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## Images of society: Identifying the 'working girl' as coding the public sphere

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# Images of society: Identifying the 'working girl' as coding the public sphere

Sabine Biebl

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Revised and expended version of an oral presentation at the interdisciplinary conference: "Working Girls: Zur Ökonomie von Liebe und Arbeit in der Moderne" ("Working Girls: On the economy of love and work in the modern age") at February 25-28, 2005 in Munich. I wish to thank R. Obst for the translation.

## Observations

- 1 They were everywhere: on sidewalks, in cafes, on park benches, in offices, in department stores, in movie theaters, in amusement parks – at the end of the 1920s they were everywhere: shop girls and office girls, typists, private secretaries, telephone operators. These young single women with their Hollywood faces, their elastic and wiry bodies, short hair and skirts, their thin legs covered by silk stockings crowded the public sphere of the cities<sup>1</sup>.

Whoever passes through the city's business district, just before 8 a.m. or after office or business hours in the evening, encounters a characteristic army of girls and women who rush to work in business premises or return tired from work: these are the masses of female salaried employees. They are the dominant image of the city's street<sup>2</sup>.

- 2 One can read this passage in the introduction to a poll conducted and published by the Central Association of the White Collar Workers in 1929 on several thousand 'working girls'<sup>3</sup>.

## Street images as images of society

- 3 The street is an area where the public and the hidden meet and interact, while the boundaries of this polarity are in a state of flux. Both, the apparent and the obscure, can be seen by looking at the street. Thus this look is oscillating between observing and decoding the visible. The Weimar society of the late 1920s seemed to define itself by views of the street – in the literal and metaphorical sense. The street is both its projection screen and surface of reflection. Time and again this society externalizes views of its inner workings: it generates typologies, is obsessed by form, and shifts its center to the exterior metropolis, which becomes a challenge to the senses<sup>4</sup>. In media, new categories of representation gain popularity that make use of the observer's perspective, such as eye-witness reportage and first-hand documentary<sup>5</sup>.
- 4 At the end of the 1920s 'the Street' serves as arena and metaphor for what society can and should be. The belief in the neutrality of pure perception and in the veracity of images produced by 'the Street' merges with a voyeuristic gaze upon what occurs beyond regulation, e.g., love, crime, and prostitution. A discourse about the street, its objects and actors emerges. For Siegfried Kracauer 'the Street' is habitat for things, a place where fundamental polarities and traditional systems of reference collapse. Therefore, reality, in its emphatic sense, becomes visible, even if just conveyed and represented by the media<sup>6</sup>. For ideologues 'the Street' is the territory of the masses and of chaos where the feared modernity crystallizes<sup>7</sup>. Guardians of public morals and enlighteners read the moral and hygienic state of society off 'the Street': e.g., a conference took place in 1931 on the topic "The Street Sight after RGBG taking effect", where "RGBG" stands for the "Reich's Law Against the Spread of Veneral Diseases". The actual matter of concern was the presence of prostitutes in public.
- 5 Berlin's streets were narrow around 1930. Flaneurs shared them with prostitutes, ladies and gentlemen, reporters, workers, jobless, war veterans, Freicorps units, demonstrators, pedestrians, with the crowd, the traffic ... This 'society,' which likely could have been encountered this way since 1918, was joined by white collar workers and, most notably, by working girls. But there is something wrong with this snapshot. It combines key players of society who do not belong together in a picture, who even exclude each other. It introduces differences that do not function properly in the synchronicity of the moment: for wherever the mass enters the stage one cannot find white collar workers, neither male nor female. By contrast, the unemployed, like demonstrators and workers, are merely manifestations of the mass. Veterans, Freicorps fighters, unemployed, whores, ladies and gentlemen, however, can effortlessly be arranged side by side in an image<sup>8</sup>.

## Nowhere to be seen

- 6 The 'working girl' is nowhere to be seen. She disappears as soon as she enters the stage. What remains is the depiction of the 'New Woman of the 20s,' indistinctly defined by the open boundaries of the types 'lady' and 'prostitute'. Beyond her work, she cannot be distinctly visualized because there are no optically significant attributes that determine her. This is true for the white collar workers in general. Admittedly their male representatives can be identified as "man with the briefcase<sup>10</sup>," as Kurt Tucholsky

observed at the end of the 1920s. The female white collar worker lacks that briefcase. The working girl does not appear in paintings, except in rare cases where the subtitle identifies her as such<sup>11</sup>. Among the entries submitted for a 1928 artists' competition organized around the theme of "The most beautiful German woman portrait" and issued by the cosmetic company Elida, there was not a single depiction of a working woman. And a year later contemporaries derided the "The Woman of Today" exhibition by the 'Association of Berlin's Women Artists' due to insufficient representation of "everyday life of modern women<sup>12</sup>."

- 7 A similar situation can be observed in art photography: in August Sander's society reconstruction "People of the 20th Century," there are merely two images of female white collar workers. Both deviate from 'the secretary's' and 'the assistant's' stereotypical imagery in different ways<sup>13</sup>. While one has no soft features, the other lacks a sense of fashion. This assistant represents the type 'old spinster' rather than 'working girl,' which is frequently featured in contemporary novels and short stories about office life such as Christa-Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (*Fates behind typewriters*)<sup>14</sup>. It is just her who is unequivocally identifiable as 'working girl', because she is depicted in her workspace.
- 8 Not at all do working girls belong to the personnel of street images and depictions of public places. Even documentary photography does not notice them. The well known press photographer and owner of one of Weimar's biggest photo agency, Willy Römer, whose pictures frequently appeared on the cover of the *Berliner Illustrierten*, was interested in blue collar workers, but not in female shop assistants or secretaries. His street pictures and snapshots of leisure culture show different personnel or frame them differently<sup>15</sup>. However, wasn't there in Luna Park that "Rollercoaster," that Siegfried Kracauer saw blue and white collar workers flock to on Saturday nights<sup>16</sup>?
- 9 To my knowledge, numerous depictions of working girls can only be found in advertisement sections of magazines like *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Die Woche* or *Münchener Illustrierte Presse*. They show the working girl, however, in the workplace and tell the typical plot that develops around the protagonist by the sequence of image and text. In an advertising campaign for "Hind's Almond Honey Crème,"<sup>17</sup> the reader would find first "department store girls" (Fig. 1), and then "office girls" (Fig. 2). In a third variation one encounters "young ladies" in the Hamburg hotel Atlantic (Fig. 3). However, the transformation of the working girl to the lady, which can happen after shopping or office hours, seems to take its toll: out of 87 department store girls and 835 office girls, just 22 made it to the Atlantic.
- 10 In other advertisements, the iconography already indicates the ambiguity of the figure (Fig. 4 and 5)<sup>18</sup>. The woman's professional life is denoted via the workplace which she is depicted in, like sitting at the desk or in front of the typewriter. Usually a male colleague or superior is placed next to her. The arrangement of the figures and their positions can be read in two ways: the boss behind the secretary or leaning against the desk could also be her husband, who puts himself in the traditional position in a couple or family portrait. It is exactly this ambiguous iconography that characterizes representations of the working girl. It condenses the story the working girl is subjected to and reduces it to its substrate. The scene of seduction is part of it: its literary portrayals frequently use the assembly of characters described before. Iconographically it anticipates the final image of the working girl-story, the married couple.

## Ideal plot

- 11 Based on roughly 100 short stories, novels, and films, the following ideal plot appears: Unlike bourgeois women before, the pretty, smart, and diligent middle-class girl of the twenties is forced by necessity to earn her living by herself and even support her family. This change in circumstance often goes along with a move from the provinces to the city. Sometimes the girl has a working class background, but mostly she comes from a bourgeois family that suffers under the economic depression. The fathers, unable to admit defeat, are either dead from the outset or will soon commit suicide. The mothers, however, barely realize that circumstances have changed, and mostly begin to do so through help from their streetwise daughters. This painful process of understanding starts with the move from the front-facing to the rear house. Hereby, the generations represent the world views of the Wilhelmenian period facing the modern. While the not-yet-dead fathers seriously hamper progress, i.e., the daughter's self-reliantly chosen path through modern life, the durable mothers appear as lovable but bothersome remnants of times past<sup>19</sup>. The girls start working as secretaries or accountants. Sales girls play just minor parts, except when we are dealing with very sad<sup>20</sup> or politically activist stories<sup>21</sup>. For an easy happy ending the sales girl is too close to the prostitute, a similarity that has been put forward in countless pulp magazines such as *Warenhausmädchen – Schicksale einer Gefallenen* (*Department store girl: The fate of a fallen one*)<sup>22</sup>. On the one hand, in the office the protagonist meets her future husband as successful colleague or boss. Between them a morally still acceptable love story ensues, finally ending in marriage. On the other hand, she encounters the evil kind of male superior whose stalking she fights off regardless of potential consequences. In the late twenties, however, the scenarios increasingly describe the protagonists' difficulties: Love still prevails, but the social climbing part does not turn out well anymore. The white collar workers are being fired and more precarious stories develop, describing life outside bourgeoisie standards as 'new bohemians' or political activists<sup>23</sup>. Implicitly, however, this lack of success is still set against the ideal of the working girl's plot.
- 12 This ideal plot has a strong impact on the understanding of the 'working girls' at the time, even where its character of illusion and distraction is to be debunked. Thus the aforementioned 1929 poll checked off that pattern of life sketched out accordingly in magazines and novels. Hereby the problem is not the pattern itself, but the sheer impossibility to live it out: "No money and no time," is the most frequent answer to the question about beauty care, sports, leisure time, and holidays<sup>24</sup>. It appears as though the stories are not compared to reality, but reality to the stories, which have formed an ideal type.
- 13 In these novels and stories the working girl is present in the street fairly soon. But these texts pretend to tell the stories of individuals. A reflection of the character about her own form of mass existence occurs only in the late 20s. This, however, does not lead to a declaration of solidarity with the white collar masses, but to a heightened awareness of separating her own success story from them.

## Collisions: The semantics of the visible

- 14 The working girl is perceived as a mass phenomenon and dominant factor in the street scene by an outside gaze. The onlooker is the sociologist and the flâneur. It is not surprising that it is just these observers who 'discover' the working girl as part of the crowd. Traditionally both have an interest in social mass phenomena. For the flâneur, the city's flowing masses are a habitat necessary for his very existence. The sociologist of the 20s is attracted by the (socially) amorphous structure of the 'mass.'
- 15 The entry of the working girl causes a collision with just that (old) concept of the masses. It has to give way or has to transform itself, because an alternative cast populates the public space and another street scene emerges. This finding corresponds to Jünger's in *Der Arbeiter (The Worker)*:
- The old masses are embodied in the throng of Sundays and holidays, in society, in political gatherings, [...] or in the uproar of the street, the flocking together in front of the Bastille, whose brutal force tipped the scales in hundreds of battles: These masses belong to the past, as well as those who refer to them as a determining factor<sup>25</sup>.
- 16 The masses as a phenomenon proliferating in the public space was the object of a discourse which had its peak in the 20s, but whose tradition reaches back into the 19th century and further<sup>26</sup>. The prototypes of this ideologically charged and pejoratively used term were the proletarian masses. It denoted a group of people in which the individual surrenders his or her conscious self-determination and merges into the crowd by suggestion or contagion of a common will. The masses were thought of as chaotic, unpredictable, and spontaneous.
- 17 Although the white collar workers increasingly resembled the proletariat in the quantitative and qualitative sense, they were excluded from the politico-ideological discussion. They made up the 'Neuen Mittelstand' ('new middle class'), which, just by its very notion, suggests other qualities like balance and stability. In the discussion on the female white collar workers the whole group is getting dangerously close to the masses. A completely new type of social mass phenomenon appeared on the street scene: The figure of the female white collar worker in the Germany of the 20s is an individual. Loneliness, to be resolved in love, is always the matter of stories. The 'German' working girl traverses the public space with the aim to make her very private fortune. This does not get changed by the political efforts from the left to strengthen solidarity among female white collar workers which are described in Breitenbach's short stories *Rot gegen Rot (Red Against Red)* or in Braune's novel *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat (The Girl at the Orga Privat)*<sup>27</sup>. Multiplied, the working girl does not become a mass of people but a series. There are similar paths, similar forms of existence, similar goals, but no common ones.
- 18 Another effect of the concept of the working girl adds a serial quality to her mass appearance: her presence and acting in public is neither chaotic nor erratic, because it is subject to certain rules. The working girl visualizes the rhythms of modern work life and thereby put structure into the chaotic city, and modernity itself:

In the light's course between the city murals there are certain times of their appearing and vanishing – they come and go ever in flocks, many by themselves, sure, but still every one put into the large machineries that cranks them all up. [...] It is a big stream early at 8, in the evening at 5 and at 7 o'clock, while its tributaries between 12 and 2 pm, the home-dropping of the lunch-time girls, are less

noticeable. All this belongs together and surrounds the existence of the briskly walking girls: the clerks and shop assistants<sup>28</sup>.

- 19 This 'social series' does not constitute a spontaneous, temporary and local phenomenon, but rather a stable continuum in space and time rhythmically organized. Following McLuhan and Theweleit, it can be called a technical structure that is reconnected to its industrial mode of production<sup>29</sup>.
- 20 It is tempting to hypothesize that the construction of the working girl type, as created in visuals and literature, had an influence on its environment. The potential implied and the stories invoked by this figure empower it to give an alternative meaning to the public space. Around 1930 the city's street was charged as a place where the chaos of the unhinged times became manifest. It was the showplace of political, social, and ideological battles. On it, the working girl now appears as a character who signals the affirmation of modernity without necessarily breaking with the past. Thus, on the one hand, the working girl is a 'child of her time,' i.e., often was orphaned or, at least, fatherless. This exhibited privacy is thereby withdrawn from the sphere of the hidden. On the other hand, the private and intimate discourses that the working girl brings to the street grew niches into the public sphere, which themselves, however, are visible. Perhaps one can follow that pacified social zones developed. Finally the working girls affects her environment and charges it not politically, but erotically.
- 21 This can, however, lead to overreactions: In 1930 a novel appears that made this latter effect in its national and international dimension the topic of discussion: *Worbs: Ein komischer Roman* (*Worbs: A comical novel*) by Anton Ulitz<sup>30</sup>. It describes the battle of the honest savings bank clerk Anton Worbs against the beginning of the women's government, i.e., of working girls, which transforms him into a determined opponent of the World War I. Worbs predicts that the offices will be flooded by women as soon as the men take up arms. The streets were already crowded with legs.

And some were pale as veal, others were shimmering greyly like mice and others violet, or, if they want to stay very plain, simply brown, but they were all transparent and behind the artificial gleaming of the stocking's color the worse glow of the naked flesh shone through.

- 22 Worbs makes the following assessment of the situation:
- 23 The woman is more dangerous than France and Russia combined, the woman is sensual, [...] and sensuality and sense of duty, sensuality and officialdom, and sensuality and public weal will remain deadly foes for ever<sup>31</sup>.

## The Flaneur as Reporter

- 24 We better leave the realm of world politics and turn to the other observer of the city street, the flaneur<sup>32</sup>. He actually came into dire straits when the working girls appeared on the scene. Almost like an invocation appears Siegfried Kracauer's constantly recurring reference to one of the ur-stories of the flaneur, *The man of the crowd* by Edgar Allan Poe<sup>33</sup>. In this story it is the intriguing expression on an old man's face that attracts the narrator's attention in the crowd of a city street and makes him follow the man through the bustle of people. The narrator assumes an abysmal story behind these features. However such people of the street have no story but the street itself:

Again one will have to think mainly of the city street with its ever-moving anonymous crowds. The kaleidoscopic sights mingle with unidentified shapes and



fragmentary visual complexes and cancel each other out, thereby preventing the onlooker from following up any of the innumerable suggestions they offer. What appears to him are not so much sharp-contoured individuals engaged in this or that definable pursuit as loose throngs of sketchy, completely indeterminate figures. Each has a story, yet the story is not given. Instead, an incessant flow of possibilities and near-intangible meanings appears. This flow casts its spell over the flâneur or even creates him. The flâneur is intoxicated with life in the street – life eternally dissolving the patterns which it is about to form<sup>34</sup>.

- 25 With the working girls the flaneur of the Berlin streets of the late 20s discovers types who are noticeable due to their repeated occurrence. He looks for them, because he knows their stories already. In one of his texts, however, Franz Hessel started the search for the secret of the “caretaking of body and soul of the capable office girls of Berlin<sup>35</sup>.” Tellingly he searched office drawers and purses, the intimate places of the modern woman which would, so he hoped, reveal their interior to him. At their bottom he came across powder boxes and lipsticks. What he learned were tips for cosmetics and how they are connected to a woman’s career.
- 26 There is no secret to be drawn from ‘the type,’ since her story rushes on. With the appearance of the working girl the flaneur switches jobs and becomes a reporter. This is not exactly a professional advancement for someone who used to go “botanizing”<sup>36</sup> in the street, because he is left with eliciting tautological images from society.

Suddenly she turned her little head up to me,

- 27 it says in Hessel's *Frühstück mit einer Verkäuferin* (*Breakfast With a Salesgirl*)<sup>37</sup>:

'And you? Actually, what do you do?'

‘Guess!’

‘Not hard. Journalist.’

'Bravo. How did you notice?'

'How you interviewed me.'

**Fig. 1: 835 Berliner Büro Girls**





**87 KÖLNER WARENHAUS - GURUS**



**erklären „HINDS“ Mandel-Tonic KREM für das vorzügliche Mittel zur Pflege der Hände**

Sie sind jung und weisen Haut vorzeitig mit ihren Sorgen – und wir haben auch schon die ersten und ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerkt. Sie können sich nicht leisten, wenn Sie nicht die besten Mittel zur Pflege der Hände verwenden. Sie müssen sich nicht fürchten, wenn Sie die ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerken. Sie müssen sich nicht fürchten, wenn Sie die ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerken.

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Die ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerken Sie nicht. Sie müssen sich nicht fürchten, wenn Sie die ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerken. Sie müssen sich nicht fürchten, wenn Sie die ersten Zeichen der Hautalterung bemerken.

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[illegible]

Fig. 4: "Schreibe überall nur mit rheinmetall"



FIG. 5: "Du hast recht, das wird seine haupt überraschung werden !"



Fig. 6: Berufstätige frauen !



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## NOTES

1. Cf. also Maren Dorner and Katrin Völkner, "Lebenswelten der weiblichen Angestellten: Kontor, Kino und Konsum?" in *Neue Frauen zwischen den Zeiten*, ed. Petra Boc and Katja Koblitz, Berlin 1995, p. 84.
2. *Die weiblichen Angestellten: Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse*, ed. Susanne Suhr, Berlin, Zentralverband der Angestellten, 1930, p. 3 et seq.
3. Here and in the following 'working girl' is used as a phrase for the very type of young working women as described below; for the phrase cf. Heide Volkening, "Einleitung" in *Working Girls: Zur*

*Ökonomie von Arbeit und Liebe in der Moderne*, ed. Sabine Biebl, Verena Mund and Heide Volkening, Berlin, 2007, pp 7-22.

4. Cf. Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, p. 270 et seq.

5. For this fascination with 'objectivity' ('Sachlichkeit') cf. Helmut Lethen, *Verhaltenslehren der Kälte: Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen*, Frankfurt/M., 1994, esp. pp 50 et seq., 187 et seq.

6. Cf. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton, 1997 (first ed. 1961), pp 62 et seq., 72 et seq.

7. Cf. again Kracauer in his early review of the film *The Street* (directed by Karl Grune, Germany 1923) in *Werke*, vol. 6.1, pp 56-58, cit. p. 56 et seq.: "The city street is a characteristic showplace of such illusory life. People cross it as accident will, brush each other and part without a word of greeting. No meeting of souls transpires, no meaningful and enduring connection binds and unites, nothing tragic happens between them, which would require as a prerequisite a real relationship and actual decisions based on it. Just figures collide, events occur, and circumstance blindly follows circumstance; all that without continuity and succession, a ghostly, unreal together of unreal people, which is unable to fill the emptily flowing time."

8. For examples cf. street scenes by George Grosz, eg., *Die Straße* (1915), or by Rudolf Schlichter, eg., *Passanten und Reichswehr* (1925/26) and *Hausvogteiplatz* (1926).

9. Cf. Rudolf Schlichter's portrait of the prostitute *Margot* (1924).

10. Kurt Tucholsky, "Der Mann mit der Mappe" (1927) in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Reinbek, 1989, pp 146-148.

11. Cf. e.g., footnote no. 14.

12. Willi Wolfradt, "Rundschau. Berliner Ausstellungen" in *Der Cicerone* 21 (1929), p. 677 et seq.

13. Cf. August Sander, *Secretary at West German Radio* (Cologne, 1931) and *Saving Bank Typist* (Cologne, 1928).

14. Christa Anita-Brück, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, Berlin, 1930; for a satirical example cf. Martin Kessel's short story "Das Horoskop" (The Horoscope) in *Eine Frau ohne Reiz: 3 Novellen aus Berlin*, Berlin, 1929, pp 7-24.

15. Cf. *Auf den Straßen von Berlin: Der Fotograf Willy Römer, 1887-1979*, ed. Diethart Krebs, Berlin, 2004.

16. Siegfried Kracauer, "Berg- und Talbahn" in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 14.7.1928.

17. "835 Berliner Büro-Girls" in *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* (1928), no. 41, p. 1315; "87 Kölner Warenhaus-Girls" in *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* (1928), no. 48, p. 1519; "Ein Tanztee im Hamburger Hotel 'Atlantic'" in *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* (1928), no. 47, p. 1511.

18. Cf. the advertisement für "Kölnisch Wasser" in *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* (1928), no. 41, p. 1313; "Elida Hautpflege" in *Die Woche* (1929), no. 38; cf. also Sabine Schlingmann, 'Die Woche' – *Illustrierte im Zeichen emanzipatorischen Aufbruchs?* *Frauenbild, Kultur- und Rollenmuster in Kaiserzeit, Republik und Diktatur (1899-1944): Eine empirische Analyse*, Hamburg, 2007, p. 261 et seq.

19. Cf. Grete Urbanitzky, *Sekretärin Vera*, Hannover, 1930; Kessel, Martin, *Herrn Brechers Fiasko*, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1932; et al.

20. Cf. Joseph Roth, *Der blinde Spiegel: Ein kleiner Roman*, Berlin, 1925; et al.

21. Cf. Josef Breitbach, *Rot gegen Rot: Erzählungen*, Stuttgart, 1929.

22. Ungern-Sternberg, Alexander Freiherr von, *Ein Warenhaus-Mädchen: Schicksale einer Gefallenen*, Berlin, 1909.

23. Cf. Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi, eine von uns*, Berlin, 1931; *ib.*, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Berlin, 1932; Karl Aloys Schenzinger, *Man will uns kündigen*, Berlin, 1931; Albert Klaus, *Die Hungernden: Ein Arbeitslosenroman*, Berlin, 1932, et al.

24. *Die weiblichen Angestellten*, op. cit., p. 46.

25. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, Berlin, 1932, p. 110.

26. Cf. for the following Paul Nolte, *Die Ordnung der deutschen Gesellschaft: Selbstentwurf und Selbstbeschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert*, München, 2000, pp 118-127.
27. Josef Breitbach, *Rot gegen Rot: Erzählungen*, Stuttgart, 1929; Rudolf Braune: *Das Mädchen an der Orga Privat: Ein kleiner Roman aus Berlin*, Frankfurt/M., 1930.
28. Anatol von Persich, "Die Mädchen mit dem eiligen Gang" in *Die schöne Frau* (1927); quoted from *Industriegebiet der Intelligenz: Literatur im Neuen Berliner Wesen der 20er und 30er Jahre*, ed. Ernest Wichner and Herbert Wiesner, Berlin, 1990, p. 59.
29. Vgl. Klaus Theweleit, "Canettis Masse-Begriff" in *Ghosts: Drei leicht inkorrekte Vorträge*, Frankfurt/M. et al., 1998, p. 223; Theweleit refers to Marshall McLuhan's considerations of chorus girls in his first book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York, 1951). – For the working girls as social series cf. figure 6, i.e., the advertisement for "Creme Mouson" in *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* (1929), no. 44, p. 1417.
30. Arnold Ulitz, *Worbs: Ein komischer Roman*, Berlin, 1930.
31. *Ibid.* pp 17, 11.
32. For 'the flaneur' as a key figure of modernity cf. Harald Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur: Konzeptionen der Moderne*, Würzburg, 1999.
33. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" in *Complete Tales & Poems*, New York, 1975, pp 475-481.
34. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, op. cit., p. 72; for Poe's concept of the flaneur cf. Neumeyer, *Der Flaneur*, pp 31-37.
35. Franz Hessel, "Interview in einer kleinen Konditorei" in *Sämtliche Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. Hartmut Vollmer and Bernd Witte, vol. 3: "Städte und Porträts", ed. Bernhard Echte, Oldenburg, 1999, pp 241-244, cit. p. 241.
36. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. I.2, Frankfurt/M., 1991, p. 538.
37. Franz Hessel, "Frühstück mit einer Verkäuferin" in *Sämtliche Werke in fünf Bänden*, vol. 3, op. cit., pp 235-240, cit. p. 239.

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## ABSTRACTS

The Weimar Society's imaginary seemed concerned with the street as the exterior, backdrop, and screen for its projections and reflections on itself. Whoever appeared in the street scene as a pedestrian became a representation of society. In the 1920s, one met veterans, workers, military personnel, prostitutes, the unemployed, and the masses in the street. Around 1930, however, young female employees, the "working girls," became an urban phenomenon and suddenly seemed to crowd the public sphere. This essay seeks to shed light on the changes in representations of the street scene that took place when working girls were added to it. Although the urban street around 1930 was a chaotic space, working girls appeared as an icon that affirms modernity without necessarily breaking with the past. This may have changed our perception of the public sphere.

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