much more chaotic feeling than the relatively serene image above. But this

discrepancy is also due to the difference in the number of people depicted and their varying

activities. For instance, the photograph below depicts large groups of men messily crowding

around tables and engaging in lively debates and conversations, which is a very different

image from the three civilized gentlemen reading their papers in the drawing above.

Noticeably lacking in both are women in any discernible number. In the above drawing, none are seen, and in the photograph below, a few women are to be found, and, yet, the scene remains dominated by men. Reading these images against one another allows us to capture a tension that will be further explored in the literature, namely, the contrast between the space's material construction and its social construction.



Fig 2: Interior of the Romanisches Café, 1930. Photograph.

Like most cafés in Berlin, the Romanisches Café also had an outdoor terrace, as can be seen in the photograph (Figure 3) below from 1925.

Fig 3: Terrace of the Romanisches Café, 1925. Photograph.

In design, it was both more modern and more sleek than the interior space, and, by the nature

of its position both within an enclosed space and also open to the street, it emphasized

spatially the threshold between the private interior and the public exterior. That is, it was not

part of the street and thus not fully public, and yet, it was also not fully withdrawn from the

street because of the open facade to the exterior. At the same time, it was not fully private,

due to its social and open nature. Furthermore, the café as an interior space is constantly in

flux: it is a space in which individuals feel at ease because they are removed from the hectic

exterior world, and yet, there are strangers all around them that constantly disallow a reading

of the space as private. The café's position between the binary construction of the socially

defined concepts of private and public makes this a unique interior space—one that lends

itself to fruitful questions regarding the kinds of boundary shifting and role playing that can

more easily exist in a liminal space. It is also through its status as "neither and both" public

and private that the café raises questions relating to the production of space and the

individual's role in producing a space with more of a leaning towards one or the other of

these binaries.

Existing between the private and public, the café also allowed for a sense of

anonymity in which, as Ashby discusses, individuals were able to negotiate their level of

involvement. That is, café frequenters could choose to either become a regular guest, and

thereby create a sense of belonging within the space, or to remain a passing stranger within

the space. Thereby, cafés not only complicated questions of private and public but also

"provide[d] an alternative manifestation of the modern urban experience, in which the desire

for community [was] in conflict with the desire for personal freedom".[117] This level of

agency that Ashby purports individuals to have will be put into question later in the chapter;

however, without a doubt, questions of belonging and personal freedom were intricately tied

to the function of cafés.

Along with the change in patronage, as discussed above, the use and gendering of the

space was also in flux during the Weimar years, as women began frequenting cafés and thus

changing the gender dynamic of a space that had always been gendered male. As a result of

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[117]Ashby, Charlotte, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller, eds. *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-siècle Culture*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013, 5.

the 1918-1919 social and legal reforms written into law, women proclaimed their equality

and were also granted equal rights in front of the law. These reforms opened up access to

spaces that had historically been closed off to them, including the spaces of bars and cafés.

This change forced a reconfiguration of normative gender behavior, since prior to this era, it

was only "working women,"—that is, those who made a living through prostitution—who

frequented these institutions.[118] Yet, within a short period of time, this was no longer the

case, because these spaces were increasingly frequented by young, white-collar women. The

established tradition that determined which spaces were deemed socially acceptable for

women thus began to transform. Yet, interactions in these spaces continued to be a source of

conflict, as men often found it difficult to distinguish the *Neue Frauen* frequenting these

establishments from prostitutes, who could also still be found practicing their trade within

these spaces. In the popular imaginary, these spaces were portrayed as offering women a

freedom never before enjoyed: previously bound to the home or only to be seen in the

company of their husbands, Weimar Germany's *Neue Frauen* were freed from these limited

options and were able to move about town, unrestricted and unencumbered by normative

behavioral standards that had previously applied to their lives. While this characterization is

clearly an oversimplification of the situation, this image was central to many people's

understanding of the café scene in Weimar Berlin.

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[118]For a discussion of the role of prostitution in cafés, see: Smith, Jill Suzanne. "Just how naughty *was* Berlin? The Geography of Prostitution and Female Sexuality in Curt Moreck's Erotic Travel Guide." *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*. Ed. Jaimey Fischer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. 53-78. For a discussion on the difficulty distinguishing between prostitutes and *die Neue Frau* in the space of cafés, see: Smith, Jill Suzanne. "Working Girls: White-Collar Workers and Prostitutes in Late Weimar Fiction." *German Quarterly* 81.4 (Fall 2008): 449-470.

Lastly, especially in the final years of the Weimar Republic, as the flagging economy was leading to high rates of unemployment, the importance of the space of the café within society was solidified. Namely, the café could be frequented on a daily basis due to the low cost of beverages, thereby providing a space in which individuals could spend hours, without the risk of being expelled or looked down upon as those loitering on the street were.

While the inhabitants of the café changed from bourgeois men to a mixed-gendered bohemian and avant-garde crowd, it is important to note that the space was still dominated by educational and intellectual status, a fact which will be important in our reading of Keun's novel later in the chapter. Arguably, this is still a vital distinguishing factor of café culture to this day. For, while it was true that "café life represents one aspect of the ways in which people from different backgrounds have come to terms with transitory existence in the modern metropolis", I argue that allowing individuals to inhabit the space does not necessarily imply equality in their ability to co-produce the space and craft it into a space that is conducive to their desire to return to it.[119][120] Cafés were often praised as the representative space of modernity, an open oasis for self-expression, especially for the *Neue Frau*. For instance, German scholar Jill Suzanne Smith describes the Romanisches Café in *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* as "first and foremost a democratic institution where women from all walks of life . . . found a home and

[119]Grafe, Christoph, and Franziska Bollerey, eds. *Cafés and Bars: The Architecture of Public Display*. New York: Routledge, 2007, 3.

[120]Works concerning the Jewish population of Berlin during the Weimar era have also suggested that this idea of shifting and temporarily transgressable boundaries may account for why the café became the site in which otherwise marginalized or disenfranchised groups were able to find a 'home' of sorts within these spaces. See for example: Estraikh, Gennady, and Mikhail Krutikov, eds. *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture*. Oxford: Legenda, 2010.

experimented with cross-gender identities".[121] However, my reading of these spaces asserts the need to eschew simplistic renderings such as these and instead highlights the problems inherent in the production of a space that developed on the principles of showcasing one's intellectual prowess and which was, for most of its history, a male-dominated space. As I argued in Chapter 2, which discussed the space of the office, allowing women into a space does not guarantee equal treatment.

Yet, despite the historical baggage, which all spaces have, cafés did indeed became spaces within the city that exemplified the shifting nature of gender and cultural boundaries and norms, providing "a key location for the blurring or breaking down of time-honored hierarchies and social frameworks of exclusion and inclusion".[122] Much more so than the home or the office, the café conveyed equality and appeared to bear a tradition of openness towards a diverse crowd. This image set the café aside as a distinctly transgressive space in which boundaries and power dynamics could be renegotiated. The idea of a space that is open to transgression and has negotiable terms of interaction is central to my reading of the café within literature, because it allows for a reading of space that assumes it to be highly susceptible to changing cultural and social trends. It also allows us to examine the interplay between the construction of space from the perspective of the individual and the construction of space as it was envisioned as a cultural phenomenon of its time. The juggling act thus consists of identifying the role of the individual, the role of the guests as a group, and the role

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[121]Smith, Jill Suzanne. "Just How Naughty was Berlin? The Geography of Prostitution and Female Sexuality in Curt Moreck's Erotic Travel Guide". *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*. Fischer, Jaimey, and Barbara Mennel, eds. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010, 74.

[122]Ashby, Charlotte, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller, eds. *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-siècle Culture*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013, 4.

of the materiality of the space, and then understanding their interplay in forming the space of the café.

Understanding the café, then, both as material reality with a historical past and as a space that is produced and thereby constantly in flux, we can now turn towards an outline of the spatial theories that will be utilized in the reading of the space of the café in the novels that will be discussed in this chapter.

Theoretical Background: Cafés as "Schwellen"

The theoretical background on space discussed in this chapter will expand on the spatial theory laid out in Chapter 2, which draws on theories of spatial production presented by Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre understands space as a socially created construct but also as a set of material and social conditions that create or shape patterns of behavior. In keeping with the nature of this dissertation, an emphasis on gender will also be carried through, as I attempt to make visible the gender dynamics taking place within the production of space. In addition to a focus on gender and a Lefebvrean understanding of space, the idea of liminal space will also be introduced. For the latter, I will draw on terminology and ideas as they have been presented in the writings of the cultural critic Walter Benjamin.

Liminal spaces are, by definition, spaces that exist on the boundary between two well-defined places, as Benjamin discusses under the term *Schwelle* in his treaty on *Schwellenkunst*. For Benjamin, a *Schwelle* is understood as a boundary or threshold, signaling the movement from one realm to the other, be it from the exterior realm of society

to the interior realm of the home, or be it from a dream state to a waking state. Importantly,

Benjamin makes a clear distinction between a *Schwelle* and a border, stating that "die

Schwelle ist ganz scharf von der Grenze zu scheiden. Schwelle ist eine Zone. Wandel,

Übergang, Fluten liegen im Worte 'schwellen' und diese Bedeutungen hat die Etymologie

nicht zu übersehen".[123] Doors and hallways, for example, all signal a crossing of a *Schwelle*

and are viewed with great significance. His use of language also links this idea to the verb

*schwellen*, to the notion of flooding—a powerful, all-consuming rush of water that sweeps

everything away and carries it to a different location.[124] Important to note is the fact that

Benjamin stresses that these *Schwellen* must be crossable—that is, that one must be able to

make it through to the other side. Incomplete crossings place the crosser in a state of terror:

"[d]en Schrecken nicht-schließender Türen kennt jeder aus Träumen. Genauer gesagt: es sind

die Türen, die verschlossen scheinen ohne es zu sein".[125] This is to say that the *Schwelle* as

such signifies a positive transition only if this transition is absolute and completable. Shifting

boundaries create discomfort, for they prevent the certainty of knowing whether the crossing

has been completed and undermine the importance of having crossed over to the other side.

Inherent in the idea of a *Schwelle*, then, is the idea that distress will always be present,

because there is never a guarantee that one will be able to exit this liminal space once one

enters it. This final aspect of the *Schwelle* will be more closely explored later in this chapter.

The risk and potential inherent in *Schwellen* is reiterated by Bjorn Thomassen, an urban

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[123]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften V·I*. 1982. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, 617-618.

[124]Some scholars, such as Winfried Menninghaus, have taken Benjamin's theory of *Schwellen* to the point of arguing that all of Benjamin's work and writing can and should be understood vis-à-vis the idea of a *Schwelle*. See: Menninghaus, Winfriend. *Schwellenkunde: Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986.

[125]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften V·I*. 1982. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989. 516.

anthropologist well known for his work on liminal theory, who both acknowledges the subversive and creative potential of the liminal and states that "without a proper re-integration, liminality is pure danger".[126] This juxtaposition between the potential, inherent in a space that defies conventional definitions, and its power to endanger, will help illuminate the close readings below and allow us to read the space of the café in a more nuanced manner.

While Benjamin's focus on the *Schwelle* often refers to more visually defined boundaries, such as doorways, the theory also holds value when applied to other spaces, as has been done in other disciplines or fields of research. This is, for instance, the case in the work *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*, a brilliant analysis of liminality within British literature.[127] Using liminality in this chapter as a tool of analysis for examining the spaces of cafés allows for a reading that reveals these interior spaces not as fixed spaces anchored in the interior, but rather, as spaces of transition, as *Schwellen,* that exist between the public and the private. As such, they are spaces that contain the possibility of both upward and downward social mobility and of both passive and assertive behaviors. The theory of liminality helps circumvent the gendered binaries of the private and public spheres, allowing for a reading that sees the space as neither and both, simultaneously. Eschewing the labeling of spaces according to a binary model, liminality allows for an investigation into the shifting nature of the spatial boundaries and into the constant renegotiation of the use of

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[126]Thomassen, Bjorn. "Revising Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces." *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between.* Eds. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts. London: Routledge, 2012, 30.

[127]Reus, Teresa Gómez and Terry Gifford, eds. *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

space as its inhabitants produce it. The notion of liminality is also useful insofar as it

identifies spaces where social codes of behavior are open to negotiation and fluctuation. As

sociologist Rob Shields puts it, a liminal space is a "free zone, betwixt and between social

codes".[128] This assumption that liminal spaces can provide greater freedom, by allowing for a

greater range of behaviors, will be fundamental to our reading of the spaces of cafés in

Weimar era literature. The theory of liminality will thus help illuminate the complex nature

of individuals' interactions with these spaces and help explain not only why the same space

can be perceived so differently by different individuals, but also why the space allows for

different behaviors at different times, which constantly brings the space into a state of flux,

always producing and reproducing the space. For the purpose of this chapter, the terms

"liminality" (from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold") and *Schwelle* will be used

interchangeably, but for simplification, liminality will be the preferred term of use.


### *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*: Spaces that Silence

Irmgard Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* was published in 1932 following

the immense success of her first novel *Gilgi* a year earlier, which was discussed in Chapter 2.

Much like her first novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* also focuses on the life of a young

woman who dreams of escaping her provincial life and becoming successful. For Gilgi, the

protagonist of the first novel, this entailed working her way up in the white-collar world of

the office. However, in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, the protagonist, Doris, is a young woman

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[128]Shields, Rob. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 1991, 108-109.

who dreams of becoming a rich and famous actress, a *Glanz* (45) – a movie star – as she calls it.[129] When the novel begins, she is living in her small hometown and has decided to keep a journal of her life's events: "ich denke, daß es gut ist, wenn ich alles beschreibe, weil ich ein ungewöhnlicher Mensch bin. . . . Aber ich will schreiben wie Film, denn so ist mein Leben und wird noch mehr so sein" (8). Her conceited nature, illustrated by the quote in which she believes herself to be special, is however constantly contrasted with the reality of the situation. Namely, her life in no way resembles a movie, for it lacks plot and excitement, and the text of the novel itself mocks these assertions she makes about herself. For example, in setting out to document her life, Doris notes that she is different from everyone around her because "ich spreche fast ohne Dialekt" (8). She prides herself on her correct use of grammar, and yet, only a few pages later, we discover that she has trouble at work because of her incorrect spelling and inability to place commas properly in dictation. The entirety of the novel, which reads as many journal entries, confirms Doris's lack of standard grammar because it is written in her vernacular—a dialectal, grammatically flawed German. Doris nonetheless becomes a loveable, though immature, protagonist, who continually vacillates between trying to make her life seem more interesting by creating drama and acknowledging her standing in life. The latter emerges, for example, when she states, "ich weiß ja, daß ich dumm bin, aber ich habe ein Gedächtnis, und wenn man mir was erklärt, gebe ich mir Mühe, es zu behalten" (40). Her lack of traditional *Bildung* (education) is important to note because it will be relevant for the later close readings, but also because it sets her apart from Keun's other character, Gilgi, who was not only of middle class origins, but who was also presented

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[129]The term *Glanz*, a noun derived from the verb *glänzen* (to shine), was the term often used in the Weimar era to describe a movie star. It shows similarities to the English use of "star," also something which shines brightly.

as very intelligent. By contrast, Doris hopes to move to Berlin and try her luck at becoming famous, but, unbeknownst to her, she is already at a disadvantage as a woman coming from a low socioeconomic stratum. She has only completed a low level of formal education before beginning her work as a secretary, a job that she does poorly.

Within the first few pages of the novel, Doris is fired from her secretarial position. In an endeavor to cover up her insufficient skills, she attempts to distract her boss from her spelling and grammatical errors by flirting with him, which does not work out well. Finding herself unemployed, her dreams of a bigger life become the catalyst for her subsequent adventures. Initially, she is hired to help out at a theatre, which she, always cunning, turns to her advantage by creating drama. Not only does she invent a story about an affair she is having with the theatre director in order to garner the attention of the other actors, but she also traps an actress in an upper-story bathroom minutes before she is scheduled to read her lines. Doris then jumps onto the stage and recites the lines herself, winning herself the role in the play, for which she is in no way qualified. From this situation, she derives the confidence that allows her to believe that she can succeed in the Berlin film world. Despite being offered a position at the theatre as a acting trainee, Doris displays an impatience for success, and, in an act which will be repeated throughout the novel, decides to act the part of *Glanz* rather than work towards becoming one. Following her first performance, she spots a beautiful fur coat in the coat room and exchanges her old coat for it. She justifies the theft to herself by thinking that looking like a success is a more secure way to get ahead than having to compete honestly with the other actresses.

Interestingly, it is the relationship to her fur coat that remains the one stable aspect of her life throughout the novel because the coat makes her feel loved in a way that is more intense than a love with any individual described in the book: "Und der Pelz war für meine Haut wie ein Magnet, und sie liebte ihn, und was man liebt, gibt man nicht mehr her, wenn man es mal hat. . . . Der Mantel will mich, und ich will ihn, wir haben uns" (62-64). Doris stages herself and enacts behaviors that she believes to be fitting for the scene of her life ("ist alles wie Kino – ich sehe mich in Bildern" [8]), and she also acts the part that she believes the setting demands. As we will explore, these tendencies greatly impact her negotiations and interplay with space, especially as it concerns the space of cafés. Having stolen the coat, and thereby committed herself to leaving, she escapes to Berlin that night. She does so in search of fame and fortune but also to escape prosecution, although the exaggerated level of police interest that she assumes to be present is another indication of her desire to add excitement to a life lacking in interest and glamour. Yet she is determined to make her life seem like a movie worth viewing; for her, the authenticity of her life is not as valuable as the visual scenes that she is able to create. Seeing her life as film, she displays a readiness to pretend to be something she is not. She is open to the act of *sich verstellen,* a term that includes within it the word *stellen* (to place) and thus suggests that pretending to be someone else also involves a willingness to place oneself in a space in order to act out a role. Both pretending (*sich verstellen*) and actively creating a life filled with scenes are spatially grounded concepts because acting out scenes also involves placing oneself into imaginary spaces.

Doris's emphasis on living her life as a film firmly situates her within her time—a time when cinema was at the center of cultural entertainment—but it also touches on the

fundamental argument regarding space in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. Namely, in order to

correctly stage a scene, one needs to understand the dynamics of the space and the

characters' roles within that space in order to correctly execute the production. Staging

involves questions of power dynamics, or the ability to control certain elements of and within

the space. As we will see, based on Doris's educational background, there are moments in

which she is more accurately and less accurately able to stage and partake in the scenes of

her life due to her ability to act within various spaces. Yet, at the core of scene-staging is also

the necessity of an imaginary stage, which is, by definition, a space upon which to stage the

scene. Thus, scene-staging involves an interplay with imaginary spaces and the

superimposition of the imaginary onto the actual spaces inhabited.

In order to properly interpret a later scene in the novel as it concerns a cafés in Berlin,

we will first turn to a reading of a scene that takes place earlier on in the novel, set in her

small hometown. Having just been fired from her job as a secretary, she retreats to a *Lokal*

instead of heading home, saying,

> Jetzt sitze ich hier. . . . Und nach Hause gehn habe ich geradezu Angst, ich kenne
> meinen Vater als ausgesprochen unangenehmen Menschen ohne Humor, wenn er zu
> Hause ist. Man kennt das—daß Männer, die am Stammtisch und in der Wirtschaft
> italienische Sonne markieren und immer die Schnauze vorneweg und alles
> unterhalten—daß die zu Haus in der Familie so sauer sind, daß man sie am Morgen
> nach einer versoffenen Nacht nur ansehn braucht und spart einen Rollmops. (23)

For Doris, the space of the *Lokal* is, in her moment of distress, a more comforting space that

that of the home, as it provides a retreat and protection from the dangers or threats that she

perceives at home.[130] Because it exists between the private home and the public streets outside, the *Lokal* can be read as a liminal space. It can be used as a space of comfort for Doris and offer a sense of retreat and privacy precisely because it is also a public space in which rules of conduct exist, requiring conviviality and joviality among the individuals inhabiting the space. The *Lokal* depends upon its status as an atmosphere of relaxation and enjoyment in order to continue existing, in order to draw customers in; without this appeal, individuals would not have a reason to frequent these spaces. Existing solely as a space visited by choice, the *Lokal* functions in a complex manner: that is, it both allows for a staging of more private behavior, such as Doris's fear and excitement, and yet, it simultaneously demands a more rigid code of behavior. By forcing a mode of interaction that privileges lightheartedness and encourages individuals to behave in ways that are not consistent with their private personas, disingenuous or inauthentic behavior becomes the basis for the space's status as a refuge for others. At home in the private sphere, for example, Doris's father is a thoroughly unpleasant man, but within the space of the *Lokal*, he is compelled to put on an air of lightheartedness. He works hard to entertain all of the other guests present, and in deviating from his usual self, acts out a personality that is much more pleasing to others. Because this space values pleasant social interactions, it forces modes of interaction that fill an important role in reestablishing a level of ease that the home lacks and that the cold streets outside cannot offer.

Yet, more than simply a liminal space in which Doris is able to find refuge before going home, it is also a space known to her—one in which she understands the interactions

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[130]As mentioned in historical section regarding cafés, cafés were primarily an urban phenomenon. Within a small town, it is reasonable to equate them with *Lokale*, in contrast to *Kneipen*, which had more of an emphasis on consuming alcohol.

and how the space is constructed, all of which is emphasized by her repeated use of the verb *kennen*. "Ich kenne meinen Vater" and "man kennt das ja" she says, highlighting her familiarity with the socially normative behaviors associated with the home and the *Lokal*.[131] She knows her father, knows that within the home he is an unpleasant, dangerous man, and yet, she also knows the rules of the *Lokal* and knows how to use these rules to her advantage. It is thus her knowledge of the social scripts involved in these spaces that allows her to place herself within the *Lokal* in order to act out the scenes of her life drama. As she puts it, she has asked a friend to come there to comfort her, "damit sie mich tröstet und beruhigt, denn schließlich habe ich eine Sensation durchgemacht" (27). In this space, Doris is able to live out her need to be consoled after her *Sensation*—the drama of her experience—precisely because she understands the dynamics and rules embedded within it. Set in a small town that she knows well, the *Lokal* is a space that she understands and can control, and because of that, she is able to use the space in the way that best suits her needs.

The space of the *Lokal* can therefore be read as a liminal space that Doris is in control of shaping and influencing. Yet, once she leaves her hometown—and with it, the space of her known *Lokal*—in search of new *Sensationen* in Berlin, her ability to read and contribute to liminal spaces becomes much more problematic, as will be seen in the close reading below. For, while the *Lokal* in her hometown is a space that she can use according to her needs— namely, as a place of refuge and a platform for staging her lived experiences—upon arriving in Berlin, she is faced with a new kind of liminal space: the space of cafés. Here, her ability

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[131]Keun, Irmgard. *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. 1932. Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2008, 22-23.

to read the situation fails, and she is thus not able to "stage" herself within the space as she initially wishes to do.

To illuminate this argument, I will turn to a scene in which Doris, only having arrived in Berlin a few days earlier, is wandering the streets and stumbles upon a peace demonstration. Although she does not understand the politics involved, she instantly joins in, wanting to be a part of the crowd, wanting to belong. During the demonstration, she suddenly feels the strong urge to learn about politics: "in mir stiegen mächtige Gedanken auf und ein Drang, Bescheid zu erfahren über die Politik" (73). Just then, she meets a man from whom she thinks she might be able to learn something: "da wehte mir der Abschwall von der Begeisterung einen Mann zu" (73). Her choice in language here—that the man is being blown towards her by the crowd, as if that is how the world would want it to be—signals her belief in their encounter as a fortuitous happenstance and reinforces her belief in his ability to enlighten her. The drama encapsulated within the description of their meeting also captures her desire to stage in her mind this scene as if in a film. In this film, an innocent young woman comes into contact with a handsome man on the street who will then be her intellectual guide and introduce her to the world of politics in the capital city. The use of the word *Anschwall* (a wave, a swell) also links this moment to the sense of being on a *Schwelle*, in transition between two worlds: the world in which she came from and the future which lies ahead of her. Doris finds herself in a moment and in a space that acts as a crossing, opening up to her the possibility of going to a café and finding the knowledge she is seeking there. Thus, without any additional information given, Doris simply states, "und wir gingen in ein Kaffee" (73). The interaction that precedes their conversation at the café is pertinent to the

reading of the café scene, for we see both Doris's naïve belief in her ability to be enlightened,

and moreover, her belief that the man would be interested in doing so, failing to see any other

motivations he might have except for simply serving as a character in her story. Important for

this reading is the fact that she chooses the space of the café for their conversation, showing

that, despite her innocence, she does already understand cafés in Berlin as spaces of

intellectual discourse. Accordingly, she hopes that the café will lend itself to being the space

in which she can gain political insight.

From the moment they arrive at the café, however, their conversation begins to go in

divergent directions. The conversation is marked by Doris asking questions such as, "Ich

fragte . . . , warum die Staatsmännischen gekommen sind?" (73). In his reply, he tells Doris

that "seine Frau wäre fünf Jahre älter als er" (73). This pattern of Doris asking questions and

the man giving completely irrelevant answers is repeated over and over, stressed

linguistically by these question-and-answer formulations: "Ich fragte" (73), "er erzählte mir"

(73); "ich fragte ihn" (73), "antwortet er mir" (73). Again and again, Doris is left asking

questions of political nature, and every time, the man gives an answer relating to his private

life, about his wife, about how unhappy he is with her, and about what a good man he

actually is. After repeated attempts to steer their conversation towards the political system

and the demonstration in which they were participating, Doris relents, realizing that he is not

interested in reacting to her questions. She, in turn, is not interested in his romantic

confessions, as it is not what she came to the café seeking. She remarks, "mein Herz was

ernst und aufgeregt und hatte keinen Sinn für Liebesgetue ohne Sinn und Verstand" (75). In

order to escape a hopeless situation, she excuses herself to go to the bathroom and sneaks out the backdoor.

Through this interaction in the café, Doris is forced to realize that the spaces of cafés do not work in the way that she expected them to, or rather, that she was not able to control the space and stage herself in the way that she had wished to do. She walks away unfulfilled, still unknowing and hoping for knowledge, and she is forced to accept the fact that, for her, educated discussions are not to be found within these spaces. The space of the café itself, and the other individuals acting within it, is not one that allows an unknown woman to enter and expect to be able to participate in socially and politically relevant discussions. Instead, it is one in which the rules of conduct have already been set long before she entered the space. In this moment, Doris's inability to participate in educational discourse is not solely due to the space disallowing it, but rather, her goal is unattainable because the space is one in which her lack of education and naïveté excludes her from participation. In this way, the space shows consistency: if one enters already educated, one can showcase that knowledge; however, if one enters the space lacking, one will exit it still lacking.

It is perhaps not the case that cafés *never* allow women to participate in such discourses, but rather, this situation speaks to Doris's misreading of intentions. For instance, she failed to see the man's possible motives for going with her to a café, and, in such moments, the gender and power dynamic clearly situated the man within the position of power. Since she was not on equal footing with the man prior to entering the space, Doris was already intellectually inferior and was thus excluded from a conversation that would have been educational in nature. Because of Doris's inexperience with Berlin, she failed to

read the scene properly, and thereby also failed to see that her expected role within the space of the café as an uneducated woman was to play the role of the interested party to the man's thoughts and insights—not to have her own questions and demands. In this way, the café is a space that allows her to be present, to exist within the space, yet does not allow her to assert herself within that space. Similar to the space of the office discussed in the second chapter, the space of the café becomes one in which, for a woman of lower educational and socioeconomic standing, her existence serves to fulfill other individuals' needs and wants rather than her own. Doris's role is that of listener, not of speaker; this is a space that privileges her receptive capacity.

Furthermore, reading the space in this manner illustrates how the café functions as a liminal space for Doris, for it is a space that harbors uncertainty and poses the risk of being configured as a *Schwelle* rather than as a static space. The space is not one in which Doris can comfortably exist on her own, as she does not have the option open to her in this instant of simply remaining in the café on her own. Rather, it functions as a threshold, in which she can enter the space, but is expected to pass through and then leave again. Within this interaction, she is, in essence, given two choices on how to complete the crossing and exit the space: to comply with the man's wishes, which would essentially transform the space from that of a café to that of a brothel, letting him solicit and be granted the sexual favors he seeks; or to refuse to comply with his wishes but thereby become dismissed from the space immediately. The man's requests of Doris, and the way in which he speaks at her and not with her, reinforces his desire to shape her, and the space, into one in which she is there to fulfill his needs.

Reading the café as a *Schwelle*, we see that the space itself does not contain and follow a uniform set of rules. Rather, it is a space that is constantly evolving and changing in nature. Doris's specific reaction to the space and to the people making requests of her in that space changes the space's underlying social purpose, but it also changes whether or not she is allowed to be present in this space. Realizing this, in this moment, Doris chooses to leave the space and says, "ich ging heimlich am andern Ausgang raus" (75). It is interesting to note that even in leaving the space, Doris cannot openly choose how to exit the space. Instead, she feels the need to do so secretly, so as not to have to confront the man and make obvious her disinterest in the proposition he is offering her. While she has the choice to exit the space, the fact that she is "sneaking" out reinforces her inferior position within this spatial dynamic. In many ways, despite being able to freely enter the space of the café, Doris never finds herself in a position of power within it. She is never able to actively participate in shaping the space and asserting herself in the space. Rather, her choices are limited to allowing the space to mold her into someone she is not, by accepting the man's advances, or leaving the space with as little disturbance as possible.

Equally fascinating about this interaction is the fact that the space functions very differently for the man with whom Doris is interacting. For him, the café is in many ways more in keeping with a historical understanding of the space as a place of refuge from the burdens of home and work, and it also reaffirms his superiority due to this educational standing. Yet, more than simply fulfilling the historical role cafés occupied for men, the space also appears to function here as a space of intense privacy—a space in which the outside world is not watching. Here, he feels unrestrained and more free to express himself

than he does in any other sphere. His interaction with Doris is telling of his understanding of the space because it is here that he instantly feels the right to air his private grievances and proposition her for her attention, with the hope that his confessions will elicit sexual interest from her. Unlike Doris's perception, in which her existence within the space is tied to him, his perception of the space is one in which all rules of conduct have vanished and he is free to do as he pleases. Even if both Doris and he are participants in creating the space, he is the one who is in control of it. Importantly, while his control of the space is in keeping with what we would expect from historical precedents—in which the café was long the domain of men—the change we see happening here in the public interior spaces of Weimar Berlin is equally telling, for it signals a blurring and reevaluation of the boundaries between the private and the public. In this moment, the café is not functioning as a semi-private sphere, as one might expect, which would exist on the brink between the privacy of the home and the public outside. Rather, it is functioning as a space more private even than those spaces originally deemed private, such as the home. If Chapter 1 discussed the loss of privacy within the home, I would suggest that this is the corollary reaction: at a loss for privacy in the home, individuals attempt to reestablish a realm in which privacy can exist, yet they do so in a decidedly public space. The café then becomes a space in which privacy, and the sharing of emotions and wishes, can be experienced. However, it leaves women in a precarious position as outsiders, especially when an unequal power dynamic is at play, as is the case with Doris. Women are not able to assert that same privilege and, instead, become listeners to men's desires.

The café thus allows the man to say anything he wishes, and he expects Doris to react positively towards his wishes and lamentations; it is thus a space in which restraints no longer exist. While the spaces of the home and the office demand a certain code of conduct, the reading of this passage shows that, within the café, the man does not feel confined by any codes of conduct. For him, the space has become one of expression and of a reestablishment of privacy that is not found in any of the other spaces. The paradoxical nature of creating a setting of privacy and intimacy within the liminal space of a café speaks to the need for privacy and comfort, and it also suggests that these attempts to mold liminal spaces into spaces of privacy occur when the home can no longer fulfill this need. This is a theme that will reappear later in the chapter as well, as it speaks to the universal nature of this dilemma throughout Weimar Berlin literature.

Doris's time in Berlin following this first experience continues to be punctuated by frequent visits to cafés, which continue to shift in nature after this first experience. Perhaps not surprisingly, at no point in the novel does she ever again attempt to assert herself within these spaces by asking questions or hoping to be educated. Rather, a progression is seen in which she continually becomes more able to be within the space of the café, physically, but is also less able to assert herself verbally. For instance, the Romanisches Café is described as a place that is popular among the intellectual elite of Berlin who are poor but educated and spend their days lounging at the café, conversing and playing chess. Despite the fact that Doris knows she is not one of the educated elite and hears others around her speak of the café in a derogatory manner as the place where "diese herabgekommenen Literaten sitzen" (103), she is fascinated with the space. For her, the café represents all that she was hoping to find in

Berlin; it is buzzing with life and energy and abounding in interesting conversations. Most importantly, it is a place not only famous among the literary scene but also for those in the film industry. In keeping with her dream of becoming a *Glanz*, we are told that she spends many evenings there hoping to infiltrate the scene.

Despite the fact that the café is described as a space defined by intellectual discourse, these intellectual discussions never include Doris, nor does she ever find the courage to reiterate and ask the questions she had previously asked the man in the café regarding politics. Rather, she has learned how to fit into the space and literally describes the process as having to force herself to become part of the physical space: "ich hatte in eine Materie zu dringen" (104). In this passage, she emphasizes the idea that, while she has found a way to be in the café, she is not able to assert herself within it or demand to be one of the participants in conversation; rather, she is only able to be there if she herself is willing to become part of the space. The use of "dringen"—which, translated, conveys the idea of having to force oneself into something, and to act with urgency—further emphasizes the force that it takes for Doris to be able to become the space. It is not a matter of blending in as much as forcing herself into the space. Through a process of abnegation, in which she denies herself personal intellectual expression in favor of spatial existence, Doris embeds herself within the space as a way of being allowed to be within a space that would otherwise serve to exclude her. Even her mannerisms become controlled and serve to reinforce her perception of the role that she thinks she should be playing rather than expressions of authentic emotion.

Acting very much as a caricature of what Doris expects an intellectual to act like, she describes a conversation in which she takes part, saying: "Da legte ich meinen Kopf weit

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zurück, während sie reden, und werfe Blicke in die Luft und höre nicht zu. Und plötzlich presse ich meinen Mund ganz eng zusammen und dann leger auf, blase Rauch durch die Nase und werfe voll Gleichgültgkeit und eiskalt ein einzelnes Fremdwort in sie hinein" (104). Despite the fact that this was a conversation, Doris's role in this interaction is entirely based on the placement of her body and the way in which she, in a stylized manner, leans her head back and then glances at the others with a cold look of indifference. Even smoking, an act intricately tied to the image of the *Neue Frau*, is done purely for show, which reinforces the indifference, the "Gleichgültigkeit", that she identifies as the emotion expected from someone in her position within the space. Yet the irony lies in the great lengths to which she goes in enacting this indifference; these efforts reveal her real emotions that are anything but indifferent. Were she indifferent, she would not feel the need to "dränge" herself into the space to then simply act disinterested. Instead, Doris desperately wants to be allowed to exist in this space, but her only means of doing so are to become part of the space and play the role of a disinterested bystander. Yet, acting out the part of someone who belongs within that space actually has the effect of further marginalizing her role and position, and in the end, she is nothing but a stylized image of an avant-garde individual.

At the same time, her efforts to stage herself are in keeping with her desires to stage her life as film, and here—unlike in the previous scene, in which her staging failed—she has mastered the task of reading the role required of her and executing it properly within the space of a café, even though she cannot authentically assert herself or contribute meaningfully to the conversations taking place. Although she is not able to remain authentic, she nonetheless holds a greater position of power than she previously did, for at least she is

now able to exist within the café without needing to flee at any moment. Read in this way, the space functions for her as one that is firmly situated in the public sphere: she has complete anonymity, yet it is precisely this anonymity that allows her to be a participant of the space. Were she to reveal her true, uneducated self, she would surely find herself to be an outcast within the café, but she remains silent, and silence becomes empowering by allowing her to hide her lack of education. The silencing that she experiences, then, can be read both as a negative consequence of a space that continues to privilege education and as a positive one that allows her to at least gain access to a highly prized space within Weimar culture.

The danger inherent in inhabiting spaces in which one is never able to express an authentic self is presented in the final scene that I will discuss here. In this scene, Doris's loss of ability to assert herself within these spaces reaches its zenith when she finds herself in a *Lokal* and describes the room: "die Decke ist graugrün geschibbert—ich sehe, ich sehe— . . . ein querer Spiegel am Ende—man sieht blaß aus aber hübsch. . . . Und so stier gucke ich jetzt auch immer, weil ich so viel sehen muß" (108-109). In her stream-of-consciousness depiction of the room, there is a radical change from the first interaction discussed, which continually repeated the phrase "ich fragte, ich fragte." Here, her ability to voice questions with the expectation of having them answered has not only disappeared, but it has been replaced entirely with a new sensory mode of functioning within that space, through sight. "Ich sehe, ich sehe," Doris repeats to herself, and this phrase emphasizes her role as a recipient of the space, but not as a contributor. Within this space, she can see and take in what is happening but cannot control or contribute to it in any meaningful way. And here, unlike in the previous scene, she is not even able to stage herself. Rather, she is left standing, looking, unable to

discern what possible role she could stage, apart from that of an outside viewer. She comes to the conclusion that there is no other role for her to play, or at least, none that she can understand. Her role as a mere viewer is further emphasized by the depiction of the mirror at the end of the room, which reflects a pale version of herself—a lesser, less intense, less real version of herself, and yet, one that is "hübsch". Therefore, as with the space of the office, Doris's purpose within the café is to be beautiful, and although she becomes part of the space, she has lost all agency within it. Her role as a recipient of space is symbolized by her ability to see, and she acknowledges this by describing herself as someone whose gaze is "stier" (unblinking). For, as she says, there is much to take in, and she fears missing out on any aspect of it. She desires to see it all, because seeing is all she can do, and seeing the space allows her to be a part of the space to which she would not otherwise have access. In this way, the space has become a sensory experience, a space that she can take in but to which she cannot contribute audibly or authentically, but rather, only physically.

In reading cafés through Doris's lens, we see how the spaces of cafés are depicted as spaces that function based on complex rules, and education continues to be the defining characteristic that determines who is allowed to more actively produce the space and who is not. Yet, in reading Doris's staging of herself in the space, we see how the space both allows for an experimentation with alternative ideas of the self, and, as a liminal space, also continues to present a danger of obscuring all sense of individuality, as seen in the final reading. Cafés as spaces both allow for an anonymity that can let individuals like Doris exist in places to which she would not have historically had access, and yet, they are still far from the egalitarian space that they are often made out to be. If one knows how to stage the scene

properly, they can be spaces of entertainment and discourse, and yet, if one does not, they become spaces through which one can only pass—that is, *Schwellen* that one must escape before becoming too embedded in the space as space itself.

*Fabian*: Cafés as Spaces of Privacy

Doris's experience in the spaces of cafés is marked by her inability to speak and participate in the political and social discourse due to her lacking education. We will now turn to a close reading of a scene in Erich Kästner's novel *Fabian*, which was also discussed in the context of the home in Chapter 1. *Fabian* can give us another perspective on the gendered nature of the café and will reinforce the above reading of Doris's interaction with cafés as spaces of exclusion based on educational status. As discussed earlier in this research, the protagonist, Fabian, is a highly educated individual with a doctorate in literature. He meets and falls in love with Cornelia, who is also highly educated, having completed a law degree with a dissertation focusing on international film rights. She has come to Berlin to work for a film company, and yet, she is paid so badly—150 Marks a month—that she realizes early on in her time in Berlin that she will not be able to survive on her educational skills alone. Already working in the film industry, she hopes to take up acting instead, because, much as Doris realized, an acting career is a highly profitable enterprise for the few women who succeed. Tragically, soon after meeting and falling in love with Fabian, she is faced with a moral dilemma. An executive at the film company has taken a liking to her and has offered her a role in one of his films. In exchange for her sexual company, he has also offered to put her up in a two-room apartment and pay her an allowance for being allowed

access to her body at anytime. While against it on principle, the offer arrives only days after

Fabian has been let go and faces an uncertain future of potential long-term unemployment.

Cornelia, a woman who prides herself on her self-sufficiency, and who does not want to be a

burden to Fabian, decides to leave him and take Makart, the film executive, up on his offer.

However, she does not have the strength to tell Fabian of her decision in person and leaves a

note for him in her apartment. In it, she explains her reasoning—"ich gehe jetzt von Dir fort,

um mit Dir zusammenzubleiben"—and asks, "wirst Du mich liebbehalten?" (162). In the

letter, she also states that "[m]orgen nachmittag werde ich, von vier Uhr ab, im Café

Schottenhalm auf Dich warten" (162), and asks him to join her there to discuss their future.

Her choice of a café as the location for them to meet, as compared to their apartments, where

they had previously spent the majority of their time, is telling. It shows a level of comfort

with the space of the café and a sense that it is an appropriate space for a serious

conversation, and yet, at the same time, it acts as a distancing mechanism between them, as it

is definitively more public than their apartments. It is this scene in the café that I will now

turn to in order to demonstrate how their interactions with each other construct the space of

the café as both intimate and estranging. Importantly, both of them are able to participate in

the space equally, even if participation in this sense involves being a person who waits.

Following his receipt of the letter the previous morning, Fabian walks to the café and

stops outside: "vor dem Café Schottenhalm machte Fabian kehrt" (176). He cannot bring

himself to go inside, as he lacks the strength to enter into an enclosed space in which he

knows, or suspects that he knows, the outcome of the conversation that awaits him. Instead,

he chooses to walk away again, staying outside under the open skies and avoiding all interior

spaces, ambling along the streets and across the *Potsdamer Platz*. Yet, despite his aimless wanderings, suddenly "befand er sich wieder vor dem Café" (176). Interestingly, while the café is not a space he wishes to enter out of fear of what will be said, he is nonetheless continuously drawn back there, unable to escape his desire to see Cornelia, even if that means having to enter into a restrictive space. The juxtaposition of the outside space of the city streets and the interior space of the café in this scene allows for a reading of the space of the café as liminal. That is, it is neither as public as the streets nor as private as their homes, but rather, it exists somewhere in between. Yet at this juncture, it is unclear towards which realm the space will tend.

Having found his way back to the café, Fabian accepts the need to enter: "und *jetzt trat er ein.*" Entering, an act emphasized by the "jetzt" in the statement, signals both a change in his attitude and in the immediacy of his action. The "jetzt" of the sentence, moreover, alludes to the temporal nature of his willingness and ability to enter the space, showing that, even a moment earlier or later, his entrance may not have been possible. But in this moment—"jetzt"—he is able to be in control of the space, and in control of himself enough to enter into the café. This tension between entering or not entering also speaks to the level of discomfort elicited by interior spaces in which relationships are constantly in flux and evolving and can change and allow for different behaviors from one moment to the next.

As he enters the café, the text states that "Cornelia saß da, als warte sie seit Jahren" (176). Her act of waiting can be read as a sign of helplessness, because waiting for Fabian to arrive is all she can do in this moment. Conversely, however, her waiting can also be read as a sign of her agency within and ownership of the space, which becomes an important aspect

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of the gender dynamic being set up in this scene. For, within the space of cafés, the act of

waiting itself is an act of agency. It firmly situates Cornelia within the male tradition and use

of the space of the café, harking back to author Hermann Kesten's description of cafés as

*Wartesäle* and Walter Benjamin's idea that the act of waiting is fundamental to the café.

Benjamin notes, "Sehr heimisch war ich [im Café] nie. Damals besaß ich noch nicht jene

Leidenschaft des Wartens, ohne die man die Annehmlichkeiten eines Cafés nicht gründlich

empfinden lernt."[132] Benjamin's association of the ability to wait with the quality of being at

home in the space of a café can help us understand Cornelia's act of waiting. While not

pleasant, waiting firmly establishes her authority within the space as someone who waits—

someone who can appreciate the nature of cafés and whose actions are in keeping with the

prescribed use of the space. Waiting, for her, is a way of claiming the space as her own and

forming it into one in which she is comfortable expressing herself. The addition of the

information that it looked like she had been waiting "seit Jahren" (for years) emphasizes the

idea that she is not new to cafés, but rather, that they have become spaces that she habitually

frequents. This idea is underscored by the fact that she, not Fabian, is the one who selected

the café as the site in which to meet.

Yet, it is not only Cornelia who is waiting and is therefore in control of the space. We

are told that even the space itself is in a constant state of waiting: "Die Wände zwischen den

zwei Treppen . . . waren mit vielen bunten Papageien und Kolibris bevölkert. Die Vögel

waren aus Glas. Sie hockten auf gläsernen Lianen und Zweigen und warteten auf den Abend

. . . damit der zerbrechliche Urwald zu leuchten beginne" (177). This image of birds,

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[132]Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften VI: Berliner Chronik*. 1985. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, 482.

themselves of glass and thus highly fragile, sitting and waiting for evening to arrive amidst their fragile environment, confronts the reader with an analogy of the space of the café. This bird scene depicts waiting as the primary mode of operation, in which both people and space itself wait, and yet, both are also equally fragile, holding within them the potential to be broken at any moment as they await change, the coming of the evening. Furthermore, it is not just any birds that are depicted, but specifically hummingbirds (*Kolibris*), which are known not for waiting but for their constant movement and famously high heart rates. Thus, the fact that these are hummingbirds that wait can be read as a further testament to the unease of the space. Just as birds do not naturally wait, this activity is also unnatural for humans; yet, in order to be in the space, it is a required skill that overrides natural instinct and instead speaks to the constructed nature of the individual's behavior. Much as Cornelia is producing the space to serve her needs in this moment, the space is also producing her, shaping her into a creature who has accepted waiting as an element of existence within this space. Seen this way, as much as Cornelia is able to fit in with expected codes of behavior and assert herself in the space as one who waits, the space itself is conforming itself to her. The relationship depends on each other's willingness to produce and be produced, with both the space and the individual holding the potential to disrupt the balance that exists between producer of space and produced space.

Yet, in this scene, the space is preserved, as Fabian also conforms to the requirements and reinforces the space as one of waiting. The text states that "er wartete eine Weile" (177), having to sit and wait as Cornelia sits in silence and does not immediately respond to his comments. Fabian's role as one who waits is equally important because it highlights his and

Cornelia's equal participation in the space. For, while Cornelia initially had to wait because of Fabian's late arrival, upon his arrival, she now makes him the waiting party through her withdrawal of speech. Up until now, Fabian has been more effective in controlling the space of the café and Cornelia's actions, even though he was outside of the space itself. In walking the streets, he exerted control over her actions, forcing her to wait for him. Yet, as soon as he enters, his dominance diminishes and he and Cornelia find themselves equal in power.

This shift in power dynamics is reinforced by the sounds that they are able to produce within the space. In their tense interaction, Cornelia breaks down and begins to cry, and her weeping sounds "als wimmere weit entfernt ein verzweifeltes Kind" (177). This description is immediately followed by the statement that "das Lokal war leer. Die Gäste saßen draußen vor der Tür, unter großen roten Schirmen. Nur ein Kellner stand in der Nähe" (177). The description of her crying as sounding far removed implies that she is not fully able to infiltrate the space acoustically, still feeling the social pressure to muffle her crying, thereby giving it a sense of coming from far away, from outside of the space itself. Nonetheless, she feels able to cry in the space, a performance of emotion usually reserved for the private sphere, where one is not seen by unintended others. Her crying in this space therefore reinforces the level of control and comfort that she has within the space of the café and marks the space as one that exists between the private and the public but is heavily skewed towards the private. This latter observation is supported by the emptiness of the space, in which the only witness to her emotional distress is the waiter standing nearby. Even the formulation of the sentence about the emptiness of the space suggests that the customers are all outside on the terrace—not the *other* customers, "die anderen Gäste," but simply "die Gäste." This

statement sets those customers apart and marks them as different from Fabian and herself, who do not self-describe as such. The other individuals' roles as customers, as guests, within the space are determined by their position on the terrace outside. Barely even in the café itself, they have a much less significant role in the production of the interior space. They may be guests, but Cornelia and Fabian are inhabitants of the interior space, controlling it and shaping it to meet their needs, even if that involves shaping it as a space that allows for her to cry.

When attempting to reply to Cornelia's sobs and the question "Was soll bloß aus mir werden?" Fabian's response is "viel zu laut" (177). Here, too, we see how the space is perceived as a liminal space: it is not completely private, because saying something too loud in private would not be an issue. He is thus aware that his tone was outside of the socially acceptable range, and yet, he raises his voice to that level, demonstrating a level of comfort and control over the space. Even if it is embarrassing to him, he vocalizes his feelings nonetheless, thereby molding the space into one that borders on the private sphere more than the public, just as it does for Cornelia.

Especially if we compare this scene to Doris's interactions in cafés in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, we can see a discrepancy between the ability that Fabian and Cornelia have to vocalize their authentic selves and Doris's inability. Reading this scene in *Fabian* allows us to see that along with, and perhaps more so than gender, education appears to be a dominant factor in how and by whom space can be produced. For those who are confident and educated, the spaces of cafés can be molded to provide privacy not found in other places, an option that is not open to Doris. In this way, cafés are spaces in which

identities matter; identities can be staged, as Doris discovered, but only members of the intellectual crowd are capable of asserting their true identities and vocalizing their needs. Yet, even for them, cafés are spaces with which they have to comply. They have to allow themselves to be produced by the space just as Doris has to become a product of her space. In this way, while Doris is able to actively stage herself, Cornelia and Fabian's roles as individuals who wait are not roles that were freely chosen, but rather, they are the roles required of them. Read in this matter, the text shows that even they are not free from the constricts of the space. Instead, they have to allow themselves to be defined by the space before they can define the space as one of privacy in order to suit their needs.

### *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*: Cafés as Home

Gabriele Tergit's novel *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931) lends itself well to the final examination of this question of the role of cafés. It further illustrates how these spaces were constructed and participated in the construction of individuals' social roles and self-understanding from a more distanced point of view. Tergit, one of the most celebrated female journalists of the Weimar period, chose to not foreground one individual character, as many of the other texts surveyed have so far done. Rather, she wrote a novel without a true protagonist and instead let Berlin, and the world of publishing and publicity, become the focal point. Brilliantly capturing the conflicts of the era and a sense of life in Berlin during the late Weimar years, the work is vital to this chapter. Its descriptions of city life and life within cafés are presented in a more depersonalized manner, as though taking a step back to view the scene from afar. This perspective helps universalize the themes already discussed in

Keun's and Kästner's work. Tergit's literary skill undoubtedly lies her ability to set the scene upon which many varying narratives play out, and it is this scene-setting that lends itself well to a close reading through the lens of spatial analysis. Through a reading of a scene involving the Romanisches Café, I will argue that these spaces were indeed conceptualized as spaces that could provide a sense of privacy and comfort that was lost within the home. However, they must also be read as transitional, or liminal spaces. Reading them as liminal spaces allows for an analysis of their functions and shortcomings within the context of spatial politics.

If the first chapter showed that the space of the home is no longer a site of privacy and comfort, then a leading question of this chapter's research is: where—that is, in which spaces, if any—can privacy and comfort be found or be reestablished? For many Weimar scholars, there exists a glorification of cafés as spaces of intellectual and artistic expression, a vision of café life that has arguably been extended throughout most of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Yet, the novel *Das Kunstseidene Mädchen* does not depict the space of the café as a place of comfort and free dialogue, but rather, as one in which women in particular are able to exist but not participate verbally, if they are not highly educated. Women's participation in the creation of the space of the café contributes to its definition as a space of *sehen*, of visuality. It is a space that can be taken in, but women are not able to add anything to it in an authentic manner. In Kästner's work, then, we see how, depending on educational status, the space, when understood as a liminal space, can indeed begin to serve as a space of privacy, if one is secure enough in the space to be able to produce it as a private space. Now, in turning towards Tergit's novel, the question then becomes how her

understanding of space adds complexity to this reading of the space as liminal and how its liminality is able to be shifted towards the private sphere through the behaviors of its inhabitants due to their need and desire for privacy and comfort.

## Das Romanische Café: a Liminal Space

While the Berlin of the Weimar Republic was a city of many cafés, without a doubt the most famous among them was the Romanisches Café, as is evidenced not only by historical fact but also given credence to by the fact that both Keun and Tergit explicitly mention it by name in their works. The reading of Keun's novel presented earlier in this chapter focused on the role that Doris played within the Romanisches Café and discussed her inability to participate in the discussions taking place there in any meaningful way, instead being relegated to acting out a stylized behavior and being the viewer of the scene. A close reading of Tergit's depiction of the café provides another, less character-driven perspective of the café that focuses on its spatial layout and function:

> Das Romanische Café befindet sich gegenüber der Gedächniskirche und besteht aus einer Schwimmer- und einer Nichtschwimmerabteilung. Die Schwimmer sitzen links von der Drehtür. Die Nichtschwimmer rechts. Das Romanische Café ist sehr schmutzig. Erstens ist es trotz seiner großen Fensterscheiben so angeräuchert, wie es für eine Stätte des Geistes notwendig ist, zweitens ist es schmutzig durch die Manieren seiner Bewohner, die unausgesetzt Überreste ihrer Raucherei auf den Fußboden werfen. Drittens auch durch die ungeheure Frequenz. Denn dieses Café ist eine Heimat. (52)

The café's division into two section, for the "swimmers" and "non-swimmers" as they were

called, was architecturally a way of spatially representing a hierarchy, in which both social

status and also sheer time spent in the café entitled one to be assigned to one or the other

room. Yet, while these two spaces were not as distinct as they may at first appear—with

many intellectual heavyweights choosing to stay in the non-swimmer section and likewise

new arrivals to the city finding their way relatively easily into the swimmer section—what is

architecturally significant in reading the space is the mention of the *Drehtür* (the revolving

door) that marks the entrance and exit to the café. The revolving door is situated between the

two rooms and the center of the café. By design, it conjures up the idea that the space is

constantly in flux, always revolving and thus allowing people to enter at the same time that

others exit without having to interact. A *Drehtür* cannot easily be described as being open or

shut, but rather, it has the quality of constantly being open, as long as one becomes immersed

in the rhythm of the other people entering and exiting. To use the door, one must time one's

moment of arrival and exit with that of others. The door can therefore be read as symbolic of

the space itself, as something that is always open—always changing and always open to new

individuals—but also as something that already has the quality of temporality built in. While

never shut out from the space, the visitor is also never completely inside, but rather is part of

a cyclical behavior that dictates an understanding of how the space is to be used: one arrives,

spends time, and then leaves again, following the pattern of behavior that others are engaging

in as well.

Importantly, the revolving door is also relevant for what it does not represent, namely,

a sense of home or security. Much as no home is ever designed with a revolving front door,

the fact that cafés, like offices, are at times designed to have such a feature, set it apart from the home and underscores the fact that, despite any other spatial indications to the contrary, this is not a space in which one is to feel at home. Thus, even if cafés are often thought of as spaces of refuge in a city in which the home does not provide this function any longer, the door already makes clear that this space is not going to allow itself to be socially constructed to resemble the home, at least with respect to who is or is not allowed to enter. If the image of a door as a gateway, or gatekeeper, is applied, we see that this space has a relatively lax system for regulating who is allowed to enter: that is, anyone who tries can enter. Only after entering the space are individuals sectioned off spatially into separate rooms.

The description of the condition of the room, with the term "Schmutz" dominating the description verbally, provides an interesting contrast to the architectural modernity of the space. For every aspect of modern design, it would appear, the inhabitants of the space, regardless of whether consciously or unconsciously, have countered its modern effects by adding their own dirt and debris to a space where these things do not appear to belong. The large glass windows, for example, have been obscured by the smoke that has darkened them and, by extension, darkened the space. While it was once designed to be drenched in light, the space is now more dim, and yet, in being dim, it has also become a more appropriate space for contemplation, "eine Stätte des Geistes." In essence, what is being said is that the inhabitants of the space have found a way to provide more privacy for themselves in this space, by lessening the ability of others to peer into the space and infringe upon their ability to use the café as a space that is separate from the exterior world. Through smoking, their use of the space has lessened its modernist appeal, which prides itself on sleek, clean lines and

spaces. Clearly, in this moment, being dirty is not actually a bad thing, as it allows the café to be transformed into a space that provides comfort and a sense of retreat more than it would otherwise be. Using the space in this way constructs it in opposition to its architectural aims and places the architectural elements and the use value in competition with each other.

The description of the cigarettes that litter the floor further reinforces the contrast laid out here between architectural elements and user elements, contrasting the cold, sleek, modern marble floor with the residual heat and dirt that comes from the extinguishing cigarette butts that have been strewn about. Yet here, unlike the smoke-covered windows that were valued positively for their ability to provide a space to think, the cigarette-covered floors are associated with the lacking manners of the patrons. Clearly, the dirty floor is not seen in the romanticized light of the dirty windows, perhaps because having a cigarette-strewn floor does not provide any additional element of comfort but rather only bespeaks the careless manner of the individuals frequenting the café. Yet beyond the simple lack of manners, at the heart of this criticism lies a question about the role of space. Tergit summarizes the café in a poignant way, saying, "dieses Café ist eine Heimat." If we were to read the space merely as a café, it would be less important that they are behaving incorrectly, but the problem is that the space here is expected, or perhaps needed, to function as a *Heimat*, a home. Understanding that behavioral codes vary depending on the space, the text asserts that this space of the café—despite its architectural design with a *Drehtür*, large windows, and cold marble floors—is actually being constructed as a space of *Heimat* by its inhabitants. Thus, while some behaviors, such as the smoking that leads to the dimmed windows, serve the space and the people well by reinforcing the idea that privacy and comfort can be

reestablished, other behaviors, such as dropping cigarette butts on the floor, are frowned upon because, much as one would not do this in one's own home, one should not do it here, if one is to understand the space as *Heimat*. This behavior, throwing cigarette butts on the floor, also emphasizes the fluid, liminal quality of the space, as it ties the interior space to the exterior space with the performance of an action that would normally be acceptable out on the street, but is unacceptable for interior spaces. The use of (and littering in) this space bespeaks its position as existing between the interior and the exterior.

As such, the architectural design and intentions of this space are in constant tension with its actual use; it is a space designed to be entered and exited in constant flow, constantly moving, and sleek and cool in its appearance. But, despite these architectural intentions, the space is one in which individuals desperately seeking a *Heimat* have, through their behavior, been able to craft it into a space that more closely meets their needs. That is, they have produced a space that allows for community and expression, at least to a certain extent. Through their actions, they are able to produce a space within the space of a café in which they are able to perform their own identities more authentically than in other spaces heretofore examined, and it is perhaps this fact that explains the great importance that cafés played in Weimar Berlin.

At the same time, the choice of the word *Heimat* carries with it so many connotations that, for example, the term *zu Hause* would not. This distinguishing factor is relevant for understanding and underscoring the role of the space of the café as a liminal space as well. For, while *zu Hause* (at home) would have simply denoted a space in which one lives, and would have bespoken the quality of the space as homey, *Heimat* changes the reading of the

space. *Heimat*, the term itself the singular focus of many individuals' research, lacks proper translation, but it can be understood as the place where one is from and where one feels one belongs, to put it simply. Yet, if we accept this definition, then we see that the relevance of calling a café a *Heimat* actually plays into its architectural design more than is perhaps obvious at first glace, for *Heimat* implies a place that a person is from and has also moved on from. That is, *Heimat* is where one is *from*, not where one ends up. It is a term that gained importance during the *Landflucht* (rural exodus) brought on by the Industrial Revolution, giving people a term to describe a place they were no longer in but felt tied to, stressing the idea that it is separate from where one currently is. Furthermore, especially among the educated class, this sense of voluntarily leaving one's *Heimat*, traditionally in order to go off to university, underlines why, for an educated group of individuals frequenting cafés in Weimar Germany, the term would resonate and be understood in this way.

Reading the space of the café as a *Heimat*, then, reinforces the café's position as a liminal space: a space in which one may feel safe and comfortable, but from which one is expected to move on, in order to avoid being the person left behind, stuck in the *Heimat* when all others have left. *Heimat* is, in this sense, both comforting and anxiety-inducing, because the fear of being stuck in a liminal space, and not being able to escape, can at times outweigh the comfort that a liminal space can provide. Describing the café as a *Heimat* underscores this precarious position; despite the architectural features, the inhabitants have been able to construct a space that more closely resembles a space in which they feel comfortable and are known to others. Yet, at the same time, echoing the imaginary of the *Drehtür*, this space also does not allow one to get too comfortable because of the risk of

being left behind, stuck in a *Heimat* from which one, by definition, is supposed to move on. The *Drehtür*, then, is an architectural feature that implies a continual change that the patrons attempt to overcome, and it is also the feature that most closely captures the nature of the space: use it and enjoy the safety and privacy while you can, but know that when more people enter, your turn to exit will also come. The space of the café is not a space of permanence.

There is, however, a tension found in the novel regarding the understanding of the space of cafés as spaces of impermanence and spaces from which one needs to move on. The novel's only character that does move on is also one of the least likeable characters in the work. Frächter, an aspiring journalist and keen businessman, spends most of the novel trying to find a way to get ahead, often at the cost of harming or exploiting others along the way. Always willing to take credit for work he has not done, and viewing all human interaction in terms of profitability, he is the only character in the novel of whom we are told that he has left the space of the café and entered into a new space, one defined by decadence.

> Soweit war er nun in knapp drei Wochen. Bereits Besprechung bei Schwannecke. Gestern noch Romanisches Café, gestern noch Tabak auf dem Boden, Zigaretten- und Zigarrenstummel auf dem nackten Boden, Marmortische, eine Schale Haut, zwei Eier im Glas, heute teppichbelegtes Parkett, lauschige Kojen und Wein und Braten und Sauce béarnaise. (55)

The contrast that is described here between the space of the café and the space to which Frächter moves on—a space marked by old-fashioned luxury, of *Teppiche* and wine and traditional foods—both underscores the minimalist, modernist, cold nature of the Romanisches Café, and draws a distinction between the modern style of the café and the

older style of decadence that more easily allows him to leave his mark on the space.

Reminiscent of Benjamin's observation about the soft textures of the nineteenth century that

allowed traces to be left on the space, as discussed in Chapter 1, Frächter's excitement about

moving on to this space is perhaps less a criticism of the desire to escape the space of the

Romanisches Café as much as it is a criticism of Frächter's motivations for wanting to move

on. For, his excitement about having reached a space that is antiquated in nature speaks to his

character, which is confirmed when we are later told that, "Frächter hatte sich die Haare

schneiden lassen. Er trug den Millimeter-Kurzschnitt. . . . Nichts erinnerte an den Herrn, der

noch vor anderthalb Jahren im Romanischen Café saß" (224). Frächter's appreciation for the

old styles must be read as a political commentary on his desire for the old system of order.

Likewise, his choice of hairstyle, having cut his longer, bohemian-style hair to take on more

of a militarist look, firmly situates him within a political allegiance that stood in stark

contrast to the intellectual, artistic value system espoused by the Romanisches Café. As such,

while the text makes clear that, as a liminal space, one does not want to get stuck in the space

of the café, being stuck is still preferable than leaving the space when the motivation for

leaving is not in keeping with all that the café represents.

Ending on a political note, Tergit's novel both speaks to the importance of having a

place of refuge and implies the risk that exists within society when spaces that were

previously private are no longer demarcated as private, leaving individuals to go in search of

the comfort they seek. In her work, Tergit paints a picture of a generation of people who find

themselves in a liminal space, having found comfort within the spaces of cafés and, yet,

having no clear place to move on to from there. As such, they risk becoming a generation of individuals who are stuck in the *Schwelle*.


Conclusion

Reading cafés as liminal spaces, in the novels surveyed we see how spaces such as cafés, which by design already exist between two clear binaries, allow for the creation and production of privacy and intimacy. It is a role these spaces are crafted to fulfill because because other, more traditionally private spaces, are not able to provide this. In this way, the novels speak to a resilience of individuals, in that they find ways to carve out the spaces they need, even if it is not in keeping with the spaces' historical use. However, it also speaks to the dangers inherent in any shift in use of space, because the use of one space can never fully replicate the function of any other space. The café is only an imperfect attempt at regaining something lost in the home. Through close readings, this chapter hopes to have illustrated what has been shown in other chapters as well, namely that the production of space is highly dependent on the user of the space and highly subjective in terms of who is and is not able to be an active participant in the creation of space. Asserting oneself in a space turns out to be much more complex than could be explained by a single factor, although in the case of cafés, educational and socioeconomic standing, as well as gender, appear to play large roles in determining who is able to use the space in a way that is most beneficial to them. For some, then, as is exemplified by Doris, cafés are not able to function as spaces where one can be authentic in behavior, and one can only ever stage an image of oneself. Yet, for others, such as Fabian and Cornelia, cafés are indeed capable of becoming spaces of refuge and privacy,

to a certain extent. And for many others, as Tergit describes, cafés became the living room

that was missing from their lives and thereby filled an important role in helping individuals,

and the creative community, to flourish.

CONCLUSION:
IN DEFENSE OF A SPATIAL READING OF INTERIOR SPACE AND GENDER


As discussed throughout this dissertation, the Weimar Republic was an era in which individuals, especially women, were granted new freedoms and could live out their lives in ways that were not previously possible. It was a time of immense upheaval within society, in which questions of gender, agency, and life choices dominated the scene, and in which trauma, often unspoken, continued to take center stage. One of the most unique aspects of this era was the access that women had to new and reconfigured interior spaces, which held the promise of greater equality for all. The spaces investigated in this study—the home, the office, and the café—became the sites in which these new ideas of freedom were negotiated. The home was modernized and stripped of its traditional functions; instead, it was re-envisioned as a space that would free individuals, especially women, from a life tied to the home, as had been the case in the past, by ceasing to be a fully domestic space. The modern office, which included the *Neue Frau* working in it, was to be the space in which men and women worked together, allowing both genders to advance their careers and support themselves financially. And cafés, long the exclusive domain of men, were opened to women from all walks of life for the first time and were seen as spaces to which the young, after a long day at the office, could come to decompress and enjoy the social scene for which Berlin

was famed during this era.[133] Yet, as I have argued in this study, reading interior space in literature reveals the limitations that these spaces held as spaces of modernity. For, while they offered access to new territory, I argue that this access did not live up to the unbounded freedom and equality expected.

My reading of interior space in this dissertation has been grounded in Henri Lefebvre's assertion that all space is produced space, an idea that has proved fruitful in reading interior space within the novels discussed.[134] Lefebvre argues against the possibility of the existence of neutral space and instead states that all space, even if it is not immediately obvious, is produced space, and is thereby embedded with ideology and reinforced by the actors within the space. He therefore conceives of space as a social product, with the interactions within space both reinforcing and simultaneously hiding the complexity of the process of this production. Having read the modernist reconfiguration of interior spaces during the Weimar era through this spatial theory, this project is able to assert that the illusion of modernist design, that it creates a space free from past limitations and history, is a false promise—an impossibility. For, even in removing all sites of memory, and in creating spaces that were defined by lack and clean, simple lines, and conceived of as "new," these sites nonetheless were spaces embedded with ideological limitations. Modernist design then, while visually free from the past constraints of décor and excess, could not act as a tabula rasa because the nature of space could not allow for a conception of space as neutral. Space is always produced, and thus always laden with restrictions. Reading space as socially produced

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[133]As discussed in Chapter 3, prior to this, the only women who frequented cafés were the prostitutes, and occasionally, members of the artistic elite.

[134] See: Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

allowed us to discover what values were driving society during the Weimar era and also

enabled us to see the implications of these values on individuals' perceptions of self.

In Chapter 1 and the space of the home, I showed how this complexity played out in

the protagonists' interactions with their rented homes. In looking at Erich Kästner's *Fabian*,

we saw how Fabian and Cornelia both struggled to define their homes as private spaces and

yet were unable to do so.[135] My reading of *Fabian* illustrated how the privacy of the home

was constantly negated through spatial, aural, and visual loss of boundaries, which

disallowed an understanding of the home as a site of privacy. This loss of boundaries was

discussed in economic terms, in which both space and income were scarce, and because of

which the protagonists found themselves living in rented rooms that inherently problematized

the question of spatial boundaries. The blurring of boundaries was also discussed from a

psychological perspective, in which we saw how individuals were fearful of inscribing their

spaces with memories, as most memories were tied to a past trauma of loss. By resisting

memory inscription upon domestic space, the space of the home was shown to be one defined

by lack: a lack of traditional features such as comfort and privacy, and a lack of memories

tying individuals to the space. I therefore argued for the validity of understanding the home

as a domestic space that no longer functioned according to its traditional roles and was

therefore no longer fully domestic.

Chapter 1 also emphasized the role of gender and argued that the loss of the

traditional home was more keenly felt by women, for whom the space of the home had been

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[135]Kästner, Erich. *Fabian: The Geschichte eines Moralisten*. 1931. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008.

the traditional space of female agency and power. As seen both in Kästner's *Fabian* in the role of Cornelia and in Fallada's *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* in the role of Lämmchen, this proved to be especially true for female characters who did not desire to be the *Neue Frau*, but rather, longed to inhabit a more traditional home.[136] For these women, the impossibility of transforming the space of the modern rented room into a traditional home was shown to be the cause of much anxiety. Insecurity, then, marked the female experience of space as discussed in these works, in which women were shown to have been dis-placed, losing their sites of agency, and yet also left without any alternative space of influence. In short, this chapter illustrated how homes became the site in which questions regarding the role of women and their control over their lives manifested themselves. Homes were also discussed as spaces in which past trauma was wrestled with, whether through the characters attempts to avoid all inscription of memory, or whether by living in a space too filled with memory and regret. The loss of the traditional home was thereby shown to have an impact on the construction of the protagonists' identities and their ability to function within an urban environment.

To clarify, this research does not, however, desire to make an argument for or against any specific design or construction of the home, but rather, it points to the inherent risk in having a lack of choice over how one wishes to live. Reading the space of the home in literature is a way of illustrating how, when not allowed to craft a home according to the image one wishes it to be, the resulting emotional duress is both real and far-reaching. While the reconfiguration of homes as modern spaces was intended to free individuals from the

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[136]Fallada, Hans. *Kleiner Mann, was nun?* 1932. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1950.

burden of the home, it proved to be equally problematic to deny individuals the possibility of producing a home as a space of privacy and as a space upon which to inscribe oneself. This was seen to be true both for the younger women who had to contend with living in rented rooms instead of the traditional homes they longed for, but also for the older women acting as landladies, whose position within the home was destabilized because of their need to rent out rooms within their previously private domestic space.

In discussing the space of the office in Chapter 2, I showed how the office, despite being designed as a modern, equality-espousing space, is seen depicted in the literature as a thoroughly anti-modern space. Here, women were allowed new access to the space, but they were relegated to a very small, specific area of the office as "Tippmädels," with all other aspects and spaces of the office remaining closed off to them. Furthermore, their treatment within the office confirmed their position as aspects of décor, in which their youth and beauty were put on display as a sign of the modernity of the office. The social relations of reproduction of the space were shown to be configured in a way that devalued women's intellectual contributions. I argued then that the modern office was configured as a space in which women were relegated to being *seen* first and foremost. Their contribution to the production of the space of the office was furthermore, aside from appearance, based on being *heard*—not in terms of speech, but rather, in terms of the production of the sounds of typing. Equating women with the machinery of the office served to further dehumanize them and reinforced their role in the space as a space itself, which was to be fashioned according to modernist principles. In summary, this chapter then challenged the traditional reading of women's historic exit from the white-collar office as a decision based on personal preference,

and argued that a reading of the space of the office illustrated the role and the relations of reproduction that encouraged women's exodus from white-collar employment. The office was shown to be a space that, despite striving to incorporate modernist ideals, proved to be anti-modern in its underlying ideology.

In Chapter 3, this research then turned towards a reading of the spaces of cafés, and through an investigation of individuals' interactions within this space confirmed that women's access to the space did not necessarily lead to their equal ability to contribute to and partake in the production of the space. Rather, I argued that other factors—most importantly, one's level of education—were the determinants of whether or not the protagonists were able to participate as active agents within the space. For some, as was seen in *Fabian*, when education was present, the café was able to be constructed as a space of privacy and comfort, qualities that were desired, as they were no longer found within the space of the home. This idea of the production of the space of the café as a more intimate space was further reinforced in Tergit's novel *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*, in which she likened the cafe to a "zu Hause."[137] My reading of her novel showed how individuals actively worked against the modernist design of the café, and in contrast to the architectural aims of the space, were able to configure the space as one that allowed for the reestablishment of privacy. In that way, cafés were able to become spaces that served as the living rooms that these protagonists no longer had at home. Moreover, in highlighting the role of gender in this chapter, my reading of Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* showed how a lack of education limited women within these spaces and allowed them to only exist as a body to be

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[137]Tergit, Gabriele. *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*. 1931. Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2004.

staged within the space. Thus, while women were granted access to cafés, they often could not participate equally within the space, very much mirroring women's positions within the office as that of a decorative item but not as an active producer of space.

The texts chosen for this project reflect the changes that the configuration of interior space underwent and show how these changes led to immense struggles for the protagonists in their attempts to define themselves within these changing spaces. In this way, reading space within the literature of the late Weimar Republic has allowed us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between built space and lived experience, and it has also illuminated the role of gender in the perception and production of space. In short, examining depictions of interior spaces has exposed the ideology embedded in these modern interior spaces and thereby shattered the illusion that these modern spaces are free of ideological constructs.

Furthermore, my research has shown how central a reading of interior space is to the understanding of the urban existence in general, depicting the interconnected nature of spaces, and showing how our understanding of Weimar culture and literature is enhanced if we allow for an incorporation of a theorization of interior space into the larger theorization of city life. This project asserts the relevance of reading literature through the lens of spatial theory, and of privileging the interior, as interior spaces—specifically the home, the office, and the café—have been shown to be the sites within which questions of gender, power, agency, and privacy are played out and renegotiated. Interior space, especially the domestic interior, has also been shown to be the space in which trauma associated with the war found expression in unexpected ways.

An investigation of the changes that interior spaces underwent, and the social and cultural shifts that the renegotiating of space represents, sheds light on this specific historical moment and yet also transcends the Weimar Republic era. The years that followed the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era that followed reveal the power and perceived danger that these spaces held as spaces of modernity, which were seen as a threat to the regime.[138] Much as the spaces during the Weimar Republic aimed to be designed free of memories of the past war, so too were the spaces reconfigured once again to obliterate the memory of the turbulent Weimar years and attempt to reestablish tradition and enforce limitations on individuals.[139] In many ways then, Weimar Berlin was a unique time in which modernist ideas were tried on, only to be discarded a few years later.

The importance of this research in establishing a better understanding of interior space within Weimar culture then also opens up a different reading of the production of

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[138]The Nazis saw Modernism, especially in the context of design, as a liberal, marxist, Jewish movement, and thereby inherently anti-German, and thus institutions (and individuals) were targeted and removed from spheres of influence. The Bauhaus, for example, was shut down in 1933 after the fall of the Weimar Republic. See: Sudjic, Deyan. *B is for Bauhaus*. London: Penguin UK, 2014. Also: Bergdoll, Barry, and Leah Dickermann. *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009.

[139]A large portion of Nazi propaganda was aimed at reestablishing women's roles as homemakers and mothers. Likewise, the design of homes returned to a glorification of turn of the century décor, including a focus on intricate, heavy furniture, as well as decorative elements such as landscape paintings, photography, etc. As noted in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, "Nazi culture amounted to little more than a celebration of... bourgeois kitsch" (111). Gellately, Robert, and Nathan Stoltzfus, eds. *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. This change in design aesthetics was most obvious in the Nazi propagated image of the ideal home, in which house (and even gardens) were redesigned, eschewing all modernist tendencies. See for example: Etlin, Richard A. *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. This push towards a change in use of space was also seen in the policies towards women and employment, in which laws were created to limit women's access to education and allowed for their removal from the workforce. See: Stackelberg, Roderick, and Sally A. Winkle. *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2002, 181 & 308. Yet as discussed in *Gender and Jewish History*, the idealization of the homemaker did not always reflect reality, as war efforts necessitated women to at times be employed outside of the home. Yet even when employed, women's roles and value was far below that of Weimar Germany, in that there was not even a pretense of their belonging in the workforce any longer that absolutely necessary. See: Kaplan, Marion A, and Deborah Dash Moore. *Gender and Jewish History*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2011.

space in the eras that followed. For example, the espoused political nature of women's return to the home is problematized in light of our reading of the home within Weimar Republic literature. While the return of the traditional home in the Nazi era was, without a doubt, a repressive move that limited women's newly acquired freedom, our reading of the home in Chapter 1 allows us to see why this move away from the modern home may have been embraced by some women, who felt displaced and longed for a more traditional home. Understanding interior space in Weimar then allows for a different understanding of how and why propaganda was able to seize upon this sense of displacement and thereby craft a loyalty independent of other political agendas.

This idea is a frightening and sobering realization that stresses the potential political nature of space, much as Tergit argued it did at the end of her novel's third chapter, in which she discusses the café and the lack of a space to move on to and argues that the options available were not the spaces one would want to inhabit. Unfortunately, many did not have a choice in the matter: the home, the office, and the café all succumbed to Nazi fervor. While the spaces of the Weimar Republic were then both spaces that were not as modern or equal as their rhetoric suggested, the production of space in the era to follow was a clear step backwards towards even further limiting individuals, especially women, in their ability to assert themselves and participate in the production of space. Reading space in Weimar literature therefore opens up the doors to researching space within other contexts as well, providing a foundation upon which to build, yet it also stressed the unique situation that was present during these years in their construction of space.

Thus, while this study has focused on a very specific moment in time, I believe the idea of privileging a spatial reading of interior space is applicable across time. Interior spaces continue to be relevant sites in which individuals negotiate questions of use and purpose and through which they craft their identities. These interior spaces—of the home, the office, and the café—continue to be the primary sites that lives are lived in and defined through, and they continue to evolve and change in form and function. Capturing these changes in the negotiation of space can provide a more complete, complex understanding of the literature and culture produced during any given era. Much as Claudia Brodsky described décor within space as "mute things that speak," I would argue that interior space, while often overlooked within the context of literary scholarship and spatial theory, is comprised not only of mute things that speak, but also of a space itself that speaks.[140] Listening to what it has to tell about the negotiation of gender and power allows us to gain a better understanding of how individuals struggle to define themselves within the spaces we all inhabit. Returning to Lefebvre's understanding of space as a social product that refers back to, reinforces, and hides behind the illusion of transparency, efforts to tease out the elements that contribute to space's production allow us to see how interior space participates in the larger production of society.

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[140]Brodsky, Claudia. *In the Place of Language: Literature and the Architecture of the Referent*. Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2009.

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