



***MODELS OF MODERNITY:  
READINGS OF SELECTED NOVELS  
OF THE LATE WEIMAR REPUBLIC***

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## Declaration

Except where reference is made to other sources, the work presented in this Thesis is the work of the author. It has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree. Some parts of the research have already been published.

Signed: *Fiona Littlejohn*

Fiona Littlejohn

Date: *20<sup>th</sup> October 2001*

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## Abstract

My thesis explores the various ways in which a small selection of novels published in 1931 depict and respond to a widespread sense of crisis during the final phase of the Weimar Republic, arguing that the authors foreground a powerful sense that modernity itself is in a state of crisis. I consider how the novels articulate diverse experiences of modernity, both within and beyond the metropolis and from different social, generational and gender perspectives. Moreover, I examine how the authors' evaluation of modernity is reflected in their use of formal and narrative techniques. Focusing upon Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm*, Hans Fallada's *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi - eine von uns*, I contend that the ambiguity and complexity of the authors' responses towards modernity were often flattened, simplified or ignored by reviewers in the politically polarized environment of the late Weimar Republic. This is partly the result of the debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit* which influenced the original reception of the novels and have continued to shape subsequent criticism. The novels themselves have often been labelled as classic examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. However, it is my contention that the novels also problematize some of the programmatic statements about this movement which circulated widely in the Weimar Republic. Therefore, I seek to re-examine the novels within the context of Weimar debates about modernity and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, as well as in the light of recent theoretical work in these areas. I also draw extensive comparisons and contrasts between the models of modernity foregrounded in Tergit's novel and Emile Durkheim's writings on anomie; in *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* and Ernst Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, and in *Gilgi — eine von uns* and Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*.



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## ***Introduction***

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This thesis aims to identify and explore the various ways in which a small selection of novels published in 1931 depict and evaluate the widespread sense of an all-pervasive crisis which characterized the final years of the Weimar Republic.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I am concerned with the extent to which the authors portray this crisis as a crisis of modernity itself on both a cultural and social level. As Detlev Peukert observes, drastic modernizing developments in the Weimar Republic seemed to proceed hand-in-hand with frequent crises, so that, in the minds of many, crisis and modernity became inextricably associated: 'Da Krise und Modernisierung zusammengingen, wurde die Erfahrung der Moderne kritisch.'<sup>2</sup> I examine the extent to which the experiences of crisis and modernity are connected in the novels and argue that the authors often call into question certain simplistic or dogmatic responses to this widespread sense of crisis, responses which circulated widely particularly during the latter years of the Weimar Republic. Furthermore, I focus upon how the authors' understanding and evaluation of modernity is mediated through formal elements such as structure and narrative techniques, exploring the link between the use of stylistic devices and the models of modernity which, in my view, emerge from the novels.

At first glance, my selection of texts may seem surprising, since they are not novels which are generally noted for a critical engagement with Weimar perspectives on modernity or for innovative or interesting formal techniques. In fact, Hans Fallada's *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* (1931), Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi — eine von uns* (1931) and Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931) are

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<sup>1</sup> Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, p.271. Dagmar Barnouw also asserts that 'the experience of modernity' and a sense of crisis came to be inextricably associated in the minds of German intellectuals of this period. Dagmar Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.4 and p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.89.



regarded in some circles as *Unterhaltungsliteratur* or even *Trivialliteratur* deemed unworthy of academic attention.<sup>3</sup> However, the novels' status in Weimar Germany as widely read, popular novels that also attracted considerable critical attention upon their initial publication makes them a particularly suitable choice for a study which aims to explore a widespread sense of unease about the course which modernity appeared to be taking at this crucial juncture in German history. Of the three authors, Fallada's works overall have attracted the greatest amount of interest from academics, whilst Keun's writings have been the subject of investigation as a result of the growing interest since the 1970s in literature by women writers and in exile literature. Nonetheless, *Bauern* and *Gilgi* have tended to be overshadowed by the authors' subsequent and better-known works, namely Fallada's *Kleiner Mann — was nun?* (1932) and Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932), which are generally considered to be more complex and sophisticated both in terms of style and content than the earlier novels.<sup>4</sup> Until recently, Tergit's oeuvre was largely neglected in academic circles, and, although this situation has begun to change in the past few years, mention of her name is still, more often than not, met with a blank look of non-recognition.<sup>5</sup>

Yet upon their original publication, all three novels sparked off considerable critical and political controversy, and attracted contradictory, sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations, which implies a greater level of complexity in the texts than has often been suggested. Tergit, for example, was

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the following editions throughout the thesis: Hans Fallada, *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben. Roman*. Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1997; Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi — eine von uns*. Hildesheim, Claassen, 1993; Gabriele Tergit, *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm. Roman*. Berlin, arani, 1997. Henceforth these novels are referred to in the main text with the short titles *Bauern*, *Gilgi* and *Käsebier* respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed assessments of the secondary literature relating to the individual novels are provided in the commentary chapters.

<sup>5</sup> Such neglect may also be countered by a promenade which has been named after Tergit near the new Potsdamer Platz complex in Berlin.

astonished to receive plaudits from both Nazi and Communist publications.<sup>6</sup> Fallada's novel unleashed a veritable deluge of print, producing 242 reviews of the first edition.<sup>7</sup> Praise came from reviewers and publications with politically diverse opinions, including Siegfried Kracauer, the Social Democratic organ *Vorwärts*, and Goebbels' publication *Der Angriff*.<sup>8</sup> Condemnation could be found in the radical right-wing *Landvolk* newspaper, the Social Democratic *Tribüne* and the Communist *Rote Fahne*.<sup>9</sup> Similar unexpected fissures and alliances across the political spectrum emerge with regard to *Gilgi*.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, reaction to Keun's novel was so strong that it even prompted the publication of alternative versions.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the response from professional critics, the novels clearly found an echo amongst the general reading public in Weimar Germany too. *Gilgi*

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<sup>6</sup> See Tergit's comments in Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt. Erinnerungen*. Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein, 1983, p.80.

<sup>7</sup> This figure is taken from Klaus Farin, *Hans Fallada: „Welche sind, die haben kein Glück.“* Munich, Tilsener, 1993, p.60.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all articles and letters relating to the original publication of *Bauern* are to be found in the Hans-Fallada-Archiv. I have provided all the reference details attached to the clippings in this collection, which for the most part comprise journal, date and place of publication. Page and volume numbers are therefore often missing, although I have supplemented them from other sources wherever possible. Siegfried Kracauer, 'Politik in der Kleinstadt', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 18 December 1931; Felix Scherrer, 'Hans Fallada: Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Vorwärts*, 8 April 1931; [no author], 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Der Angriff*, 3 September 1931.

<sup>9</sup> [no author], 'Bücher der Zeit. Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Das Landvolk*, 19 May 1931; a.g., 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Tribüne*, 12 April 1932; H. Fischer, 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Rote Fahne*, 27 June 1931.

<sup>10</sup> On the gender-related split in attitudes towards *Gilgi* in the Social Democratic Party, for example, see Ute Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz. Weibliche Angestellte', in *Neue Frauen. Die zwanziger Jahre*, ed. by Kristine von Soden and Maruta Schmidt. Berlin, Elefanten Press, 1988, pp.25-31 (pp.28-29); Doris Rosenstein, '„Mit der Wirklichkeit auf du und du?“ Zu Irmgard Keuns Romanen „Gilgi, eine von uns“ und „Das kunstseidene Mädchen“', in *Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman. Neue Interpretationen zum Roman der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Sabina Becker and Christoph Weiß. Stuttgart/Weimar, Metzler, 1995, pp.273-290.

<sup>11</sup> [no author], 'Gilgi — eine vom „Vorwärts“', *Der Weg der Frau*, (1933), no. 1. Reprinted in *Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Kunstamt Kreuzberg, Berlin and the Institut für Theaterwissenschaft der Universität Köln. Berlin/Hamburg, Elefanten Press, 1977, p.484. See also Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz', p.28; Rosenstein, 'Wirklichkeit', p.277.



achieved the highest sales of around 30,000 copies as well as being serialized in *Vorwärts* and made into a successful film starring Brigitte Helm.<sup>12</sup> Extracts from *Käsebier* also appeared in *Vorwärts*<sup>13</sup> and Tergit received enthusiastic letters from readers of the book, although plans for a film version and translations were never realized.<sup>14</sup> The novel sold 5,000 copies, which was still a respectable figure in the depths of the Depression, although the phenomenal sales of Fallada's *Kleiner Mann — was nun?* the following year suggest that the market for books had not been entirely dampened.<sup>15</sup> *Bauern* was serialized in the *Kölnische Illustrierte* in advance of its publication in book form and, subsequently, in the *Fränkischer Kurier*. The book version sold between 2,500 and 10,000 copies.<sup>16</sup> The response, above all from critics, but also from the general reading public, suggests that all three novels struck a raw nerve in Weimar Germany. The status of the novels at the time as popular, widely disseminated texts is a key reason for my decision to focus upon these works in a study which aims to explore a widespread sense of unease that

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<sup>12</sup> Rosenstein, 'Wirklichkeit', p.288, p.277 and p.289. On the *Vorwärts!* controversy, see also Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz', p.28.

<sup>13</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.172.

<sup>14</sup> The file of correspondence relating to *Käsebier* in the Tergit-Nachlass at Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar, contains 28 enthusiastic letters from readers in the 1930s. On plans for film versions or translations, see letter from Gabriele Tergit to Herr Fröhlich, 4 December 1931; letters from Marion Saunders to Gabriele Tergit, 15 January 1932 and 2 February 1932; letter from C.H. Brooks to Gabriele Tergit, 25 May 1932; letter from Gabriele Tergit to Erich Engel, 6 July 1932. All letters in Tergit-Nachlass, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar.

<sup>15</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.80. Tergit attributes the abrupt drop in sales after 15 December 1931 to a new set of emergency economic decrees issued on that day by Chancellor Brüning. *Käsebier* is also a considerably less sentimental and escapist work than *Kleiner Mann — was nun?*

<sup>16</sup> On the serialization, see Jenny Williams, *More Lives Than One. A Biography of Hans Fallada*. London, Libris, 1998, p.103 and p.110. Tergit (*Seltenes*, p.81) claims that *Bauern* sold 2,500 copies. Liersch puts the figure at 10,000: Werner Liersch, *Hans Fallada. Sein großes kleines Leben. Biographie*. Düsseldorf, Diederichs, 1981, p.215. Farin records that 6,000 copies of the first edition were printed. Farin, *Hans Fallada*, p.60.

the novels themselves both reflect and attempt to engage with and that is exemplified in the controversies of the original reception.

A central reason for the resonance of these texts in the Weimar Republic is almost certainly the proximity of narrated events to the time of publication. The novels were all published in 1931 and written in the same or the preceding year.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, they are largely set within the final, crisis-ridden phase of the Weimar Republic in the midst of economic depression, mass unemployment and political instability. *Gilgi* covers the first few months of 1931, whilst *Käsebier* spans the period from early 1929 to May 1931 with the final chapter set in an unspecified future time, thus charting the transition into crisis from relative political and economic stability. The state of technology together with the political atmosphere situate Fallada's novel in the Weimar era, although specific dates, or references from which dates could be inferred, are not provided. Nonetheless, the historical events upon which the novel draws occurred between November 1928 — the year that marked the start of the depression in agriculture which was later compounded by the Wall Street Crash — and November 1929.<sup>18</sup> Since the texts deal with the immediate past and with issues which remained acutely relevant, they were bound to generate heated debate amongst those advocating particular routes to deal with, or escape from, the political, social and economic crisis of the late Weimar Republic.

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<sup>17</sup> Fallada wrote *Bauern* between 4 February and 2 September 1930 and it was published in March 1931. See Liersch, *Hans Fallada*, pp.212-213 and p.416. *Gilgi* was published in six print runs in October and November 1931, according to Rosenstein, 'Wirklichkeit', p.288; Tergit finished *Käsebier* in early August 1931 and the novel was published in November. See Tergit, *Seltenes*, pp.77-80.

<sup>18</sup> Liersch, *Hans Fallada*, pp.176-177 and p.200, provides the dating of events on which *Bauern* is based. Tilton points out that the worldwide economic depression exacerbated the depression in German agriculture which had begun in 1928. Timothy Alan Tilton, *Nazism, Neo-Nazism and the Peasantry*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975, p.54.



Yet this does not explain how readers of similar political persuasions should come up with such diametrically opposed readings of the novels; how, conversely, readers with contrasting political opinions could reach such similar interpretations; or why different parties felt able to harness these novels to further their specific causes. It is my contention that a complex and, at times, ambivalent assessment of the perceived crisis emerges from the texts themselves, which often became flattened or over-simplified in reception at the time because of the polarized political climate in the late Weimar Republic. A further reason for this over-simplification, I will argue, was the categorization of the novels in a substantial amount of the original reception as examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. As I outline in detail in Chapter 3, *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary tendency was popularly associated with realistic mimesis, a lack of formal experimentation, unbiased reportage and an uncritical affirmation of technological modernity, a tendency which has continued in post-1945 scholarship. Tergit, Keun and Fallada are frequently referred to as tape-recorders or cameras, terms which imply a mechanical reproduction or transcription of reality that bypasses all critical and artistic faculties. The selected novels by these authors are presented as accurate and authentic records of life during the closing years of the Weimar Republic, which instead of actively exploring, analysing or attempting to understand the contemporary crisis, simply reflect it passively, almost unwittingly in a kind of subconscious, knee-jerk response. Seen in this way, the novels could be utilized as vehicles to advance the reviewers' own interpretations of, and alternatives to, the contemporary critical situation. Moreover, as will be elaborated below, such perceptions in the original criticism have continued to shape the later reception of the novels, which may account for the relative lack of academic interest in these works.

The notion that the author acts as seismograph or that literary works simply reflect social reality has been called into question in debates about modernism during the past two decades, in which critics have emphasized that modernist works are not merely passive transcriptions, but also involve an active or critical response.<sup>19</sup> This is true not just of the avant-garde, but also of the less obviously experimental works to be discussed here and to which the label *Neue Sachlichkeit* has been attached. As I will argue, far from simply replicating the surface of social reality in an unbiased, automated fashion, Fallada, Keun and Tergit actively seek to understand, represent and interpret the upheavals and the sense of crisis in the late Weimar Republic, developing specific perspectives upon the nature and causes of this crisis. In addition, rather than limiting themselves to passive registration, the authors cast a critical light upon debates, for instance about the *Neue Frau*, physiognomy, or Berlin and the provinces, on to which preoccupations about modernity had been displaced and which circulated widely within the public domain in the Weimar Republic. To demonstrate this, it will be necessary to illustrate how these contemporary debates often articulate concerns about the repercussions of modernity and how they are presented in the novels themselves.

Establishing the models of modernity which underpin the novels and the contexts in which they were developed constitutes the first main line of inquiry in this thesis. The next chapter will consider recent definitions of modernity and the way in which these can be linked to theoretical inquiries into artistic modernism in order to provide a framework against which the models of modernity in the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience Of Modernity*. London/New York, Verso, 1983; David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, 'Modernism and the Experience of Modernity', in *Modernity and the Text. Revisions of German Modernism*, ed. by Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick. New York/Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1989, pp.1-16.



individual texts can be evaluated. I subsequently outline four key areas in which concerns about modernity were manifested or which evoked a powerful sense of crisis during the Weimar Republic, namely shifting social groupings, changing gender roles, tensions between Berlin and the provinces and, finally, the interconnections between the development of mass production and the concept of the authentic. These constitute central preoccupations in all three texts, albeit evinced in diverse ways and articulated from differing regional, social, generational and gender perspectives.

The second main line of inquiry in the thesis will be to trace the impact of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* label upon the reception of the novels. I aim to illustrate that rather than presenting classic examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the novels actually problematize certain claims for literature which appeared in programmatic writings about *Neue Sachlichkeit*, especially regarding the possibility of value-free writing untouched by the subjective opinions of the author. In addition, I argue that the reception of the novels in the post-1945 era has continued to be determined by some of the programmatic claims of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, particularly through perpetuating the notion that the novels are mere snapshots or transcriptions of the age, a view of literature, moreover, which is not in itself unproblematic and which, as I have already indicated above, has come under increasing attack at least within the context of debates about modernism. Chapter 3 sketches out the main aspects of theoretical discussions about *Neue Sachlichkeit* in relation to literature in the 1920s and 1930s, which created the framework for the initial reception of the novels. This will act as a foil to which reference will be made in the individual analyses of the novels for two main reasons: firstly, to determine the extent to which the novels take up, yet also subvert aspects of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and secondly, to illustrate the extent to which debates surrounding

*Neue Sachlichkeit* in the Weimar years affected both the original and the post-1945 reception of the selected texts.

The subsequent chapters take the form of extensive commentaries on the individual texts. I have deliberately restricted the number of my core texts to three, because detailed readings are necessary to support my criticisms of the reception to date, to explore the involved models of modernity which emerge from the texts, and to consider how this is mediated through the form. However, in order to establish the wider context and to relate the novels to contemporary discourses about modernity in the Weimar Republic, reference is made to a large number of other works of literature as well as writings on culture and society from the Weimar era. I also draw extensive comparisons between the central texts and well-known theoretical writings on modernity: I link *Käsebier* with Emile Durkheim's writings of the 1890s on anomie, *Bauern* with Ernst Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935) and *Gilgi* with Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (original Russian version: 1940). The intention here is not to suggest that the authors were familiar with these particular works (something which would not have been possible for Fallada and Keun anyway), nor to imply that these theorists provide a magic key of interpretation. Rather, comparing the similar patterns of thought displayed in these texts serves to clarify the particular models of modernity which appear in my selected texts.

However, this approach must confront the issue of the criteria by which the comparison of novels with sociological, philosophical, political or literary theoretical writings can take place, or indeed, is justified. Such questions of how to bring diverse works from a range of disciplines into some kind of relationship with each other have been crucial to recent debates about modernism and modernity. The next section will give a brief account of some of these debates in



order to establish a meaningful framework within which to explore the understanding and evaluation of modernity in the selected texts and to examine their relationship to modernism in general. Moreover, the discussion will provide a working definition of modernity for the thesis and outline how modernity can be related to the content and form of a work of literature. This is particularly important given the variations in the usage of the terms modernity and modernism, which 'appear and reappear in philosophical, literary and other texts in what is at first sight a bewildering array of guises'.<sup>20</sup> The subsequent discussion will begin with a general discussion of modernity and modernism, before highlighting key ways in which the impact of modernizing processes were felt in the Weimar Republic in particular and indicating how they are taken up in the selected novels.

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<sup>20</sup> Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi, 'The Theory and Politics of Postmodernism: By Way of an Introduction', in *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. by Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi. London, Macmillan, 1990, pp.1-45 (p.1).

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# CHAPTER ONE

## ***Modernity & Modernism***

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## 1. Defining the parameters

Debates about modernism in the last two decades have emphasized the importance of viewing it as a widespread and heterogeneous cultural phenomenon and of engaging with works which have often been excluded from the established canon of modernist texts. Consequently, such discussions are pertinent to an attempt to re-evaluate texts such as the novels by Fallada, Keun and Tergit. Moreover, in the wake of Jürgen Habermas' speech upon being awarded the Adorno prize, these debates have increasingly sought to explore the development of artistic modernism from a wider historical, political and cultural perspective, often relating the development of artistic modernism to the processes of modernization and the project of the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Analysing examples from a range of literatures, for example, Marshall Berman emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of modernism, which at its best, in Berman's view, offers an ambivalent and critical analysis of emergent modernity.<sup>2</sup> David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen also perceive modernism to be a response to modernity, which produces what is in their eyes 'the still fascinating heterogeneity of the modernist tradition'.<sup>3</sup> They assert the importance of accepting diversity and plurality as basic features of modernism, because there is

not one experience of modernity but many, just as there is not one modernist text but a wide variety of texts that articulate experiences of modernity in different aesthetic codes, from different subject positions, and with different political affiliations and national contingencies.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Die Moderne — ein unvollendetes Projekt', in Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne — ein unvollendetes Projekt. Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze 1977-1990*. Reclam, Leipzig, 1990, pp.32-54.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience Of Modernity*. London/New York, Verso, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, 'Modernism and the Experience of Modernity', in *Modernity and the Text. Revisions of German Modernism*, ed. by Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick. New York/Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1989, pp.1-16 (p.4).

<sup>4</sup> Bathrick and Huyssen, 'Modernism', p.7.

However, they argue that if modernism as a whole is to retain any significance, an approach must be found to relate this diverse body of works from a range of disciplines and cultures in a meaningful way.

Richard Sheppard seeks to develop such an approach by using Louis Althusser's concept of a 'problematic'.<sup>5</sup> Althusser argues that the basic unity of any given ideological field is constituted by its underlying objective structure or problematic.<sup>6</sup> The subjective nature of any individual encounter with the problematic will produce mutations in the specific surface level manifestations in the mode of particular works. These mutations can be so great as to make responses to the same problematic appear completely unrelated at the surface level, where they will foreground, highlight or suppress different aspects, depending on the degree to which the writers or artists are explicitly conscious of the problematic. If modernist works are considered in this light, Sheppard argues, then it is easy to see why they constitute such a heterogeneous body of work, for they will exhibit varying degrees of consciousness and complexity in their perception of the problematic, their attempt to represent or pictorialize it and the manner of their response to it. The apprehension and presentation of the problematic can vary extensively as can the nature and the complexity of the response to the problematic. Studying the specific differences in these responses and the various ways in which the problematic manifests itself provides a meaningful context within which to examine individual modernist texts and relate them to modernism as a whole. Applying this approach allows the consideration

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<sup>5</sup> These ideas are first outlined in Richard Sheppard, 'The Problematics of European Modernism', in *Theorizing Modernism. Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. by Steve Giles. London/New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.1-51. However, I refer to the fuller discussion in Richard Sheppard, *Modernism — Dada — Postmodernism*. Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster. London, Verso, 1996, pp.65-71.



of similar patterns of thought across a range of disciplines, which is crucial to my project of comparing evaluations of and responses to a sense of crisis in literary, sociological and philosophical texts. Nonetheless, this still leaves open the question of how to characterize the problematic which generates modernism.

At the heart of the modernist problematic, in Sheppard's view, lies a fundamental sense of crisis arising from the disintegration of the values and beliefs upon which the Enlightenment and liberal humanism had rested. Taking a wide range of examples from physics, mathematics, philosophy, sociology, theology, linguistics, literature and the visual arts, Sheppard highlights three key strands of this perception of crisis, which he describes largely in terms of its metaphysical dimensions. Firstly, the perception of reality as stable and harmonious, derived from the classical concepts of space, time and causality in Newtonian physics and Euclidian geometry, was undermined by new scientific discoveries suggesting that reality was unknowable, fluctuating, discontinuous and relative. Secondly, Enlightenment and liberal humanist beliefs in human nature as rational and autonomous were eroded by the impact of such thinkers as Nietzsche and Freud. A perception arose of human nature as innately irrational and subject to unconscious powers which are only imperfectly knowable: the human ego was seen as a loose cluster of fragments, rather than being fixed and stable. Finally, these shifts in the concept of human nature and of reality led to 'a change in the sense of the relationship between humanity and reality'.<sup>7</sup> The belief that the autonomous individual was the stable centre of a logically ordered universe was overtaken by a fundamental sense of estrangement and displacement. The assumption of a correlation between the structures of reason and of the material world was shattered, bringing into question conventional attitudes which had

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<sup>7</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism*, p.35.

arisen from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment towards the status of language, history and European culture. The dominance accorded to human reason in Enlightenment thought was questioned and the importance of other human faculties were asserted.<sup>8</sup> In many modernist works, Sheppard argues, there is a profound sense that the emancipatory ideals of modernity have performed a dialectical turn and are in danger of turning into the opposite of its fundamental values, the development which Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer characterize in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. In summary,

in several fundamental respects and across a spectrum of apparently unrelated areas, it was felt that the “logocentric” understanding of reality on which classical modernity and the liberal humanist epoch had been based was being called into question or shattered by the experience of modernity in its contemporary configuration.<sup>9</sup>

Such concerns about the inadequacy and inexactitude of language and the direction taken by European culture; questions about the prioritization of reason to the exclusion of other aspects of the human personality as well as the failures of reason to apprehend the full complexities of reality which has more to it than the rational mind can explain; anxieties about the proliferation of supposedly emancipatory institutions which have become self-sustaining, dysfunctional systems; and non-linear conceptions of time and history: these are all concerns which, as the individual commentary chapters will show, are clearly foregrounded in my selected texts.

Nonetheless, the powerful sense of crisis in the selected novels is not only manifested in the intellectual and cultural aspects upon which Sheppard’s characterization of the modernist problematic largely focuses, but also in terms of a crisis of social, political and technological modernity. As noted in the

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<sup>8</sup> This shift was, of course, already evident in Romantic literature and thought in which much of modernism is rooted.

<sup>9</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism*, p.34.



Introduction, the novels by Fallada, Keun and Tergit are located in the clearly recognizable socio-historical reality of the Weimar Republic. Sheppard's approach thus needs to be complemented with a means of characterizing modernity which takes account of its technological and social manifestations.

## **2. Modernity, Time and Space**

Recent accounts of modernity have focused upon the impact of far-reaching transformations in the conceptualization and experience of space and time. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, for instance, investigates the growing perception in the nineteenth century that space and time had been annihilated as a result of the new speed enabled by the railways.<sup>10</sup> Stephen Kern focuses upon the four decades preceding the outbreak of the First World War, arguing that the perception of time and space as absolute, unchanging categories was radically transformed not only by rapid and manifold technological developments, but also by profound cultural and intellectual innovations, such as the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries, or Einstein's theory of relativity.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Kern attempts to establish a link between modernity and modernism, by tracing the impact of these shifts upon modes of representation in European art and literature.

David Harvey and Anthony Giddens each adopt a longer historical perspective in their separate analyses of modernity in terms of the impact of a radical restructuring of space and time upon social relations and upon ways of conceptualizing the world. Both writers argue that in the pre-modern world, the calculation of space and time was bound to a specific locale and often determined by cyclical events in the natural world, such as the rhythm of the seasons, or of

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<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Die Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise. Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert*. Munich/Vienna Hanser, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1983.

day and night, which varied depending upon the particular place. This situation was radically altered by the emergence of abstract and uniform means of measuring time and representing space, such as mechanical clocks and Ptolemaic maps. Such objective modes of measurement and representation disconnected the calculation of time and space from specific localities and enabled these categories to be standardized and regulated on a regional, national and, eventually, global scale. Harvey and Giddens both emphasize that these developments permitted space and time to be appropriated for private uses and transformed into a commodity:

Symbolized by clocks and bells that called workers to labour and merchants to market, separated from the 'natural' rhythms of agrarian life, and divorced from religious significations, merchants and masters created a new 'chronological net' in which daily life was caught.<sup>12</sup>

By the same token, according to Harvey, accurate maps proved crucial in the European race to establish trade and commerce with the rest of the world and ultimately to appropriate space through colonization.

Harvey and Giddens advance different views on the impetus behind this restructuring of time and space, each of which I shall investigate in turn. Harvey asserts that what he designates 'time-space compression' is propelled by the dynamic development of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Once time and space become linked to the pursuit of profit, Harvey contends, their usage and definition become subject to constant alteration in the interests of increasing the turnover of capital: the more

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<sup>12</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge MA/Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p.228. Giddens refers to the effect of dividing the day into zones, such as the "working day" in Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, Polity, 1990, pp.17-18. In an earlier paper, Giddens refers to his admiration for work which explores the 'commodification of time-space with the formation of industrial capitalism'. See Anthony Giddens, 'Modernism and Postmodernism', *New German Critique*, 22 (Winter 1981), 15-18 (p.15, Giddens' italics).

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, *Postmodernity*, p.240.



efficiently time and space can be organized, the more quickly capital can be recuperated and the greater the returns on investments. This provides a huge incentive to develop new technologies and systems of organization which will overcome both temporal and spatial obstacles to the acceleration of turnover:

There is a whole history of technical and organizational innovation applied to the reduction of such barriers — everything from assembly-line production (of cars or battery hens), acceleration of physical processes (fermentation, genetic engineering), to planned obsolescence in consumption (the mobilization of fashion and advertising to accelerate change), the credit system, electronic banking, and the like.<sup>14</sup>

For Harvey, therefore, time-space compression is determined by the need to accelerate commodity production and by the circulation of capital. He maintains that this impetus to intensify the speed of turnover is not uninterrupted, but tends to spring from economic crises during which the need to acquire some kind of edge on competitors in order to survive is exacerbated: 'Modernizations that affect turnover time are not, therefore, deployed at a uniform rate. They tend to bunch together mainly in periods of crisis.'<sup>15</sup> Such time-space compression renders social relations impermanent and insecure, subject to destabilization with the onset of each economic crisis.

Harvey argues that the crisis of 1847-1848 in Europe generated just such a fundamental shift in the experience of space and time, which in turn precipitated the modernist crisis of representation. He asserts that the economic depression and the subsequent revolutions swept across the continent, forcing people to recognize the extent to which industry and finance had become spatially integrated and local events could be determined by occurrences in distant countries. Harvey also contends that since such crises recurred periodically, the Enlightenment sense of progressive time was called into question and a cyclical

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<sup>14</sup> Harvey, *Postmodernity*, p.229.

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *Postmodernity*, p.230.

notion of time took root. Objective and absolute ways of representing and conceptualizing time and space no longer seemed to correspond to experience: therefore, modernist artists and writers, such as Manet and Flaubert, began to seek new ways of representing the experience of time and space as relative and insecure. Harvey thereby links modernity as a social phenomenon involving time-space compression to changing modes of representing time and space on canvas or within a narrative in modernism.

Giddens refers to the restructuring of time and space as '*time-space distancing* — the conditions under which time and space are organised so as to connect presence and absence'.<sup>16</sup> According to Giddens, social relations in the pre-modern world are characterized by presence: social interactions occur within a localized context with all parties physically present. The advent of modernity, however, permits social relations to occur between “absent” others’ or people who are not always, and may never have been, physically present in the same place.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, locale or place becomes increasingly phantasmagoric, or structured by distant social influences and economic relations. Giddens terms this process disembedding or ‘the “lifting out” of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space’.<sup>18</sup> He proceeds to identify two key types of mechanism which both prompt and depend upon disembedding: symbolic tokens, such as money, and expert systems of professional or technical knowledge, such as construction or car and air travel. Whereas pre-modern social relations are characterized by presence alone, disembedding mechanisms enable modern social relations to conjoin ‘instantaneity and deferral, presence and absence’.<sup>19</sup> Whilst Harvey — in common

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<sup>16</sup> Giddens, *Consequences*, p.14 (Giddens’ emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> Giddens, *Consequences*, p.18.

<sup>18</sup> Giddens, *Consequences*, p.21.

<sup>19</sup> Giddens, *Consequences*, p.25.



with various other theorists — conceives of capitalism as the driving dynamic behind modernity, Giddens discerns the effect of disembedding tendencies in four interrelated modern institutions, namely capitalism, surveillance, military power and industrialism, and he accords none of them causal priority.

These accounts of modernity in terms of time-space transformations are of relevance because the novelists foreground a strong preoccupation with the repercussions of precisely such a radical restructuring of space and time within the Weimar Republic. All three authors, for instance, explore the impact of new technologies which promote disembedding and the acceleration of modern life. Similarly, they all demonstrate a concern with the introduction of organizing space and time such as rationalization along Fordist and Taylorist lines designed to accelerate production and consumption. In addition, they focus upon some of the consequences produced by the disembedding mechanisms of the mass media, of money, of influence of technological developments in the media. Moreover, as I argue in the individual commentary chapters, they organize narrative space and time in order to draw the readers' attention to such transformations.

The discussion of modernity thus far has been somewhat abstract and generalized. Most theorists argue, however, that the repercussions of modernizing processes vary depending upon country, culture and the pace at which such changes occur. Indeed, many writers emphasize the rapid pace of modernization in Germany from the 1870s onwards and in contrast to the more gradual development in other countries such as Britain, where these processes had commenced over a century earlier.<sup>20</sup> The next section will therefore concentrate

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Dagmar Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988; V.R. Berghahn, *Modern Germany. Society, Economy and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987.

more specifically upon four key areas in which spatio-temporal transformations and disembedding wrought profound changes upon social relations during the Weimar Republic. The rapidity and scale of these changes generated both a sense of opportunity and excitement and a deep feeling of insecurity and uncertainty. The four areas upon which I focus are: firstly, the shifts in established class identities; secondly, the questioning of hitherto conventional gender roles; thirdly, the relationship between Berlin and the provinces; and fourthly, mass production and the concept of the authentic. Furthermore, I indicate in broad terms the various ways in which the tensions created by such deep-seated changes are manifested with differing emphases within the novels and the extent to which the authors identify with or criticize these concepts, which will be explored in greater detail within the individual commentary chapters. This will provide four main factors to be explored and compared in the authors' depiction and analysis of modernity throughout the thesis.

### **3. The Impact of Spatio-Temporal Transformations In the Weimar Republic.**

#### *3.1 Shifting Middle-Class Identities*

The social structures and groupings which had formed during the Wilhelmine era underwent profound changes during the Weimar Republic, as the results of long-term modernizing processes were felt and conventional social and moral codes became more fluid.<sup>21</sup> Tergit, Fallada and Keun explore the impact of these shifting social structures and roles upon their characters, illustrating the sense of both opportunities and insecurities generated by this particular aspect of modernity. All three novelists focus upon the middle class in the broadest sense, drawing their characters from the *Bildungs- und Geldbürgertum*, the petty bourgeoisie

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<sup>21</sup> Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, especially pp. 87-91.



of farmers and owners of small businesses, and the so-called *Neue Mittelstand* of white-collar workers. Working-class characters are more marginal and, where they do figure, appear as the suffering objects of middle-class greed or as the focus of pity or of fears about downward mobility amongst the middle-class characters. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the authors themselves had their origins in the milieu of the old middle classes, but that they all experienced adult life as white-collar workers to varying extents.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the shifting social status of the middle classes had an impact upon the authors' own social standing.

During the Weimar Republic, economic restructuring and rationalization measures, designed to overcome spatio-temporal barriers and stimulate the economy through mass production and consumption, contributed both to the undermining of the traditional middle classes and to the growth in the number of white-collar workers.<sup>23</sup> The traditional middle classes were characterized by a growing feeling of uncertainty and fears about downward mobility during the Weimar Republic. The wealth of the rentier class, which 'seinerzeit als unentbehrliches Merkmal des alten Mittelstandes galt', was decimated by the war and the period of hyper-inflation.<sup>24</sup> In addition, many craftsmen and tradesmen felt squeezed between big business and trade union power, whilst the establishment of the republic with its pragmatic style removed their main source

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<sup>22</sup> On the authors' backgrounds, see Werner Liersch, *Hans Fallada. Sein großes kleines Leben. Biographie*. Düsseldorf, Diederichs, 1981; Jenny Williams, *More Lives Than One. A Biography of Hans Fallada*. London, Libris, 1998; Gabriele Kreis, 'Was man glaubt, gibt es.' *Das Leben der Irmgard Keun*. Zurich, Arche, 1991 (although this is more novel than biography); Heike Beutel and Anna Barbara Hagin, eds., *Irmgard Keun: Zeitzeugen, Bilder und Dokumente erzählen*. Cologne, Emons, 1995; Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt. Erinnerungen*. Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein, 1983; Egon Larsen, *Die Welt der Gabriele Tergit. Aus dem Leben einer ewig jungen Berliner*. Munich, Auerbach, 1987; Eva-Maria Mockel, *Aspekte von Macht und Ohnmacht im literarischen Werk Gabriele Tergits*. Aachen, Shaker, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, pp.159-161.

<sup>24</sup> Hilde Walter, 'Die Misere des „neuen Mittelstandes“', *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (22 January 1929), 130-132 (p.131).

of class identification and pride: 'Außer Einkommenseinbußen zählten der Verlust einer bisher relativ privilegierten Sozialstellung und die Demontage der monarchisch-imperialen Dekoration des Reiches, der ihre Identifikation gegolten hatte.'<sup>25</sup> Farmers, on the other hand, who had gained from the years of inflation, suffered from a failure to restructure and modernise during these years, so that when the international agricultural crisis broke in 1928, they were unprepared and severely affected.<sup>26</sup> A hostile or resentful attitude towards the Republic developed amongst a substantial number of the traditional middle classes, which, Peukert claims, can be detected in the erosion of the liberal middle-class vote from the mid-1920s onwards. As will be discussed in the individual commentaries, all three novelists trace the development of anti-modern or anti-Republican sentiments within the middle classes.

The rising number of white-collar workers was a key social phenomenon of the Weimar Republic which resulted from modernization. Peukert points out that the percentage of white-collar workers in the workforce had increased from 10.3 per cent in 1907 to 17.3 per cent in 1925.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the Weimar Republic, there were 3.657 million white-collar workers, of whom 1.028 million were women.<sup>28</sup> Those identified as white-collar workers ranged from sales assistants, office workers, technicians, up to middle management. This expansion of the white-collar workers was generated by the growth of the service industries

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<sup>25</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.159.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Alan Tilton, *Nazism, Neo-Nazism and the Peasantry*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975, p.54.

<sup>27</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.22. See also Walter, 'Die Misere', p.130.

<sup>28</sup> Christa Jordan, *Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung. Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik*. Frankfurt am Main and others, Lang, 1988, p.12. In his 1929 study of the situation of the *Angestellten*, Siegfried Kracauer provides figures of 3.5 million white-collar workers, of whom 1.2 million were women. Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten. Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, p.11.



and the sphere of consumption, as well as the emergence of large companies which required greater levels of administration and bureaucracy.<sup>29</sup>

The increase in the numbers of white-collar workers was accompanied by a qualitative shift in the type of work they performed. At the turn of the century, book-keepers, bank officials and civil servants had qualified as members of the bourgeoisie by virtue of their education, which had assured them of a high income, a secure job and a privileged way of life.<sup>30</sup> For employees in businesses, their positions had often only represented a transitional phase on the way to later independence and they had frequently lived in their employers' households. After the First World War, however, the white-collar workers were effectively transformed into waged workers, whose jobs became increasingly routine, low-skilled and insecure. Incomes were mostly levelled down to those of blue-collar workers while the relationship with the employer became distant and impersonal.

Nonetheless, many white-collar workers still clung to the belief in their middle-class status and adhered to bourgeois values and aspirations, remaining convinced that they were better educated and more highly cultured than the working classes. Kracauer writes: 'Die Stellung dieser Schichten im Wirtschaftsprozeß hat sich gewandelt, ihre mittelständische Lebensauffassung ist geblieben. Sie nähren ein falsches Bewußtsein.'<sup>31</sup> This false consciousness, which Kracauer claims was promoted by companies and by white-collar workers' organizations, is manifested, among other things, in the spending habits of white-collar workers, who sought to maintain a bourgeois lifestyle despite their reduced incomes. As a consequence of their desire to assert a certain degree of

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<sup>29</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p.12; Walter, 'Die Misere', p.131.

<sup>30</sup> On the forerunners to Weimar's *Angestellten*, see Jordan, *Zerstreuung*, pp.22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p.81.

culture and education, the white-collar workers played a key role in the development of the new mass media, leisure and entertainment industries, both as employees and as consumers. In Kracauer's view, the lights, glamour, size and opulence of the new bars, cinemas and entertainment palaces served to distract the white-collar workers from the tedium of their work and held out the promise of participation in the bourgeois world to the proletarianized white-collar workers which they had no real hope of attaining.

Kracauer deliberately focuses upon the experience of white-collar workers in Berlin, reasoning that their situation is most developed here and indicative of the future for the rest of the country. Nonetheless, the large provincial city and the small town surroundings in which the figures in *Gilgi* and *Bauern* operate produces rather different emphases in the portraits of the contemporary experience and attitudes of white-collar workers, which, as I will show, are related to the more uneven pace of modernization in the provinces. In all three novels, false consciousness is most powerfully manifested amongst intellectuals and journalists who are suddenly forced to confront their dependence upon the market and a loss of social status, a development which provokes a radical response. Significantly, the female white-collar workers in the novels by Tergit and Keun do not undergo this sense of loss, but rather find a sense of opportunity and liberation through their employment, whereas Fallada emphasizes the difficulties experienced by the one female white-collar worker in his novel. Indeed, the portraits of women lend *Käsebier* and *Gilgi* a somewhat more optimistic perspective on modernity than is to be found in *Bauern*.



### 3.2 Neue Frau: New Opportunities and Old Restrictions

Initially, the Weimar Republic promised to be an era of professional and political emancipation for women, as the constitution provided the right to vote and assured sexual equality. A high turnout of female voters in the elections of 1919, when 49 women were elected to the Weimar National Assembly, and the large increase in female membership of the SPD and USPD parties between 1918 and 1920 indicates an active engagement in the political sphere in the early years of the Republic.<sup>32</sup>

Access to higher education for women also improved during the Weimar Republic, although quotas remained in place and the era saw a general devaluation of academic training and the professions.<sup>33</sup> In 1908, the proportion of women in the student population was under 5 percent; in 1918/19, it had reached 9.5 percent and by 1932/33 stood at 18.8 percent, although many women had to face financial hardship, prejudice amongst students and university teachers alike, and poor job prospects upon qualification.<sup>34</sup> Tergit, who had herself completed her doctorate and was bitter that it proved to be superfluous for her subsequent career, depicts some of the advantages and difficulties for academically qualified women in the Weimar Republic in the character of Fräulein Dr. Kohler.<sup>35</sup>

As far as paid employment was concerned, the overall proportion of women working outside the home only rose slightly during the Weimar Republic from 31.2 percent in 1907 to 35.6 percent in 1925. Women who had taken on jobs in transportation and heavy industry during the First World War, which were

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<sup>32</sup> Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*. New York/Oxford/Munich, Berg, 1989, 156-175.

<sup>33</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.103 and pp.168-169. See also Erhard Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik*. Munich, Fink, 1986, p.161.

<sup>34</sup> Kristine von Soden, 'Frauen in der Wissenschaft', in *Neue Frauen. Die zwanziger Jahre*, ed. by Kristine von Soden and Maruta Schmidt. Berlin, Elefanten Press, 1988, pp.124-130.

<sup>35</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.10.

traditionally perceived as men's work, tended to leave these occupations to make way for the returning men.<sup>36</sup> However, there was a shift in the structure of female employment. The proportion of white-collar workers and civil servants amongst women in paid employment almost doubled between 1907 and 1925, while the proportion of women employed in agriculture and domestic service fell.<sup>37</sup> Yet it was a common perception that the number of women in paid employment had risen dramatically during the Weimar era, which Ute Frevert attributes to the greater visibility of female white-collar workers.<sup>38</sup> Those employed in the service industries came into contact with the general public more frequently than those working in domestic service or agriculture. In addition, most of the new businesses which employed white-collar workers were located in the cities, so that many young women migrated to the cities in search of work and became more visible in the public, urban spaces on their way to and from work.

Consequently, the image of the independent *Neue Frau* which arose during the 1920s was mostly associated with the modern urban environment — Gilgi's awareness of the medieval or mock-medieval cityscape of Cologne only develops as she begins to question her role as a *Neue Frau*, of which she is almost a caricature at the start of the novel. The *Neue Frau*, a slender, fashionably-dressed sales assistant or office worker with bobbed hair, make-up and cigarette, who spent her evenings in bars, cafés, dancehalls or cinemas, existed more in the imaginations of journalists, film-makers and advertisers than in reality. The image may have served to shape the aspirations of young women, but such a lifestyle remained closed to many female white-collar workers, who were generally less

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<sup>36</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.102.

<sup>37</sup> Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, p.101.

<sup>38</sup> Ute Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz. Weibliche Angestellte', in *Neue Frauen. Die zwanziger Jahre*, ed. by Kristine von Soden and Maruta Schmidt. Berlin, Elefanten Press, 1988, pp.25-31 (p.26).



well-paid and had fewer promotion opportunities than their male counterparts.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the image of the *Neue Frau* as active, career-minded and in pursuit of her own happiness and sexual fulfilment rather than selflessly sacrificing herself to husband, family and home, became a focal point for anxieties about modernity, particularly as the economic situation worsened.

Such fears were manifested in debates over a birth-strike among young women, the resistance to efforts to decriminalize abortion, and the new perception that issues of sexuality, reproduction and fertility were legitimate spheres for state intervention.<sup>40</sup> Motherhood was still seen by many as a woman's highest vocation and there was a widespread expectation that upon marriage women would give up employment and return to their traditional roles as housewives and mothers. During times of high unemployment a great deal of public resentment arose towards married women with jobs, who were castigated as 'Doppelverdiener', and discriminatory labour laws were introduced to prioritize men's access to jobs.<sup>41</sup> Pressure upon women to return to traditional roles grew, particularly as the economic crisis intensified, whilst the conflicts generated by the demands of their new roles had not been settled. In the face of such tensions, it is perhaps not surprising then that not only reactionary men, but also large numbers of women began to idealize and to return willingly to traditional female roles, which could often involve a return from Berlin or the big city to the small town or village.<sup>42</sup> This is exemplified by the protagonist of Christa Anita Brück's novel of

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<sup>39</sup> Frevert, 'Kunstseidener Glanz', pp.25-26.

<sup>40</sup> Cornelia Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany. Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties*. Basingstoke/London, Macmillan, 1992, p.xi.

<sup>41</sup> Karin Hausen, 'Unemployment also Hits Women: The New and the Old Woman on the Dark Side of the Golden Twenties in Germany', trans. by Jan Lambertz, in *Unemployment and the Great Depression*, ed. by Peter D. Stachura. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1986, pp.78-120.

<sup>42</sup> See Katharina von Ankum, 'Introduction', in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, pp.1-11.

1930, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*, a female white-collar worker who returns to her small home town disillusioned by the limitations placed on her professional opportunities by men and hoping to regain strength: 'Kraft und Reinheit der Heimaterde atmen, fern sein vom Getriebe der Menschen, von der Unrast der Geschäfte, des Erwerbs, der Erbärmlichkeit.'<sup>43</sup> Disappointment with the urban world of work produces a retreat to the small town, where the protagonist believes she belongs.

Significantly, the lot of housewife and mother appears far from idyllic in my selected texts, ranging from the verbal and physical abuse suffered by the poorer housewives in Fallada's novel via the stifling and dull petty bourgeois marriage of the Krons in *Gilgi* to the bored and betrayed rich housewives in both *Gilgi* and *Käsebier*. Nor are the conflicting demands and expectations placed upon the female white-collar worker underplayed. Nonetheless, in the novels by Keun and Tergit, the women white-collar workers are central characters, who are shown to be more open to modernity's opportunities and more capable of a differentiated, complex response towards its repercussions than their male counterparts. This is not to say that they are unaware of modernity's darker sides, but that they are less trapped in a nostalgic yearning for the past and desire to turn back the clock than the male characters. I argue that the main female characters tend to be the bearers of a limited optimism that ultimately provides *Käsebier* and *Gilgi* with a more positive outlook on modernity than Fallada's novel. None of the major figures in *Bauern* are women and indeed the world of the novel is on the whole a very male-dominated one, perhaps because of its small town setting. Fallada does highlight the basic problems of low pay and chauvinistic attitudes for the one female white-collar worker, Klara Heinze. Nonetheless, the most

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<sup>43</sup> Christa Anita Brück, *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen*. Berlin, Sieben-Stäbe-Verlag, 1930, p.354.



prominent female character and one of the most sympathetic and positive figures in the novel is the traditional mother figure, Elise Tredup, who displays a genuine sense of solidarity, loyalty and compassion towards others. However, it appears to me that like the famous mother figure Lämmchen in *Kleiner Mann – was nun?*, who instinctively sympathizes with the Communists, this sense of solidarity springs from what Fallada clearly perceives to be her essential maternal qualities and capacity for caring. By contrast, the traditional mother figures in *Gilgi* and *Käsebier* serve as negative role models or symbols of a resented restriction.

### 3.3 Berlin/Provinz

Akin to the two areas discussed above, discourse about Berlin and the provinces constituted a response to the displacement of power over the pace and direction of social change, in this case the disembedding of political and economic power from local contexts of face-to-face interaction to distant national organizations characterized by absence. Moreover, like the images of the *Neue Frau* and the mother figure, both Berlin and the provinces became invested with imaginary meanings in public discussions about modernity in the press, literature and visual media of the Weimar Republic. Indeed, these signifiers often became associated, so that Berlin and the *Neue Frau* frequently served as interchangeable signifiers of modernity, as in Heinrich Mann's identification of Berlin with the young female white-collar worker: 'Gleichnis Berlin ist jedes der abertausend Mädchen, die schlank, hurtig und keß nach ihrer Arbeitsstätte eilen.'<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, pre-modern ways of life were represented by the traditional wife/mother and a rural or provincial environment. At the end of Erich Kästner's

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<sup>44</sup> Heinrich Mann, 'Berlin', in Heinrich Mann, *Essays*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1960, pp.434-442 (p.441). For a more extended discussion of this association, see Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets. Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989.

1931 novel *Fabian*, the protagonist retreats away from the active sexuality of women in the city back to his selflessly and unwaveringly devoted mother in a provincial small town.

Moreover, as with the images of women, the discourse about Berlin and the provinces often became polarized, obscuring points of overlap or blurred boundaries. When Gross-Berlin was established in April 1920, almost 60 village communities, alongside numerous farms and estates were incorporated into the new municipality.<sup>45</sup> However, this aspect of Berlin was frequently excluded in writing of the time, in which Berlin came to be viewed as the site of modernity *per se*, although this perception was valorized differently by enthusiasts and opponents of modernization.<sup>46</sup>

Visions of Berlin as the embodiment of modernity focused upon the key traffic intersections of the Alexanderplatz, Potsdamer Platz and the Gleisdreieck railway intersection and shunting yards, which were greatly extended and reconstructed during the Weimar years in order to facilitate the movement of traffic around the city — the type of spatial reorganization designed to overcome temporal and spatial barriers to which David Harvey refers.<sup>47</sup> Such constant redevelopment turned these sites in the eyes of many writers and artists into emblems of ceaseless transformation, speed and technological changes which radically altered human perception.<sup>48</sup> The Alexanderplatz is, of course, deployed

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Simmons, *Berlin: The Dispossessed City*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988 (p.58).

<sup>46</sup> Michael Bienert, *Die eingebildete Metropole. Berlin im Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik*. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1992, p.70. Italics in original. Bienert is citing the title of Klaus R. Scherpe, 'Berlin als Ort der Moderne'. Berlin, unpublished lecture, 1989.

<sup>47</sup> See pp.18-19 above.

<sup>48</sup> For discussions of writings about these sites during the Weimar Republic, see Bienert, *Die eingebildete Metropole*, pp.59-91, and Erhard Schütz, 'Beyond Glittering Reflections of Asphalt: Changing Images of Berlin in Weimar Literary Journalism', in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann. Columbia, Camden House, 1994, pp.119-126.



most strikingly as a symbol of renewal and change in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). Joseph Roth celebrates technological modernity in the 'eiserne Landschaft' around the Gleisdreieck over and above the rural landscape, urging fellow writers to come to terms with the modern urban world and appreciate its beauty.<sup>49</sup> Others felt that the cinema was the only medium suitable to capture 'Berliner Tempo', and the sense of speed and of the constant movement of large crowds in the city is indeed powerfully presented in visual form in Walter Ruttmann's 1927 film *Berlin. Die Symphonie der Großstadt* or the opening sequence of Joe May's *Asphalt* (1928/29). Both films also capture the new sites of urban entertainment and consumption with bright electric lights, advertising hoardings, modern fronts and lavish interiors, which were powerful symbols of modernity in the Weimar era, particularly in the vicinity of the Kurfürstendamm. Such venues were also associated with a liberalization of attitudes towards sex. Curt Moreck's *Führer durch das „lasterhafte“ Berlin* (1931) offered a tongue-in-cheek guide for newcomers to Berlin on the sexual delights available in different venues and in different areas of the city.

Configured as the epitome of modernity, Berlin also became a focal point for anti-modern or reactionary sentiments, and functioned as a shorthand for an array of objections or fears about modernity. In such discourse, the capital city was demonized, whilst the small town or village becomes the subject of nostalgic idealization, as the embodiment of a pre-modern, more secure way of life, rooted in presence. For more conservative forces, Berlin's image as a sexual mecca made it a target for attacks about sexual depravity, disease, moral degeneration and the disintegration of the family.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the small town or village could be

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Bekenntnis zum Gleisdreieck', in Joseph Roth, *Werke*, 6 vols. Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch; Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1990, II: *Das journalistische Werk 1924-1928*, ed. by Klaus Westermann, pp.218-221 (p.219).

<sup>50</sup> Osborne, *Politics of the Body*, p.75.

portrayed as a bastion of traditional Christian family values — an idealization which Fallada's novel so thoroughly rejects that it shocked many original reviewers of various political persuasions.

Anti-Berlin sentiment was often also class-related, born of middle-class anxieties about loss of status and wealth with the establishment of the democratic republic. As the seat of national government and as a large industrial city with an extensive working-class population, Berlin was demonized as the 'Bollwerk der Demokratie' by those who felt that the Republic granted excessive influence to socialism, the urban working classes and industrial interests.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, many artisans and owners of small businesses felt threatened by the advanced rationalization of production and consumption, modernizing processes widely viewed as being at their most advanced in Berlin. For these reasons, regionalist political parties like the *Hessische Volksbund*, the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Landespartei* and the *Bayerische Volkspartei* emerged in the immediate post-war years, all of which campaigned vigorously for administrative and cultural autonomy from Berlin.<sup>52</sup> Anti-Berlin sentiment thus expressed fears about the disembedding of economic and political power from local contexts to remote groups and places.

Kurt Tucholsky points out how selective and polarized attitudes towards modernization become in the discourse about Berlin and the provinces. For instance, even the fiercest local patriot is, he argues, inured to the impact of advertising, newspapers and mass consumption — key disembedding mechanisms whose influence thoroughly permeates the locale:

Die Anti-Berliner, die am liebsten in der Landestracht ins Bett kriechen würden, die sich mit Betonung der partikularistischen Eigenart gar nicht genug tun können, putzen sich nämlich brav

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<sup>51</sup> Bienert, *Die eingebildete Metropole*, p.67. See also Tilton, *Nazism*, especially p.10 and p.57.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolf Heberle, *From Democracy to Nazism. A Regional Case Study in Political Parties in Germany*. New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1970, pp.45-55.



den Mund mit Kaliklora, gurgeln mit Odol, benutzen die Reklame ihrer Zeitschrift, unterliegen denselben Einwirkungen der deutschen Allerweltsreklame . . . <sup>53</sup>

Conversely, Berlin is not in itself thoroughly modernized and aspects of life normally associated with the provinces, such as petty small-mindedness, prejudices and a myopic mentality, are often manifested in the city too.<sup>54</sup>

Like Tucholsky's articles, the selected novels are marked by a critical awareness of the polarizations which occur in the discourse about Berlin and the provinces in Weimar Germany as well as of the imaginary meanings and associations which become attached to these places. Through a trio of *flâneurs*, Tergit emphasizes the constructed nature of contemporary visions of Berlin, in which her novel is set, albeit with two brief excursions of Berliners to Baden-Baden and Cottbus. She also traces the repercussions of disembedding on Berlin's physical infrastructure and on its socio-economic relations with both the provinces and other countries. Fallada explores this relationship from the other end of the chain, as the action in his novel is mostly set in the fictional small town of Altholm in Pomerania, but also ranges out to a tiny hamlet, villages and the large provincial administrative centre, Stolpe. No scenes actually take place in Berlin, although the capital city's influence is clear as it dispatches ministerial decisions, journalists and lawyers to Altholm. Fallada highlights how distorted perceptions of all these places can be manipulated to govern action and how they conceal more complex relationships. Situated in the large provincial city of Cologne, *Gilgi* offers yet another perspective on the relationship between Berlin and the provinces, with Berlin functioning as the alluring symbol of glamour, mobility, progress and independence, although here it is in competition with

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<sup>53</sup> Ignaz Wrobel [i.e. Kurt Tucholsky], 'Berlin! Berlin!', *Die Weltbühne*, 23 (29 March 1927), 499-501 (p.500).

<sup>54</sup> Ignaz Wrobel, 'Berlin und die Provinz', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (13 March 1928), 405-408 (p.407).

London, Paris and Madrid. The relative nature of the significance invested in the urban landscape is brought to the readers' attention not only through Gilgi's shifting perspectives on Cologne and her excursions into previously unknown parts of the city, but also through the different perspectives of individuals such as the *flâneur* and tourists, in search of the authentic face of the city.

### 3.4 Modernity, Mass Production and the Authentic

The ideal of the authentic emerges as a reaction to the anonymity of the city and the development of industrial mass production and consumption. If the mass-produced item depends on disembedded socio-economic relations, the authentic object is associated with conditions of production and use (or reception in the case of art) based upon the pre-modern conjunction of space and place, and space and time. Hence, this also arises from a restructuring of spatio-temporal relations in the modern world. A brief consideration of Georg Simmel's interpretation of the value of the authentic, unique object should clarify this interrelationship. In *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900), Simmel — who usually demonstrates an acute awareness of the ambiguous repercussions of modernity — expresses his preference for the unique object made by a single artisan for a specific customer over anonymous mass-produced items. Importantly, he connects this preference to a rootedness in place and to the face-to-face interactions within the local community. The customized objects made by artisans depend upon a personal relationship with the consumer, Simmel argues, and create a sense of temporal continuity and embeddedness in place: 'Hierdurch entstand jenes „Verwachsen“ der Persönlichkeiten mit den Gegenständen ihrer Umgebung'.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, Simmel claims, anonymous items produced by

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<sup>55</sup> Georg Simmel, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989, VI: *Philosophie des Geldes*, ed. by David P. Frisby and Klaus



numerous workers who have never met their customers simply reinforce a sense of isolation and alienation in modern individuals. However, the only enclave which remains invulnerable to the division of labour and mechanized mass production, Simmel believes, is the work of art, which continues to be the unique expression of an individual personality:

Die Geschlossenheit des Kunstwerks aber bedeutet, daß eine subjektive Seeleneinheit in ihm zum Ausdruck kommt; das Kunstwerk fordert nur *einen* Menschen, diesen aber ganz und seiner zentralsten Innerlichkeit nach: es vergilt dies dadurch, daß seine Form ihm der reinste Spiegel und Ausdruck des Subjekts zu sein gestattet.<sup>56</sup>

Simmel's preference for the authentic article therefore arises as a reaction to the feared impact of the division of labour and the anonymous conditions of industrial production, as of course did such tendencies as the English arts and crafts movement.

Some three decades later, following an explosion in the popularity of the cinema and radio together with technological improvements in photographic reproduction,<sup>57</sup> Walter Benjamin would argue that this uniqueness and authenticity associated with the work of art in pre-modern conditions of production was no longer sustainable.<sup>58</sup> Authenticity had been undermined in the age of mechanical reproduction, where the work of art was designed to be mechanically reproducible. In contrast to Simmel, Benjamin valorizes the

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Christian Köhnke, p.637. This text is based on the second expanded edition of 1907.

<sup>56</sup> Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, p.630, Simmel's emphasis.

<sup>57</sup> On the impact of mass media on the culture of the Weimar Republic, see Petro, *Joyless Streets*, pp.170-171; Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik*, pp.35-51.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rudolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, I.2, pp.471-508. This is the third and final version of this text. For details of the discovery and publication history of the different versions, see the editorial discussion in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII.2, pp.661-690 and Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity and the 'Threepenny Lawsuit'*. Bern, Lang, 1997, p.113.

collective and mechanical production of art in positive terms, believing it to have revolutionary potential, whilst efforts to sustain the 'Aura' or uniqueness were believed by Benjamin to inhibit this potential. Benjamin's approach towards these issues will be discussed in more detail in relation to *Käsebier*.

As with the discourses relating to women and to Berlin and the provinces, it is the unreflected use of the notion of the authentic which is the subject of my selected novelists' attention. They also criticize the cynical exploitation of the notion. In a grimly ironic twist, the yearning for the authentic, for objects, experiences, language, customs or ways of life which are unique in time and place, is transformed by the culture industry into a kind of consumer demand. This demand is, in turn, met by the very mass media and mass production that is ultimately responsible for the destruction of that which is authentic and which the consumers of this repackaged authenticity originally sought to escape. Tergit highlights the contradictions involved in a working-class folk singer being celebrated as the genuine representative of authentic, proletarian Berlin by those responsible for driving forward the modernizing processes which destroy the conditions for such authenticity. Fallada focuses upon the way in which seemingly authentic local customs, language and traditions are revived and even invented as propaganda to appeal to farmers fearful of the repercussions of modernity. Moreover, Fallada demonstrates the crucial role played by the apparatus of technological modernity in disseminating this propaganda and attracting enthusiasts. Enthusiasm for the supposedly authentic lives of the working class is also criticized by Keun. However, Keun explores the impact of mass production and the mass media from a slightly different angle, examining the problematic aspects both of a desire to participate in the consumer culture and conform to the mass images and of fears of what Stefan Zweig referred to as a 'Monotisierung



der Welt' which produces the search for an authentic, individual experience.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, a key topic in all three novels is the problematic nature of stock language or set phrases which once set into mass circulation by the media are repeated until they become meaningless.

As well as being a value to pit against the ramifications of industrial production, the authentic or genuine was also a key term within the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, which strove for 'die höchste Authentizität'.<sup>60</sup> Within this context, the term is used in several ways. It is employed in opposition to what was perceived as an excessive ornamentation in language in order to applaud simple, supposedly natural-sounding language. It also refers to whether the writing or work of art is based upon the author's actual experience or a real-life episode. Finally, it is used to designate a general impression of realistic mimesis. These points will be expanded and clarified in the next chapter. Here, it is important to note that within literary debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the authentic does not represent a rejection of modernization, but rather is used to designate a type of art thought to be suitable for an age of rapid modernization. The expressions 'echt' and 'authentisch' occur repeatedly in the reception of my selected texts, although, as will be argued in the course of the thesis, the novels themselves directly and indirectly debunk the enthusiasm for the authentic involved in literary discussions of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

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<sup>59</sup> Stefan Zweig, 'Die Monotonisierung der Welt', in *Weimarer Republik. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1918-1933*, ed. by Anton Kaes. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983, pp.268-273. First publ. in *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (1 February 1925).

<sup>60</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.170.

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# CHAPTER TWO

***Weimar Debates about  
Neue Sachlichkeit***

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## 1. Neue Sachlichkeit and Crisis

In a review of Lion Feuchtwanger's *Erfolg. Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz* (1930), Carl von Ossietzky expressed his astonishment at the utterly contradictory assessments of Feuchtwanger's novel about politics and the judiciary in Munich in the early years of the Weimar Republic: 'Dem Einen ist die Geschichte zu bayrisch, dem Andern nicht bayrisch genug. Dem Einen zu politisch, dem Andern zu privat.'<sup>1</sup> Ossietzky attributes these contrasting reviews to the sudden widespread backlash against the strong tendency in the Weimar Republic for novels to engage with contemporary social issues in a realist manner, which Ossietzky terms *Naturalismus*, but which was also commonly referred to as *Neue Sachlichkeit*. He laments Feuchtwanger's misfortune in not having published his novel a few months earlier, when:

Mindestens in der liberalen Presse wäre es als Meisterleistung eines Zeitromans gefeiert worden. Heute hat man sich an der Reportage, den Zustandsschilderungen, der sozialen Kritik gründlich den Magen übergessen. Der Nationalismus ist die große Mode. Die politische Reaktion ist schon da, die ästhetische schreitet fort. [...] Was sollen da Autoren, die noch mit den Emblemen der republikanischen, der sozialistischen und demokratischen Epoche kommen?<sup>2</sup>

Ossietzky associates the waning of *Neue Sachlichkeit's* star with the widespread erosion of the democratic republican consensus and the worsening economic and political crisis. He argues that, rather than seeking to be confronted with modern subject matter and a clear perspective on the present, people have begun to take flight into fascism in politics and to a form of Romanticism or Biedermeier manner in literature.

Ossietzky's article on the reception of *Erfolg* in the Weimar Republic neatly illustrates some of the central features which are also to be found in the

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<sup>1</sup> Celsus (i.e. Carl von Ossietzky), '„Erfolg“ ohne Sukzeß', *Die Weltbühne*, 26 (11 November 1930), 727-729 (p.727).

<sup>2</sup> Celsus, 'Erfolg', pp.728-729.

reception of *Käsebier*, *Gilgi* and *Bauern* and which, in my view, have contributed to over-simplified or one-sided readings of these novels. In particular, the phenomenon of sharply conflicting or contradictory reviews which so struck Ossietzky in the reception of *Erfolg* also characterizes the reception of my three central texts. Moreover, as I discuss in detail in the individual commentary chapters, these schisms in the reception of the novels by Tergit, Keun and Fallada are powerfully influenced by the intensified opposition to, and discussion of, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which arose from the acute sense of crisis following the onset of the Great Depression in Germany. In my opinion, the subtlety and complexity of the authors' response to the sense of crisis has been largely obscured by the sharply polarized environment of their original reception which has continued to affect analyses of the novels in the post-1945 era. Furthermore, the novels themselves have frequently been categorized as examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which has obscured the critique offered in the novels themselves of some of the more extreme claims or programmatic statements made by the proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

In order to support these arguments, it will be necessary to reconstruct the key aspects of theoretical discussions about *Neue Sachlichkeit* in relation to literature in the 1920s and 1930s which constituted the framework for the initial reception of the novels. This will act as a foil to which reference will be made in the individual analyses of the novels relating to two main areas. Firstly, it will be used to highlight how the debates surrounding *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the Weimar era have affected the reception of the novels, both following their initial publication and in more recent years. Secondly, it will be employed to trace the extent to which the novels demonstrate tendencies associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*, but



also to explore how they simultaneously criticize or problematize some of the movement's more simplistic premises.

The concept of *Neue Sachlichkeit* is surrounded by notorious terminological confusion. Since the revival of interest in Weimar literature in the late 1960s, critical debate in this area has, for the most part, sought to define the term and determine the extent of its applicability.<sup>3</sup> Most commentators argue that the impact of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was evident in most spheres of cultural activity in the Weimar Republic, including architecture and design, music, film, photography and the visual arts, as well as literature.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is generally held that the term was coined by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, director of the Mannheim municipal art gallery, to refer to new styles in painting, examples of which he was assembling for a new exhibition.<sup>5</sup> Both the style and the name are then thought to have filtered into literature, although Sabina Becker has recently questioned this view.<sup>6</sup> Some critics, notably Helmut Lethen and Jost Hermand, perceive *Neue Sachlichkeit* to be not just a cultural phenomenon, but rather the dominant ideology of the

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<sup>3</sup> See the overview in Klaus Petersen, '„Neue Sachlichkeit“: Stilbegriff, Epochenbezeichnungen oder Gruppenphänomen?', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 56 (1982), 463-477 (p.463).

<sup>4</sup> Harald Olbrich, 'Die „Neue Sachlichkeit“ im Widerstreit der Ideologien und Theorien zur Kunstgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *Weimarer Beiträge*, 26 (Dec. 1980), 65-76; Deborah Smail, *White-Collar Workers, Mass Culture and Neue Sachlichkeit in Weimar Berlin. A Reading of Hans Fallada's 'Kleiner Mann - Was nun?', Erich Kästner's 'Fabian' and Irmgard Keun's 'Das kunstseidene Mädchen'*. Bern and others, Peter Lang, 1998; Carl Wege, 'Gleisdreieck, Tank und Motor. Figuren und Denkfiguren aus der Technosphäre der Neuen Sachlichkeit', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 68 (1994), 307-332; John Willett, *The New Sobriety 1917-1933. Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Horst Denkler, 'Sache und Stil. Die Theorie der Neuen Sachlichkeit und ihre Auswirkungen auf Kunst und Dichtung', *Wirkendes Wort*, 18 (1968-1969), 167-185 (p.170); Jürgen Heizmann, *Joseph Roth und die Ästhetik der Neuen Sachlichkeit*. Heidelberg, Mattes, 1990, pp.29-37; Jost Hermand, 'Einheit in der Vielheit? Zur Geschichte des Begriffs „Neue Sachlichkeit“', in Jost Hermand, *Stile, Ismen, Etiketten. Zur Periodisierung der modernen Kunst*. Wiesbaden, Athenaion, 1978, pp.80-93 (p.80).

<sup>6</sup> Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, I: *Die Ästhetik der neusachlichen Literatur (1920-1933)*, especially pp.39-45.

so-called era of stabilization between late 1923 and late 1929. In these accounts, *Neue Sachlichkeit* is defined as a kind of 'antiutopian pragmatism', which jettisons idealist and revolutionary ambitions in favour of an acceptance of the status quo, an uncritical affirmation of capitalism, rationalization and technological modernity.<sup>7</sup> The question of whether *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels do indeed represent an unquestioning acceptance or promotion of the ramifications of modern, industrialized society will be taken up again later. *Neue Sachlichkeit* is thus generally perceived as a phenomenon which impacted upon the whole scope of Weimar culture, although views of the nature and the parameters of its influence vary considerably in the post-1945 debates.

Nonetheless, since my concern is to uncover the circumstances surrounding the original reception of the selected novels, I have largely confined my discussion to how the notion of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, along with terms like *(Neo-)Naturalismus* and *Neue Gegenständlichkeit*, was applied to novels in articles and reviews from the 1920s and early 1930s, although I also refer to more recent academic assessments of *Neue Sachlichkeit* where appropriate. Within this context, *Neue Sachlichkeit* was not really a formal movement or a term coined by a group of writers to designate a specific set of prescriptive principles they had formulated. Rather, it appears to have acted as a focal point for discussions about the function, form and subject matter of literature in an age of democratization, industrialization and mass culture. Theoretical discussions about *Neue Sachlichkeit* occurred mostly within the framework of book reviews, where an individual novel or a group of novels was used to exemplify desirable or undesirable trends in

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<sup>7</sup> Jost Hermand, 'Neue Sachlichkeit: Ideology, Lifestyle or Artistic Movement?', trans. by Stephen Brockmann, in *Dancing on the Volcano. Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann. Columbia, Camden House, 1994, pp.57-67 (p.58). See also Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des „Weißen Sozialismus“*. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1970.



modern literature. Characteristics of the novels were often oversimplified or exaggerated in order to support the particular standpoint of the reviewer. In many ways, therefore, *Neue Sachlichkeit* often acted as a construct which could vary depending upon the polemical purposes of the reviewer, which accounts in part for the slippery nature of the term. The key journals in which such discussions took place were *Die Weltbühne*, *Die literarische Welt*, *Der Querschnitt*, *Die Literatur* and *Die Linkskurve* and articles from these publications therefore constitute my main sources.<sup>8</sup>

From my reading of these reviews and articles about novels, there appear to have been three closely related areas of contention in the literary theoretical discourse about *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The first central point of contention revolved around the representation of contemporary reality. Debates also clustered around the extent to which authors should intervene or present their own opinion in the text and whether they should offer any alternatives to the situations they depicted. This is a crucial point, since detractors of my selected novels have often objected to the lack of a definite alternative or obvious political solution to the critical situation in Weimar Germany, an omission which is felt to have paved the way for National Socialism. Finally, reviewers in the Weimar era were exercised by whether *Neue Sachlichkeit* could, or should, be evaluated as 'high art' or as 'mass culture'. Once again, this is of significance, because the novels by Tergit, Keun and Fallada have often been identified and dismissed as trivial literature written for a mass audience.

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<sup>8</sup> Becker adds *Der Scheinwerfer* and *Das Tage-Buch* to this list. Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I, p.48. On the role of these journals in intellectual discussions regarding *Neue Sachlichkeit*, see also Karl Werner Scheele, 'Aspekte der "Neuen Sachlichkeit" in ausgewählten Romanen von H. Fallada, E. Kästner, I. Keun, E. Reger und G. Tergit', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Middlebury College, 1993, p.5.

## 2. From Anti-Expressionism to Neue Sachlichkeit

It has often been noted that the decisive impetus to *Neue Sachlichkeit* both in literature<sup>9</sup> and in the visual arts<sup>10</sup> arose from the rejection of Expressionism. This was partly the result of a scepticism towards idealism and grand visions in general which appeared irrelevant in the face of the senseless mass slaughter of the First World War. For example, the protagonist of Siegfried Kracauer's *Ginster* (1928) cannot muster any enthusiasm for philosophical writings during the war: 'Entweder forderten sie eine vollkommene Welt oder setzten die Vollkommenheit schon voraus. In der Zwischenzeit fielen die Soldaten.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the narrator of Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) turns to philosophy in the hope that it will help him to come to terms with his grim experiences of war, but finds it is irrelevant.<sup>12</sup> As the dominant literary mode in the run-up to the First World War, the idealist aspirations of Expressionism were seen as particularly suspect by the survivors. Hermann von Wedderkop complains that the utopianism of Expressionism contributes to a widespread deluded mentality which distracts people from their material suffering:

Jetzt zeigen sich auch der großen Masse die verheerenden Folgen  
des Expressionismus. Ein ganzes Volk lebte von Idee durch Jahre

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<sup>9</sup> Fritz Achberger and others, 'Wirkungen in der Praxis? Naturalismus - Neue Sachlichkeit - Dokumentarismus', in *Realismustheorien in Literatur, Malerei, Musik und Politik*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand. Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne/Mainz, Kohlhammer, 1975, pp.87-102 (p.92); Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I, pp.97-108; Denkler, 'Sache und Stil', p.170; Karl Prümm, 'Neue Sachlichkeit. Anmerkungen zum Gebrauch des Begriffs in neueren literaturwissenschaftlichen Publikationen', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 91 (1972), 606-616 (p.610, p.616).

<sup>10</sup> Sergiusz Michalski, *Neue Sachlichkeit: Malerei, Graphik, und Photographie in Deutschland 1919-1933*. Cologne, Taschen, 1992, p.17; Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*. London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Ginster. Von ihm selbst geschrieben*, in Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, 8 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973, VII: *Ginster. Georg*, ed. by Karsten Witte, pp.7-242 (p.210).

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Renn, *Krieg*, Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurter Societäts-Druckerei, 1929, p.174.



hindurch, war glücklich bei dieser Nahrung, verzückt oft, als ob es sich um „Vollfetten“ handelte.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, the Expressionist desire for ecstatic release and violent intensity of individual experience, evinced in poems such as Alfred Ehrenstein's 'Der Kriegsgott' (1911) or Ernst Stadler's 'Der Aufbruch' (c.1912), to name but two examples, was associated with the initial mass fervour for the Great War, which had resulted in so many young men rushing headlong to their deaths.

As various critics have noted, the focus upon subjective experience in Expressionist writings was seen from the post-war perspective to be ultimately egocentric, arrogant, remote from reality and self-destructive.<sup>14</sup> 'Es genügt aber nicht, Kräfte zu entfalten. Tritt ihnen kein Objekt entgegen, so verzehren sie sich in sich selbst.'<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Max Freyhan decries the failure to acknowledge anything beyond the self in Expressionist writings: 'Die Welt war gewissermaßen da von Gnaden des Selbst und des Ich'.<sup>16</sup> Von Wedderkop comments that Expressionism is detached from reality, as it 'wird geboren, fabriziert in Gemütlichkeit, vom Zimmer aus'.<sup>17</sup> Although the Expressionist manner continued into the post-war period, it was criticized for failing to take account of social circumstances, political events and economic problems.

Consequently, there was a call for writers to look beyond the self and turn their attention to their immediate surroundings, the external world and

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<sup>13</sup> Hermann von Wedderkop, 'Querschnitt durch 1922', cited in abbreviated form in Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.52-53 (p.52). First publ. in *Der Querschnitt*, 3 (1922-23) [no p. no.s].

<sup>14</sup> Achberger and others, 'Wirkungen', p.92; Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I, p.98; Denkler, 'Sache und Stil', p.170; and Prümm, 'Neue Sachlichkeit', p.610.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Kayser, *Das junge deutsche Drama*, extract in Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.53-54 (p.54).

<sup>16</sup> Max Freyhan, 'Neue Klassizität', cited in abbreviated form in Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.62-64 (p.63).

<sup>17</sup> Von Wedderkop, 'Querschnitt', p.52.

contemporary social issues. Writers were urged to relocate the individual within the wider environment and emphasize the importance of external reality. Kracauer's *Ginster* draws praise from Harry Kahn, who argues that the novel places people and objects on a par rather than making the unique individual the measure of all things: 'Dinge wie Menschen und Menschen gleich Dingen stehen.'<sup>18</sup> Within this context, *Neue Sachlichkeit* writers sought to take account of representative or typical experiences and events, rather than describing particular, individual circumstances. Lion Feuchtwanger sought to achieve 'die bildnishaft Wahrheit des Typus' in *Erfolg*, for example.<sup>19</sup> In his review of *Ginster*, Kahn writes that the novels about the First World War which began to appear in the late 1920s focus on 'typische[ ] Einzelschicksale von Front und Etappe'.<sup>20</sup>

If Expressionism had been criticized for its lack of political impact and failure to bring about any improvements to social and economic conditions, the advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit* aimed to effect social change through their treatment of contemporary subject matter. It was thought that when confronted with obvious social injustices or shocking contemporary situations, readers would be so appalled that they would be compelled to take action, thus generating social transformation. Literature was therefore to have a practical social function or application.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the events or issues themselves were to occupy the foreground, rather than the author's subjective experience, opinions or analysis of those events. Arnolt Bronnen's novel *Film und Leben Barbara La Marr* (1927) elicits enthusiastic praise from Bernard von Brentano for precisely this reason:

Der Romanschriftsteller wirft aus seinem Roman alles heraus, was eine europäische Entwicklung hineingepackt hatte — jene

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<sup>18</sup> Harry Kahn, 'Ginster', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (18 December 1928), 927-929, (p.928).

<sup>19</sup> Lion Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg. Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz. Roman*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1999, p.807.

<sup>20</sup> Kahn, 'Ginster', p.927.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Denkler, 'Sache und Stil', p.173.



Psychologie, jene Problematik, jene Erfahrung. Er nimmt den Bericht wieder vor; er zeigt den Tatbestand, das reine Geschehen, das rätselvolle Geschehen.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than concentrating upon the inner lives of individuals and presenting psychological explanations for their behaviour, von Brentano asserts, Bronnen concentrates solely upon the observable facts, upon the occurrence itself. In order to centre the readers' attention on these 'facts' or events, the writer had to be as unobtrusive as possible, to act as an impartial observer, centring upon external gestures, facial expressions and physical surroundings, rather than displaying an omnipotent and privileged insight into the characters' motives and inner thought processes. Alfred Polgar applauds the minimal authorial intervention in Ernest Hemingway's work: 'Psychologie bleibt weg, beschrieben wird nicht, die Figuren beschreiben sich selbst durch Reden und Schweigen, durch die Handlung, die sie tun, und die Haltung, die sie einnehmen.'<sup>23</sup> It was argued that the sensation of being plunged in *medias res* would stimulate the readers into formulating their own opinions about the issues involved and thus adopting a more active role. Brentano argues that a reader of Bronnen's novel 'wird gezwungen, selber seine Meinung zu haben und diesen Kampf zu erfahren, indem er ihn betrachtet'.<sup>24</sup> In these reviews, it was clearly felt that if authors refrained from imposing their opinions, readers would be compelled to reflect on the events themselves. The problematic aspects of such reasoning will be discussed below.

Like the Naturalists before them, the proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* looked to the natural sciences as models of neutrality in recording and presenting

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard von Brentano, 'Leben einer Schauspielerin', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (31 January 1928), 170-174 (p.171).

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Polgar, 'Hemingway', in *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und Dokumente zur Deutschen Literatur 1918-1933*, ed. by Anton Kaes. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983, pp.390-392 (p.391). First publ. in *Das Tage-Buch*, 10 (14 December 1929), 2180-2182.

<sup>24</sup> Von Brentano, 'Leben', p.173.

reality. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* writer was thought to create 'eine geographische Schilderung oder biologische Studie'<sup>25</sup> and was likened to a 'Geometer' or 'Topograph'.<sup>26</sup> Other popular models advocated for *Neue Sachlichkeit* writers included the reporter and the eye-witness, as Egon Erwin Kisch outlines in the foreword to *Der rasende Reporter* (1925):

Der Reporter hat keine Tendenz, hat nichts zu rechtfertigen und hat keinen Standpunkt. Er hat unbefangene Zeuge zu sein und unbefangene Zeugenschaft zu liefern, so verlässlich, wie sich eine Aussage geben läßt, — jedenfalls ist sie (für die Klarstellung) wichtiger als die genaue Rede des Staatsanwalts oder des Verteidigers.<sup>27</sup>

The disinterested perspective of the lay person delivered from the thick of the action was thought to guarantee the credibility of the account and, moreover, to render the work more accessible to the readers. The Expressionist view of the artist as visionary or spiritual leader was thus replaced by the notion of the writer as unbiased photographer, reporter or eye-witness, whose task consisted in objectively recording and presenting reality as he or she encountered it. In the reception of the selected novels, Tergit, Fallada and Keun are often presented in these terms.

The emphasis upon veracity and an accurate presentation of reality also led to the increasing popularity of genres such as the biography or autobiography; the *Schlüsselroman* or *roman-à-clef*, a genre in which characters are thinly disguised replicas of real-life individuals; and the *Zeitroman*, which dealt with contemporary issues and often involves an intense focus upon the present. For similar reasons

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<sup>25</sup> Kurt Pinthus, 'So siehst du aus!', cited in abbreviated form in, Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.49-50. First publ. in *Das Tage-Buch* 2 (1921), 1405-1408.

<sup>26</sup> Carl von Ossietzky, 'Ludwig Renn', *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (5 March 1929), 381-383 (p.383).

<sup>27</sup> Egon Erwin Kisch, *Der rasende Reporter*, in Egon Erwin Kisch, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. by Bodo Uhse and Gisela Kisch. Berlin/Weimar, Aufbau, 1972, V. Foreword reprinted in 'Nachbemerkung', pp.659-660 (p.659).



of establishing a sense of authenticity, novels often included a preface or afterword in which the author claimed to have witnessed the events, to know the characters, or to have produced an historically accurate or true account. The preface to Joseph Roth's *Die Flucht ohne Ende* (1927) was one of the most famous examples, which acquired a programmatic status in the Weimar Republic, although recent publications have argued that Roth's preface cannot be taken at face value.<sup>28</sup> Such truth claims were frequently found in novels about the First World War, including Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (1928) and Renn's *Krieg*.<sup>29</sup> In the preface to the second part of *Jahrgang 1902* (1928), Ernst Glaeser insists that his work is not a novel and emphasizes his intention to present the truth, although he concedes that his knowledge is only partial:

Es wäre mir leicht gewesen, einen ‚Roman‘ zu schreiben. Ich habe mit diesem Buch nicht die Absicht zu ‚dichten‘.  
Ich will die Wahrheit, selbst wenn sie fragmentarisch ist wie dieser Bericht.<sup>30</sup>

Glaeser considers invention, fiction and imagination to be much easier to achieve than a faithful reproduction of events as witnessed by himself and his friends. Arnold Zweig emphasizes that his novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) is not the product of invention or imagination, but has its basis in historical fact: 'dessen Fabel nicht erfunden ist'.<sup>31</sup> Truth claims are prized above fictionality by these writers.

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<sup>28</sup> Enthusiastic praise for the reportage in Roth's novel can be found in Manfred Georg, 'Beobachtet, nicht „gedichtet“', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (3 January 1928), 35-36. This view is criticized by Heizmann, *Joseph Roth*, and Reiner Wild, 'Beobachtet oder gedichtet? Joseph Roths Roman „Die Flucht ohne Ende“', in *Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman. Neue Interpretationen zum Roman der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Sabina Becker and Christoph Weiß. Stuttgart/Weimar Metzler, 1995, pp.27-48.

<sup>29</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen Nichts Neues*. Berlin, Propyläen, 1929, preface; Renn, *Krieg*, preface.

<sup>30</sup> Ernst Glaeser, 'Jahrgang 1902 [Vorwort des zweiten Teils]', in Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, II, p.202.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold Zweig, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa. Roman*. Aufbau, Berlin, 1994, p.489.

In a slightly different vein, Erik Reger warns the readers of his exposé of the power of industrial cartels in the Ruhrgebiet, *Union der festen Hand* (1931), not to be deceived by the label of 'Roman' on the title-page.<sup>32</sup> Reger prefaces his work with a set of operating instructions, the second of which, in contrast to Glaeser, emphasizes that the realistic aspect of the novel, and its claim to truth, arises from the typical nature of the events depicted, rather than the specific details: 'Man beachte, daß in diesem Buche nicht die Wirklichkeit von Personen oder Begebenheiten wiedergegeben, sondern die Wirklichkeit einer Sache und eines geistigen Zustandes dargestellt wird.'<sup>33</sup> Feuchtwanger too insists that he has not merely provided cheap copies of actual individuals and changed the names, as in a *Schlüsselroman*, but rather has aimed for a more general validity in *Erfolg*. Whereas Glaeser is writing about specific cases and rejects all claims to fictionality, Feuchtwanger and Reger seek closeness to reality by capturing general, typical trends. However, in general, such disclaimers or prefaces were designed to encourage readers to compare the events in the novel with actual occurrences or with their own experiences.

Attention to detail was also believed to add to the credibility of the story and the impact upon readers, which would ultimately produce action. Ossietzky applauds Renn's almost obsessive exactitude and accumulation of minute details in *Krieg*:

Die Einzelvorgänge sind mit größter Genauigkeit festgehalten; jedes Detail hat die Gewissenhaftigkeit eines Berichterstatters herbeigetragen, den das Bewußtsein, unvollständig zu sein, quälen würde.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Erik Reger, *Union der festen Hand. Roman einer Entwicklung*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1946, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> Reger, *Union*, p.7.

<sup>34</sup> Ossietzky, 'Ludwig Renn', p.382.



Although Renn offers neither an explanation of the war's origins nor any vision for the future, the power of his work lies, Ossietzky contends, in the extraordinary detail, which attests to the veracity and honesty of Renn's report. The desire for precision and accuracy also underpins the incorporation of documentary materials into the work of fiction: in *Erfolg*, Feuchtwanger includes chapters full of statistics about population, employment, travel, the judiciary, or government expenditure, whilst Reger inserts newspaper reports between the five books in *Union der festen Hand*.<sup>35</sup>

This externalization and accentuation upon that which can be observed also affects the temporal structures of the narratives, which tend to proceed chronologically or to convey the impression of simultaneity. There is an intense focus on the present and often very little, if any, information is provided about the characters' prehistory or about their future at the close of the story. Manfred Georg argues that the narrator in *Die Flucht ohne Ende* is no longer omnipotent, no longer able to survey the entire field of action from an almost Olympian vantage point like a military commander, but rather stands in the midst of time's flow, recording everything as it happens: 'Es wird nicht mehr vom Feldherrnhügel abgeschlossener Erkenntnis, sondern mitten in der marschierenden Zeit aufgenommen. Es gibt daher keinen Anfang und keinen Schluß eines Geschehens mehr.'<sup>36</sup> The subject matter and the altered narrative perspective thus impacts upon the temporal dimension of *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels.

The need for accessibility and to allow the 'facts' to speak for themselves without artifice and embellishment generated corresponding demands for language to be stripped of supposedly superfluous circumlocutions, imagery,

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<sup>35</sup> Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg*, pp.212-218; Reger, *Union*, pp.120-121, pp.251-254, pp.363-366, pp.502-503.

<sup>36</sup> Georg, 'Beobachtet', pp.35-36.

symbolism and metaphor in favour of conciseness and precision. This was welcomed as a reaction to the bombastic language of Expressionist literature, which Wedderkop attacks as '[d]ie leere Geste, der Pomp der Diktion, das unnoble Unterstreichen, das Unpräzise, Unsaubere, Fettige des ganzen Geistes'.<sup>37</sup> Kurt Pinthus praises the terse style of the newly emerging trend in literature: 'Der Stil dieser Bücher, tastend versucht oder natürlich gekonnt, ist unsentimental, schmucklos und knapp.'<sup>38</sup> Even the detractors of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, such as Rudolf Arnheim, approved of the increasing use of simple, functional language in literature: 'Wir spüren da, gegenüber allem Zierat, eine Reinlichkeit und Ehrlichkeit, die uns wohltut und erfrischt.'<sup>39</sup> The narrator in Renn's *Krieg* explains the reasoning behind his choice of simple sentence structures and vocabulary:

An den Schriftstellern fiel mir auf, wie willkürlich sie die Worte setzen, obwohl es doch eine ganz klare Notwendigkeit gab, wie man die Worte setzen muß, daß nämlich die Worte immer in der Reihenfolge stehen, wie sie der Leser erleben soll, zum Beispiel nicht: eine grüne, über mehrere Kuppen ansteigende Wiese; denn zuerst muß man doch wissen, daß es eine Wiese ist, und daher muß das Wort vorn im Satze stehen.<sup>40</sup>

The use of concrete, simple language and uncomplicated grammatical structures was thus a deliberate device to render the experience more immediate and more accessible to the readers.

In summary, *Neue Sachlichkeit* evolved as an anti-Expressionist movement, which emphasized contemporary subject matter, social relevance and accessibility.

<sup>37</sup> Hermann von Wedderkop, 'Bühnenexpressionismus', cited in abbreviated form in Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.50-52. First publ. in *Der Neue Merkur*, 6 (1922), no. 2, 102-110.

<sup>38</sup> Kurt Pinthus, 'Männliche Literatur', cited in abbreviated form in *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und Dokumente zur Deutschen Literatur 1918-1933*, ed. by Anton Kaes. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983, pp.328-335 (p.328). First publ. in *Das Tage-Buch* 10 (1 June 1929), 903-911.

<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, 'Neue Sachlichkeit und alter Stumpfsinn', *Die Weltbühne*, 23 (12 April 1927), 591-592 (p.591).

<sup>40</sup> Renn, *Krieg*, p.173.



Ultimately, the advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit* aimed to provoke their readers into formulating opinions about the social injustices and situations they portrayed and thereby to prompt their readers into agitating for change. It was thought that this could be achieved through objective or value-free presentation of reality with authors refraining from providing motivations or explanations for behaviour or events. There was a focus upon the present or the recent past, with the aim of creating the sense of being *in medias res* for the readers. In the interests of accessibility, language was to be as precise, concrete and simple as possible.

### 3. Weimar Critiques of *Neue Sachlichkeit*

It is widely asserted that *Neue Sachlichkeit* is a phenomenon of the era of stabilization and one which was abandoned by its leading proponents with the advent of the Depression.<sup>41</sup> Joseph Roth's article 'Schluß mit der „Neuen Sachlichkeit!“', published in two instalments in January 1930 is frequently considered to be the movement's deathknell. Ossietzky's review of *Erfolg* clearly marks a change in attitudes, but his defence of Feuchtwanger indicates that not all were ready to abandon the movement. As Sabina Becker argues, given the continued publication after 1929 of articles advocating *Neue Sachlichkeit* and of literature in this manner, it is more accurate to speak of an overall intensification of debate about *Neue Sachlichkeit* after 1929, when both critical and supportive voices became more strident.<sup>42</sup> It is in this period of intensified discussion about *Neue Sachlichkeit* between 1929 and 1933 that my selected texts were originally published.

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<sup>41</sup> Klaus Petersen notes that this seems to be the one area of consensus in post-1945 debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Petersen, 'Neue Sachlichkeit', pp.468-469.

<sup>42</sup> Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I, pp.56-59.

Attacks on *Neue Sachlichkeit* came from various quarters: from those who sought to escape from the modern world which was its subject matter; from Marxist critics who demanded clear alternatives to the crisis in the late Weimar Republic; and from writers who had themselves previously been categorized as exponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Otto Rombach's article 'Die Reporter' published in December 1929 provides a good example of an escapist backlash against *Neue Sachlichkeit*, in which anxieties about modernity have been displaced on to that literary movement.<sup>43</sup> Firstly, Rombach demands the kind of escapist literature Ossietzky condemns, harking back to a pre-modern rural existence, rather than a representation of modern urban life:

Wir in den Städten, die wir die Wahl haben zwischen Taxameter, Autobus, Untergrund-, Straßenbahn oder Stadtbahn, lesen mit Wonne vom Herbstgang des netten Poeten, der mit der Gänsemagd anbandelt. [...] Brauchen wir die Geschichte um uns herum, unter der wir sechs Tage kuschen, auch in der Sonntagsausgabe?<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, he deplores the impermanence and fleeting relevance of reportage writing in comparison with the longevity enjoyed by works of classical Antiquity, which suggests concerns about the transient nature of modernity. Finally, Rombach fears that authors will forget what he still views as the timeless, unchanging ego in their rush to focus upon contemporary events: 'Aber es liegt darin die Gefahr, daß über dem Zeitbewußtsein die überzeitliche Persönlichkeit vergessen wird.'<sup>45</sup> *Neue Sachlichkeit* only serves to exacerbate a sense of crisis for Rombach.

Left-liberal and Marxist critics of the programmatic statements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* concentrated their attacks on the claim that writers could be utterly

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<sup>43</sup> Otto Rombach, 'Die Reporter', *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (3 December 1929), 847-849.

<sup>44</sup> Rombach, 'Reporter', p.848.

<sup>45</sup> Rombach, 'Reporter', p.848.



unbiased and remove all subjective elements from their work, albeit for slightly different reasons. As will be illustrated in the individual commentary chapters, these criticisms are particularly pertinent to the reception of *Käsebier*, *Gilgi* and *Bauern*, where the representation of reality and the neutral or objective standpoint of the author were hotly contested.

In 1925, left-liberal Kurt Tucholsky categorically rejected Kisch's assertion that it was possible to produce a report free of bias and subjective values: 'Das gibt es nicht. Es gibt keinen Menschen, der nicht einen Standpunkt hätte.'<sup>46</sup> Tucholsky argues that every report inevitably reveals something about the writers' opinions, values and personality, a point echoed by Joseph Roth in his famous call for an end to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Roth attacks the credibility which the model of the eye-witness had gained as a guarantee of objectivity and veracity in literature, arguing that an eye-witness account only provides information about the personality of the eye-witness rather than about the event in question.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Roth is critical of the faith placed in the claims to truth, authenticity and accuracy found in the prefaces to novels: 'Man erfinde eine Geschichte und sage, man sei dabeigewesen: man glaubt der erfundenen Geschichte.'<sup>48</sup> Such declarations are no guarantee of veracity or of reality, according to Roth. In the eyes of liberals such as Tucholsky and Roth, a value-free, unbiased reproduction of reality is simply not possible, because individual subjective opinions cannot be deactivated.

A further criticism levelled at the call for authorial impartiality and for a focus upon objects and external details by the advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was

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<sup>46</sup> Peter Panter [i.e. Kurt Tucholsky], 'Der rasende Reporter', *Die Weltbühne*, 21 (17 February 1925), 254-255 (pp.254-255).

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Schluß mit der „Neuen Sachlichkeit“', in Joseph Roth, *Werke*, 6 vols. Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch; Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1991, III: *Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*, ed. by Klaus Westermann, pp.153-164, (p.154). First publ. in *Die Literarische Welt*, 17 and 24 January 1930.

<sup>48</sup> Roth, 'Schluß', p.154.

that these veristic techniques vitiated the movement's aim of inciting its readers to change current conditions by bringing them face-to-face with injustice and suffering. Hermann Kesser pinpoints one of the key problems for a literature which seeks to eliminate an overly intrusive narrative voice and to encourage readers to adopt a more active role: the readers may not respond as the author anticipates, or may draw unexpected conclusions.<sup>49</sup> Kesser argues that, although the presentation of the First World War in novels of the late 1920s succeeds in generating a sense of outrage, the sheer horror of the events threatens to overwhelm the readers emotionally and petrify them like Medusa's gaze rather than galvanize them into action:

Wie ein mächtiges Bild des Grauens stehen die Kriegsbücher da. [...] Man ist überrannt, überschwemmt, erschüttert. Und viele lassen sich wahrscheinlich nur zu leicht in das Gefühl hineinverführen, als ob ohne weiteres Dazutun das Ereignis an sich, das scheinbar wie eine Naturkatastrophe vom Himmel herabgefallene, aber in Wahrheit von greifbaren Menschen auf dem Erdboden geschaffene Ereignis, aus sich heraus die Energien zu seiner Selbstvernichtung für ewige Zeiten liefern müsse.<sup>50</sup>

In the absence of an overtly political and clear exposition of the war's underlying causes, the war appears like a natural catastrophe, Kesser argues. The above quotation also illustrates the view that the narrow focus upon incidents and objects in *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels hinders action by the readers. For, Kesser suggests, by excluding the human motives, decisions and inner thought processes which generate the incidents in question, *Neue Sachlichkeit* writers imply that these events are beyond human control, driven forward by their own momentum. Analogous arguments have been put forward by scholars in the post-1945 era.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Hermann Kesser, 'Die deutsche Literatur zeigt ihr Gesicht', *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (21 May 1929), 789-793.

<sup>50</sup> Kesser, 'Gesicht', p.790.

<sup>51</sup> Achberger and others, 'Wirkungen', p.95; Helmut Gruber, "'Neue Sachlichkeit' and the World War', *German Life and Letters*, 20 (1967), 138-149; Heizmann, *Joseph Roth*, pp.44-45.



Béla Balázs voices similar objections from a Marxist perspective, claiming that the focus upon external, observable details and occurrences obscures the impact of human agency upon events:

Aber zur Tatsachenwirklichkeit, an die wir uns doch halten wollen, gehört wohl auch der Mensch. [...] Um ihn mit all seinen Resonanzen auf die Umwelt zu erfassen und zu gestalten, dazu genügt aber die ‚Reportage‘ vom ‚Greifbaren‘ nicht.<sup>52</sup>

Balázs asserts that by prioritizing objects and by seeking to remove human emotions, imagination and motives from literature, *Neue Sachlichkeit* constitutes the literary counterpart to the mechanizing, reifying and depersonalizing processes operating in Weimar society as a whole: ‘Sie ist als Bild der taylorisierten Welt aus dem Lebensgefühl des Trustkapitals erstanden. Es ist die Aesthetik des laufenden Bandes.’<sup>53</sup> The depiction of people as objects simply fosters a sense of fatalistic resignation to the status quo, in Balázs’ view: ‘die daraus folgende Ohnmacht, die über das bloße Hinnehmen der gegebenen Wirklichkeit, über das bloße Anschauen nicht hinwegkommen kann.’<sup>54</sup> The activist aspirations of *Neue Sachlichkeit* thus fail, according to Balázs, precisely because of the priority placed upon objects, externalization and value-free writing. This line of argument has also been taken up in post-1945 discussions of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, for critics whose work is informed by Marxism like Balázs and Georg Lukács, reality can only truly be comprehended and represented from that particular ideological perspective. Without this context, readers are simply faced with a sequence of random, isolated facts whose mutual relevance or interaction is obscured for the readers. Lukács criticizes what he perceives as the *Neue*

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<sup>52</sup> Béla Balázs, ‘Männlich oder kriegsblind?’, *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (25 June 1929), 969-971, (p.970).

<sup>53</sup> Béla Balázs, ‘Sachlichkeit und Sozialismus’, *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (18 December 1928), 916-918 (p.917).

<sup>54</sup> Balázs, ‘Sachlichkeit’, p.917.

<sup>55</sup> See especially Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932* and Hermand, ‘Einheit’.

*Sachlichkeit* obsession with external, surface details and the precise reproduction of historically verifiable particulars:

Die Wirklichkeit einer Einzelgestalt, eines Einzelschicksals usw. hängt nun davon ab, wie weit, mit welcher Wahrheit und Durchschlagskraft, wie konkret, sinnlich und zugleich typisch in ihnen dieser Gesamtprozess und seine treibenden Kräfte zum Ausdruck kommen.<sup>56</sup>

Lukács insists that it is not important for every single detail to correspond with empirical reality: rather the novelist should be at liberty to alter details, if this enables the essential dialectical processes which generate these surface details to be revealed to the readers. Impartiality and the fetish for specific details thus militates against the *Neue Sachlichkeit* aim of capturing reality, in Lukács' eyes.

In addition to the condemnation of the drive towards objectivity, the lay perspective and calls for clear, comprehensible language were attacked by critics across the political spectrum as a sign that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* writers lacked talent or creative skill. Joseph Roth typifies this view when he condemns the linguistic efforts of the adherents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as over-simplified: 'Man schreibt nicht gut, man schreibt simpel.'<sup>57</sup> Many antagonists of *Neue Sachlichkeit* draw a distinction between the workmanlike efforts of its writers on the one hand, and truly creative talent on the other. Rombach, for example, dismisses those who employ reportage as mere craftsmen or 'Handwerker an der aktuellen Gesellschaftsordnung' as opposed to those he perceives to be genuine 'Dichter'.<sup>58</sup> Balázs makes a similar distinction between 'Sachlichkeit' and 'Dichtung', arguing that the attempt to raise reportage to the realm of creative writing 'ist Zeichen eines primitiven Banausentums und ist die Parole der Unbegabten'.<sup>59</sup> Balázs

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<sup>56</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Reportage oder Gestaltung? Kritische Bemerkungen anlässlich eines Romans von Ottwalt', in *Die Linkskurve*, 4 (July 1932 and August 1932), 23-30 and 26-31 (July, p.28).

<sup>57</sup> Roth, 'Schluß', p.154.

<sup>58</sup> Rombach, 'Reporter', p.848.

<sup>59</sup> Balázs, 'Männlich', p.971.



dismisses the practitioners of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as talentless individuals or fact-recording automata, 'Registraturmaschinen der Tatsachen'.<sup>60</sup>

These accusations of minimal literary talent together with the assertion that the authors are workmanlike or are simply mechanical recording instruments which fail to process intellectually or artistically the reality they register recurs frequently in the criticism of the novels by Fallada, Keun and Tergit. In addition, the criticisms about the lack of clear alternatives and an obvious perspective are also levelled at the novels by Fallada, Tergit and Keun. They are accused of merely documenting surface details rather than capturing the essence of reality.

In the individual commentary chapters, I explore the often conflicting reception of my selected texts and illustrate the extent to which the debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit* I have just outlined shape these contradictory reviews. In many cases, the terms of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* discussion are implicit and it is not clear to what extent the critics are conscious of operating within its parameters. Furthermore, I demonstrate that rather than being typical examples of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature, the novels themselves provide an active critique of some of certain aspects of this movement and some of the more naive claims made on its behalf, which has frequently been overlooked.

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<sup>60</sup> Balázs, 'Sachlichkeit', p.916.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## *An Anomic Model of Modernity*

*Gabriele Tergit's Käsebier erobert den  
Kurfürstendamm.*

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## 1. Unwanted Allies

Upon publication of her first novel *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* (1931), Gabriele Tergit was shocked to find her work applauded by those she had sought to criticize.<sup>1</sup> In particular, she was horrified to receive praise from individuals and publications associated with the NSDAP:

Aber ich wurde gepriesen, zum Teil von den falschen Leuten, von Nazis zum Beispiel, die sagten: ‚Ja, so geht die Tugend vor die Hunde, aber wir werden euch die echten Werte bringen, Treue und Wahrheit!‘ Hanns Johst, des Führers Freund, nannte mich ‚ein tapferes preußisches Herz‘, obwohl er bestimmt wußte, daß ich eine Jüdin war.<sup>2</sup>

As Tergit's surprise at being acclaimed in unexpected quarters indicates, she clearly believed that her own analysis of, and attitude towards, the events she had depicted could easily be discerned from the novel. Yet the appropriation of the novel by Nazi critics, who believed that Tergit's interpretation of contemporary events accorded with their own and who sought to deploy *Käsebier* as a springboard for their own propaganda, suggests that Tergit's own standpoint was far from obvious. This may be the outcome of biases which readers bring to bear in reading texts of any complexity. Be that as it may, *Käsebier* has generally been interpreted as an unbiased record of events in the late Weimar Republic and valued as an authentic document written with scrupulous objectivity whether by critics following the novel's original publication, or when the novel was reissued in 1977.

In my opinion, however, a very specific perspective on modernity is foregrounded in *Käsebier*, which, as I will argue, has much in common with the concept of anomie developed by French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Tergit, *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm. Roman*. Berlin, arani, 1997. Abbreviated in references as K.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt. Erinnerungen*. Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein, 1983, p.80.

Tergit's assessment of modernity is in crucial respects mediated through the formal aspects of the novel, in particular narrative pace and structure, so that form and meaning are intimately fused. My aim in this chapter is therefore twofold: on the one hand, to uncover the circumstances which produced the tenacious perception of *Käsebier* as an impartial 'Dokument'<sup>3</sup> with a 'Chronikgehalt'<sup>4</sup>; and on the other hand, to illustrate Tergit's particular evaluation of modernity through an extensive exploration of her first novel.

## 2. A 'Schlüsselroman'? The Käsebier-Carow Connection

Tergit's account of choosing the subject matter for *Käsebier* in her posthumously published autobiography *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt* (1983) offers both a clue to her understanding of modernity and an insight into the history of the novel's reception.<sup>5</sup> Tergit claims that the precise form of her topic was suggested to her by a conversation she had with Walter Kiaulehn, her friend and colleague from the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the left-liberal newspaper where Tergit was employed as a legal correspondent and feuilletonist between 1925 and 1933.<sup>6</sup> On the day following the publication of an article by Heinrich Mann about the popular entertainer Erich Carow, Kiaulehn informed Tergit that a journalist had already clinched a publishing deal for a book on Carow and was asking for contributions. It is possible that the volume in question was *Erich Carow. Karriere eines Volkskomikers* (1930) to which various Weimar luminaries, including Heinrich

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Nerth, 'Käsebiers Ku'damm Leben', *Die Welt*, 21 May 1977, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Annemarie Weber, 'Elegante Apokalypse. Das war Berlin im Jahre 1929', *Presse*, 10 July 1977, p.19.

<sup>5</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, pp.77-81.

<sup>6</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.14. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, alongside the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, represented left-wing democratic journalism in the Weimar Republic. See Kurt Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse 1914-1945. Geschichte der deutschen Presse. Teil III*. Berlin, Colloquium, 1972, p.216.



Mann, Kiaulehn, Kurt Pinthus and Kurt Tucholsky, contributed articles.<sup>7</sup> This example of canny profiteering and the immediate exploitation of any potential new market crystallized ideas which Tergit had been considering for some time:

Ich plante schon lange eine Satire auf den ‚Betrieb‘, den ich für den Zerstörer aller echten Werte hielt, um etwas Nichtexistierendes zu schreiben. Ich wollte sozusagen Andersens ‚Des Kaisers neue Kleider‘ erweitern. Aber ich erkannte, daß ein Buch, aus dem man nicht erfährt weswegen telefoniert, telegraphiert, in Autos gerast wird — ein Kafka-Thema — , unmöglich ist.<sup>8</sup>

Tergit surmounted this problem by inventing the singer Georg Käsebier to be ‘der ganz gleichgültige Aufhänger für Journalisten, Bauunternehmer und Massenmedienleute’.<sup>9</sup> In the novel, she charts Käsebier’s meteoric rise to stardom and his equally swift return to obscurity. However, the singer himself remains largely in the background and the author concentrates instead upon the extensive merchandising operation surrounding Käsebier in order to highlight the role of the modern mass media in the commodification of popular culture. Tergit exposes the extent to which the professional circles of journalists, lawyers and architects together with financiers and speculators are involved in generating a short-lived economic boom based on Käsebier.

From Tergit’s statement about her intended topic, it is possible to identify four main areas of concern to the author which foreground a sense of anxiety about the impact of modernization, particularly the repercussions of the kind of spatio-temporal transformations described in Chapter 1. Firstly, it reveals her concern about the destruction of those values which she considers to be authentic and genuine. Secondly, the responsibility for this destruction is placed squarely at the feet of bustling economic activity. Thirdly, this activity involves, and is

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<sup>7</sup> Erich Carow and others, *Erich Carow. Karriere eines Berliner Volkskomikers*, ed. by Manfred Georg and Peter Schaeffer. Berlin, Eden, 1930.

<sup>8</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, pp.77-78.

<sup>9</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.78.

facilitated by, technological developments which overcome spatio-temporal barriers, by the rapid dissemination of information by telephone and telegraph, and the headlong rush of people from place to place in cars. Finally, Tergit's desire to write about a non-existent or phantom product suggests that all this intensive activity and high-speed movement is a self-sustaining system which requires only the most spurious rationale to function. In summary, Tergit's intended theme exhibits a profound sense of anxiety about the erosion of an established set of ethical values as a consequence of a profiteering mentality and uncontrolled commodification which is promoted by modern transportation and communication. Such concern about the disintegration of a value code resulting from unrestrained economic activity and modernizing processes recalls Durkheim's notion of anomie. Whereas the enthusiastic Nazi critics perceived in *Käsebier* an attack on a capitalist society akin to their own ideological rejection of modernity and whereas other critics have interpreted the novel as an objective reflection of conditions in the late Weimar Republic, I argue in the course of this chapter that *Käsebier* presents a basically anomic model of modernity which attributes the negative repercussions of time-space transformations to the disintegration of traditional values resulting from unchecked economic activity, rather than condemning modernity *per se*. Before proceeding to a discussion of anomie and an analysis of Tergit's model of modernity, however, it is necessary to examine how this intended modern fairy-tale came to be viewed as a documentary reflection of events in the early 1930s.

Part of the answer must surely lie with the interpretation of the novel as a *roman-à-clef* or *Schlüsselroman*, a genre in which characters are thinly disguised replicas of real-life individuals. Ironically, this perception of *Käsebier* was initially generated by the very same unrestrained commodification, profiteering and



unscrupulous machinations of the press which Tergit sought to criticize. In her memoirs, Tergit asserts that Peter Sachse, publisher of the tabloid-style *Berliner Herold* and a contributor to *Erich Carow*, had suggested to Kiaulehn that the latter could obtain publicity for the novel by reviewing it as a *roman-à-clef* about Carow.<sup>10</sup> Kiaulehn followed Sachse's advice and Sachse promptly ran an article claiming that Tergit's character bore no resemblance to Carow whatsoever, thus establishing the parameters of the novel's reception. Tergit claims that many of the subsequent reviews revolved around the question of Käsebier's similarity to Carow, thereby obscuring the central issues she wished to raise in the novel: 'Das war ein glänzender Reklametip, ein wohlgemeinter Freundschaftsdienst von Kiaulehn, nur, *nur* daß er mein Buch verfälschte.'<sup>11</sup> In Tergit's view, the Käsebier-Carow connection established by Kiaulehn completely distorted subsequent interpretations of her novel.

Tergit's bitterness about Kiaulehn's publicity stunt half a century after the event may seem somewhat exaggerated, but the *roman-à-clef* label was indeed unfounded and has been both highly misleading and extraordinarily persistent. There are undeniably some superficial parallels between Käsebier and Carow, relating to their working class origins, their act, the clubs they run and their sudden fame. A fictional parallel to the *Erich Carow* volume appears in the novel entitled 'Käsebier. Ein Berliner Volkssänger' (K, p.98) and the text of one of Käsebier's most successful songs, 'Ich geh stempeln' (K, p.52) echoes the text, although not the metre, of Carow's well-known song 'Ick jeh' stempeln'.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding these few outward correspondences between real-life individual and fictional figure, Käsebier is not developed sufficiently as a character to

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<sup>10</sup>Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.80.

<sup>11</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.80. Tergit's italics.

<sup>12</sup> Georg and Schaeffer, eds., *Carow*, pp.88-91.

warrant being termed a copy of Carow: virtually no attention is devoted to his personal history, his inner thought processes or responses to his fame. In fact, there are only two brief conversations covering four pages in which Käsebier speaks at all (K, pp.171-174). This represents a stark contrast to Feuchtwanger's portrait of the morose, ambitious and greedy folk singer Balthasar Hierl in *Erfolg*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as I argue in section 8 below, Carow was not the only 'Berliner Original' to undergo this kind of ruthless commercial exploitation during the Weimar Republic, and in tracing the trajectory of Käsebier's career, Tergit identifies the origins of key processes in the commodification of popular culture via media distribution which continue to operate in intensified form today.

Yet the Käsebier-Carow connection has proved remarkably tenacious. Kiaulehn continued to perpetuate it decades later<sup>14</sup> and in 1977 Walter Höllerer gave the *Schlüsselroman* reading renewed credibility 'trotz leichter Proteste der anwesenden Autorin'.<sup>15</sup> Some critics have adopted the *Schlüsselroman* label unquestioningly,<sup>16</sup> while others have exercised greater caution<sup>17</sup> but only in rare cases has this designation been rejected completely.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lion Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg. Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz. Roman*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1999. See for example pp.218-226; pp.365-366.

<sup>14</sup> Kiaulehn described his former colleague as 'die geistreiche Gerichtssaalfeuilletonistin Gabriele Tergit, die für Ernst Rowohlt den Roman des Berliner Volkskomikers Erich Carow geschrieben hatte'. Walter Kiaulehn, *Mein Freund der Verleger. Ernst Rowohlt und seine Zeit*. Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1967, p.176.

<sup>15</sup> Hedwig Rohde, 'Es lag was in der Luft', *Tagesspiegel*, 9 September 1977, p.4. See also Höllerer's slightly modified view in Hedwig Rohde, 'Die kritische Berliner. Dritte Folge der Colloquiumsserie in der Akademie', *Tagesspiegel*, 2 April 1987, p.4 (feuilleton).

<sup>16</sup> Margarete Dierks, 'Berlin-Romane und Blumen-Kulturgeschichte', *Frankfurter Hefte*, 36 (1981), 65-68 (p.65); Horst Hartmann, 'Eine goldene Seifenblase platzt. Wiederentdeckter Roman aus den zwanziger Jahren', *tat*, 17 March 1978, p.14 (feuilleton); F. Hellendall, 'Zum Tod von Gabriele Tergit', *Aufbau*, 20 August 1982 [no p. no.s]; Erhard Schütz, *Romane der Weimarer Republik*. Munich, Fink, 1986, pp.155-157.

<sup>17</sup> [no author], 'Aktualität nach fünfzig Jahren', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28 July 1977, [no p. no.s]; Marianne Eichholz, '„Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm“, Roman von Gabriele Tergit', *Die Zeit*, 5 August 1977, p.38; Christa Rotzoll, 'Der



Overall, the *roman-à-clef* designation has exerted a distorting influence on the reception of *Käsebier*. Firstly, it implies that Tergit's interest lay in the particular case of Carow and in superficial details, whereas she was in fact concerned with highlighting more general, underlying tendencies. Secondly, the belief that Tergit had simply observed and copied contemporary figures fuelled the perception of the novel as an authentic, photographic reproduction of the late Weimar Republic, as a work with historical or documentary value rather than a piece of creative fiction. In turn, the view that *Käsebier* is not a work of art, but a journalistic report has meant that the stylistic and fictional aspects of Tergit's novel have been largely neglected. These perceptions of the novel clearly echo some of the main arguments in the debates surrounding *Neue Sachlichkeit* during the Weimar Republic, which were outlined in Chapter 2. The next section will examine the extent to which the *Schlüsselroman* label has contributed to the categorization of *Käsebier* as a *Neue Sachlichkeit* novel and consider how the parameters of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* debate have powerfully shaped the reception Tergit's first work well beyond the Weimar era.

### 3. The Reception of *Käsebier*

Most critical discussion of *Käsebier* has taken the form of reviews in the daily press, firstly following the novel's original publication in 1931 and secondly, when it was reissued by Krüger/Fischer in 1977 at a time of renewed public and academic interest in the Weimar era.<sup>19</sup> With rare exceptions, *Käsebier* was largely

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Volkssänger und die Bequatscher. Gabriele Tergits wohlhaltener Berlin-Roman', *Tagesspiegel*, 23 April 1977, p.26 (feuilleton); Peter Zapfel, 'Wiedersehen mit Käsebiers Kurfürstendamm', [*Die Kultur?*], April 1955, p.10.

<sup>18</sup> Lutz Hachmeister, 'Janischt merken die Leser', *Tagesspiegel*, 16 October 1988, p.12; Pem, 'Berlin ist ihr Schicksal', *Aufbau*, 28 February 1969 [no p. no.s].

<sup>19</sup> Ingeborg Drewitz mentions that the re-publication coincides with the dedication of the Berliner Festwochen to the 1920s. cf. Ingeborg Drewitz, 'Im 20er-Jahre-Wirbel', *Tagesspiegel*, 22 May 1977, p.49.

forgotten in the intervening period, thus sharing the fate of many works by writers who went into exile during the Nazi era.<sup>20</sup> As an outspoken critic of Hitler, the Nazis and the leniency shown by judges to right-wing perpetrators of political violence,<sup>21</sup> Tergit was forced to flee from Germany on 5th March 1933 following a narrowly foiled attempt by the SA to arrest her which was ordered directly by Göring.<sup>22</sup> She never returned after 1945 except as a visitor, having made her permanent home in London and taken British citizenship. However, as Inge Stephan has noted, whereas the renewed interest in literature of the Weimar Republic, in exile literature and in works by women writers combined to produce a fairly substantial engagement with writings by Marielusie Fleißer and Irmgard Keun in academic circles from the late 1970s onwards, there has been comparatively little academic discussion of Tergit's oeuvre.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.1 'Gegenwartsskizze' or 'Zeitgemälde'? The Weimar Reception

Only a handful of reviews of *Käsebier* from the 1930s is still available, but it is possible to discern in them the impact of contemporary debates surrounding *Neue Sachlichkeit*, although this is implicit and it is not clear to what extent the critics are conscious of operating within its parameters. One such reviewer, Dr. U., has much in common with the advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, as he values unsentimentality and objectivity, minimal authorial intervention and the sensation

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<sup>20</sup> I have found only one review devoted to *Käsebier* from the intervening period: Zapfel, 'Wiedersehen'. The novel is also mentioned in largely autobiographical birthday congratulations, such as Pem, 'Berlin ist ihr Schicksal.'

<sup>21</sup> See for example articles such as 'Atmosphäre des Bürgerkriegs', 'Wilhelm der Dritte erscheint in Moabit', 'Bürgerkriegsgericht' and 'Freigesprochen' reprinted in Gabriele Tergit, *Wer schießt aus Liebe? Gerichtsreportagen*, ed. by Jens Brüning. Berlin, Das Neue Berlin, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.125.

<sup>23</sup> Inge Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos. Gabriele Tergits Berlin-Roman „Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm“', in *Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman: Neue Interpretationen zum Roman der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Sabina Becker and Christoph Weiß. Stuttgart/Weimar, Metzler, 1995, pp.291-313.



of being plunged in *medias res*.<sup>24</sup> Dr. U. acclaims *Käsebier* as ‘Der beste Zeitroman dieses Jahres’ and applauds the lack of pathos and sentimentality in the novel.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he commends what he perceives to be the neutral narrative stance, untainted by any particular ideological position, axe-grinding or potential solutions. In Dr. U.’s opinion, this impartial standpoint allows Tergit to capture a raw slice of contemporary reality: ‘das Buch ist das Leben unserer Zeit’.<sup>26</sup> The reviewer equates the novel with life itself, and even criticizes the inclusion of certain formal techniques which accentuate the novel’s fictionality and advises the reader to ignore them: ‘sieht man von einigen Döblinschen Einflüssen in stilistischer Hinsicht ab, so bleibt ein wundervoll scharfsichtiges, unbarmherziges und sachliches Bild des allgemeinen Betriebes [...]’.<sup>27</sup> Overall, this reviewer’s appraisal of *Käsebier* indicates that his values accord with the more over-simplified view of realism championed by the proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which esteems the objective presentation of events or facts with minimal evidence of the author’s own opinions.

On the other hand, the criticisms levelled at *Käsebier* by the reviewer for the *Vossische Zeitung* echo some of the main objections to *Neue Sachlichkeit* outlined in Chapter 2. Tergit has, this reviewer argues, failed to penetrate beyond the surface details or to place her many interesting individual observations into a meaningful, coherent context for the reader:

Uebrig bleiben auf der Plusseite des Buches eine Reihe von Einzelbeobachtungen, notiert von einer Frau, die hellhörig und journalistisch geschult ist. Sie ergeben zusammengekommen keinen Roman mit festen Umrissen, kein Gegenwartsgemälde mit

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<sup>24</sup> Dr. U., ‘Der beste Zeitroman’, *General-Anzeiger für Dortmund*, 12 December 1931 [no p. no.s].

<sup>25</sup> Dr. U., ‘Der beste Zeitroman’.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. U., ‘Der beste Zeitroman’.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. U., ‘Der beste Zeitroman’.

Bedeutung, aber doch eine Gegenwartsskizze, frisch hingestrichelt.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the reviewer's insistence that Tergit's novel is not a rich, complex work of art, but more of a preliminary sketch of contemporary life recalls the distinction made by *Neue Sachlichkeit's* detractors between true artistic talent and the workaday craftsmanship of *Neue Sachlichkeit* reportage. The impact of the *Schlüsselroman* designation in this assessment is evident: 'Die eingeweihten wissen, daß [...] es sich hier um einen sogenannten Schlüsselroman handelt.'<sup>29</sup> Both Dr. U and the reviewer for the *Vossische Zeitung* argue that Tergit's novel adheres for the most part to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* ideal of reproducing contemporary reality from an objective viewpoint with minimal authorial interference, although the former critic welcomes this technique and the latter decries it.

By contrast, Rudolf Olden, Tergit's friend and colleague from the *Berliner Tageblatt*, asserts that Tergit goes beyond a superficial photographic representation of events she has witnessed. He claims that through the use of formal techniques such as montage and multiple perspectives — presumably those techniques which Dr. U dismisses as Döblinesque influences — Tergit is able to create an accurate, convincing and complex portrait of the age:

Es ist ein Roman, aus Fetzen, Fetzen von Schicksalen, Gesprächen, Menschen zusammengenäht, wie eine komische, bunte Decke aus Lappen. Nachher aber, von rückwärts gesehen, ist das Ganze drin, das jetzt im Zu-Grunde-Gehen ist, also viel, sehr viel, und wie aus Zufall sehr sinnreich, sehr kunstvoll kombiniert.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Dr. U., Olden acknowledges these clearly fictional devices, and he argues that the seemingly disconnected elements acquire significance and coherence when viewed retrospectively as a whole. Olden refers to the novel with the term

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<sup>28</sup> oap, 'Gabriele Tergit: „Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm“', *Vossische Zeitung*, [no d., no p. no.s]. In Tergit-Nachlass, Deutsches Literaturarchiv.

<sup>29</sup> oap, 'Gabriele Tergit'.

<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Olden, 'Tergits erster Roman', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 25 November 1931, p.3.



rejected by the reviewer for the *Vossische Zeitung*. 'ein Zeit-Gemälde'.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Olden counters the assertion that *Käsebier* is a *roman-à-clef*.

Viele von den Figuren wird man erkennen wollen, aber, glaubt mir, sie sind's nicht. Ich weiss genug von ihnen, um es sagen zu können, bei keinem waltet photographische Nüchternheit, sie sind kombiniert, verdichtet, neugestaltet.<sup>32</sup>

Such an emphasis upon the fictional status of Tergit's novel appears to have been an exception amongst Weimar reviewers.

### 3.2 Better late than never?: The Post-1945 Reception.

Although generally more circumspect in applying the *Schlüsselroman* label, most critical discussion of *Käsebier* which appeared after 1945, both within the daily press and the small number of academic studies, has continued to emphasize the novel's importance as an authentic record or document. Moreover, as in the Weimar reviews, the terms of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* debate are often implicitly adopted.<sup>33</sup> On the whole, *Käsebier* tends to be discussed as an unbiased historical chronicle or accurate reflection of reality rather than a work of fiction.<sup>34</sup> Annemarie Weber refers to its 'Chronikgehalt' and claims it is 'eines der frischesten Zeitdokumente' imaginable.<sup>35</sup> Other critics term it a 'Dokument'<sup>36</sup> or the 'Spiegelbild Berlins aus der Zeit der untergehenden Weimarer Republik'.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, most post-1977 reviewers consider Tergit's first novel to be an insider exposé of the mechanics of the press and advertising which acquires its critical

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<sup>31</sup> Olden, 'Tergits erster Roman'.

<sup>32</sup> Olden, 'Tergits erster Roman'.

<sup>33</sup> *Neue Sachlichkeit* itself is only once mentioned explicitly, when Hedwig Rohde describes a reading of Tergit's novel alongside four other novels categorized as belonging to this movement. Rohde, 'Es lag'.

<sup>34</sup> The exception to this is Eichholz, who emphasizes that although 'keinen Augenblick die Klasse-Journalistin verleugnend', the novel is an 'erdachte Geschichte'. Eichholz, 'Käsebier'.

<sup>35</sup> Weber, 'Elegante Apokalypse'.

<sup>36</sup> Nerth, 'Ku'damm Leben'.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Paul, 'Gabriele Tergit 85', *Tagesspiegel*, 4 March 1979, p.5.

edge from the author's ruthlessly honest and objective presentation of her own profession. One critic writes: 'Mittelpunkt ist die Zeitung, und es ist natürlich Gabriele Tergit's Zeitung, die sie mit seltener Liebe, Scharfsichtigkeit und Einfühlung zeichnet.'<sup>38</sup> Tergit's occupation as a journalist is felt to guarantee the veracity of her account, although her articles on court proceedings often clearly indicate her own opinion on a particular sentence.<sup>39</sup> These interpretations of the novel echo the premium placed upon authors writing about familiar topics and their immediate milieu, in the programmatic statements about *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

The impartiality and precise observation skills associated with the reporter figure in discussions about *Neue Sachlichkeit* are also often mentioned, as critics commend Tergit's ear for dialogue<sup>40</sup> or single out 'die scharfe Beobachtungsgabe der Autorin'.<sup>41</sup> Reference is also made to the camera and to sound recording equipment, which suggests that the author merely observes and documents with scrupulous objectivity rather than providing a clear analysis and her own opinion of events. The novel is 'wie ein Bänkelgesang auf Schellackplatte'<sup>42</sup> or a medium through which the age 'sich [...] im Originalton zu Wort meldet'.<sup>43</sup> In a rare review of *Käsebier* in the years between 1932 and 1977, Peter Zapfel praises Tergit's ability to create a sense of immediacy for readers:

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<sup>38</sup> [no author], 'Aktualität'. cf also Rotzoll, 'Volkssänger'.

<sup>39</sup> For example, 'Es geht auf keinen Fall, daß der Begriff der Notwehr so weit gefaßt wird, daß eine offenbare Überschreitung entschuldigt wird, noch dazu bei einem Menschen, der sich dauernd an politischen Händeln beteiligt [sic]'. Gabriele Tergit, 'Helden der Straße', in Tergit, *Wer schießt aus Liebe?*, pp.147-149 (p.149). First publ. in *Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 April 1931. Sibylle Schütz analyses the various forms such comments take in Sibylle Schütz, 'Gerichtsberichterstattung als Spiegel der Zeitgeschichte - die Berliner Journalistin Gabriele Tergit (1894-1982)', unpublished Magisterarbeit, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> [no author], 'Aktualität'; Rotzoll, 'Volkssänger'.

<sup>41</sup> Hartmann, 'Seifenblase'; cf also Rohde, 'Berlinerin'.

<sup>42</sup> Nerth 'Ku'damm Leben'.

<sup>43</sup> ffg, 'Käsebiere Berlin. Zum Tod von Gabriele Tergit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 July 1982, p.17.



Wenn sie etwa eine ihrer Personen bei einem Spaziergang begleitet, malt und zeichnet sie mit ihrer Kamera, und man ruht sich aus von den hervorragend lebensechten Tonbändern, auf denen noch eben, unsere Ohren peinigend, das stereotype Geschwätz jener gewissen Sorte von Kurfürstendamm ertönte.<sup>44</sup>

The references to a camera and sound-recording equipment alongside the feeling of being plunged in *medias res* are strongly reminiscent of the models advocated for writers in the programmatic statements of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Zapfel claims that Tergit's 'den Atem abwürgenden Objektivität' does not preclude the inclusion of her own standpoint, but he fails to define this standpoint or to explain how it can be reconciled with her impartiality.

It is only in the past two decades that Tergit's oeuvre has received any critical attention from the academic community. Initially, this took the form of encyclopedia articles, brief references and masters theses.<sup>45</sup> Two recent doctoral dissertations have examined *Käsebier* in the context of other novels from the Weimar era. F.C. Foster's claim that the fictional depiction of the press in *Käsebier* accurately reflects contemporary circumstances in the Weimar newspaper industry suggests a view of the novel as an accurate reproduction of events and of the author as a recording instrument.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Foster dismisses Tergit's disclaimer

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<sup>44</sup> Zapfel, 'Wiedersehen'.

<sup>45</sup> *International Dictionary of Central European Emigrés 1933-1945*, vol.2, part 2, L-Z: *The Arts, Sciences and Literature*. Munich/New York/London/Paris, Saur, 1983, p.1159; Eckhardt Köhn, *Straßenrausch. Flanerie und kleine Form. Versuch zur Literatur des Flaneurs von 1830-1933*. Berlin, Arsenal, 1989; Kirsten Petersen, 'Gabriele Tergits „Käsebier“ als neusachlicher Roman. Zur Krise der literarischen Interpretation in der Weimarer Republik', unpublished Magisterarbeit, Hamburg, 1987; Sabine Schmitz, 'Aspekte des Zeitromans der Endphase der Weimarer Republik, dargestellt an G. Tergits Roman "Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm"', unpublished Magisterarbeit, Cologne, 1989; Christiane Schultze-Jena, 'Roman und Reportage. Zum Zeitroman am Ende der Weimarer Republik. Dargestellt an Gabriele Tergits Roman "Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm"', unpublished Magisterarbeit, Hamburg, 1988; Schütz, 'Gerichtsberichterstattung'. Unfortunately, I have only been able to obtain and read the last of these four Magisterarbeiten.

<sup>46</sup> F.C. Foster, 'The Press of the Weimar Republic and its Representation in German Literature', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bristol University, 1996. I am grateful to Dr. Foster for permission to cite from this thesis.

about the status of *Käsebier* as a *roman-à-clef*, listing a large number of real-life individuals upon whom the characters in the novel are supposedly based.<sup>47</sup> Karl Werner Scheele does not assign Tergit to *Neue Sachlichkeit* on the basis of particular stylistic tendencies, but rather on the basis of her interest in matters such as the rise of so-called trivial mass culture, the cult of technology and the Weimar fascination with the Soviet Union and America. Unfortunately, Scheele does not consider Tergit's own perspective on these topics.<sup>48</sup>

This perception is also evident in the few academic publications on *Käsebier*.<sup>49</sup> Erhard Schütz, for instance, supports the *roman-à-clef* interpretation of the novel and also emphasizes Tergit's insider knowledge of the press.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, Schütz also detects a certain degree of sentimentality in the novel, which he considers a typical attribute of many Weimar *Zeitromane*.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, Heide Soltau argues that by comparison with Keun's works, *Käsebier* is remarkably unsentimental.<sup>52</sup> Soltau also notes that Tergit's work, along with that of Keun and Marieluise Fleißer, is often ascribed to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. However, Soltau discerns a more self-consciously fictional style and narrative technique than that generally implied by the post-1977 newspaper reviews of Tergit's novel, although she unfortunately does not present any analysis of this.

Inge Stephan and Eva-Maria Mockel both explicitly classify Tergit's writing as belonging to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, although Stephan does not attempt to define the term and the three criteria outlined by Mockel as typical of *Neue*

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<sup>47</sup> Foster, 'The Press', p.217.

<sup>48</sup> Scheele, 'Aspekte', p.279.

<sup>49</sup> Dierks, 'Berlin-Romane', p.65; Helmut Müssener, 'Gabriele Tergit, Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm', *Moderna Språk*, 71 (1977), 308.

<sup>50</sup> Schütz, *Romane*, pp.155-156.

<sup>51</sup> Schütz, *Romane*, p.158.

<sup>52</sup> Heide Soltau, 'Die Anstrengungen des Aufbruchs. Romanautorinnen und ihre Heldinnen in der Weimarer Zeit', in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, ed. by Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 2 vols. II: Munich, Beck, 1988, pp.220-235 (p.234).



*Sachlichkeit* — namely a lack of sentimentality, an interest in contemporary subject matter, and irony — seem too general and vague to be useful for such a categorization.<sup>53</sup> It must be added that *Neue Sachlichkeit* itself does not constitute the central focus of either study: Mockel's main interest lies in exploring the presentation of power relationships in Tergit's literary oeuvre with reference to Alfred Adler's theories, whilst Stephan aims to widen discussion about the discourse of the city in modernist literature beyond the Impressionist and Expressionist writers who, she claims, are typically cited in academic debates about that topic. I will return to these assessments of the novel at appropriate places within the course of the chapter.

In summary, the debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the late Weimar Republic have structured the reception of Tergit's first novel, not only following its original publication in 1931, but also after *Käsebier* was re-issued in 1977, although the influence of these debates upon the critics is rarely explicitly acknowledged and the critics may not even be conscious of its impact. However, the extent to which discussions surrounding *Neue Sachlichkeit* have affected the reception of *Käsebier* is evident from the persistent references to the novel's documentary status, to the author's objectivity and her observational skills, and to the camera or sound-recording equipment as models of unbiased writing. The *Schlüsselroman* label has contributed considerably to the failure to analyse the novel as a work of fiction or to engage closely with the narrative technique and formal aspects of the work. Where *Käsebier* has been explicitly categorized as belonging to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, there has been insufficient definition of this term.

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<sup>53</sup> Eva-Maria Mockel, *Aspekte von Macht und Ohnmacht im literarischen Werk Gabriele Tergits*. Aachen, Shaker, 1996. See especially pp.169-174; Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos'.

My analysis of *Käsebier* aims to counter the assertions of objectivity and focus upon surface details by arguing that a clear perspective on the underlying processes of modernization emerges in the novel. Following an outline of Durkheim's understanding of anomie, I trace the anomic model of modernity in four key areas related to radical time-space transformations in Tergit's novel. Firstly, I consider how Tergit organizes narrative space and time to convey the impression of the increasing velocity of modern life and the effect of such a shift upon social relations. Secondly, I explore Tergit's presentation of the restructuring of Berlin in order to improve and accelerate the circulation of goods, money and people around the city. I subsequently analyse Tergit's depiction of three individual responses to these infrastructural changes, arguing that she thereby criticizes widespread responses to the city by her contemporaries. Fourthly, I show how Tergit portrays and evaluates the erosion of authenticity through the commodification of popular culture, facilitated by the disembedding mechanism of the mass media.

#### **4. Durkheim and Anomie**

In comparing the understanding of modernity in *Käsebier* with Durkheim's notion of anomie, it is not my intention to claim that Tergit was directly drawing on Durkheim's work or even that she was familiar with his writings, although this is not impossible. Tergit did study sociology, alongside history and philosophy, and she attended lectures given by German sociologist Max Weber, but there is, to the best of my knowledge, no evidence that Tergit encountered Durkheim's work. My aim in comparing the models of modernity in Durkheim's sociological works and Tergit's novel is to clarify the particular nature of Tergit's evaluation of modernity.



Durkheim develops his concept of anomie in two key sociological studies, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), and *Suicide* (1897).<sup>54</sup> Durkheim discerns a sense of crisis accompanying the modernization process, which he attributes to the decline of an established set of social values which regulated human conduct and provided social stability. In very general terms, anomie is a condition of dislocation and estrangement from society experienced by individuals as a result of this weakening of the traditional moral consensus. Durkheim attributes the dissolution of the regulatory social forces to what are in effect time-space transformations wrought by economic imperatives, although he does not employ such terminology. His analysis of the crisis is based on a modernist conception of human nature and of the changing nature of the social reality in which individuals operate.

Durkheim's concept of anomie is grounded in his understanding of the way in which human behaviour is regulated by social forces. In *The Division of Labour in Society*, he draws a distinction between the forms of regulation in traditional and modern societies. According to Durkheim, traditional societies are composed of small homogeneous groups of individuals living in close proximity. These traditional societies are organized around kinship relationships and are also characterized by powerful collective beliefs and social practices derived from a common religion. These social codes have a moral force, so Durkheim argues, which refers to their capacity to compel individuals into a particular form of behaviour and to act as an imperative beyond the individual will. The strong moral consensus in traditional societies, which Durkheim refers to as the *conscience*

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<sup>54</sup> I refer to the following translations: Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, trans. by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1933; Emile Durkheim, *Suicide. A Study in Sociology*, trans. by John A. Spalding and George Simpson. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952.

*collective*, sets out individuals' social duties and obligations. Hence it also provides them with a secure sense of their place and function with a stable social whole.

However, this powerful moral consensus begins to disintegrate under the pressures of social transformations, according to Durkheim. The developments highlighted by Durkheim are in fact the processes of modernization resulting from temporal and spatial restructuring, although he does not explicitly refer to them in these terms. In contrast to traditional societies, he argues, advanced industrial societies have larger, heterogeneous populations which occupy a broader geographical area than traditional societies, although the populations are mainly concentrated in urban areas. These changes in the spatial organization of society profoundly affect social relations: the density of population requires a more complex division of labour than in traditional societies, so that the grouping of individuals along familial lines is replaced by organization along occupational lines.

Durkheim contends that these developments result in individuals becoming simultaneously, and paradoxically, both more reliant upon others and more autonomous: because the division of labour becomes more complex and specialized, individuals become more dependent upon others to carry out economic functions which they cannot, but individuals concurrently attain greater independence, because both the differentiation and the size of the population weakens the *conscience collective*. The *conscience collective* therefore exerts less influence over the attitudes and activities of individuals than it does in traditional societies, so effecting a decline in behavioural similarity. The strong moral consensus together with its regulatory force has therefore been swept away by these modernizing processes.



This phenomenon is compounded by deregulation in the economic sphere, where the advent of the global economy has made it impossible for producers to calculate consumer demand. As a result, periods of economic crisis occur when production outstrips consumption, when it becomes 'unbridled and unregulated' and vice versa.<sup>55</sup> Durkheim's emphasis upon the international nature of the modern market once again suggests an underlying preoccupation with time-space transformations, which have a destabilizing effect upon social relations by removing all limitations on economic activity. Crucially, Durkheim links this to periodic crises which punctuate modern life, as David Harvey does.<sup>56</sup> The rapidity of the changes in the economic sphere have, Durkheim contends, prevented the establishment of any new forms of regulation, but he expects new forms of regulation will eventually emerge. In other words, modern advanced societies are in a transitional phase and the sense of crisis will persist until these transformations are complete. It is important to note that Durkheim does not advocate a return to the traditional form of moral regulation, and indeed, he believes such a reversal to be impossible.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, he does not attribute the negative aspects of modern life to modernity itself, but rather to the fact that it is insufficiently developed.

Durkheim envisages the division of labour operating as one new form of regulation. Under the normal conditions of the division of labour, the day-to-day interaction and communication between the different divisions or functions should, Durkheim contends, establish a set of social practices which become habitual. Eventually, these habits become encoded as a new set of reciprocal

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<sup>55</sup> Durkheim, *Division*, p.370.

<sup>56</sup> cf. Chapter 1, pp.19-20 above.

<sup>57</sup> Giddens emphasizes this point. Anthony Giddens, 'Introduction: Durkheim's Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy', in *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Giddens. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp.1-50 (p.10).

duties and obligations and acquire a certain regulatory force.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the new regulatory forces maintain individuals' consciousness of their duties and obligations towards others, thereby enabling them to feel fully integrated into the social whole, albeit on a different basis from the sense of integration in traditional societies.

However, certain abnormal or deviant manifestations of the division of labour prevent the establishment of this sense of reciprocity, including the anomic division of labour. This occurs when the divisions become inflexible and fixed as a consequence of interference by certain social groups in the process of the division of labour for their own private interests whilst ignoring their obligations and duties towards others. Durkheim cites class conflict and the rigid separation of capital and labour as an example of such interference. Insufficient communication takes place between the different functions, and individuals' perception of their contribution to and involvement in society as a whole is lessened. In contrast to Marx, Durkheim does not consider this situation to be an intrinsic effect of the division of labour, but insists that it is an abnormal development.<sup>59</sup>

To summarize, the term *anomie* as employed in *The Division of Labour in Society* designates a condition of estrangement and isolation from the social whole experienced by individuals. This condition originates from the decline of the traditional moral consensus, wrought by what can be characterized as time-space transformations, and the failure of new forms of regulation to establish themselves because of the attempts by particular social groups to protect their

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<sup>58</sup> Durkheim, *Division*, p.366.

<sup>59</sup> Durkheim, *Division*, p.368. Steven Lukes highlights the key differences between the theories of the division of labour in Marx's theory of alienation and Durkheim's concept of *anomie*. Steven Lukes, 'Alienation and Anomie', in Steven Lukes, *Essays in Social Theory*. London, Macmillan, 1977, pp.74-95 (pp.79-80). cf. also Giddens, 'Introduction', pp.10-11.



private interests. It is easy to see how this relates to the modernist 'problématique', as adumbrated in Chapter 1. The fixed position of the individual in a stable and secure reality has been replaced by an individual whose situation is precarious and uncertain in relation to a reality in the process of transformation. Furthermore, Durkheim's notion that individuals require some form of regulatory force for their conduct presupposes a view of human nature that disputes the Enlightenment understanding of individuals as intrinsically free, rational moral agents.<sup>60</sup>

Durkheim expands upon this assessment of human nature in *Suicide*, where he further develops the concept of anomie. When examining statistical data on suicides, Durkheim noticed that the rate of suicide rose not only during periods of economic hardship and misfortune, as he had expected, but also during times of rapid economic expansion, increasing prosperity and rising living standards. He attributes this to the removal of the regulatory limits on human desires during periods when social stability is disrupted by far-reaching social transformations, be they beneficial or detrimental. This assertion is underpinned by Durkheim's understanding of the nature of human wants. He believes that human wants are boundless and have no inherent regulatory mechanisms to establish a limit to them, in contrast to the wants of animals which are regulated by certain biological limitations. Given the lack of any internal regulatory mechanism, some *external* mechanism is required to provide explicit limitations to human desires and again, it is only society which is capable of exercising this moral regulation, in Durkheim's view.<sup>61</sup>

When society is subject to the kind of radical social transformations mentioned above, Durkheim claims that it loses this regulating force: 'But when

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<sup>60</sup> cf. Lukes 'Alienation and Anomie', pp.82-84.

<sup>61</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, p.249.

society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence'.<sup>62</sup> Durkheim concludes that this disturbance of the social equilibrium and weakening of the power of society to establish boundaries for wants leads to an increase in suicide. In the case of sudden economic misfortune, the threshold of limitation is drastically reduced and individuals are required to restrain their desires to a level below that to which they are accustomed. The process of adjusting to this new situation cannot be completed overnight, and for some individuals the extra limitation can become intolerable. In the case of rapid economic growth, on the other hand, the threshold of limitation surges upwards as greater wealth leads to an abrupt increase in the means for individuals to achieve their desires. The upper limit is not known, and so desires seem limitless. This situation has become endemic in modern societies as a result of the deregulation of economic and industrial relations, and hence there is a perpetual sense of crisis and instability in modern life. According to Durkheim, this situation has been exacerbated by the priority placed on the economy in modern life and the expansion of markets to global, or infinite, scope, which means there is no limit to ambition or desire. It is especially acute for those involved in trade and industry where

the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so too is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes reality. A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known. Henceforth one has no strength to endure the least reverse. The whole fever subsides and the sterility of all the tumult is apparent [...].<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, p.252.

<sup>63</sup> Durkheim, *Suicide*, p.256.



This passage describes a state in which boundless avarice and a rejection of limitations have taken root alongside a profound sense of restless dissatisfaction and boredom — hence the craving for continuous novelty and a merely fleeting interest in any activity. The pursuit of purely private interests has completely destroyed any sense of reciprocal duties and obligations between individuals. Finally, all that remains is a powerful feeling that this feverish activity is only an illusion and the individual is left with a sense of futility and despair, which in extreme cases can provoke suicide. In Durkheim's view, therefore, anomic suicide occurs when the forces which regulate social equilibrium lose their power and effectiveness.

Like Durkheim, Tergit displays a preoccupation with the crisis caused by the dissolution of traditional moral values which socially codify individuals' reciprocal duties and obligations. The novelist traces the erosion of established values to time-space transformations and to the dominant position occupied by the economy in modern life. In addition, Tergit illustrates how the removal of the consensual social values has led to unrestrained greed, selfishness and the pursuit of private interests regardless of the costs to others. For some characters, the absence of the established social code leaves them feeling isolated and unable to envisage the social whole or their part within it. They succumb to an intense feeling of personal failure, despondency and frustration resulting from their inability to achieve unrealistic goals, or from being forced to accept harsher restraints than usual. Faced with this situation, figures such as Frechheim, Rohhals and Miermann contemplate or commit suicide, or simply lose the will to live. However, in many ways, in particular in relation to female emancipation, Tergit exhibits a highly positive attitude towards the effects of modernity. Moreover, she does not advocate a return to the traditional values, which are largely presented as

obsolete and inappropriate for dealing with the modern age. She therefore does not condemn modernity *per se*, but rather shares Durkheim's assessment that its negative repercussions can be attributed to the absence of some kind of regulatory force in this transitional, crisis-ridden phase. Yet whereas Durkheim can envisage a means of establishing this new moral regulation grounded in the division of labour, Tergit is ultimately at a loss to suggest any new means of regulation.

The next two sections will focus upon the ways in which Tergit deploys narrative techniques to convey the key role played by the economy in precipitating time-space transformations in modern life and to point to the negative effects of the ensuing disintegration of the traditional moral consensus. Although time and tempo will be treated separately from space and place for ease of exposition, the transformations of time and space are of course interdependent, and reference will be made to the ways in which they interconnect.

## **5. Time and Tempo**

### *5.1 The Changing Rhythm of Modern Life*

As discussed in the previous section, Durkheim perceived the elevation of the economy into a central position in advanced industrial societies to be a central factor in eroding the traditional moral consensus and inducing a condition of anomie. One crucial way in which Tergit draws attention to the dominance of the economy in *Käsebier* is by emphasizing that the seasonal cycle based on events in the natural world has been replaced by a cycle dictated by economic imperatives. That the novel is so structured as to convey this impression indicates that Tergit has consciously shaped her material to illustrate general processes rather than simply reflecting surface details or chronicling events.



The business cycle upon which the novel is structured is paralleled by the cycle of the seasons as the stagnant economy of winter yields to a dynamic boom in spring and early summer. However, this pathetic fallacy is subverted as the whole cycle is orientated not towards the harvest in autumn, but towards the consumer orgy of Christmas, after which the ground is cleared for a completely new set of merchandise. By drawing this disjunctive parallel between the seasonal cycle and the economic cycle, Tergit emphasizes the extent to which the regulation of human life by the rhythms of nature has been supplanted by the demands of production and consumption. Moreover, a permanent sense of crisis appears to have taken root, since the economic extremes of prosperity and depression are incorporated into each cycle. This critical situation is redolent of David Harvey's argument that after 1848 'it became easier to invoke some cyclical sense of time (hence the growing interest in the idea of business cycles as necessary components to the capitalist growth process [...])'.<sup>64</sup> It also suggests that society is currently locked into a state of instability.

The novel opens with a scene of economic stagnation on Dönhoffplatz in the depths of winter. Many shops are experiencing slow sales whilst goods and money are circulating around the minimum number of people: 'Aber im ersten Stockwerk beginnen die Sorgen. Der Handel geht zurück. Alles direkt. Fabrik-Detail-Konsument. Wenn möglich Fabrik-Konsument.' (K, p.5) The retailers and middlemen are being squeezed out in this economic crisis, precisely those people like the ambitious journalist Willi Frächter and the agent Dr. Kaliski who later flourish most during the economic boom based on Käsebier. The static economic situation is reflected in the frozen weather which is also causing problems at the *Berliner Rundschau*, located on the less affluent side of the square.

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<sup>64</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge MA/Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p.261.

The persistent cold prevents Miermann, editor of the *feuilleton*, from running an article on slush — the only good article he has — for several weeks.

The arrival of spring ushers in a new lease of life and a veritable flood of economic activity and circulation of new ideas following the appearance of the first article on Käsebier written by Emil Gohlisch, one of Miermann's two staff writers. The change of season is made explicit by constant references from both the narrator and the characters, who comment on the 'Frühlingsausbruch' (K, p.26) or that 'Richtiger Frühling ist in der Luft'. (K, p.81) At the end of May, the banker Richard Muschler and Otto Mitte, head of a large construction company, agree to construct a luxury apartment complex which will incorporate a theatre for Käsebier. Summer sees the start of Käsebier's tour and the dissemination of his films and songs. Commodification and merchandising begins in earnest at this point, and employment rises as staff are required to produce and sell the various new Käsebier dolls to retailers, to write about, photograph and paint Käsebier for the press, and to work on the various court cases surrounding the singer. Only the construction project is mentioned in the autumn and the success of the Käsebier trend for consumer goods reaches its apogee at Christmas 1929. The religious festival has effectively become a festival of consumption, revealing the extent to which the economy has usurped the position previously held by religion in pre-modern societies, the kind of a development which, in Durkheim's view, plays a key role in the deregulation of consensual values. Gohlisch and his colleague on the *feuilleton*, Fräulein Dr. Kohler, find themselves overwhelmed by the Käsebier goods on sale at the Christmas Market, which range from Käsebier shoes to pens, cigarettes, books, records, balloons and dolls. There is: 'Vom Boden bis zum Himmel nichts als Käsebier.' (K, p.192) However, by the following spring, the novelty value has been exhausted and saturation sets in: Käsebier's new film is 'ein



furchtbarer Durchfall' (K, p.198) and the designers abandon him in favour of Mickey Mouse for the following Christmas: 'Es war nichts mehr mit Käsebier, es mußte Neues kreiert werden, zwei Jahre das gleiche geht nicht, und sie [Fräulein Götzel] entwarf eine Micky-Maus aus Staubtüchern.' (K, p.198, my addition) The Mickey Mouse merchandise is exactly the same as that produced for Käsebier; all that has changed is the external appearance in order to stimulate the economic cycle again. Therefore, so the narrator implies, the Mickey Mouse fashion will follow an identical pattern to the Käsebier trend, just as the folk singer succeeded the parrot theme in Fräulein Götzel's collection for Christmas 1928. Although Mickey Mouse's popularity ultimately proved to be more durable,<sup>65</sup> Tergit's general point about the role of superficial novelty in consumption still remains valid and could be supported through countless other examples of fads and fashions with a high turnover. Moreover, Tergit's depiction of the way novelty functions in consumption recalls Walter Benjamin's understanding of modernity as the recurrence of the ever-same in the guise of the ever-new, particularly in the realm of consumption: 'The world of circulation of the commodity is precisely the announcement of the new as the ever-same'.<sup>66</sup> Tergit would appear to be foregrounding a common modernist preoccupation, since there is also a point of overlap with Durkheim's concept of anomie. As noted in the previous section, ceaseless craving for continuous novelty is cited by Durkheim as characteristic of the anomic state induced by the removal of regulatory forces and unrestrained economic activity. By demonstrating that the temporal rhythms of modern life are determined by the 'planned obsolescence in consumption'<sup>67</sup>, Tergit illustrates that

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<sup>65</sup> Stephan observes that Tergit could not have foreseen the longevity of the Mickey Mouse phenomenon. Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos', p.294.

<sup>66</sup> cf. David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*. Cambridge MA, Polity, 1988, p.210.

<sup>67</sup> Harvey, *Postmodernity*, p.229.

economic imperatives occupy a dominant position in society and that these imperatives directly contribute to restless dissatisfaction and the endless desire for novelty in modern life.

It is not only in relation to the seasons that the temporal rhythms based on natural events have been supplanted by those established by economic considerations: Tergit also depicts how the cycle of day and night has become distorted as the boundaries between the two are erased. Thanks to technological and organizational innovation, production, exchange and consumption and the movement of people can occur at any time, thereby accelerating the turnover of capital by effectively halving the duration of production. Frächter harangues the director of the first Käsebier film to work all hours to put the film on the screens: 'Wir müssen uns bloß mit dem Film beeilen. Nachtaufnahme, Tagaufnahme. Sie müssen hinterher sein, es muß schneller'. (K, p.145) Speed is the key to success, and production must be accelerated, according to Frächter. Both Mitte and the publisher Waldschmidt refuse to travel if they cannot do so overnight, revealing the impact of the drive for acceleration upon social relations and conceptions of time.

The disruption of the cycle of day and night clearly involves not only a change in the rhythm of modern life, but also its pace and the process of time-space compression. Like the changing rhythm of modern life, the changing pace of modern life is also portrayed by Tergit as being propelled by the demands of the economy and once again, she deploys certain formal techniques in the novel to convey the effect of this aspect of modernization. Through her deployment of narrative pace within the novel, Tergit foregrounds a powerful awareness of the transformations wrought by time-space compression.



## 5.2 The Changing Pace of Modern Life

According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, narrative pace refers to the way in which textual space is organized in relation to the duration of time at the level of the story.<sup>68</sup> Following Gérard Genette, Rimmon-Kenan states that if the ratio between the duration of story-time and the amount of text allotted to it is unchanged throughout the text, the narrative pace remains constant. The example she provides is of each page in a text being devoted to a year in the life of a character. However, constant narrative pace is a rare occurrence. Rimmon-Kenan argues that narrative pace tends to vary, involving relative acceleration and deceleration in any given text. Such modifications in narrative pace occur when the proportion between the textual space and the story-time changes 'relative to the "norm" established for this text'.<sup>69</sup>

In *Käsebier*, a significant shift in narrative pace occurs midway through the novel when the Käsebier boom begins to collapse. The modification in narrative pace is therefore connected to the structure of the economic cycle. Tergit devotes a larger amount of textual space to a much shorter period of story time in the first half of the novel than in the second half; in other words, the narrative pace accelerates in the latter half of the text. The novel spans the period from early 1929 to May 1931, excluding the final chapter which is the only chapter without any precise reference to the date. The first half of the text covers approximately four months and relates the events during the period of economic expansion between winter in early 1929 and late April of the same year when Frächter discusses his rationalization plans for the *Berliner Rundschau* with its owner, Cochius, and arranges for the production of much of the Käsebier merchandise.

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<sup>68</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London, Routledge, 1989.

<sup>69</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p.53.

The detail with which events are recorded during this period reflects the enormous amount of activity and movement packed into this relatively short span of story-time. Tergit thereby conveys the sense of time-space compression involved in marketing Käsebier in order to maximise profit and ensure a speedy return on investments. For example, within a single afternoon, Käsebier is scheduled to record his songs, perform for UFA's weekly news show and meet the socialite Margot Weißmann. The 'Käsebierkonjunktur' (K, p.243) only really snowballs following the radio lecture by playwright Otto Lambeck on 10th March; by the evening of 13th March, Frächter has secured promises for contributions to a book on the singer, whilst Käsebier's resoundingly successful première at the Wintergarten theatre on the Kurfürstendamm takes place on 11th April.

Yet the narrator makes frequent comments about the delays involved, which are surprising in the light of the tremendous speed of events. For instance, although the première at the Wintergarten is held only a month after Käsebier has been thrust into the limelight, the narrator remarks upon the tardiness of this event: 'Am 11. April, schon spät, aber immerhin noch möglich, gastierte Käsebier im Wintergarten.' (K, p.97) A similar comment is made concerning the delay in recording Käsebier's songs: 'Zwei Tage nach der Premiere war der Nachmittag endlich für Plattenaufnahmen Käsebier reserviert.' (K, p.132) These observations might be introduced to suggest that despite the apparently rapid pace, some temporal and spatial barriers are still hampering the economic boom. However, given the breakneck pace of events in the story and the narrator's satirical stance, I am inclined to conclude that such comments are ironical. Furthermore, the direct narratorial comment here indicates that the narrator is not as objective as the reception of *Käsebier* would suggest.



Midway through the novel, there is a significant acceleration of narrative pace. Relative to the detail in the first half of the novel, many events are elided in the second part which spans a two year period instead of approximately four months. Although dates continue to be documented with precision, they are much further apart; in the space of a page, the narrative moves from 24th July to 29th August 1929. (K, p.169) Whereas a substantial segment of the first half of the text was occupied by the events of March and April 1929, the events of the same two months in 1930 are condensed into a sentence occupying a tiny proportion of the text by comparison: 'Inzwischen war es März, inzwischen war es April.' (K, p.198) The change in narrative pace corresponds to a shift in focus to the construction project on the Kurfürstendamm which is plagued from the start by procrastination and delay. In addition, the economic decline triggered by the Wall Street Crash takes its toll and is exacerbated as Käsebier's star begins to wane after Christmas 1929. Both of these events contribute to a slowdown of circulation and activity. The acceleration of narrative pace therefore corresponds to a deceleration in the field of economic activity at the level of the narrated events and to an inability to exploit time and space for the maximisation of profit.

The shift in narrative pace is best illustrated through the comparison of two strikingly similar chapters which mark significant junctures in Käsebier's career. Each chapter deals with the première of a Käsebier act. Chapter 10, 'Premiere im Wintergarten', signals Käsebier's successful move from Hasenheide to the Kurfürstendamm where he is warmly acclaimed, whilst Chapter 34, 'Die Eröffnung des Käsebiertheaters', relates his final rejection by fashionable Berlin. In both chapters, events, conversations and exchanges are narrated in almost the same sequence with some of the dialogues being repeated practically verbatim. The latter chapter is, however, considerably shorter, and certain events devoted to

the stimulation of economic activity which occur in the former chapter are omitted in the latter chapter. These omissions are rendered particularly noticeable for the reader by the otherwise similar chronological order in which the events are narrated.

Both chapters open with remarks from the narrator that all prominent members of Berlin society have attended the event. The subsequent arrival of Aja Müller is greeted in each case with almost identical comments on her outfit from Thedy Muschler: in Chapter 10, Thedy exclaims, 'Die Aja Müller ganz lang' (K, p.97) and in Chapter 34, she comments, 'Die Aja Müller ganz lange Handschuhe'. (K, p.255) This is followed by observations on the attendance of theatre and variety critics. In Chapter 10, the narrator notes the presence of the theatre critics and the absence of the variety reviewers, a situation which testifies to the serious critical attention received by the singer as his popularity increases, according to the narrator. In Chapter 34, by contrast, Gohlsch remarks on the reverse situation to Käte, interpreting the absence of the theatre critics as indicative of Käsebier's failing fortunes. During the interval, Käte and Margot have virtually identical conversations which vary only in their attitude towards the singer:

Inzwischen stand Käte bei Margot Weißmann. 'Enchanté de vous voir', sagte Margot zu Käte wegen des fremden Herrn.  
'Enchanté', sagte auch Käte.  
Der Herr sagte: 'C'était très chic ça! Très chic.'  
Käte sagte: 'Ja, fand ich auch, ich bin neugierig auf Käsebier.'  
'Einfach toll', sagte Margot, 'fabelhaft, phantastisch, großartig.'  
'Wann kommen Sie endlich zu mir?'  
'Aber, meine Liebe, bestimmt. Ich wollte Sie längst anrufen, ich habe ein ganz schlechtes Gewissen.' (K, p.102)

Inzwischen stand Käte bei Margot Weißmann.  
'Enchanté de vous voir', sagte Margot zu Käte wegen des fremden Herrn.  
'Enchanté', sagte auch Käte.  
'Keine Stimmung heute', sagte Margot, 'schwaches Programm. Langweilig.'  
'Ja, ich finde auch, ich finde ja schon längst nichts mehr an Käsebier. Wann kommen Sie endlich zu mir?'



„Aber, meine Liebe, bestimmt, Sie kommen ja morgen abend erst mal zu mir.“ (K, pp.257-258)

This is one example of an endless repetition of stock phrases in conversation which foregrounds a sense of that language is becoming ever more meaningless in an age of advanced technological communication.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the changed judgement on Käsebier even before they have seen him perform indicates that it is the public reaction to him and his novelty value which have changed rather than anything about his act. Indeed, during the singer's performance, the narrator comments that Käsebier 'war wie immer'. (K, p.258) On leaving the Wintergarten première, the audience discusses Käsebier's performance at length, whereas it is hardly mentioned following the theatre opening. Furthermore, the 'Salonkommunismus' (K, p.107) exhibited by Frächter and Käte is replaced at the theatre opening by street-fighting as the political situation becomes increasingly volatile.<sup>71</sup> In the novel, both occasions are followed by a soirée at Margot's home.

Through such chronologically parallel sequences and identical conversations, the reader is encouraged to reflect on the contrast between the frantic activity, meetings, exchanges and movement in the early part of the novel, and the stagnation, economic decline and political instability in the latter half. Tergit employs a dialectic of repetition and omission in order to convey the gradual deceleration of the economy. The conscious use of such formal devices to stimulate the reader to reflection indicates that Tergit did not simply observe, record and reproduce a given reality like a camera, but deliberately sought to draw her readers' attention to the fictional status of the work. Furthermore, these chapters indicate that Tergit's awareness of time-space transformations impacts

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<sup>70</sup> See p.16 and pp.38-39 above.

<sup>71</sup> Berghahn describes the extraordinary escalation of political violence and paramilitarism in the early 1930s. V.R. Berghahn, *Modern Germany. Society, Economy and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.120.

upon the modes of representation and the narrative techniques employed within the novel.

### *5.3 The Pursuit of Private Interest*

Tergit also emphasizes the importance of speed for financial gain through the contrasting fortunes of the characters. The ability to control and exploit the means of accelerating turnover is the critical factor distinguishing the economically successful from the financial failures in the novel. The new technologies and means of organizing production increase the means for people to achieve their desires and remove previous barriers. However, as in Durkheim's accounts of anomie, Tergit depicts how these modernizing processes unleash furious economic activity and remove the limitations on personal ambition. As a result, people are blinded to their obligations and duties towards others in their pursuit of private interest.

Most industries and professions appear to be subject to spatio-temporal restructuring of production along Fordist lines. Even medicine is not exempt. Gohlisch's description of his visit to Dr. Ahlheim's surgery with a sprained thumb suggests a Fordist production line in which tasks have been redistributed spatially in order to maximise the number of patients seen in a day. Patients must circulate from cubicle to cubicle, Gohlisch relates, and whilst one patient is being X-rayed, another is disrobing, a third is at reception and a fourth is receiving radiation treatment. The treatment of all patients, no matter what their ailment, is utterly standardized: Gohlisch is asked to undress before anyone has inquired after his complaint. Dr. Krone argues that to have any kind of success in the medical profession, such rationalization is essential: 'man muß einen Betrieb aufziehen'. (K, p.19) The word 'Betrieb' is significant here, since it illustrates the extent to



which economic imperatives dominate all sectors of modern life and promote time-space transformations. However, although emphasizing the pervasive nature of rationalization in Weimar society, Tergit does not indicate that rationalization is extended into the private sphere and internalized by individuals in the same way that Keun does, as will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

Nowhere is the necessity of accelerating production in times of crisis more striking in Tergit's novel than in the case of Muschler, who is driven by his increasingly precarious financial situation to try and turn his undeveloped land on the Kurfürstendamm into a profit-making venture. Nevertheless, Muschler cannot cope with the pace of events demanded by modern technology and the speed of information transfer. He is therefore unable to exploit the advantages which new technology offers him to achieve a swift and large return upon his investment. When on holiday in Cannes, various individuals write to Muschler to express their concern and reservations about the viability of the scheme proposed by Mitte and the architect Karlweiß. However, the receipt of a telegram forces him into a hasty decision:

Bevor aber Muschler auf diesen Vorschlag antworten konnte, war er schon überholt. Otto Mitte telegrafierte, er erhalte sogar eine erste Hypothek von 900 000 Mark, müsse aber dazu definitiv Bescheid wissen, ob Muschler zu einer Konferenz zurückkommen könne. (K, p.154)

The immediate response demanded and expected by the telegram robs Muschler of his opportunity for careful consideration and enables events to overtake him. Tergit's depiction of how Muschler's actions are shaped by modern technologies of communication and transport echoes Stephen Kern's account of the way European governments allowed themselves to be rushed into war, because of a frenetic pace of negotiations and hasty responses enabled by the telephone and

telegram.<sup>72</sup> Muschler's response to the changing social relations created by shifts in space and time was therefore characteristic.

Flummoxed by the pace, Muschler is himself incapable of driving the project forward and consequently loses the space from which he had hoped to profit. The whole theatre project is characterized from the start by a lack of pace, constant delays and setbacks, of which the postponement of the initial meeting between Muschler and Mitte from 30th April to 6th May is symptomatic. Despite Mitte's promises to Muschler that the mortgage arrangements will be finalized in July, the first meeting relating to the mortgage is only held on 1st August. (K, p.169) Moreover, difficulty in obtaining planning permission proves costly in terms of time: 'Zwei Monate waren vergangen, seit Karlweiß gesagt hatte, in den nächsten Tagen hätte er den Bauschein.' (K, p.182) The cumulative effect of such delays is to postpone the opening date of the theatre by six months, during which time the housing market collapses and the apartments become impossible to let.

Frächter, on the other hand, proves a master at the introduction of new technologies to accelerate production and consumption and displays a keen awareness of the significance of speed for maximising profit, constantly hurrying along the projects in which he is involved. The connection between Frächter's activity and the new technologies of speed is made explicit in the narratorial description of him as 'ein Motor, der mit tausend Umdrehungen in der Sekunde lief'. (K, p.145) The most ardent champion of rationalization within the novel, he has made the trip to America which was so popular with contemporary German industrialists, businessmen, trade unionists, engineers and workers to view working practices, especially at the Ford car plants.<sup>73</sup> He is able to rationalize his

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<sup>72</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1983, p.260.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Nolan discusses the extent of the impact of Fordism upon theory and practice in German industry during the inter-war period. Mary Nolan, *Visions of*



own work by employing the new technologies which facilitate tempo. For instance, he flies between Berlin, Dresden and Hamburg (K, p.145) and constantly uses the telephone to arrange meetings and contracts. As a result, Frächter is able to take advantage of all potential markets for Käsebier consumer goods, arranging not only the contributions to the book he edits, but also the singer's film, theatre and recording contracts (with the notable exception of the Kurfürstendamm theatre project) as well as the cigarette brands and the shoes. Whether his deals generate films, books or cigarettes is of no significance to Frächter; they are all goods to be produced and consumed as quickly as possible before their novelty value wears off.

The tremendous energies released by Frächter's rationalization of space and time have an immediately beneficial effect upon the economy. However, the readers are encouraged to reflect negatively upon Frächter's activity by the narrator. Tergit's narrator is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic; that is, a narrator who is above the level of the narrated events and who does not participate in them.<sup>74</sup> Rimmon-Kenan claims that such narrators tend to be the most reliable.<sup>75</sup> The narrator therefore acquires a certain authority, and the text of Tergit's novel does not subvert this authority or lead the readers to question the narrator's reliability. As will be shown in the next chapter, this represents a contrast to *Bauern*, where the readers are encouraged to develop a sceptical attitude towards the narrator. The direct judgements made by the narrator are therefore a strong clue as to Tergit's characterization and evaluation of modernity.

Direct narratorial comment upon Frächter is hardly favourable. He is, for instance, described as a 'Kanone' (K, p.146), which although it suggests success

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*Modernity. American Business and the Modernization of Germany.* New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p.95.

<sup>75</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, p.103.

also carries obvious associations of military destruction and devastation. Furthermore, the net result of his unrestrained ambition and his efforts to accelerate the pace of modern life for private gain leave only destruction and human suffering in their wake. The cigarette factory ceases production after a year and Käsebier is consigned to provincial backwaters. The rationalization of the *Berliner Rundschau* reveals Frächter's complete disregard for his obligations and duties towards others: he immediately dismisses a fifth of its staff by arbitrarily crossing the names of unknown personnel from a list and he significantly reduces the wages of the remaining staff. The final venture associated with Frächter is the demolition of the newspaper offices, although he has moved on to become a shareholder in Waldschmidt's publishing empire. This contrasts sharply with the presentation of the Social Democratic mayor Gareis in Fallada's novel, who uses technological modernization and rationalization of time in order to improve the lives of his disadvantaged constituents.

Frächter's use of the means of overcoming spatio-temporal barriers to the turnover of capital is therefore shown by Tergit to have negative repercussions, because his egoistic individualism provides him with no sense of his duties and obligations towards others. It is not modernity itself which is condemned by Tergit, but the absence of any moral regulation which would provide limits for Frächter's behaviour. A similar evaluation of modernity can be traced in Tergit's presentation of the changing physical and spatial structures of Berlin, and of the separation of space from place.



## 6. Space and Place

### 6.1 Changing Spatial Relations

In addition to the narrative techniques used to convey a sense of speed, Tergit also reproduces the disjointed, fragmented and random nature of modern capitalist urban experience in the structure of the novel. There is no fixed object of focalization in *Käsebier*. Some key characters are simply ignored or fade into the background as the narrative progresses. The author Lambeck almost disappears once his function in the 'Käsebierkonjunktur' (K, p.243) has been fulfilled. On the other hand, certain important figures such as Mitte and Muschler are introduced relatively late and their dealings become vital in the second half of the novel. This device emphasizes the characters' position as members of an intricate social network around which ideas, products and money circulate through a myriad of individual transactions. Moreover, the narrative switches in seemingly haphazard fashion between individuals and different locations, moving restlessly around the editorial offices of the *Berliner Rundschau*, various cafés and restaurants, hotels and theatres, law courts, municipal offices, streets and squares. This energetic movement from place to place within the narrative mirrors the complex diffuse flow of people around the city and conveys the impression of simultaneity, as the narrator relates what happens on the same day at different locations in the city. For example, whilst Muschler is rejecting a construction scheme proposed by Erich Waltke, Dr. Kaliski is in the midst of arranging the financial backing for another project on this land. (K, p.127) On the same day, Mitte discovers that a large project is being planned at Hohenschönhausen and he offers the Käsebier project to Karlweiß, the architect of the Hohenschönhausen scheme, in exchange for the construction contract on that scheme.

The physical infrastructure of Berlin functions in the novel as an elaborate network which promotes interaction, mobility and the traffic of goods and ideas with its cultural institutions, forms of communication and transport and, perhaps most crucially, by means of its streets and squares. The layout of the streets encourages fortuitous encounters. For instance, a crossroads brings together different social groups: 'An der Leipziger Straßenecke kreuzt das Bürgertum die Gegend der Unsicherheit.' (K, pp.35-36) The Kurfürstendamm constitutes a particularly rich source of such meetings, some of which generate a flurry of new activity. For instance, the crucial encounter between Lambeck and Frächter when Frächter draws the playwright's attention to Gohlisch's article on Käsebier takes place on the Kurfürstendamm. (K, p.48) The Kurfürstendamm is also the location of significant social gatherings which foster new contacts and business arrangements, thereby revitalizing economic activity. The first soirée at Margot Weißmann's home on the Kurfürstendamm ultimately generates the deal between Muschler and Mitte as the result of a conversation between Muschler and Kaliski. The Kurfürstendamm thus operates as the key structural interconnection and location for traffic and exchange within the novel.

In Tergit's novel, the Kurfürstendamm also functions as a metaphor for transience, speed and the ephemeral, nowhere more so than in the brevity of Käsebier's conquest of this site which is so confidently proclaimed by the novel's title. As noted in Chapter 1, the Kurfürstendamm was perceived by many writers and artists in the Weimar Republic as an emblem of ceaseless transformation. During the Weimar Republic, Berlin was as much a byword for construction and redevelopment as it has been during the past decade, and this was particularly evident on the Kurfürstendamm. The rapid turnover of shops and cafés in this



street reminds Siegfried Kracauer of the movement of 'eine Hafenbevölkerung',<sup>76</sup> whilst Joseph Roth perceives the only permanent characteristic of the Kurfürstendamm to be its capacity for constant renewal: 'Unwandelbar ist seine Wandelbarkeit. Langmütig ist seine Ungeduld. Beharrlich seine Unbeständigkeit.'<sup>77</sup> Neither Kracauer nor Roth connect this phenomenon to modernizing processes, perceiving transience to be the normal condition of the Kurfürstendamm. Similarly, Franz Hessel denies that the constantly shifting locations of 'Verkehr' and 'Betrieb' in this area can solely be attributed to modernization: 'Das kann nicht nur daran liegen, daß hier die Häuser sich modernisieren, es muß ein sozusagen unterirdisches Gesetz der Stadt sein.'<sup>78</sup>

Tergit also emphasizes how the distribution and use of the street's physical space is merely temporary and subject to continual alteration over extremely short stretches of time. However, she also connects these spatial transformations specifically to modernizing processes designed to overcome economic crises. Significantly, many buildings are being transformed from private homes into commercial sites, illustrating how space is being increasingly given over to the promotion of economic activity rather than private use. The narrator describes how spiralling inflation forced property owners to destroy huge ground floor apartments and private homes to make way for shops, new sites of commerce and public interaction:

Die Hausbesitzer am Kurfürstendamm verfielen dem Taumel der Inflation. Sie zerstörten die Parterrewohnungen, diese hochherrschaftlichen Wohnungen von 10 bis 14 Zimmern [...].

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<sup>76</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Straße ohne Erinnerung', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, 8 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1990, V.3: *Aufsätze 1932-1965*, ed. by Inka Mülder-Bach, pp.170-174 (p.171).

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Der Kurfürstendamm', in Joseph Roth, *Werke*, 6 vols. Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch; Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1991, III: *Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*, ed. by Klaus Westermann, pp.98-100 (p.100).

<sup>78</sup> Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin. Beobachtungen im Jahr 1929*. Berlin, Morgen, 1979, p.132.

Läden sollten diese Wohnungen werden, Läden für 50 000 Mark  
Miete, Läden für Autos, Läden für Kleider, Läden für Parfüms,  
Läden für Schuhe. (K, p.175, my omission)

Established shops are in the process of drastic renovation 'denn es mußte einfach gebaut werden, koste es was es wolle'. (K, p.175) Such feverish enthusiasm for redevelopment is echoed by Heinrich Wurm, Frächter's associate in the Romanisches Café. Wurm is jubilant at the rumour that the houses around the Spandauerstraße, Stralauerstraße and Jüdenstraße are to be demolished along with the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, to make way for hotels and offices, new venues of economic and commercial interaction (K, p.59).

The position of the more enduring and prominent landmarks, around which the identity of the Kurfürstendamm has previously accrued, has therefore become precarious. This phenomenon is not confined to a single street: many other locations, such as the ironically named Hohenschönhausen site, are subject to demolition, renovation and construction during the course of the novel, creating a sense that the physical infrastructure of the metropolis is a constantly changing space. The composition of the network and the structural interconnections do not only conduct and promote circulation, transience and perpetual motion, but are themselves in a state of flux in order to stimulate the economy. The external appearance of the city has thus become shifting and unstable. No counterpart to this phenomenon emerges in *Gilgi* or *Bauern* which are set outside Berlin.

As Schütz and Stephan have noted, the function of the Kurfürstendamm in *Käsebier* recalls that of the Alexanderplatz in Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929).<sup>79</sup> The Alexanderplatz too is subject to spatial reorganization in order to improve the efficiency of urban transportation: the demolition,

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<sup>79</sup> Schütz, *Romane*, p.157; Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos', p.293.



excavation and construction work involved in building the U-Bahn and the new stations on the Alexanderplatz figure prominently in Döblin's novel. Although the physical space of the square is constantly being altered and the identity of the square undergoes a process of perpetual renewal, there is a certain sense of permanence, since the existence of the square itself is not threatened. A similar claim can be made for the Kurfürstendamm in Tergit's novel. The difference in the authors' choice of location reflects the social class which they choose to depict;<sup>80</sup> Tergit's professional circles are concentrated in the west, whilst Döblin focuses upon the Lumpenproletariat in the east of the city. Yet in both, Berlin becomes a place of continual transformation, traffic and motion.

However, in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the destruction is creative and the reader is encouraged to contextualize the process of perpetual change and development in largely positive terms. In *Käsebier*, the impact of private interests upon the modernization of urban space is shown to produce highly negative effects. The partners in the Käsebier theatre project, Muschler and Mitte, both exhibit the type of profiteering mentality and boundless avarice which Durkheim perceives to be endemic in trade and industry as a result of moral deregulation. The obsession of these individuals with the pursuit of their own private interests leads them to neglect their duties and obligations towards others. As with Frächter's drive to accelerate the turnover of capital, the repercussions of the actions of Muschler and Mitte are shown to cause long-term suffering.

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<sup>80</sup> cf. Eichholz, 'Käsebier'.

## 6.2 Architecture and Anomie

The narrator points to the deregulation of a formerly strictly controlled housing market in 1927, when '[d]ie Zwangswirtschaft wurde gelockert' (K, p.200), as the cause of a sudden expansion in property development and renovation. Muschler and Mitte are misled by this rapid growth and are unable to foresee the abrupt collapse of the property market which ultimately leaves them both bankrupt: 'Muschler und Mitte konnten sich nicht vorstellen, daß es je anders würde. Niemand konnte sich das vorstellen.' (K, p.200) This indicates the difficulties of maintaining an overview of a global market and of accurately calculating consumer demand, which Durkheim saw as a result of economic and moral deregulation. The young architect Oberndorffer argues for restraint and moderation in the Käsebier theatre and apartment project, arguing that the demand is for smaller-scale accommodation with 1.5, 2.5 and 3.5 rooms. Nonetheless, Muschler and Mitte adopt instead a rather grandiose scheme incorporating luxury apartments with four, five and six rooms.

Muschler is motivated to develop this land on the Kurfürstendamm because, as a banker, he is faced with an increasingly insecure financial situation. This drastically reduces the threshold of limitation on his desires, but he is unwilling to accustom himself to this new situation, the kind of response which Durkheim characterizes as typical in such situations. Although his wife, Thedy, suggests that they simply sell their land and live on the interest, Muschler has his sights set on a much higher goal: 'So viel bringen die Terrains nicht. Ich kann mich nur durch einen Coup sanieren. Wenn ich von dem Bau einen Überschuß von hunderttausend Mark im Jahr habe, wird's gehen.' (K, p.124) Greed and the pursuit of private interest therefore constitute Muschler's key motives in becoming involved in the construction project, and throughout he focuses solely



on the financial side of the scheme, abnegating all responsibility for the design itself, an attitude encapsulated in his oft-repeated mantra: 'Beim Bauen ist der Bau gar nicht so wichtig, die Finanzierung ist alles.' (K, p.129) He refuses to pay any heed to Oberndorffer's warnings that well-designed, good quality buildings prove more financially viable in the long run.

The other partner in the project, Mitte, similarly demonstrates a remarkable lack of interest in the schemes themselves or in the potential repercussions for those who are forced to inhabit his buildings, revealing an egoistic individualism without foresight or social responsibility. Mitte made his fortune during the 'relativ kontinuierlichen jahrzehntelangen wirtschaftlichen Aufschwung'<sup>81</sup> in the Wilhelmine empire when the state appears to have provided no regulatory restraints upon his private greed: 'er hatte so wenig wie die Beamten an die Menschen gedacht'. (K, p.155) Despite his 'Millionenbesitz' (K, p.155), Mitte remains dissatisfied and is constantly seeking to increase his vast fortune, which echoes the insatiable greed Durkheim perceives to be characteristic of the chronic state of anomie and crisis in industry and finance, although Mitte has not yet been visited by a sense of disillusionment and despair caused by an infinitely receding goal: 'Er konnte nie genug Projekte haben, nie genug Risiko'. (K, p.155) However, the erosion of the traditional moral consensus has destroyed any sense of obligations or duties towards others, and the judicial system in the Weimar Republic, as in the Wilhelmine Empire, provides no checks on his behaviour:

Er tat nichts gegen die Gesetze. Waren die Kinder abgeschnitten vom Glück des Lebens, sonnenlose Geschöpfe, von den Höfen und Treppen verjagt, wo es ihnen verboten war zu spielen, ohne Grünfläche, ohne Sandplätze, allen Gefahren ausgesetzt, ihn ging das nichts an. (K, p.155)

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<sup>81</sup> Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, p.91.

The language employed here to describe how the physical space around the children blights their lives is highly emotive and designed to elicit the reader's sympathy. Therefore, rather than providing an 'objektive Beschreibung'<sup>82</sup> of the construction industry in the 1920s, Tergit offers a clear comment upon those involved.

The obsession of both Muschler and Mitte with financial gain generates useless and uninhabitable buildings. Max Schulz, who allocates the contracts for the Käsebier theatre and apartment complex on Mitte's behalf, is forced to accept the cheapest tenders regardless of quality, as he explains to the owners of a firm renowned for skill and quality: 'Was soll ich machen? [...] ich krieg's billiger. Sie wissen, ich arbeite gern mit Ihnen, aber Geschäft ist Geschäft, kalkuliert muß werden.' (K, p.208, my omission) Moreover, Karlweiß, the architect, fails to execute his job properly or to communicate properly, as the Bavarian foreman complains:

Schauens her, Herr Kommerzienrat, noch net amal die Fenster hat er gleich gezeichnet. An der Kurfürstendammfront sind sie verschieden geteilt. Jetzt stellt's sich's heraus, daß nit genug Platz für die Türen ist, müssen die Bekleidungen abgeschnitten werden. [...] So' a Arbeiterei ist do a Gewissenlosigkeit von am Architekten.  
(K, pp.209-210)

The architect neglects his obligations towards the workers and contractors, who are therefore unable to fulfill their functions correctly, resulting in a situation which recalls Durkheim's description of the anomic division of labour. Furthermore, both the Hohenschönhausen project and the Käsebier theatre complex are badly designed with too much emphasis placed upon the visual impact created by the communal spaces of the buildings rather than upon their function as homes. The Hohenschönhausen building may sport 'eine bildschöne Fassade' (K, p.182), but, as the narrator notes, it has been built '[n]ach einem

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<sup>82</sup> Scheele, 'Aspekte', p.194.



völlig irrsinnigen Plan' (K, p.182) by Karlweiß. The narrator emphasizes the long-term detrimental effects of the shoddy design upon the occupants: 'Das Resultat war später, daß Frau und Kinder jahraus, jahrein in dem fensterlosen Raum bei künstlichem Licht spielten und nähten.' (K, p.182) The apartments in the theatre complex are so poorly designed that they prove uninhabitable. (K, p.210) All the energetic demolition and reconstruction in the novel is shown to yield neither innovative modernist architecture, nor humane, good quality housing, but instead uninhabitable rubbish fit only for demolition.

The housing market collapses 'rasend schnell' (K, p.200) in the spring of 1930 as a consequence of the international economic crisis.<sup>83</sup> This demonstrates the extent to which industry and finance have become spatially integrated and reveals the flip side of excessive consumption as crisis, exhaustion and waste in a scene of utter desolation on the Kurfürstendamm.<sup>84</sup> The situation is compared to the devastation wrought by cholera and to the crisis and depression at the end of a gold-rush, an economic cycle of boom and bust:

Muschler sah den Kurfürstendamm. Haus bei Haus die Zettel.  
Tote Stadt, die Cholera hatte gehaust. Oder war es wie in  
amerikanischen Goldgräberstädten, wenn das Gold zu Ende war?  
To let, to let, to let, Haus bei Haus? Die Läden zu. Haus bei Haus.  
Der Liberale, laissez faire, laissez passer, rief plötzlich nach dem  
Staat. (K, p.201)

The last sentence of this passage is telling: Muschler finally becomes aware of the problems caused by economic deregulation and calls for state intervention and assistance. Yet even in the face of his subsequent bankruptcy, Muschler flatly refuses to acknowledge any limitation to his own greed. He continues to sanction Thedy's high spending and, more seriously, engages in corrupt business practices

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<sup>83</sup> Peukert, *Weimarer Republik*, p.243.

<sup>84</sup> On the etymology of 'consumption', see Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn., London, Fontana, 1988, pp.78-79.

which endanger his investors' deposits. Finally, neither he nor Thedy is prepared to sacrifice any of their private property to repay the firm's creditors.

By contrast, Muschler's uncle, Frechheim, auctions the contents of his home and insists that Muschler should do the same: 'Hast du denn kein Ehrgefühl mehr?' (K, p.269) He reacts to the sudden economic misfortune and abrupt limitation upon his life-style by contemplating suicide, an act which is only just prevented by the timely arrival of Waldschmidt. (K, p.275) Frechheim's explanation of the factors which have brought him to this pass echo Durkheim's description of anomic suicide. Frechheim claims that he has been brought to the brink of suicide by the disappearance of a traditional moral consensus which regulated business practices and set out rights and obligations:

Sehen Sie, Muschler hat gar kein Gefühl für die Firma. Meine so früh verstorbene Frau und ich haben uns bei jeder Gelegenheit überlegt, ob es der Firma nützt oder schadet. Für Muschler ist N. Muschler und Sohn, obwohl er doch den Firmennamen trägt, Hekuba. (K, p.275)

Waldschmidt agrees with him that the younger generation of entrepreneurs and businessmen no longer view their concerns with pride, nor do they subscribe to established rules of conduct which had regulated the business practices of their generation.

Tergit's assessment of the process of spatial reorganization in Berlin is rooted in an anomic model of modernity. Economic and moral deregulation, themselves the result of time-space compression which integrates markets on a global level, promote egoistic individualism and greed, thereby undermining the established consensual values and social practices. The dissolution of such values brings Frechheim to the brink of anomic suicide and enables Muschler and Mitte to neglect their duties towards others which has long-term harmful repercussions. Once again, the evaluation of the impact of modernizing processes demonstrates



an understanding of the underlying tendencies behind the contemporary crisis in Weimar, rather than a preoccupation with superficial details, as is often suggested in the reception of *Käsebier*. Moreover, these developments are not depicted with scrupulous impartiality and lack of bias: instead, a specific view emerges with regard to their impact and the way individuals respond to them.

## **7. Flânerie: Three Responses to the Anomic Crisis<sup>85</sup>**

The discussion of urban public spaces has so far focused exclusively upon the changing physical spatial structures of the city, such as its architecture, its landmarks and the layout of its streets. However, it is also necessary to consider the experiential aspects of public space, how individuals respond to the rapid transformation of their physical environment and what meaning they invest in it. Such subjective experiences of the modern metropolis are presented to the reader through the solitary strolls of Lambeck, Miermann and Kohler. During their strolls, they reflect upon the changing face of the city with varying degrees of fear and fascination, from Miermann's sense of dispossession via Lambeck's ambivalence to the commodification of the urban space to Kohler's more optimistic but pragmatic enjoyment of her mobility. Significantly, the responses to the urban space shown by Lambeck and Miermann were common reactions amongst Tergit's contemporary artists - particularly male artists. Tergit exposes the constructed nature of these views of the city, a technique which indicates her awareness that the subjective standpoint of the individual could affect their appraisal and representation of reality and which furthermore implies that she did not believe an entirely neutral and unbiased perspective on reality was possible.

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<sup>85</sup> Some parts of this section have already appeared in slightly different form in Fiona Littlejohn, 'Mobility in the Metropolis: Responses to the Changing City in Gabriele Tergit's *Käsebier erobert den Kurfürstendamm* and J.B. Priestley's *Angel Pavement*', *New Readings*, 5 (1999), 39-50.

For the journeys through the city by Kohler and Lambeck, Tergit drew upon her own feuilletons 'Eingewöhnen in Berlin' and 'Vorfrühlingsreise nach Berlin'.<sup>86</sup> Although some sections are taken over word for word, the sequence of the sections is reordered and new portions are inserted in order to create a specific view of the city appropriate to the character in question. Reference to some of the significant alterations will be made in the context of the discussion of each character.

In addition, I analyse the extent to which the characters' activity can be related to that of the *flâneur*, who has become such a central figure in sociological, cultural and literary explorations of the metropolis and of modernity. As a historical figure, the *flâneur* was originally associated with the Paris of the nineteenth century, in which context Walter Benjamin introduces the figure into investigations of modernity with his study of Charles Baudelaire.<sup>87</sup> According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* roamed through the city streets, seemingly idle, but in fact carefully watching and reading the multifarious urban signifiers. In general, the *flâneur* was a marginal figure in the midst of an urban crowd, isolated by his preference for observing rather than participating in the frantic activity and commodity exchange of the city. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has noted, such a refusal to engage directly is one means of maintaining a psychic distance between the self and the rapidly expanding urban mass, enabling the *flâneur* to preserve a sovereign subjectivity in the face of the threat of being absorbed into the swirling flux of the city: 'the city revolves around the spectator, who copes

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<sup>86</sup> Gabriele Tergit, *Atem einer anderen Welt. Berliner Reportagen*, ed. by Jens Brüning. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1994, pp.13-17 and pp.17-21. Unfortunately Brüning does not include the dates when these feuilletons were originally published.

<sup>87</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, I.2, pp.509-690.



with urban diversity by reducing it to a marvelous show'.<sup>88</sup> *Flânerie* therefore constitutes a particular response to what Richard Sheppard terms the modernist 'sense that the human(ist) subject has been radically "decentred"',<sup>89</sup> counteracting the threat of a chaotic external world with a powerful affirmation of the ability of the individual consciousness to control this disorder. Hence, whilst *flânerie* involves an obvious fascination with modernity, it also signals a profound anxiety about social transformations within the urban context. Significantly, there are no *flâneur* figures in Fallada's novel and the *flâneur* in *Gilgi* encounters a very different urban landscape in Cologne. Tergit, however, uses the *flânerie* of Lambeck, Miermann and Kohler to explore a set of possible responses to modernity, although it is Kohler's response which ultimately appears to be the most appropriate to the challenges of the anomic crisis.

### 7.1 The Shock of the City: *Flânerie* as Retreat

Inge Stephan rejects the notion that Otto Lambeck constitutes a *flâneur*, arguing that he is not intoxicated by the city streets.<sup>90</sup> However, it seems to me that Lambeck displays characteristics that are entirely typical of the *flâneur*, especially in his ambivalent reaction to the new public spaces of commerce, mass entertainment and leisure which he associates with a simultaneously enticing and threatening female sexuality. As argued in Chapter 1, these connections between shifts in perception, modernity and a simultaneously threatening and enticing female sexuality which pervade Lambeck's vision of Berlin was a characteristic field of association for many artists and writers in Weimar. This section will

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<sup>88</sup> Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, 'The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris', in *The Flâneur*, ed. by Keith Tester, London/New York, Routledge, 1994, pp.22-42 (p.31).

<sup>89</sup> Richard Sheppard, *Modernism — Dada — Postmodernism*. Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2000, p.52.

<sup>90</sup> Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos', p.302.

outline these interconnections in Lambeck's vision of modern Berlin and argue that through his *flânerie*, Tergit offers a critique of a common way of perceiving and depicting the city in the works of her male contemporaries.

In Berlin for what proves to be the disastrous première of his new play, established author Lambeck wanders the streets in search of inspiration for a series of articles about the city commissioned by the *Berliner Tageszeitung*. He thus continues the association between *flânerie* and *feuilleton* whose co-emergence in the Paris of the 1830s was noted by Benjamin.<sup>91</sup> This short prose form represents a new departure for Lambeck, which entices him because it affords opportunities for direct communication with the masses: 'Es würde ihm Vergnügen machen, das Erfahrene [...] sogleich an den Mann zu bringen.' (K, p.35) However, Lambeck is accustomed to his status as an independent intellectual and unused to writing on demand or selling his work as a commodity. For example, eight days after attending Käsebier's show, Lambeck has, to Kohler's surprise, done no more than make a start on his review. (K, p.54) Furthermore, the commission requires him to engage with the modern world, whereas he usually avoids contemporary topics and favours themes which can be contemplated at a distance. (K, p.54) Therefore, through the commissioned articles, Lambeck is abruptly confronted with the commodity value of his writing together with the question of how to rapidly apprehend and represent the new spaces of leisure and entertainment.

In Lambeck's eyes, the modern urban sites of mass culture and commerce are populated with assertive and sexually alluring female figures. He registers with surprise the confident new presence of women in urban public spaces, a development which he associates with modernity and speed: 'Die Frauen haben

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin, 'Baudelaire', p.538. cf. also Köhn, *Straßenrausch*, p.7. Köhn considers Lambeck's commission as typical of the connections between city, short prose form and *flânerie*.



schöne schlanke Beine. Schön ist die Berlinerin geworden, tüchtig und rasch.' (K, p.35) He notes the commodification of the female body through make-up, a development which he relates to women's bold new attitude and the smell of petrol, recalling the car which was then the height of technological modernity: 'Sie waren herrlich manikürt und massiert und gesalbt und gerötet und geweißt. Lambeck roch diese Luft aus Freiheit, Frechheit und Benzin.' (K, p.47) Lambeck thus makes the connection between technological innovation, active female sexuality and the city, which Patrice Petro claims was widespread amongst contemporary artists and writers.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, Lambeck's attraction towards the women in urban public spaces is transposed onto the city itself: 'Lambeck liebte den Gendarmenmarkt.' (K, p.36) Such erotically charged accounts of traversing the urban space can be found in the writings of Tergit's contemporaries, as in this encounter recorded by Kracauer in 1930:

Ich genoß sie [die Straßen] blindlings und ließ mich von ihnen verbrauchen, und kehrte ich auch stets matt von den Ausschweifungen heim, so hielt mich doch nichts davon zurück, meiner Leidenschaft am andern Tag wieder nachzugeben.<sup>93</sup>

This episode recalls the behaviour which Ferguson perceives to be typical of the *flâneur*: the city streets threaten to overwhelm the narrator's capacity for rational decision-making and obliterate his sovereign subjectivity, as he yields to the irrational, compulsive attraction. However, the narrative ends with an affirmation of the power of individual consciousness to control the disorder represented by female sexuality:<sup>94</sup> after a struggle, Kracauer's narrator frees himself and never

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<sup>92</sup> Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets. Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, p.40.

<sup>93</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Erinnerung an eine Pariser Straße', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Schriften*, 8 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1990, V.2: *Aufsätze 1927-1931*, ed. by Inka Müller-Bach, pp.243-248 (p.243, my addition).

<sup>94</sup> On the association of female sexuality with disorder in urban public spaces, see Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder and*

returns to the district again. Moreover, the essay itself demonstrates the narrator's ability to master the subject matter and present urban experience at a safe distance to the readers.

Lambeck experiences similar anxieties about loss of rational control as he yields to the charms of the urban spectacle. He is fascinated by the diversity of the Kurfürstendamm, from cinemas to dances, from the latest clothes and beauty techniques to bright electric lights and the most fashionable comestibles. Like many male artists and writers in Weimar, Lambeck links these signs of the impact of mass culture on the city with the increasing commodification of women's bodies through ultramodern standardized garments and make-up. Yet the seductive nature of the urban landscape threatens to overthrow male rationality and agency by ensnaring and absorbing men into the world of commodities and exchange:

Kapitol in Rosa, Lila und Rot. Kino, Café, Restaurant, d.h. Paläste, Marmor, Gloria und Königin, Sekt, elegante Kleider, Charleston und Jazz, Freßgeschäfte mit bunten Salaten und Artischoken, Flipp und Cobler, rotes, grünes, gelbes Licht, Schlange und Krokodil, Feh und Zobel, Seide und Spitzen, lackierte Kojen, wo Schönheit fabriziert wird mit Dampf, gefetteter Hand und knisterndem, elektrischem Strom für die Pelztiere, die rosa Beine, cotyfarbene Münder, suchende Portemonnaies und suchende Augen für die Herren haben [...]. (K, p.48)

Just as the city dissolves into random elements of mass culture, so the women on the Kurfürstendamm fragment into isolated fashionable commodities and the furs and skins of the predatory animals they wear. Unlike the historical themes of his plays, the immediacy, quantity and rapidity of the external stimuli do not provide the requisite distance or pace for the kind of rational reflection and mastery of his material to which Lambeck is accustomed. Lambeck finds himself unable to isolate an appropriate topic for his feuilletons which will typify Berlin: 'Und diese



Artikelserie? Wo den Stoff hernehmen?' (K, p.48) The impact of modernity on the urban space thus threatens Lambeck's ability to produce art.

In the sites of entertainment and exchange, Lambeck is therefore confronted with the shift in perception which, as noted in Chapter 1, was associated with Berlin in the 1920s by artists and intellectuals. At the turn of the century, Georg Simmel had already noted the adjustments in perception which were essential for the modern city-dweller to cope with the rapid onslaught of diverse sensory stimuli in the metropolis.<sup>95</sup> In 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', Benjamin links the impact upon perception created by the constant shocks and motions of modern metropolitan experience to the transformations in apperception caused by film:

Der Film entspricht tiefgreifenden Veränderungen des Apperzeptionsapparates — Veränderungen, wie sie im Maßstab der Privatexistenz jeder Passant im Großstadtverkehr, wie sie im geschichtlichen Maßstab jeder heutige Staatsbürger erlebt.<sup>96</sup>

The constantly changing image of the film in screen prevents the extended contemplation and reflection enabled by static art works, Benjamin argues.

This modernist preoccupation with shifts in apperception and the repercussions for contemplation and for art is clearly manifested in Lambeck's *flânerie*. During his first stroll, he retreats away from the busy districts of commerce, offices and industry to the area of historical monuments which celebrate the imperial past and on to the Humboldt university. Lambeck's route at this juncture is the reverse of that taken by the narrator in 'Vorfrühlingsreise nach

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<sup>95</sup> Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, VII: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, ed. by Rüdiger Kramme and others, 2 vols, I, pp.116-131.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, I.2, pp.471-508 (p.503). On the different versions of this essay, see p.37 above.

Berlin', which implies that Tergit deliberately restructured his journey to proceed in this pattern.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Tergit includes a piece of extended musing about the poor treatment of the German baroque architect and sculptor, Andreas Schlüter,<sup>98</sup> and about a woman in a more passive, domestic and subordinate role than those striding along the Kurfürstendamm, which does not appear in the feuilleton:

Das Zeughaus. Masken sterbender Krieger. Schlüter. Welch deutsches Schicksal! Sein Reiterdenkmal, das großartigste der Zeit, unbekannt in der übrigen Welt, er schlecht behandelt, in der Verbannung arm gestorben. Die Witwe ohne Pension und schlecht behandelt, zurückgewiesen, als sie den König darum bat. (K, p.36)

By contrast with the constantly changing external stimuli in the commercial spaces which Lambeck barely has time to register, the sight of the static images permits this meditation. Therefore, like Benjamin, Tergit emphasizes that such contemplation requires a fixed object whilst the endless motion of people and traffic precludes the form of perception upon which reflection of this kind is based. Tergit also makes the connection between city and film in this respect: Frächter consoles Lambeck with the thought that apprehending and representing the modern metropolis has posed difficulties for even the best artists, and suggests that film might offer the only suitable medium for such a task. Although Lambeck admires films, especially Chaplin's works, he is afraid to employ the new medium himself, confessing: 'Ich aber fürchte mich noch.' (K, p.49) Through Lambeck's *flânerie*, Tergit thus explicitly thematizes the problems for artistic representation which are generated by societal modernity. This is significant because it suggests that Tergit was aware that the type of realism demanded in the programmatic statements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* was obsolete: the procedure of

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<sup>97</sup> Tergit, 'Vorfrühlingsreise', p.19.

<sup>98</sup> cf. Henry and Mary Garland, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, 2nd edn. Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.802.



merely observing and registering events as they occur has been rendered impossible by modernizing developments.

Lambeck, however, looks to familiar territory, away from the frightening modern world rather than seeking new artistic forms. At the end of his first walk, he retreats to an inn decorated in pre-war style, where he recalls the stable, static values in the world of his youth: 'Wir waren gläubig und stolz und Untertane, die die Uniform anbeteten.' (K, p.37) He therefore regrets the loss of those consensual values which bound society together, suggesting that his response to modernity is precipitated by anomie. Lambeck's choices of routes through the city and of subject matter represent a rebellion against the increasing rationalization of time and space, like those *flâneurs* around 1840 who, according to Benjamin, took turtles for walks in the Parisian arcades.<sup>99</sup> However, Benjamin argues that the protest of the *flâneur* cannot halt the pace of progress and it is Taylorism, not *flânerie* which has the last word. Similarly, by writing about Käsebier, Lambeck unwittingly paves the way for a new wave of modernization and rationalization, so his protest against modernity is shown by Tergit to be powerless to halt the rampant commodification and the relentlessly accelerating march of progress in the novel. Moreover, since Lambeck's response to the modern metropolis echoes that of many male artists and writers in Weimar, Tergit thereby criticizes a widespread reaction to modernity as obsolete. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, Keun provides a similar critique of Martin, a *flâneur* figure who is suddenly confronted with the commodity status of his writing and who transposes his anxieties about modernity onto the female body.

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<sup>99</sup> Benjamin, 'Baudelaire', pp.556-557.

## 7.2 The Nihilistic Flâneur

Whereas Lambeck can discern an enticing, exciting side to modern Berlin, Miermann can only mourn 'die tote Stadt'. (K, p.236) Miermann's vision of the contemporary metropolis is pervaded by all the apocalyptic, nightmarish desolation of Georg Heym's city poetry (for example, 'Berlin III', 'Der Gott der Stadt' or 'Die Stadt der Qual')<sup>100</sup> or of Ludwig Meidner's paintings such as *Apocalyptic Landscape* (c.1913), a ravaged scene in which both the city and its inhabitants have been destroyed.<sup>101</sup> Once again, Tergit exposes the constructed nature of this particular vision of the city, which was a widespread reaction to transformations in the urban space.

Miermann wanders through the city after the funeral of Augur's daughter, during which he imagined the suffering and disappointment the child would have experienced had she lived longer: 'Das verratene Herz, das getäuschte Vertrauen, die Einsamkeit in den großen Städten hätten sie niedergebeugt.' (K, p.234) Such thwarted expectations, utter hopelessness and the absence of any sense of belonging are classic symptoms of the condition which precipitates anomic suicide in Durkheim's view, and they determine Miermann's response to the city.

Modernizing processes have had a purely destructive and dehumanizing effect, in Miermann's eyes, creating an urban landscape as insubstantial and temporary as a film set: 'Er ging die traurige Zimmerstraße zurück durch die tote Leipziger Straße, eine Gegend, wie für einen Film aufgebaut, am nächsten Tage abzureißen.' (K, p.236) Unlike Lambeck, Miermann deliberately avoids the bustling commercial areas from the start, seeking out instead an almost rural public space suggestive of pre-modern social relations occurring in a localized

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<sup>100</sup> Georg Heym, *Dichtungen*, ed. by Kurt Pinthus and Erwin Loewenson. Munich, Wolff, 1922, p.11, p.15, pp.93-94.

<sup>101</sup> Reprinted in black and white in Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism. Primitivism and Modernity*. New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1991, p.159.



context to which he clearly longs to return. Stepping into Jüdenhof [*sic*], where the old houses with lights in the windows are sheltered by a large tree, Miermann experiences 'entsetzliches Heimweh' (K, p.236) and, in a penitential gesture, embraces the tree and unashamedly asks it for help. The time required for a tree to grow to such a size implies longevity and endurance and, as Inge Stephan has noted, the tree is the one sign of nature encountered by Miermann during his journey through the city.<sup>102</sup> Stephan also suggests that the tree represents a family tree and hence Miermann's Jewish origins. Indeed, the setting is reminiscent of the Eastern European *shtetl*, a way of life which the assimilated Miermann has firmly rejected: as he dies less than a month later, he utters a Jewish prayer for the first time in 35 years.<sup>103</sup> (K, p.250) Both the prayer and the seeking out of this almost rural space indicate a longing to return to religion's consensual values which bound societies together.

Walking back through the old lanes, Miermann observes with regret that houses are soon to be replaced by new office blocks. (K, pp.236-237) He therefore categorizes negatively the increasing commercialization of the city which encroaches upon the urban space previously available for the private domestic sphere. He recalls the city's appearance before its explosive expansion, 'als sie noch aussah wie eine Stadt, als man noch nicht Haus um Haus abgerissen hatte'. (K, p.236) His stroll through the city constitutes an attempt to reclaim the territory as locale or as place, as he maps his memory of the town before its metamorphosis into a metropolis onto the space he is traversing. Yet this enterprise fails because his memories of social relations based upon presence and face-to-face human interaction — to use Giddens' terminology — are ousted by an overwhelming sense of absence, of a dehumanization of the space: 'Es ist kein

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<sup>102</sup> Stephan, 'Stadt ohne Mythos', p.298.

<sup>103</sup> cf. also Erhard Schütz, *Romane*, p.157.

Platz mehr für den Menschen und seine Sehnsucht.<sup>104</sup> (K, p.237) Miermann is consumed by an apocalyptic vision of returning to the city in a thousand years to find a scene of desolation in which humanity and joy have been extinguished:

Niemand begegnete ihm. Er war zurückgekehrt nach tausend Jahren in die verfallene Stadt. Unbewohnt waren die Häuser, nur manchmal stand ein alter Gott davor in bortenbesetzter Uniform, der Schlüssel hielt. Nie mehr würden hier Menschen atmen. Das Lachen starb, als die Menschen hier zugrunde gingen. Er nur allein war aufgeweckt. (K, p.237)

Miermann's negative response to the changing city reveals his fears about the detrimental impact of increasing commercialization and the growing metropolis upon traditional community, values and social structures.

Miermann's sense of dispossession is compounded when he receives his redundancy notice from Frächter the next day. Like Lambeck, Miermann has been accustomed to view himself as an independent intellectual and the letter forcibly confronts him with the commodity value of his writing. However, Miermann reacts much more vehemently than Lambeck to this realization, not only because his livelihood is under threat whilst Lambeck receives a generous fee, but because he must face his status as a white-collar worker in a large organisation:

Was ist man? Ein freier Schriftsteller? Ein Journalist? Ein Politiker? Nein, lieber Gohlisch, ein kleiner Angestellter, verstehen Sie, zum Arbeitsgericht können Sie gehen, ein Dienstmädchen, ein Hausknecht, dem man zum 15. kündigt. Sie sind ein Künstler, Gohlisch? Denken Sie? Sie sind's aber nicht! Sie sind ein niedrig bezahlter Angestellter. (K, p.239)

The bitterness of Miermann's outburst highlights the shock of this discovery and recalls Siegfried Kracauer's analysis in *Die Angestellten* (1930) of the petty bourgeoisie's reaction to their loss of social status in the Weimar Republic, as discussed in Chapter 1. Miermann had attempted to maintain a distinction

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<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 1, p.20-21 above.



between himself as an independent writer and thinker, and the group of white-collar workers. He refers to this group contemptuously with epithets such as 'klein' and 'niedrig bezahlt', and insists 'daß ein Mann in meiner Position einen anderen Lebensstandard braucht um seinen Blick zu behalten, wie ein kleiner Büroangestellter'. (K, p.247) The word 'Blick' is significant, as it recalls the sudden drastic contraction in outlook and prospects which Durkheim considers to be responsible for upsetting the equilibrium between desires and the means to realize them. Finally, the sudden restriction on Miermann's activity proves intolerable, severing his already weak attachment to life, and he dies that evening.

Miermann's response to modernity is, like Lambeck's, shown to be obsolete and incapable of dealing with the circumstances of contemporary life. He clings on to a value system that is inappropriate in the face of the social transformations which have occurred. Rather than seeking new ways in which moral boundaries can be established in the modern world, he hopes in vain for the restoration of traditional moral boundaries and for time-space transformations to be reversed. Nonetheless, Miermann's death from a heart attack in the Berlin streets as a Frächter-like opportunist rages in a nearby café and Nazi gangs haunt the streets has a terrible poignancy.

### *7.3 The Female Flâneur: Modernity as Liberation*

The journey across the city made by Fräulein Dr. Kohler offers a more optimistic, but pragmatic response towards modernity, a difference which could be attributed to both her generation and her gender, as she is some twenty years younger than both Lambeck and Miermann. However, as a female *flâneur*, Kohler would appear to present something of an anomaly in the literature of modernity,

an issue which will need to be addressed before Kohler's status amongst Torgit's trio of *flâneurs* can be properly assessed.

Much recent criticism has pointed to the conspicuous absence of the female *flâneur* from the literature of modernity. For instance, referring specifically to the situation in Paris around 1900, Janet Wolff argues that the ideology of separate spheres rendered women's presence in urban places suspect.<sup>105</sup> Unlike men, women could not, she asserts, indulge in the aimless strolling or loitering in the streets required by *flânerie* without being misrecognized and categorized by men as prostitutes. According to Wolff, the presence of women in public spaces was only considered respectable by the prevailing bourgeois morality if they were seen to have a purpose such as shopping or the journey between work and home. However, Wolff observes that such purposive forays into the public arena undermined the distance and lack of participation necessary for *flânerie*. Anke Gleber points to the persistence of such problems for the female *flâneur* in the Weimar Republic, despite the increased visibility of women in public spaces: in a rather sweeping generalization, she claims that 'any woman walking the streets on her own, even in the presumably emancipatory age of Weimar Germany, has to first justify, assume, and establish her stance of *flanerie*'.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Gleber contends that knowledge of being the constant object of observation by men leads women to internalize the male norms for evaluating appearance and image. As a result, she maintains, women focus upon their own image and that of other women to the exclusion of all other objects.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Janet Wolff, 'The Artist and the *Flâneur*: Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris', in *The Flâneur*, ed. by Keith Tester. London/New York, Routledge, 1994, pp.111-137.

<sup>106</sup> Anke Gleber, 'Female Flanerie and the *Symphony of the City*', in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, pp.67-88 (p.76).

<sup>107</sup> Gleber, 'Female Flanerie', p.81.



In sharp contrast, however, Tergit provides her readers with an example of the female *flâneur* in the figure of Fräulein Dr. Kohler. Tergit's presentation of Kohler's stroll through the city in a chapter entitled 'Ein Mädchen läuft durch die Stadt' quite simply does not permit any misreadings or misinterpretations of her activity as soliciting. Moreover, Kohler wanders through the streets aimlessly, without displaying any consciousness that she is the object of observation by men and without being accosted. This contrasts with the experience of Gilgi, who is harassed in unfamiliar areas of the city and '[l]äuft schneller, als ein Junge ihr eine kräftige Schweinerei zuruft' (G, p.53). Similarly, Doris in Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932) is often mistaken for a prostitute as she walks through the city.<sup>108</sup> Katharina von Ankum argues that it is Doris's vulnerable economic position and the continuing concentration of economic power in male hands which blocks her path to free mobility in the city.<sup>109</sup> By contrast, Kohler enjoys a more secure economic position, able to earn 400 Marks a month working for a prestigious newspaper, although her financial situation becomes increasingly precarious as the novel progresses. This might constitute the premise of her freedom, although Tergit gives no indication that Kohler's *flânerie* is in any way exceptional or unusual.<sup>110</sup>

Far from confining her attention and observation to images of women, as Gleber claims that women are wont to do, Kohler directs it towards the city's architecture, towards street signs, advertising, posters, scars left in walls by bullets

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<sup>108</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen. Roman*. Munich, dtv, 1996, pp.106-107, p.129.

<sup>109</sup> Katharina von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*', trans. by Jamie Owen Daniel in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, pp.162-184.

<sup>110</sup> This self-evident nature of Kohler's *flânerie* is perhaps all the more surprising, because Tergit herself was initially afraid to venture alone into urban public spaces, as she relates in her autobiography. Tergit, *Seltenes*, p.10.

and displays of commodities. The stimuli she encounters provoke her to recover and reconstruct the city's past and to reflect upon its present; in other words, to consider the modernity of the city. As such, her activity bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Franz Hessel's narrator in *Spazieren in Berlin*, who describes *flânerie* as:

eine Art Lektüre der Straße, wobei Menschengesichter, Auslagen, Schaufenster, Cafétterrassen, Bahnen, Autos, Bäume zu lauter gleichberechtigten Buchstaben werden, die zusammen Worte, Sätze und Seiten eines immer neuen Buches ergeben. Um richtig zu flanieren, darf man nichts allzu Bestimmtes vorhaben.<sup>111</sup>

For instance, the sight of the Prussian directorate for construction and finance triggers in Kohler the recollection of the building's function during the First World War and a particularly powerful memory surfaces from August 1918 of a strong seventeen-year-old boy swinging his suitcase against the prison gate. The location has now changed: the building has been painted in soft shades of pink and, where the boy once stood there now hangs a ripped poster, protesting about hunger, unemployment and mass poverty, which ends ominously in the word 'Diktatur'. (K, p.91) Therefore, Kohler's aimless strolling and her activity in 'reading' the signs of the city's physical infrastructure echoes that of famous contemporary male *flâneurs*.

Nonetheless, Tergit's female *flâneur* concentrates on constructing a very personal urban topography, whereas Hessel's narrator includes written source material to document the history of the city alongside his subjective memories.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, in contrast to Miermann and Lambeck whose visions of the city draw on stock contemporary topoi, Kohler does not seek to project a mythologized or sentimental concept of the city onto contemporary Berlin, but presents a more

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<sup>111</sup> Benjamin, 'Baudelaire'; Hessel, *Spazieren*, p.130.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, the walk through the Tiergarten. Hessel, *Spazieren*, pp.145-149.



differentiated and individualised perspective on the changing use of urban space. In addition, Kohler's view of the city is more pragmatic and realistic than that of her male counterparts and observing changes to the urban fabric elicits neither the oppressive foreboding experienced by Miermann nor the sexual charge of Lambeck's encounter with the city. Whilst Miermann fears the flimsy modern constructions will tumble down around him, Kohler finds new buildings to be impressively solid: 'herrlich vertikal, roter Ziegel, sachlich modern, hart'. (K, p.92) Furthermore, Kohler is aware of the changing socio-economic relations behind typical urban scenes and of the technological advances in agriculture and transportation which enable such imported perishables to be sold in the city. (K, p.92)

Nevertheless, Kohler's vision of the impact of modernization and of international economic forces upon the urban space is shot through with an awareness of the harsh economic realities of city life during the Depression, as evinced through her observations in working-class districts. She perceives the cramped living and working conditions of individuals in the dilapidated buildings, wonders anxiously about children's future prospects as the traditional structures of apprenticeship and employment disappear, and compares the high price of groceries displayed in the streets with the low wages of the working classes. In addition, she notices unemployed men lingering in the streets or desperately trying to scratch a living from the sale of small items like braces or combs. Unlike Lambeck, therefore, the observation of the opposite sex does not add to the attractions of the city streets for Kohler. Furthermore, Kohler's observation of young women — 'Fräuleins mit Zillefiguren' (K, p.91) — idling outside hotels elicits the same sense of sympathy without sentimentality as the sight of the unemployed men, as she thinks: 'Auch kein leichtes Dasein'. (K, p.91) Kohler's

realistic observations of the urban poor contrast starkly with the idealized or romanticized presentation of figures such as the ragpicker or the prostitute in the work of contemporary male *flâneurs* like Benjamin or Hessel.<sup>113</sup>

Yet Kohler also discovers the city in which people live, work and play. Whilst Miermann sees the city as a deserted place which has ousted people from its unreal streets, Kohler discerns the human face of the city, the interactions characterized by presence in a particular place, rather than only those characterized by absence as a result of disembedding. On the ridiculously small spaces of the balcony, people attempt to restore a sense of local identity and place: 'Für Seele und Sehnsucht war der Balkon da, Blumenkästen wurden gestrichen, neu befestigt, Bindfäden gezogen für Feuerbohnen und wilden Wein, Taubenhäuser aufgestellt.' (K, p.92) The asphalt becomes an infinite realm of imagination and play for children who mark out their hopscotch games on it with chalk, or use its smooth surface for marbles and spinning tops.

At the end of her journey, Kohler returns to the apartment furnished in Wilhelmine style which she shares with her mother and numerous lodgers. However, whereas Lambeck flees voluntarily from modern urban spaces to the limited, familiar interior of a pre-1914 inn, Kohler cries as she is compelled to step back into the past. Frau Geheimrat Kohler's desire to preserve the remnants of the bourgeois household binds them to the huge and expensive apartment which fetters Kohler's movement and she longs to discard it: 'Ich habe gar kein Gefühl mehr für Besitz! So beweglich sein wie möglich! Nur keine Sachen, die einen beschweren.' (K, p.263) For Lambeck and Miermann, the modernizing developments which have separated time from space, and space from place, radically alter the public space in which they had always moved freely. For Kohler,

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<sup>113</sup> cf. Hessel, *Spazieren*, pp.219-220.



the same developments have released her into the world of movement in public space and opened up a whole new realm of opportunity beyond the fixed, circumscribed world of the home, where space and place were identical. This constitutes the premise of her more positive response towards transformations in urban space. Even if Kohler does not quite splash into puddles and muddy her dress and shoes to express her joy at being a forward-looking, economically independent twentieth-century woman, as a character in one of Tergit's short stories does, she still finds traversing the urban space a liberating experience.<sup>114</sup>

Through the *flânerie* of Lambeck, Miermann and Kohler, Tergit presents the readers with a set of different responses to modernity, particularly as it impacts upon the urban space. These individuals all endorse the values espoused by the narrator to a certain extent, since they share the narrator's concern about the harmful effects of unchecked economic activity. However, whereas the responses of Miermann and Lambeck are shown to be completely unequal to the challenge of modernity, it would seem that Kohler's response, which accepts and embraces modernity whilst recognizing its limitations and darker aspects, is the most appropriate.

## **8. The Travesty of the Authentic and the Triumph of the Image**

### **8.1 From Käsebier to Mickey Mouse**

As outlined in the introduction, Tergit envisaged Käsebier herself as an instrument whereby she could expose how unrestrained economic activity contributed to the disintegration of those moral values which she perceived to be authentic or genuine. The following discussion will trace the modernizing

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<sup>114</sup> Gabriele Tergit, 'Der Bruder', in *Atem einer anderen Welt*, pp.184-189 (p.189). Unfortunately, the editor Jens Brüning does not provide the date of this story, which was unpublished during Tergit's lifetime.

processes underlying the disintegration of Käsebier's own authenticity as a result of rampant commodification. Of course, commentators have frequently noted the extensive commercialization and marketing of Käsebier's act and image, but, to the best of my knowledge, the way in which Tergit connects this process to the development of modernity has not been the subject of critical attention. The singer's rise to stardom involves disembedding, as he is separated from his local context and his act is redistributed in various ways across time and space. Tergit presents the wider repercussions of the destruction of authenticity, substance and uniqueness in largely negative terms, insofar as it contributes to moral deregulation and the erosion of a sense of duty towards others. In order to clarify Tergit's anomic perspective on this issue, I will compare it with Walter Benjamin's essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit', whose approach towards these issues is informed by Marxism.

Käsebier's initial appeal derives from the genuine, unpretentious nature of his act. He represents an old, authentic Berlin, in which space is still identified with place and in which social relations are still predominantly characterized by presence. The narrator twice mentions the singer's 'Schnauze' (K, p.50), emphasizing his rootedness in the city and in a very specific milieu, 'Berliner Schnauze' being the term both for the dialect and for the particular kind of assertive attitude and sharp wit associated with Berliners.<sup>115</sup> As his name suggests, Käsebier is utterly ordinary and down-to-earth: 'Zu dick und zu blond, Schnauze, fast Fresse schon, war er Trost von Vater, Mutter und Kind, Blut vom Blut dieser Stadt.' (K, p.52) This narratorial description serves to reinforce the singer's

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<sup>115</sup> Dittmar and others define 'Berliner Schnauze' as 'eine ... Mischung aus Witz und Humor, Schlagfertigkeit, verbaler Ausdruckstärke, selbstbehauptender Aggressivität und „Großschnauzigkeit.“' Cited in Stephen Barbour and Patrick Stevenson, *Variation in German. A Critical Approach to German Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.118, (Barbour and Stevenson's omission).



identification with a certain place, and his popularity amongst his original, working-class audience in Hasenheide springs from his expression of concerns specific to their locale:

Um Liebling des Volks zu sein, sang er als Zugabe: ‚Ich tanz Charleston, du tanzt Charleston, er tanzt Charleston, und was tun Sie?‘ Was soll Charleston, fünf Minuten von der Reichenberger Straße, wo es noch den Feierabend gibt, um auf den Balkon die Strippe zu ziehen für den wilden Wein, und Vater bekocht, beflickt und bewaschen werden muß? Sie sangen im Chor: ‚Ich geh stempeln, du gehst stempeln, er geht stempeln, und was tun Sie?‘ — ‚Ich brauch Vorschuß, du brauchst Vorschuß, er braucht Vorschuß, und was brauchen Sie? (K, p.52)

Käsebier cultivates his identification with the locale, adapting songs and substituting lyrics which he knows will increase his appeal to this particular audience. Lambeck admires the shared concerns, community and solidarity which underpin both the audience participation and the black humour in the face of hardship: ‘Hier, lange vergeblich gesucht, [...] wächst Selbstironie und Galgenhumor und das Glück der Gemeinschaft.’ (K, p.53) The word ‘Gemeinschaft’ is significant, because it suggests precisely the kind of stable, secure society with a strong sense of common values whose dissolution Tergit portrays and, moreover, which Durkheim would describe as a traditional society.<sup>116</sup>

Lambeck’s report for the *Berliner Tageszeitung* functions as the catalyst for the separation of space and place, since it makes Käsebier known beyond his own district to people widely dispersed in time and space. Rich, fashionable Berliners flood the venue in Hasenheide in search of authenticity and a sense of community, and thereby unwittingly destroy these very qualities. Most of Käsebier’s original audience are ousted and can only complain furiously outside:

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<sup>116</sup> In his review of Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Durkheim agrees with Tönnies’ analysis of the nature of ‘Gemeinschaft’. cf. *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Giddens. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p.146.

‘Wa sin woll nich mehr fein jenug vor Käsebiers Stube?’ (K, p.69) This is significant, because as Käsebier’s original audience disappears, he can no longer regulate his act by their response. Consequently, his act undergoes a process of refinement, eliminating the element of self-mockery, the expression of proletarian concerns and the sense of community originally so admired by Lambeck.

This change becomes especially noticeable when the singer is transplanted out of his locale to the Wintergarten theatre in the West of the city. The audience are ‘entzückt’ (K, p.105) to have discovered what they imagine is authentic Berlin: ‘War es nicht Berlin? Hof an Hof? Mench an Mensch? [...] War es nicht Berlin von Westen nach Osten?’ (K, p.105) Yet the positive response anticipated by these questions is subverted immediately by the information that Käsebier now refrains from singing the ‘Stempeln’ lyrics to the Charleston song to spare his audience’s sensibilities: ‘Er war ein lebenswürdiger Mensch, er sagte den Menschen nicht gern etwas Unangenehmes.’ (K, p.105) Overall, Tergit illustrates how Käsebier’s authenticity and identification with a particular place has been undermined as he is transported away from those local social relations which originally produced his popularity.

Nevertheless, it is the image of Käsebier as a genuine Berliner that is commodified, packaged and sold to the public in travestied form through the mass media, a development which is precipitated by economic imperatives and the need for novelty. The transfer of information via the mass media thereby functions as a disembedding mechanism, tearing Käsebier from a particular place and making him simultaneously accessible to huge numbers of people who may be at a great spatial distance from each other.<sup>117</sup> In a film operetta, for example, he

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<sup>117</sup> Giddens does not cite the mass media as a disembedding mechanism, concentrating on the example of money, but, as Steve Giles has pointed out, ‘modern media of information transfer from the Gutenberg press to the fax clearly do satisfy Giddens’s disembedding criteria’. Steve Giles, ‘Afterword:



plays the part of an everyday, plain-speaking Berliner who gets into all sorts of scrapes and amusing situations at the court of a young Austrian archduke. Records and radio broadcasts serve to bring his voice to the masses, and his image is reproduced in every conceivable manner from photographs and film, to the character merchandising of various types of dolls. By far the most striking example of the efforts to sell this image of hearty proletarian Berlin must be the artificial recreation of surroundings akin to the Hasenheide venue on that ultimate site of modernity in Weimar Berlin, the Kurfürstendamm. Convinced that 'das Publikum da draußen ist für's Volkstümliche' (K, p.172), Muschler and Mitte envisage a theatre where the singer will take on the role of hospitable landlord in 'Käsebiers Gute Stube' or 'Käsebiers Sommergarten'. (K, p.172) However, by the time work is completed, fashionable Berlin has tired of Käsebier and on the opening night, the wooden interior and Käsebier's act encounter a frosty reception from the West Berlin audience: 'Es war kein Kontakt da.' (K, p.257) The contrast with the 'Glück der Gemeinschaft' (K, p.53) witnessed by Lambeck during the performance in Hasenheide could not be greater.

Käsebier's sudden rise to stardom and the ensuing commodification of his image facilitated by the disembedding mechanism of the mass media therefore undermine and destroy the very authenticity and uniqueness which generated his popularity in the first place. In her presentation of the trajectory of Käsebier's career, Tergit identifies the main processes involved in the transition from traditional to advanced, modern societies. She also highlights a key structure in the commodification of popular culture during the Weimar Republic, for it was not only the oft-mentioned Erich Carow who enjoyed sudden popularity as a

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Avant-Garde, Modernism, Modernity: A Theoretical Overview', in *Theorizing Modernism. Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. by Steve Giles. London/New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.171-186 (p.180).

'Berliner Original': the artist Heinrich Zille, whose work focuses on the problems of urban life, such as youth crime, prostitution, unemployment and poor housing conditions, also experienced a 'rücksichtslose kommerzielle Ausnutzung' in the 1920s.<sup>118</sup> According to Matthias Flügge, all manner of marketing ploys were devised relating to Zille and his work: 'Zille-Bälle, Zille-Kneipen, -Schnäpse, -Zigaretten'.<sup>119</sup> Even 'Zille-Puppen' were sold along with 'ähnlicher Geschmacklosigkeiten'<sup>120</sup> in the Berlin souvenir shops of the 1920s, suggesting that proletarian Berlin was widely perceived as the genuine, authentic face of the city. Zille films were also produced, as part of what Flügge calls the fashionable bourgeoisie's cynical fascination with poverty.<sup>121</sup> The similarities between the marketing of Zille, as described by Flügge, and of Käsebier are striking.

However, I do not wish to present Zille as an alternative candidate to Carow for the *roman-à-clef* interpretation of Tergit's work. Rather, it seems to me that the commercial exploitation of such 'Berliner Originale' as Erich Carow, Otto Reutter and Heinrich Zille by the burgeoning culture industry in the Weimar Republic demonstrates the broader relevance of Tergit's work and indicates that the author has pinpointed a central aspect of modernity rather than simply describing the fate of one isolated individual as the label *Schlüsselroman* implies. The commercial exploitation of Zille points to the existence of a widespread, nostalgic fascination with the authentic and with social relations based on presence, which had sprung up, paradoxically, in the very city associated with the cutting edge of modernity and amongst precisely those individuals responsible for driving these modernizing processes forward. It further demonstrates that Tergit

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<sup>118</sup> Matthias Flügge, 'Heinrich Zilles grafische Zyklen und sein Werk der zwanziger Jahre', in Renate Altner and others, *Heinrich Zille 1858-1929*. Berlin, Berlin-Information, 1988, pp.165-206 (p.197).

<sup>119</sup> Flügge, 'Heinrich Zilles grafische Zyklen', p.197.

<sup>120</sup> Flügge, 'Heinrich Zilles grafische Zyklen', p.197.

<sup>121</sup> Flügge, 'Heinrich Zilles grafische Zyklen', p.199.



has not simply concerned herself with superficial, external details as the reviewer for the *Vossische Zeitung* argued, but isolated an underlying phenomenon and central structure of modernity which continues to operate in intensified form today. It is for this reason that Tergit's novel seems so pertinent to modern readers, which would not be the case had she simply concerned herself with superficial details and with producing a photographic copy of the age.<sup>122</sup>

Ultimately, Tergit's novel reveals how the authentic is not only the victim of its own travestied image as peddled by the mass media, but is displaced by pure image as the fad for Käsebier, a real singer whose act depended upon his presence in a particular locale, is superseded by a craze for Mickey Mouse, a cartoon drawing whose relationship with the audience is determined by absence from the start. Image and illusion are shown to triumph over the genuine and authentic. Many of these issues were also explored by Benjamin in his essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' and a comparison of Tergit's novel with this essay will prove instructive in clarifying the novelist's characterization of modernity.

## 8.2 Fascism and Aura

Like Tergit, Benjamin attributes the notions of authenticity and originality in a work of art to conditions of reception based on the pre-modern conjunction of space and time, and space and place. Benjamin argues that the uniqueness and authenticity of the work of art is being undermined by technological advances which enable the reproduction of art on a vast scale and its reception by a mass

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<sup>122</sup> Several post-1945 critics express surprise that the novel has not dated and are astounded by its pertinence to aspects of the Federal Republic, whether it be in the 1950s, 1970s or 1980s: [no author], 'Aktualität'; Eichholz, 'Käsebier'; Hartmann, 'Seifenblase'; Nerth, 'Ku'damm Leben'; Neumann, 'Comeback der alten Dame'; Rohde, 'Es lag'; Rohde, 'Die kritische Berlinerin'; Zapfel, 'Wiedersehen'.

audience.<sup>123</sup> He perceives this process, which he terms 'die Zertrümmerung der Aura', in a much more positive light than Tergit.<sup>124</sup>

Benjamin perceives the aura to be an attribute of the work of art which is historically determined by socio-economic conditions, and he accordingly investigates its disintegration within the context of social transformation. He contends that traditionally, works of art mostly had to be copied by labour intensive, manual reproduction, until the introduction of the printing press during the Renaissance enabled the technological reproduction of written works; subsequently, the development of the lithograph and the photograph in the nineteenth century permitted the technological reproduction of images. Manual reproduction had enabled the original work of art to maintain its authenticity through its unique location in space and time, its own exclusive historical experience which could not be shared by copies. Moreover, artistic production had, Benjamin claims, originated in the service of magical and religious ritual in which the work of art had acquired a cult value, whereby awareness of its existence was more important than its visibility. Even to the privileged few who had access to art, it remained somehow inherently distant. For Benjamin as for Tergit, authenticity is generated by pre-modern social relations.

Moreover, like Tergit, Benjamin conceives of the loss of the aura as resulting from the disembedding processes involved in modernity, which alter the conditions for the reception of the work of art. He claims that the arcane reception of art has been rendered obsolete by the development of technological means of reproducing works of art, such as photography and recorded sound.

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<sup>123</sup> Schivelbusch also links Benjamin's concept of the loss of aura to spatio-temporal transformations, arguing that the railway destroyed the aura of previously inaccessible areas. cf. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Die Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise. Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert*. Munich/Vienna, Hanser, 1977, pp.42-43.

<sup>124</sup> Benjamin, 'Kunstwerk', p.479.



This destroyed the aura of unapproachability by enabling art to be brought into situations denied to the original and to audiences widely separated in time and space. Benjamin illustrates this point with two examples: the recording of a choral work originally performed in a concert hall or in the open air can be played in any room, and a photograph can bring a cathedral into a studio. The most advanced stage of technological reproduction to date, Benjamin argues, is the simultaneous use of photography and recorded sound in talkies which reach a mass audience.

In addition, the technological reproducibility of the work of art does not only contribute to the atrophy of the aura through altering the mode of artistic reception, but also through altering its production. New works of art produced by photography and film are *designed* to be reproducible and disseminated amongst a huge number of people: 'das reproduzierte Kunstwerk wird in immer steigendem Maße die Reproduktion eines auf Reproduzierbarkeit angelegten Kunstwerks.'<sup>125</sup> As such, they have no authentic original which is copied. In Benjamin's opinion, it is therefore pointless to inquire which print is the original photograph, since any number of prints can be taken from a single negative.

It is possible to describe Käsebier's career as involving the loss of aura. Initially, a live theatre act known to a limited audience in a particular quarter of Berlin, he becomes a film star and recording artist, whose image is reproduced countless times through every possible medium. The shift from Käsebier to Mickey Mouse could be seen in Benjaminian terms as part of the tendency to design contemporary art to be technologically reproducible. Käsebier's act is not intended to be technologically reproducible, but rather is made so by later, external developments. Mickey Mouse, in contrast, is a cartoon drawing intended

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<sup>125</sup> Benjamin, 'Kunstwerk', p.481.

for mass reception in film and is specifically created to be as easy to reproduce as possible.<sup>126</sup>

In contrast to Tergit, Benjamin views the loss of aura as a highly positive development, because it transforms the relationship of the masses to art, both in the fields of reception and production, thereby providing art with revolutionary potential. His discussion focuses chiefly on film, which he believes to be the most advanced form of technological reproduction. He argues that, in the field of reception, film has the capacity to compel its audience into a critical and questioning attitude towards its surroundings. According to Benjamin, it achieves this through techniques such as montage, slow-motion, close-ups, varying camera angles and showing perspectives inaccessible to the individual eye.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, as mentioned in the context of Lambeck's *flânerie*, Benjamin contends that the constantly changing image on screen has a shock effect on the psyche, which corresponds to far-reaching changes in perception brought about by contemporary urban life. The mass reception of film stimulates people into considering how far it is possible to solve the challenges created by the new forms of perception, an exercise which on an individual basis they may be tempted to avoid.

Both Tergit and Benjamin connect fascism to issues of authenticity and originality, but in quite distinct ways. For Benjamin, the revolutionary potential of film is not being achieved, because film capital seeks to protect its interests and its ownership of the means of production.<sup>128</sup> Film capital attempts to hinder the

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<sup>126</sup> In the earlier two versions of this essay, Benjamin refers to '[die] erdumkreisend[e] Micky-Maus' as a figure from collective dreams. Cited from Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. (zweite Fassung)', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989, VII.1, pp.350-381. See p.377.

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin, 'Kunstwerk', pp.499-500.

<sup>128</sup> Benjamin, 'Kunstwerk', p.494.



development of the critical attitude which film ought to stimulate, by preserving the aesthetic concepts predicated on the dominance of cult value in the reception of art. Benjamin cites the example of artificial personality cults through the star system — precisely the kind of cult which is created around Käsebier — as an attempt by the studios to reinstate the aura.

In Tergit's eyes, big business's efforts to protect its own interests produces the reverse effect: rather than seeking to artificially re-establish authenticity, it is responsible for the loss of that authenticity. Therefore, whilst the writers share the view that big business is having an impact upon art in order to protect its interest, they detect contrasting results. Furthermore, Tergit and Benjamin both consider that fascism employs and extends the methods of capital. In Benjamin's view, fascism harnesses such notions as uniqueness, authenticity, individual creative genius and permanent universal values in art to distract the masses from seizing the means of production. Furthermore, he claims that whilst pretending to speak for the masses, fascism simply organizes them more efficiently and provides them with a means of expression within the existing social order, rather than provoking them towards the expropriation of the means of production:

Die Massen haben ein Recht auf Veränderung der Eigentumsverhältnisse: der Faschismus sucht ihnen einen Ausdruck in deren Konservierung zu geben. *Der Faschismus läuft folgerecht auf eine Ästhetisierung des politischen Lebens hinaus.*<sup>129</sup>

It is therefore crucial, in Benjamin's view, to recognize the historically determined nature of art and aesthetic theory and to abandon concepts which film has rendered obsolete. Instead of asking whether photography and film constitute art based upon traditional aesthetic theory, Benjamin contends, we should introduce appropriate new concepts into aesthetic theory which cannot be employed by fascism to dupe the masses.

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<sup>129</sup> Benjamin, 'Kunstwerk', p.506, italics in original.

In Tergit's eyes, fascism represents an intensification of ruthless business practices and exploitation, which emphasize the external visual appearance over substance and content: it is the destruction of originality and aura which makes Frächter and his ilk successful. Unlike Benjamin, Tergit does not view the success of fascism as arising from the *preservation* of such notions as the authentic, uniqueness and individual creative genius. Instead, she presents the deregulation of these established artistic values by new forms of art, such as film, photography and recorded sound, as providing the basis for ruthless opportunists such as Frächter to promote style over substance for financial gain. Yet Tergit can offer no alternatives, no way out like Benjamin, although her own writing makes it clear that she is seeking new and more appropriate aesthetic methods for the modern age.

### 8.3 Style over Substance

In *Käsebier*, new media, such as film, photography and recorded sound, are shown to liberate economic potential and to deregulate the market for artistic products by allowing for the commodification and sale of all forms of art on a hitherto unknown scale. This is amply evinced in the trajectory of Käsebier's career traced at the beginning of this section. Tergit also illustrates how the interference of private interests results in the production of shoddy goods, which have negative and even harmful repercussions for consumers. This signals a rather different conceptualisation of modernity from Benjamin.

Frächter's much trumpeted reforms at the *Berliner Rundschau* involve the prioritization of style over substance for economic purposes, a development which is linked by Gohlisch to the Käsebier theatre complex. Kroner cynically echoes Muschler's dictum 'Beim Bauen kommt's nicht mehr auf den Bau an', to



which Gohlisch responds 'Bei der Zeitung kommt's nicht mehr auf den Inhalt an'. (K, p.211) This is another example of stock phrases which are endlessly repeated in conversations in the novel and which point to an anxiety about the emptying out of content and meaning in language fostered by modern methods of communication. Another key phrase is: 'Wir telefonieren einmal'.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, language is also affected as Frächter shifts the emphasis from the written word to the visual image in the newspaper by introducing large photographs on the front page together with sections on cosmetics, fashion and gossip, which he quite rightly believes will increase the newspaper's circulation figures. These developments were entirely typical of a move towards the visual in the contemporary press.<sup>131</sup> In *Gilgi*, Keun traces a similar turn away from the written word and prioritization of visual signals, particularly through the growing popularity of physiognomy, which she connects to the drive for rationalization and for economy of expression in the Weimar Republic. Significantly, Hans Puttnies asserts that the increased number of visual images in circulation in the Weimar Republic was generated by economic needs:

Alle diese Bilder wurden in ihren unterschiedlichen Wirkungskreisen von professionellen Regisseuren und Künstlern, Grafikern und Fotografen erzeugt. Sie unterlagen also immer einem kommerziellen Impuls, der ihren Ausdruck mit bestimmten Interessen verband.<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, Tergit's emphasis upon the commercial imperatives propelling the growing use of visual images suggests that she has identified an underlying development in Weimar Germany.

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<sup>130</sup> See p.96 above.

<sup>131</sup> For a detailed discussion on changing modes of perception and the turn to a visual culture in Weimar Germany, see Petro, *Joyless Streets*.

<sup>132</sup> Hans Puttnies, *Das Gesicht der Weimarer Republik. Menschenbild und Bildkultur 1918-1933*. Katalog einer Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums, Berlin, und des Einstein Forums, Potsdam 2000, p.20.

The same impulse encourages manufacturers to exploit the new emphasis upon visual appearance by photography and film in order to sell shoddy goods. A conversation between Schulz, who awards the contracts for the Käsebier theatre, and Duchow, a carpenter, highlights the harmful repercussions for consumers caused by the obsession with the visual image. Relating information provided by his cobbler, Schulz reveals his concern that consumers value appearance and price above quality and content even at the cost of their health: 'Wenn se Blasen an de Fieße kriejen und verkrüppelte Zehen, is ihn allet ejal, sieht hübsch aus und kost nicht viel.' (K, p.196) Duchow claims that customers, and in particular female customers, are no longer interested in the quality or content of goods, if the visual appearance and the price are favourable. (K, p.196) Duchow argues that this obsession with style over substance encourages the decline of skilled craftsmanship, and he is scornful of the demand for cheap products. Tergit thereby touches on contemporary debates about the threat to German quality work from the modernizing processes of standardized mass consumption and the concomitant rationalization of production.<sup>133</sup>

Significantly, the prioritization of form over content does not only affect the economic sphere, but is presented as a key feature of National Socialism in Tergit's novel. Miermann considers the National Socialists to be 'die Form als Inhalt', (K, p.218) a party which aestheticizes politics to the extent of replacing substance with style. Moreover, figures who emphasize visual appearance over the quality or content of the goods they produce are associated with Nazism. For instance, Schulz is compelled to award the contract for supplying gas and water to the Käsebier theatre to the lowest bidder rather than to a company which produces high quality work, and this bidder is quite openly a Nazi: 'Max Schulz

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<sup>133</sup> These debates are outlined in Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, pp.84-103.



mußte den Auftrag an Staberow Söhne geben, obwohl ihm Staberow höchst unsympathisch war, so 'n moderner schneidiger Nazi, der Geschäfte mit 'n Hakenkreuz im Knopfloch machte.' (K, p.194) Ruthless business practices and low quality work is thus linked by Tergit with National Socialism. Crucially, Miermann also thinks that it is pure chance that Frächter with his bluff, bluster and hypocrisy has not yet joined the NSDAP. (K, p.217) Miermann shares the narrator's condemnation of Frächter: long before his dismissal, the *feuilleton* editor is aware that Frächter is a ruthless opportunist who follows every popular trend that can advance his own private interests.<sup>134</sup> In Miermann's opinion, such undiluted opportunism makes Frächter 'gefährlich. Er unterstützt jede Bewegung, die man hemmen müßte. Er ist für Bluff. Er ist für Trommeln.' (K, p.215) Through characters such as Frächter and Staberow, Tergit links the prioritization of style over substance promoted by the visual culture and the relentless pursuit of private interest in the economic sphere to the unrestrained activities of the National Socialists. Thus, despite the praise Tergit received from individuals and publications associated with the NSDAP, her novel in fact overtly censures and condemns their activities.

## 9. Conclusion

Although Tergit's novel has often been perceived as a work which is completely objective and neutral, qualities which are generally associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary novel, it seems to me that Tergit operates with a very specific understanding of modernity in *Käsebier*. The novel displays an anxiety about the way in which rationalization, driven by the predominance of economic concerns, is permeating into every aspect of life in the Weimar Republic, even

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<sup>134</sup> Other critics also mention the connection between Frächter's opportunism and his postulated turn to National Socialism. cf. Scheele, 'Aspekte', p.263.

love. In contrast to Keun, however, this is not presented as an inherent danger in the project of modernity itself, but rather it is the result of the transitional phase in which modernity is currently caught. Like Durkheim, Tergit suggests through the trajectory of Käsebier's career and through the *flânerie* of Miermann and Lambeck that a retreat to a traditional form of moral regulation or a reversal of modernity is impossible. Moreover, Tergit's preoccupation about the dangers of egoistic individualism and the selfish pursuit of private interests is also a central concern in the other two selected texts, but Tergit attributes this to the removal of old means of regulating human action and restricting wants. Kohler's *flânerie*, which delights in exploring and accepting the possibilities offered <sup>by</sup> modernity, but which retains an awareness of its negative repercussions appears to offer the best alternative in the novel. Tergit does not indulge in the modernolatory often associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature, but neither does she advocate a flight to a past which has now disappeared, nor to the fascist irrationalism which would soon bring the SA to arrest her in the middle of the night. *Käsebier* is a novel which insists that the present must be confronted.

Nonetheless, Kohler's balancing act constitutes a slender alternative in the face of the unremittingly bleak close of the novel amidst the bank collapse of summer 1931. The ruthless opportunist Frächter, associated with the National Socialists, is the only winner, as news of business failures follow in rapid succession; the *Berliner Rundschau*, bastion of liberal values, lies in rubble; and the violent street clashes between Communist and Nazi gangs intensify.<sup>135</sup> The ending of *Käsebier* is undoubtedly the most stark and sobering of the three selected texts, ominously foreshadowing the future course of events.

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<sup>135</sup> In her articles of this era for *Die Weltbühne* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, Tergit reported frequently upon trials concerning such political violence and she was horrified by the leniency shown to Nazi perpetrators. See Tergit, *Wer schießt aus Liebe?*



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# CHAPTER FOUR

***‘Nicht alle sind im selben Jetzt da’:***

***Modernization and Political Radicalization  
in the Provinces in Hans Fallada’s  
Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben.***

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## 1. False Expectations

Hans Fallada's third novel, *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* (1931) focuses upon the conflict which arises during the agricultural depression of the late 1920s between the fictional small town of Altholm in Pomerania and the *Bauernschaftsbewegung*, an agricultural protest movement.<sup>1</sup> I argue that Fallada traces the source of these developments to tensions and contradictions generated by the uneven rate at which modernization had permeated into provincial life. Fallada's concentration in this novel on the crisis created by modernization in rural areas provides an illuminating contrast to the urban setting of the other selected texts. Moreover, the tensions created by the uneven development of modernization are exacerbated in the novel by the use or misuse of propaganda by various groupings. Fallada foregrounds a powerful sense that modernity is in a state of crisis in his depiction of those journalistic and legal institutions whose ostensible aim is to establish truth through rational investigation, but which have instead become instrumental in obscuring the truth.

Fallada based his novel upon events which occurred in the small industrial town of Neumünster in Schleswig-Holstein during 1928 and 1929 where the author was working from financial necessity for the local *deutschnational* newspaper, *Der General-Anzeiger*. Fallada's own political sympathies lay with the Social Democrats, whom he had joined upon his release from prison in 1928, 'weil das Programm dieser Partei mir weltanschaulich am ehesten liegt.'<sup>2</sup> Neumünster found itself a focal point for the grievances of the *Landvolkbewegung*, a

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Fallada, *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben. Roman*. Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1997. Abbreviated in references as BBB.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Hans Fallada to his parents, 3 November 1929, in Gunnar Müller-Waldeck and Roland Ulrich, eds., *Hans Fallada. Sein Leben in Bildern und Briefen*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1997, pp.87-88 (p.87). Fallada served a prison sentence for embezzlement from 1926-1928.



movement agitating on behalf of agricultural interests.<sup>3</sup> The *Landvolkbewegung* burst onto the political scene in Schleswig-Holstein with mass demonstrations in January 1928, as farmers became frustrated with the failure of their existing representative organizations to effect any change in government policy which might alleviate the agricultural depression. Eschewing the usual procedural channels, the farmers resorted to direct action, including demonstrations, boycotts, non-payment of taxes and attempting to prevent foreclosures and livestock auctions. *Das Landvolk*, a propaganda sheet edited by Bruno and Ernst von Salomon, was also used to garner support from January 1929.<sup>4</sup> Between April and September 1929, one branch of the movement under Claus Heim even resorted to bombing public buildings and the homes of key public figures in the area.

When another of the movement's leaders, Wilhelm Hamkens, was imprisoned for attempting to prevent the seizure of cattle, the farmers held a demonstration in Husum during which they clashed with the authorities. Hamkens was moved to the prison in Neumünster, where a second demonstration occurred on 1st August 1929, the day of Hamkens' release. The local mayor had chosen not to ban the demonstration, despite pressure from his party, although he had sought to discourage the demonstration by moving Hamkens to Flensburg for his release. A flag which depicted a sword and a

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<sup>3</sup> The following account of the *Landvolkbewegung* and the events in Neumünster is drawn from the analyses in Rudolf Heberle, *From Democracy to Nazism. A Regional Case Study in Political Parties in Germany*. New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1970; Michelle Le Bars, 'Die Landvolkbewegung in Schleswig-Holstein: Geschichte und Literatur', in *Hans Fallada. Beiträge zu Leben und Werk. Materialien der 1. Internationalen Hans-Fallada-Konferenz in Greifswald vom 10.06 bis 13.06.1993*, ed. by Gunnar Müller-Waldeck and Roland Ulrich. Rostock, Hinstorff, 1995, pp.67-99; Timothy Alan Tilton, *Nazism, Neo-Nazism and the Peasantry*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst von Salomon describes his association with the *Landvolkbewegung* in *Der Fragebogen*. Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1951, pp.260-285.

plough in the colours of Imperial Germany and which was attached to a scythe was carried at the head of the demonstration. Concerned by the scythe and the provocative potential of such a flag in an industrial town with a large working-class population of Social Democrat voters, the local police chief attempted to confiscate the flag and when met with resistance, seized it by force. In the subsequent disorder, several demonstrators were injured and numerous individuals arrested. A farmers' meeting held later in the local auction hall was also broken up. The *Landvolkbewegung* declared a boycott of Neumünster which lasted until July 1930 and had serious repercussions for the town's economy. The trial of those arrested during the demonstration took place in October and November 1929 and was reported upon across Germany. Fallada covered the trial for the *General-Anzeiger* and he also wrote articles on the demonstration, the boycott and the trial for the left-liberal journals *Die Weltbühne* and *Das Tagebuch*.<sup>5</sup>

These occurrences provided the basis for Fallada's novel, although he shifts the setting from Schleswig-Holstein to Pomerania. Fallada's novel is divided into three books which are framed by a *Vor-* and *Nachspiel*. The first book, 'Die Bauern', covers the events leading up to the demonstration and the demonstration itself. The second, 'Die Städter', explores the reaction to the demonstration, the development of the boycott and the attempts to have it lifted, while the third book, 'Der Gerichtstag', focuses upon the trial. Since Fallada based his novel on recent events which had been reported throughout Weimar Germany, questions about the way in which he transformed fact into fiction have always been at the heart of critical debate about *Bauern*. Moreover, as in the case of *Käsebier*, the original reception of *Bauern* was undoubtedly influenced by contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Fallada, 'Landvolkprozeß', *Die Weltbühne*, 25 (3 December 1929), 832-835; Hans Fallada, 'Bauern-Krieg wider Neumünster', *Das Tage-Buch*, 10 (1929), 1516-1519.



discussions about *Neue Sachlichkeit*, by the perception that the novel was a *Schlüsselroman* and by a misjudged publicity campaign which shifted readers' expectations of the novel and of Fallada's political sympathies.

## 2. Weimar Reception

Like Tergit, Fallada was shocked by some of the criticism, which he felt misinterpreted his main focus of interest in the novel and his political attitude. Many critics believed that Fallada sympathized with the farmers and with the radical right. He wrote to his mother: 'I reject the notion that I have written a novel about farmers and I certainly don't want to be identified with the extreme right . . .'<sup>6</sup> This appears to have been a fairly consistent attitude since, during the trial of those arrested during the demonstration, he had also insisted: 'Ich sympathisiere ganz und gar nicht mit Landvolk und Rechtstverbänden'.<sup>7</sup> This raises the question of how *Bauern* created the perception that Fallada's political sympathies did indeed lie with such groups.

Critics' expectations about the novel were undoubtedly affected by a change of title and by the initial publicity material, both of which served to stress the importance of the farmers. It has often been noted that Fallada's original working title for the novel had been *Ein kleiner Zirkus namens Belli*, which referred to an incident of press corruption and a deliberate distortion of the truth described in the *Vorspiel*.<sup>8</sup> In the final published version, a similar title — 'Ein kleiner Zirkus namens Monte' — was retained for the *Vorspiel* alone.

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Jenny Williams, *More Lives Than One. A Biography of Hans Fallada*. London, Libris, 1998, p.107. Williams' translation.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Hans Fallada to his parents, 3 November 1929, pp.87-88. See footnote 1, p.146.

<sup>8</sup> See Günter Caspar, *Fallada-Studien*. Berlin/Weimar, Aufbau, 1988, p.5; Kurt H. Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus und Hoffnung — Untersuchungen zum Menschen- und Gesellschaftsbild im massenhaft verbreiteten politischen Zeitroman am Beispiel der Romane 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben' von Hans Fallada und 'Alle Menschen werden Brüder' von*

However, the title under which the novel was published suggests a rather different centre of interest. Fallada himself did not choose the title: Werner Liersch attributes it to Fallada's publisher, Ernst Rowohlt, whilst Jenny Williams and Günter Caspar ascribe it to the editor of the *Kölnische Illustrierte* in which the novel was serialized prior to its publication in book form.<sup>9</sup> The change in title appears to have been part of a publicity campaign designed to increase sales amongst the dissatisfied farming community itself. A metre-high poster appeared in 200 towns featuring the flag associated with the farmers' protest movement and the words 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben. Der Roman der deutschen Bauernnot 1930' against a background of red flames.<sup>10</sup> The slogan clearly suggests that Fallada's novel is concerned with a specific historical event and, by referring to the suffering of the farmers, indicates a sympathy with them. The original dust jacket for the novel depicts a farmer glowering at the viewer, a disproportionately large fist loosely clenched by his side.<sup>11</sup> The title and publicity material implied that the farmers' plight constituted the main centre of interest in the novel and that Fallada was sympathetic towards the agricultural community.

The impact of the changed title on the reception is striking. One reviewer is surprised by the political slant of the novel, because: 'Liest man diesen Romantitel, so erwartet man eine rechtsradikale Hetzschrift, eine Verherrlichung der Bombenleger des Landvolks, eine Schimpferei auf die sogenannten Bonzen.'<sup>12</sup>

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Johannes Mario Simmel. Frankfurt and others, Lang, 1988, p.240; Gerhard Schmidt-Henkel, 'Hans Falladas Roman *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*. Zum Genretypus und zum Erzählmodell', in *Hans Fallada. Beiträge zu Leben und Werk. Materialien der 1. Internationalen Hans-Fallada-Konferenz in Greifswald vom 10.06 bis 13.06.1993*, ed. by Gunnar Müller-Waldeck and Roland Ulrich. Rostock, Hinstorff, 1995, pp.45-66 (p.47); Williams, *More Lives*, p.102.

<sup>9</sup> Caspar, *Fallada-Studien*, p.5 and p.18; Werner Liersch, *Hans Fallada. Sein großes kleines Leben. Biographie*. Düsseldorf, Diederichs, 1981, p.213; Williams, *More Lives*, p.103.

<sup>10</sup> See Liersch, *Hans Fallada*, p.215.

<sup>11</sup> Pictured in Liersch, *Hans Fallada*, p.214.

<sup>12</sup> G. Wbg., 'Bauern — Bonzen — Bomben [sic]', *Hamburger Echo*, 13 July 1931.



Another critic asks: 'Nimmt der Verfasser Stellung für die Bauern und gegen die Bonzen, wie es vielleicht mancher nach dem Titel annehmen möchte?'<sup>13</sup> However, this reviewer can find little evidence that Fallada supports the farmers. Kurt Tucholsky is surprised to find 'ein wundervoller Kleinstadtroman' and asserts that George Grosz would have been a more appropriate choice to design the dust jacket.<sup>14</sup> As in the case of *Käsebier*, the publicity campaign appears to have exerted a strong influence on the initial reception of Fallada's novel.

Moreover, *Bauern* was also subject to the perception that it was a *Schlüsselroman*, as was *Käsebier*.<sup>15</sup> Despite Fallada's appeal to the readers in the preface that his books was 'ein Roman, also ein Werk der Phantasie' (BBB, p.5), most reviewers have little hesitation in concentrating on the specific historical episode and identifying the fictional Altholm with Neumünster. Karl August Wittfogel's review is subtitled 'Die Geheimnisse von Neumünster', whilst Tucholsky notes that Fallada chose his subject matter 'wohl anknüpfend an die Vorgänge in Neumünster'.<sup>16</sup> The *Landvolk*, the radical right-wing newspaper of the *Landvolkbewegung* itself claims that 'jede Einzelheit, jede Person [ist] unverkennbar'.<sup>17</sup> Fallada's novel was thus seen as a work which simply recorded events.

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See p.4 above for note on Weimar reviews held in Hans-Fallada-Archiv, Feldberg.

<sup>13</sup> Ro, 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung*, 7 May 1931.

<sup>14</sup> Ignaz Wrobel [i.e. Kurt Tucholsky], 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Die Weltbühne*, 27 (7 April 1931), 496-501 (p.497). In fact, George Grosz provided the original cover for Fallada's next novel *Kleiner Mann — was nun?* which is depicted in Liersch, *Hans Fallada*, p.246.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Hans Jaeger, [no title], *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Doppelheft 1932; G. Wbg, 'Bauern'.

<sup>16</sup> Karl August Wittfogel, 'Bauern, Bonzen, Faschisten — Die Geheimnisse von Neumünster', *Die Linkskurve*, 4 (Feb. 1932), 28-31 (p.28); Wrobel, 'Bauern', p.496.

<sup>17</sup> [no author], 'Bücher der Zeit. Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Das Landvolk*, 19 May 1931.

This perception of the novel also indicates the impact of debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit* upon the reception. Like Tergit, Fallada is frequently referred to as a mechanical recording instrument whose ability to reproduce events 'mit photographischer Treue' is seen to bypass his conscious critical and artistic faculties.<sup>18</sup> The dialogue is referred to as a 'grammophongetreue Wiedergabe'<sup>19</sup> or it is claimed that Fallada 'einfach fotografiert' a central problem facing Weimar society 'wohl ohne daß der Verfasser sich dessen bewußt geworden ist'.<sup>20</sup> These reviews depict Fallada as one of those *Neue Sachlichkeit* writers whom Balázs dismissed contemptuously as mere 'Registraturmaschinen der Tatsachen'.<sup>21</sup> One critic combines the *Neue Sachlichkeit* models of the reporter and photographer, claiming that 'Fallada hat mit dem sicheren und geschulten Auge des Reporters vorzügliche Einzelmomente haarscharf zu photographieren gewußt'.<sup>22</sup> Various critics assert that *Bauern* is not a novel at all, but rather, as Felix Riemkasten claims, 'der 550 Seiten starke glänzende Bericht eines großartigen Journalisten'.<sup>23</sup> However, as this chapter will show, Fallada's novel is highly critical of these models of objectivity advocated in programmatic writings of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

The question of Fallada's political sympathies was highly contested and produced a broad spectrum of opinion. Some critics applauded the novel's objectivity and the degree to which authorial opinion appears to have been

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<sup>18</sup> [no author, no title], *Der Wiener Tag*, 4 October 1931.

<sup>19</sup> Wrobel, 'Bauern', p.499.

<sup>20</sup> E.K., 'Es steht zur Debatte: „Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben“ von Hans Fallada', *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, 21 March 1931.

<sup>21</sup> Béla Balázs, 'Sachlichkeit und Sozialismus', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (18 December 1928), 916-918 (p.916).

<sup>22</sup> R.D., 'Es steht zur Debatte: „Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben“ von Hans Fallada', *8-Uhr-Abendblatt*, 21 March 1931.

<sup>23</sup> Felix Riemkasten, 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Der Tag*, 6 May 1931. See also V.W., 'Fallada und Fleisser', *Der Querschnitt*, 12 (Feb. 1932). Others evaluate this negatively, complaining that as reportage, *Bauern* is not a work of art. For example, R.D., 'Es steht zur Debatte'.



eliminated from the novel. Siegfried Kracauer is amongst those who enthusiastically acclaim the difficulty of ascertaining the author's political stance:

Zum Unterschied von den meisten Zeitreportagen ist es im engeren Sinne tendenzlos. Ich kann ihm daraus um so weniger einen Strick drehen, als es eine Tendenz hat, die heute über der politischen meistens vernachlässigt wird: die zum genauen, unbegrenzten Aufweis der Wirklichkeit.<sup>24</sup>

Kracauer does not have the impression, he claims, that an author is depicting the events, but it is rather as if these events are speaking directly to the reader. Other critics express greater reservations about the 'standpunktlosen Standpunkt' they discern in the novel.<sup>25</sup> Echoing the arguments advanced by the detractors of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, one Communist reviewer expresses concerns that a neutral stance is inadequate and inappropriate to portray such a reactionary, anti-Republican movement as the *Landvolkbewegung*. Fallada fails to include the necessary socio-economic context and is

so objektiv, daß er darüber die historische Wahrheit dieses Zustandes aus den Augen verliert, der nicht objektiv zu betrachten ist, sondern in seiner staatsfeindlichen reaktionären Tendenz in den politischen Komplex 'deutsche Wirtschaft' einzuordnen wäre.<sup>26</sup>

The reviewer for Erfurt's *Tribüne* discerns a much more insidious intent, arguing that Fallada deliberately employs an apparently objective narrative perspective as a cloak to advance his right-wing views.<sup>27</sup> Rather than a mechanical recording instrument, Fallada is perceived as a subtle, clever and cunning political author,

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<sup>24</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Politik in der Kleinstadt', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 18 December 1931. Similar assessments are provided by Riemkasten, 'Bauern'; Felix Scherrer, 'Hans Fallada: Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Vorwärts*, 8 April 1931; V.W. 'Fallada und Fleisser'.

<sup>25</sup> Jaeger, [no title].

<sup>26</sup> H.G.B., 'Die Provinz stellt sich vor. H. Fallada: Bauern, Bomben und Bonzen [sic]', *Berlin am Morgen*, 4 December 1931.

<sup>27</sup> a.g., 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben von Hans Fallada', *Tribüne*, 12 April 1932.

bent on duping the public, a view which continues to have currency in some quarters today.<sup>28</sup>

By contrast, some reviewers detected an overt political stance in the novel, although this ranged from Social Democrat<sup>29</sup> via liberal<sup>30</sup> and moderate conservative<sup>31</sup> to fascist<sup>32</sup>, which echoes the confusion over Tergit's political stance. The fascist label was applied by writers in Communist publication, although it must be remembered that, from 1928, the term was regularly employed by Communists to refer to Social Democrats as well.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the early 1930s, the KPD intensified its campaigns in rural areas, seeking to woo disaffected voters by playing upon class injustices and Fallada's novel provided a useful, timely springboard to advocate this important new policy. Fallada is criticized for providing an incomplete, distorted and unrealistic picture of the rural community as lacking in social differentiation and presenting a united political front: 'Gab es nicht schon damals Gutsbesitzer, Bauern, große und kleine, Häusler, Knechte und Landarbeiter, genau wie heute?'<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Rudolf Heberle's account of electoral behaviour in Schleswig-Holstein in this period stresses that the KPD's policy failed amongst this particular group of

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<sup>28</sup> See Claus-Dieter Krohn, 'Hans Fallada und die Weimarer Republik. Zur Disposition kleinbürgerlicher Mentalitäten vor 1933', in *Literaturwissenschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie. Festschrift für Wilhelm Emrich*, ed. by Helmut Arntzen and others. Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 1975, pp.507-522; Ellis Shookman, 'Making History in Hans Fallada's *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*. Schleswig-Holstein, Nazism and the *Landbewegung*', *German Studies Review*, 13 (1990), 461-80; Ellis Shookman, 'Figuring Out Hans Fallada: A Reply to Thomas Bredohl', *German Studies Review*, 17 (1994), 79-81.

<sup>29</sup> Ro, 'Bauern'.

<sup>30</sup> [no author], 'Bücher der Zeit'.

<sup>31</sup> G. Wbg., 'Bauern'.

<sup>32</sup> Wittfogel, 'Bauern'; H. Fischer, 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Rote Fahne*, 27 June 1931.

<sup>33</sup> Peukert describes the inflationary use of this term in the Weimar Republic. Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, pp.262-263.

<sup>34</sup> Fischer, 'Bauern'.



farmers, precisely because of a lack of such sharp class differences.<sup>35</sup> Karl August Wittfogel attacks Fallada's novel for propagating the fascist lie of *Blut und Boden* and a cohesive rural community: 'Der Geist der faschistischen Volksgemeinschaftslüge leitet F's Blick und seine Feder.'<sup>36</sup> In my opinion, however, Fallada exposes the constructed nature of precisely such a 'Volksgemeinschaft' in his portrait of the farmers' movement in the novel.

The fascist or radical right-wing publications also distance themselves from *Bauern*. The reviewer for *Das Landvolk* argues, somewhat bizarrely, that Fallada is a wannabe radical right-winger, but simply cannot conceal his basic liberal impulses. The NSDAP *Angriff* is full of praise for Fallada's gripping style: 'alle Achtung — der Roman ist gekonnt!'<sup>37</sup> Fallada has often been damned with this praise by later critics, who see this comment as evidence of Fallada's fascist tendencies. Nonetheless, the reviewer expresses the hope that a writer 'unserer Gesinnung' would be able to make contemporary political topics so fascinating, which suggests that Fallada is not included in this category.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, Fallada's novel met with a vast and varied critical response during the Weimar Republic. Like *Käsebier*, a misleading publicity campaign and the debates about *Neue Sachlichkeit* structured the reception of the novel. Moreover, since Fallada had chosen a well-known set of political events as the basis for his novel, the political import of his novel was hotly contested and interpreted in almost mutually exclusive ways depending upon the political convictions of the reviewers.

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<sup>35</sup> cf. Heberle, *From Democracy*, p.82 and pp.86-87.

<sup>36</sup> Wittfogel, 'Bauern', p.29.

<sup>37</sup> [no author], 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben', *Der Angriff*, 3 September 1931.

<sup>38</sup> [no author], 'Bauern', *Der Angriff*.

### 3. Post-1945 Reception

In contrast to Tergit and Keun, Fallada's work was not subject to a long period of neglect in the post-1945 period. Johannes R. Becher took Fallada under his wing when he found himself in the Soviet zone of occupation at the end of the Second World War. Becher's address at Fallada's funeral in 1947 ensured that Fallada's works were incorporated in the GDR canon as critical and realistic, historically accurate writings, albeit with the reservation that they lacked the necessary political conviction.<sup>39</sup> Some claim that Fallada's insight and political judgement was as limited as that of his characters, but for precisely these reasons consider *Bauern* to be an authentic record of false consciousness amongst the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>40</sup> Despite Rowohlt's policy of reissuing a novel by Fallada every two years and the consistently high sales of *Kleiner Mann — was nun?*, West German criticism of Fallada's works in general and *Bauern* in particular remained scarce until the mid-1970s.<sup>41</sup> Sales of *Bauern* rose significantly in 1973, which has been linked to the success of a film for television, and from this time onwards, more interpretations of the novel by West German academics began to appear.<sup>42</sup>

Many of the key features of the Weimar reception of *Bauern* continue in the post-1945 era, such as the tendency to identify events, people and places in the novel with historical counterparts. For example, although insistent that he has no interest in exploring the novel as a *roman-à-clef*, Martin Sadek still reveals in great detail the connections between the novel and the historical individuals and

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<sup>39</sup> A long extract from Becher's speech is reprinted in Klaus Farin, *Hans Fallada: „Welche sind, die haben kein Glück.“* Munich, Tilsner, 1993, pp.116-121.

<sup>40</sup> Werner Liersch, 'Die dritte Dimension', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 13 (1965), 167-172 (pp.170-172).

<sup>41</sup> On paperback sales of Fallada's novels from 1950 onwards see Jürgen C. Thöming, 'Hans Fallada. Seismograph gesellschaftlicher Krisen', in *Zeitkritische Romane des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die Gesellschaft in der Kritik des deutschen Literatur*, ed. by Hans Wagener. Reclam, Stuttgart, 1975, pp.97-123 (p.99); and Farin, *Hans Fallada*, pp.130-138.

<sup>42</sup> Thöming, 'Hans Fallada', p.103.



events, concluding that Fallada's story 'entspricht in fast allen Details der Wirklichkeit'.<sup>43</sup> Also typical of this propensity is F.C. Foster's dissertation which identifies in tabular form places, characters and newspapers in the novel with their counterparts 'In Reality'.<sup>44</sup>

The view of Fallada as a skilled observer and recorder of facts surfaces in Becher's assessment that Fallada 'war als Dichter kein Denker'.<sup>45</sup> Fallada is also referred to as 'einen Seismographen, der auffallende Fakten unwillkürlich registriert, aber nicht selbst auswertet'<sup>46</sup> and as a 'Registrator' rather than a 'Deuter der Krise seiner Zeit',<sup>47</sup> who managed to produce an accurate portrait of the reasons for the downfall of the Weimar Republic, albeit 'ohne es zu wissen'.<sup>48</sup> Others assert that Fallada was only able to write about events he himself had witnessed or experienced, which is redolent of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* concept of the author as eye-witness and reporter.<sup>49</sup>

As in the initial reception of the novel, opinions are divided as to whether Fallada achieves a completely objective and neutral stance, or whether his sympathies lie with a particular political grouping. Helmut Pfanner, for example, contends that Fallada's opinion is impossible to discern.<sup>50</sup> Some consider Fallada

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Sadek, 'Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben. Realität und Roman', in *Hans Fallada. Werk und Wirkung*, ed. by Rudolf Wolff. Bonn, Bouvier, 1983, pp.42-62 (p.58).

<sup>44</sup> F.C. Foster, 'The Press of the Weimar Republic and its Representation in German Literature', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bristol University, 1996. See also Harry Bergholz, 'Hans Fallada's Breakthrough', *German Quarterly*, 29 (1956), 19-24 (p.22); Elke Matijevich, *The 'Zeitroman' of the Late Weimar Republic*. New York, Lang, 1995, p.58.

<sup>45</sup> Johannes R. Becher, 'Am Grabe Hans Falladas', extract in Farin, *Hans Fallada*, p.118.

<sup>46</sup> Thöming, 'Hans Fallada', p.115.

<sup>47</sup> Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, p.171.

<sup>48</sup> Sadek, 'Bauern', (p.45).

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, p.264; Helmut F. Pfanner, 'Die „Provinzliteratur“ der zwanziger Jahre', in *Die deutsche Literatur in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Wolfgang Rothe. Reclam, Stuttgart, 1974, pp.237-254 (p.241).

<sup>50</sup> Pfanner, 'Provinzliteratur', p.243.

to be basically an apolitical writer, although Michelle Le Bars is keen to assert that political neutrality does not preclude an ability to grasp the broader context which many critics assert Fallada is incapable of comprehending.<sup>51</sup> Others assert that although Fallada endeavoured to be objective, his work is still biased and partial. Jürgen C. Thöming argues that such bias arises despite the neutral narrative style, because Fallada portrays the bourgeoisie in isolation from other social classes.<sup>52</sup> Reinhard K. Zachau also points to Fallada's attempt to create a neutral *Sachlichkeit* through the extensive use of dialogue, but concludes that the overwhelmingly favourable portrait of Gareis, the Social Democratic mayor, implies a sympathy towards the SPD.<sup>53</sup>

Various reviewers, however, perceive Fallada to be sympathetic both to the farmers and to fascism. Recalling the criticisms made by Fischer and Wittfogel, critics such as Alfred Gessler, Claus-Dieter Krohn and Hanno Möbius censure Fallada for portraying the farmers as a united group steeped in tradition and lacking in social differentiation. They also criticize Fallada for failing to highlight the socioeconomic causes underlying the emergence of the *Landvolkbewegung* and for concealing the links between the farmers' movement and radical right-wing groups. Krohn, for example, complains: 'Während er sich in der Beschreibung des Handlungsablaufs exakt an die historischen Vorgänge hielt, werden weder die militant reaktionären Züge der Landvolkbewegung noch die antisemitischen Kampfparolen [...] erwähnt.'<sup>54</sup> Yet these critics assert that this was not deliberate and that Fallada was simply not intellectually capable of any far-reaching analysis of the movement: 'Unfähig zur rationalen Einsicht, ist

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<sup>51</sup> Le Bars, 'Die Landvolkbewegung', p.92.

<sup>52</sup> Thöming, 'Hans Fallada', p.113.

<sup>53</sup> Reinhard K. Zachau, *Hans Fallada als politischer Schriftsteller*. New York and others, Lang, 1990.

<sup>54</sup> Krohn, 'Hans Fallada', p.515.



Fallada nicht einmal zur kritischen Rezeption in der Lage.<sup>55</sup> Fallada is again portrayed as naive and lacking critical judgement.

Quite a different perception of Fallada is offered by Ellis Shookman, who considers the author to be cunning, sly and disingenuous in the extreme, 'falsifying critical facts about the historical farmers and their right-wing friends'.<sup>56</sup> Shookman maintains that Fallada's distortion of events is all the more insidious because it is concealed behind a cloak of seeming objectivity, impartiality and accuracy in order to deliberately dupe the reader: 'Fallada's own cynical insights into such shady journalism make it unlikely that his own narration could have been naive.'<sup>57</sup> According to Shookman, the reason for this elaborate deception was not political, but the result of Fallada's literary ambitions and desire to secure the farmers as his readership. Shookman bases this rather curious claim on an article written by Fallada about reading habits in the countryside, in which Fallada expresses his surprise that farmers are willing to accept untruths in literature.<sup>58</sup>

In my view, however, one of Fallada's key concerns within the novel is related to the problematic nature of discourses which supposedly guarantee objectivity and neutrality. Rather than presenting a textbook example of a *Neue Sachlichkeit* writer, Fallada fosters a critical questioning of the figures of the photographer, reporter and eye-witness which were advocated as models for writers in programmatic writings about *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The novel focuses upon the telling and re-telling of the events surrounding the confiscation of the flag, as different parties struggle to have their version accepted as the authoritative one. Within this framework, Fallada also draws attention to the constructed nature of

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<sup>55</sup> Krohn, 'Hans Fallada', p.520.

<sup>56</sup> Shookman, 'Making History', p.467.

<sup>57</sup> Shookman, 'Making History', p.472.

<sup>58</sup> Hans Fallada, 'Was liest man eigentlich in Hinterpommern', *Die literarische Welt*, 1 (1925), 4-5; Reprinted in Müller-Waldeck and Ulrich, eds., *Hans Fallada*, pp.60-61 (p.60).

concepts such as the 'Volksgemeinschaft' of the farmers. Moreover, Fallada is concerned with the way propaganda is employed to exploit the tensions created by the uneven development of modernization in the countryside and to generate reactionary tendencies. Similar issues are also at the heart of Ernst Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935), as the next section will illustrate. As in the reading of *Käsebier*, the intention in considering *Bauern* in the context of Bloch's text is to clarify the specific nature of Fallada's understanding of modernity, not to suggest that *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* provides a magic key of interpretation.

#### **4. Interpreting Reaction: *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* and *Ungleichzeitigkeit***

There are two central ways in which it is useful to read *Bauern* against Ernst Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*. Firstly, Bloch's central preoccupation in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* is how to read and interpret the signs of irrationalism and reaction manifested in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly amongst the young, the middle classes (mainly, the petty bourgeoisie and white-collar workers) and the peasantry. Bloch thus concentrates on the same three social groups upon whom Fallada's attention centres in *Bauern*. Both writers focus upon the connections between the emergence of political reaction amongst these groups and the uneven development of modernization across class and geographical location. Secondly, Bloch and Fallada have a common interest in the impact of propaganda on these groups, and in particular, in the ineffectiveness of left-wing propaganda. The texts explore how a distorted, fragmented or partial representation of the economic and political crises in the Weimar Republic have shaped the political opinions and subsequent actions (or inaction) of such groupings. At the heart of both works lies a deep concern with the struggle to control the meaning and interpretation of events, with the representation of reality. Nonetheless, there are key differences



between the works, not least of which is that Bloch's aspirations for the future utopia of a Communist society lend his work a sense of optimism and a political alternative which cannot be found in Fallada's work, and this despite the fact that *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* was finished in exile with the knowledge that the Republic had been replaced by the National Socialist dictatorship.<sup>59</sup>

One motivation behind Bloch's investigations of the emergence of reaction and irrationalism is to suggest new possibilities for Communist action and propaganda. He is critical of the way in which the Communists have interpreted the situation in late Weimar Germany and of their response to the fascist threat, which seeks to exacerbate the economic and political crisis in order to bring about the longed-for revolution more quickly. Bloch, however, believes that this hope is premature and based upon a false analysis of the origins of reactionary sentiment. It is not sufficient to hope that these forces will simply disappear or even to ridicule them, because 'nicht alles noch „Irrationale“ ist einfach auflösbare Dummheit'.<sup>60</sup> Bloch's alternative involves developing a more complex view of history and time than that offered by a dialectical model of history.

Bloch's understanding of time and history is, as Tony Phelan has pointed out, a distinctly modernist one.<sup>61</sup> Sheppard notes how the concept of time as a process of progression advancing in a dialectical or uniform manner yielded amongst many modernist thinkers to a sense of time as relative, discontinuous,

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<sup>59</sup> Bloch stresses in the preface to the first edition written in Locarno that the work was essentially written in Weimar Germany. Ernst Bloch, *Gesamtausgabe*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1962, IV: *Erbschaft dieser Zeit. Erweiterte Ausgabe*, p.18.

<sup>60</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.19.

<sup>61</sup> Tony Phelan, 'Ernst Bloch's "Golden Twenties": *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* and the Problem of Cultural History', in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Keith Bullivant. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1977, pp.94-121 (p.100).

irregular and insecure.<sup>62</sup> Bloch too perceives of history not in the conventional dialectical terms of Marxism, but as a multi-layered, multi-directional set of forces or energies:

Die Geschichte ist kein einlinig vorschreitendes Wesen, worin der Kapitalismus etwa, als letzte Stufe, alle früheren aufgehoben hätte; sondern sie ist ein *vielrhythmisches und vielräumiges, mit genug unbewältigten und noch keineswegs ausgehobenen, aufgehobenen Winkeln*.<sup>63</sup>

Bloch emphasizes that the development of capitalism proceeds unevenly and at different paces, leaving some individuals at odds with the most advanced modes of production and the resulting superstructure: 'Nicht alle sind im selben Jetzt da. Sie sind es nur äußerlich, dadurch, daß sie heute zu sehen sind. Damit aber leben sie noch nicht mit den anderen zugleich.'<sup>64</sup> Bloch maintains that this situation is particularly acute in Germany, where the extremely rapid nature of industrialization and the development of capitalism slowed the integration of the land-owning class into the capitalist economic and political system and prevented the bourgeoisie from establishing itself as thoroughly as in France or Britain. The swift and uneven development of capitalism in Germany, Bloch insists, has allowed former modes of production and exchange to persist, particularly amongst the large land-owning Junker class and the smaller farmers. The capitalist crisis (namely, the Great Depression) 'vollzieht sich in einem Land mit besonders viel vorkapitalistischem Material', Bloch claims, and thus will not automatically lead to a Communist revolution, because key sections of the population have not yet been fully integrated into capitalist modes of production and exchange.<sup>65</sup> These groups are bearers of 'der unüberwundenen Reste älteren ökonomischen

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Sheppard, *Modernism — Dada — Postmodernism*. Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2000, pp.65-68.

<sup>63</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, pp.68-69, italics in original.

<sup>64</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.104.

<sup>65</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.114.



Seins und Bewußtseins'.<sup>66</sup> Bloch refers to the continued existence of such older forms of production and ideology that are at odds with advanced capitalism as *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, which Phelan suggests might be translated into English as 'dissimultaneity' or 'non-contemporaneity'.<sup>67</sup>

Bloch identifies three groups which often display signs of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*: the young, the farmers and the middle classes. He claims that amongst young people the conflict with the current age derives from a sense of incompleteness and a longing for the future. However, as a result of the critical economic situation and seeming lack of future prospects, many young people create alternatives to the present by retreating to an idealized past: 'Jugend, welche mit dem kahlen Jetzt in keinem gleichen Schritt und Tritt ist, geht leichter zurück, als daß sie das Heute passiert, um ins Morgen zu kommen.'<sup>68</sup> Young people from a bourgeois background who have lost all hope of bourgeois prospects are, in Bloch's eyes, particularly susceptible to the perversion of their longing for the future into a return to the past and to the romanticization of hero figures and older forms of hierarchy offered by the National Socialists:

Die scharfe Luft der Jugend läßt linkes Feuer, wenn es brennt, noch stärker brennen; doch wird rechts ‚erneuert‘, so ist die Jugend bürgerlicher und verführter Kreise erst recht verführbar: das bluthaft, das organisch Junge ist ein guter Boden für Nazis. Bünde von sehr altem Zuschnitt tauchen auf ihm auf, bluthaftes, greifbares Leben in kleinen Gruppen, mit einem gekannten Führer, nicht mit Nummern an der Spitze.<sup>69</sup>

Class thus plays a part in the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* displayed by young people, according to Bloch.

The second group which Bloch considers to be *ungleichzeitig* has its roots entirely in past time and still exists in what Anthony Giddens would term

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<sup>66</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.114.

<sup>67</sup> Phelan, 'Ernst Bloch's "Golden Twenties"', p.103.

<sup>68</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.106.

<sup>69</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.105.

pre-modern embedded social relations. The group of farmers is 'von ganz lang her, indem sie wurzelt. Lebt fast noch genau wie die Voreltern, tut dasselbe wie sie'.<sup>70</sup> Bloch asserts that the rootedness of the farmers' existence in a local context and a sense of time still dictated by the cycles of nature is in clear contradiction to the present day, to the most advanced state of capitalist relations. It is not only the agricultural crisis which is driving the farmers towards the right, Bloch insists, but also

ihre gebundene Existenz, die relative Altform ihrer Produktionsverhältnisse, ihrer Sitten, ihres Kalenderlebens im Kreislauf einer unveränderten Natur widerspricht der Verstädterung, verbindet der Reaktion, die sich auf Ungleichzeitigkeit versteht.<sup>71</sup>

Bloch claims that in contrast to the proletariat or the urban middle class, farmers have control of the means of production and live in social and economic relations which originated in pre-capitalist (i.e. pre-modern) times. They 'stammen aus vorkapitalistischen Zeiten, aus Produktionsverhältnissen, die schon Landaufteilung verlangt hatten, als es noch keine individuell wirtschaftenden Bürger gab'.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Bloch argues that because the same relations of production apply to all farmers, whatever the size of their farms or income, they are still able to perceive themselves as belonging to the same class: 'Diese gemeinsam gebliebene Produktionsform macht auch so schwer, die großen ökonomischen Gegensätze in der Bauernschaft zu mobilisieren'.<sup>73</sup> The farmers still live according to conditions of production and economic exchange which originated in pre-capitalist times; until this substructure has disappeared, Bloch asserts, the ideological superstructure will also remain intact.

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<sup>70</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.106.

<sup>71</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.107.

<sup>72</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.107.

<sup>73</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.107.



The third group whose members are at odds with the current time, in Bloch's opinion, is the urban middle class. Bloch argues that the post-war economic crises which have impoverished the middle class have driven its members into idealized memories of their pre-war existence and released latent *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, rather than prompting revolution as the Communists had anticipated: 'Die Unsicherheit, welche bloß Heimweh nach Gewesenem als revolutionären Antrieb erzeugt, setzt mitten in der Großstadt Gestalten, wie man sie seit Jahrhunderten nicht mehr sah.'<sup>74</sup> Bloch asserts that insecurity has had this effect, because the middle class operates at one remove from the contemporary forms of production and exchange. Bloch claims that prejudices and longings which originate in the economic substructure of the Middle Ages are resurfacing and producing a susceptibility to fascism:

Überbauten, die längst umgewälzt schienen, wälzen sich wieder zurück und stehen als ganze mittelalterliche Stadtbilder im Heutigen still. Hier ist die Schenke zum nordischen Blut, dort die Burg des Hitler-Herzog, dort die Kirche zum Deutschen Reich [...].<sup>75</sup>

In Bloch's view, members of the old *Mittelstand* long to return to the early stages of capitalism, when their small businesses flourished, and want to restore 'die Wirtschaft wieder auf die Stufe des frühkapitalistischen Kleinbetriebs'.<sup>76</sup> Their current hatred of parliamentary democracy arises from its position as a guarantor of free trade and competition, which, although it initially benefitted the petty bourgeoisie, is now resented for promoting large enterprises. Moreover, Bloch argues, the white-collar workers' desire to maintain a distinction between themselves creates a longing for a quasi-feudal or military hierarchy: 'Die Lust des Angestellten, nicht proletarisch zu sein, steigert sich in orgiastische Lust der

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<sup>74</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.108.

<sup>75</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.109.

<sup>76</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.110.

Unterordnung, des magischen Beamtenseins unter einem Herzog.'<sup>77</sup> The ideology of the middle classes is thus rooted in an economic substructure which is at odds with the present day.

Class is not the only determining factor in the continued existence of different temporal dimensions or layers in the present day: geographical location appears to play a key role as well. Bloch observes the variations between the situations of white-collar workers in the small towns and in the big cities: 'In kleinen Städten leben sie nur von gestern her, doch in großen haben sie die Umzüge, falsch glänzendes Vergnügen dazu.'<sup>78</sup> The white-collar workers in the cities are already subject to propaganda to manipulate and harness their *Ungleichzeitigkeit*. The small towns lag behind the development in the cities and are full of Berlin's cast-offs rather than local produce, opinions and ideas: in the small town 'herrscht die Phrase von gestern, und wie die Läden ihre Konserven haben, so kommt die öffentliche Meinung fertig gesetzt, frisch gekirnt, als Abhub aus Berlin'.<sup>79</sup> To put this in the context of modernization, it is possible to say that for Bloch social and economic relations dependent upon place have been partially disembedded in the small town:

Armselige Läden sind mit Töpfen, billigen Kleidern, Abfall aus der Großstadt überfüllt; viel zu viel Konserven altern dazwischen. [...] Aber die meisten Krähwinkel sind heute so gehässig, tot und konventionell wie eine unglückliche Ehe.<sup>80</sup>

The disjunction with the present day produces a stagnant, festering atmosphere in the small town. Bloch perceives the countryside to exist in an even older temporal dimension, which allows the emergence of myths about organic, rural communities and of *Blut und Boden*: 'Dagegen dem Land steigt alter Saft in längst

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<sup>77</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.109-110, Bloch's italics.

<sup>78</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.31.

<sup>79</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.32.

<sup>80</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.32.



vergessene Triebe, es nährt Nationalsozialisten und völkische Mythologen, kurz, steht auf als *Pastorale militans*.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, although the big city, the small town and the countryside each ostensibly exist in the same calendar year, Bloch conceives of them as existing in different times, at different stages of history, simultaneously.

Bloch is particularly concerned by the role of the newspapers in reinforcing the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* of the white-collar workers and encouraging their reactionary tendencies. He mentions the distorted presentation of events in newspapers and the way in which reports are becoming ever more imaginative, ever less reliant upon facts, in order to conceal the true state of affairs:

Der Handelsteil einer guten bürgerlichen Zeitung stimmt noch halb, frisierte Berichte rauht er zuweilen auf. Der politische Teil hat sozusagen Charakter, nämlich den des Verlegerkapitals und der großen Inserate. Aber bereits die Berichte dieses Teils werden desto phantasievoller, je ferner ihr Schauplatz rückt, je dünner also das tatsächliche Wissen ihrer Gegenstände wird.<sup>82</sup>

Imagination and entertainment have replaced factual, accurate reporting in Bloch's opinion, obscuring the truth in the interests of capital. Furthermore, the stories in the newspaper have no real relevance to the businessman's life, nor any impact upon his attitudes, Bloch argues, but are simply presented in the most harmless, colourful way possible in order to distract the readers. Bloch maintains that the white-collar workers have little time and energy to read and that journalists take advantage of this situation by distorting reality in their reports and emphasizing only the amusing parts of life: 'Aber freilich tun die Männer, welche das Leben unterm Strich der Zeitung schneidend und schreibend spiegeln, erst recht das ihre hinzu, Spaß daraus zu machen, windig und wendig.'<sup>83</sup> The readers are presented with an imprecise, incomplete and partial perspective on life in

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<sup>81</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.53.

<sup>82</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.37.

<sup>83</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.37.

order to prevent them from grasping the emptiness of the whole: 'Dem mittleren Leser wird die Leere worin er leben muß, mit lauter ungenauen Stückchen zugestellt.'<sup>84</sup> Bloch associates such fragmented, disconnected items above all with magazines and journals, in which advertising and economic interest has ousted all intellectual discussion.

Like Bloch, Fallada is centrally concerned with the emergence of reactionary sentiments amongst farmers, the old *Mittelstand* and the white-collar workers. The novelist does not focus upon young people as a distinct group in the same way as Bloch, although the admiration of grammar school pupils for the pseudo-military behaviour of right-wing agent provocateur Henning in refusing to yield his flag does imply the kind of susceptibility to military hierarchies, irrationalism and right-wing ideologies amongst the young described by Bloch.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Fallada connects the development of reactionary sentiments as a whole to the collision of attitudes produced by the uneven pace at which modernization has filtered into provincial and rural areas. This contrasts with the focus upon the more advanced aspects of modernity in *Käsebier*. Through the figure of Altholm's mayor, Gareis, Fallada emphasizes the need for the SPD to recognize the temporal disjunctions and to develop a differentiated rather than a blanket approach to win over these disaffected groups, although the chances of success appear slim. In addition, Fallada explores the construction, reinforcement and dissemination of idealized myths about pre-modern conditions and ways of life

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<sup>84</sup> Bloch, *Erbschaft*, p.37.

<sup>85</sup> The narrator comments: 'Es war nicht schwer zu raten, welche Stellung des Gymnasium Altholms zu den Ereignissen am 26. Juli nehmen würde: ein Fahnenträger, der mit seiner Fahne fällt, war ein zu überzeugendes Bild, als daß die Jungen sich ihm hätten entziehen können.' (BBB, p.237) Fallada also depicts the demonization of Frerksen as Henning's attacker by the grammar school pupils, who bully Frerksen's son mercilessly (BBB, pp.237-243), and the adoring hordes of young people who gather outside the good-looking Henning's hospital window, hoping to catch a glimpse of Henning, whom the narrator ironically labels 'der Volksheros'. (BBB, p.278)



which prove all too seductive in a crisis-ridden age. In common with Bloch's text, *Bauern* highlights the reflexive nature of the press and its role in promoting action or inaction through the partial or distorted presentation of events, which is often influenced by powerful economic interests. Overall, Fallada's novel seeks to foster critical questioning of different modes of discourse and truth claims and to awaken a greater scepticism in readers who, in the novel, itself are presented as overly credulous and trusting.

The following three sections focus in turn upon the presentations of the farmers, the middle classes and SPD mayor Gareis in the novel, together with the the varying development of modernizing processes, or temporal layers, associated with these groups. In the novel, the farmers are depicted in conditions which are furthest removed from those of advanced modernization, the white-collar workers and middle-classes occupy a kind of half-way house, whilst Gareis embodies the most developed aspects of modernization. Section 7 will also examine the problematic aspects of Fallada presenting the more positive, emancipatory side of modernity through the strong and, at times, ruthless figure of Gareis, which contrasts with the positive experiences of modernity sketched by Keun and Tergit. The final section analyses how Fallada seeks to promote a critical attitude towards discourses and media which were perceived to be reliable and authoritative: firstly, on the thematic level of the novel and, secondly, on the formal level. This last section also highlights ways in which Fallada presents a critique of the models which were advocated for the objective and accurate presentation of the truth within the more simplistic programmatic writings on *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

## 5. 'Pastorale militants'? Die Bauernschaftsbewegung and Rural Reaction

One of the key criticisms levelled at Fallada's presentation of the farmers has been that it perpetuates the myth of an organic agricultural community and idealizes rural life. However, as will be argued in this section, Fallada is more concerned with illustrating how the myth of a 'Volksgemeinschaft' is constructed and how supposedly long-standing traditions, language and customs are introduced by the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* to appeal to farmers who feel out of joint with an age of rapid modernization. This use of targeted propaganda by a radical right-wing grouping contrasts starkly with the SPD's approach towards the farmers, as will be discussed in section 7 below. In addition, Fallada emphasizes the contradictory attitude towards modernity displayed by the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* whose tactics rely upon modern means of communication and transport, but which propagates a decidedly anti-modern message.

### 5.1 'All so etwas gibt es noch'

One of the most striking illustrations in the novel of the uneven rate at which modernizing processes have developed in provincial areas can be found in the figure of Banz, who cultivates the remote croft of Stolpermünde-Abbau. In the spirit of Bloch's analysis, Fallada presents this farmer as existing in socio-economic conditions which are completely at odds with advanced capitalism. Banz and his family have the kind of static existence confined to one particular local area which is typical of pre-modern society. The nearest village is seven kilometres away, and Banz's wife only journeys there four or five times a year. Without transportation, the children are unable to attend school and their labour is in any case necessary for the farm. This pre-modern lifestyle is not presented as idyllic or desirable in the novel, and there is no suggestion of the 'Agrarromantik' of which Fallada has



often been accused.<sup>86</sup> The family barely manages to scratch a living from the extremely poor soil which they farm with none of the advantages of modern agricultural methods. Consequently, the family is poorly nourished: 'Von dem bißchen Korn und Hafer, die gebaut werden, bekommen die Kaninchen das meiste. Die Familie des Bauern lebt von Kartoffeln.' (BBB, p.100) In years when they cannot afford a horse, Banz's wife and children are forced to pull the plough and other implements. Prepared for the reader's incredulity that such backward practices still persist in modern society, the narrator insists: 'All so etwas gibt es noch.' (BBB, p.100) In addition, the narrator emphasizes the detrimental effect that poor nourishment and hard work has upon the children's growth and health: 'Der Bauer ist groß and stattlich, die Frau groß und hager, aber die Kinder sind breite knorrige Zwerge, schweigsame Zwerge mit ungeheuren Händen.' (BBB, p.100) Therefore, Fallada does not idealize the pre-modern, but concentrates the readers' attention upon its negative effects.

Banz also retains a confidence in irrational superstitions which conflict sharply with the rational mentality of the modern age, with the 'now'. This is clearly illustrated when he hitches a lift in a fish-truck which is returning from the market in Stettin. The lorry represents modern transportation methods which enable the consumption of fresh fish inland and in the cities, contrasting sharply with Banz's usually static existence. As he is on the run from the police, Banz tells the driver that his daughter is sick and that he is going to visit women who can cure the illness through blowing gently on a picture. The driver's astonishment at such an irrational and superstitious idea suggests that the farmers are a by-word for backwardness and illustrates how at odds Banz's beliefs are with those of the modern age: 'Glaubst du denn wirklich noch an solchen Mist mit dem Bepusten?'

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<sup>86</sup> cf. Krohn, 'Hans Fallada', p.512; Shookman, 'Making History', p.469.

Das tun doch nur die dummen Bauern.' (BBB, p.360) This type of irrational superstition is also associated with the farmers by Bloch. Moreover, the incident demonstrates Banz's *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, the degree to which his ideology and means of existence are at odds with advanced aspects of modernization.

In addition, Fallada illustrates how the assumption that modernization is proceeding at an even pace can produce the political radicalization of individuals such as Banz. Modern state institutions adopt an impersonal, blanket approach, which makes no provision for those still living in effectively pre-modern conditions. Fallada emphasizes that the lives of Banz's children are far from ideal, but the measures taken to compel them to attend school does not take account of the basic problem of a fourteen kilometre round trip with no transportation. The authorities choose to penalize Banz by impounding his horse, which only increases the burden on the children and restricts the mobility of the family still further. Banz attempts to prevent his horse from being impounded which results in his imprisonment and consolidates his anti-Republican sentiments. On his release, Banz hangs a sign in his yard which reads: 'Dieser Hof wurde im Winter 1927 von Landjägern und Vollstreckungsbeamten der deutschen Republik räuberisch überfallen.' (BBB, p.101) Subsequently, Banz becomes involved in terrorism and violence, storing explosives for the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* in his barn and assaulting a policeman during the demonstration. Thus, whilst Fallada accentuates the hardship of the pre-modern way of life, he implies that the failure of modern institutions to recognize and adapt to the continued existence of such conditions generates resentment and political radicalization.



## 5.2 (De)Constructing Rural Idylls

In *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Bloch expresses his concern that only radical right-wing and fascist organizations have recognized how to target their propaganda at those living in conditions at odds with modernity. Similarly, in Fallada's novel, only the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* is shown to develop ways in which to exploit the anxieties of those living in essentially pre-modern social and economic relations in an age of rapid modernization. Fallada demonstrates how the movement relies on such conditions in order to compel the farmers to act uniformly and to produce the appearance of a 'Volksgemeinschaft'. In the novel, the farmers do not all act in unison or speak with one voice because they represent a united, organic community, as critics such as Fischer and Wittfogel claim. Instead, Fallada demonstrates how conformity of behaviour and opinion is secured through threats of violence, ostracization and loss of livelihood, a tactic which is dependent upon the continued existence of pre-modern relations.<sup>87</sup>

The first speech to the Gramzow farmers by Reimers, one of the leaders of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung*, makes it clear that uniform behaviour is not spontaneous. Reimers warns of the dire consequences and social exclusion awaiting any farmer who dares to break the boycott of forced sales: 'Niemand darf zu ihm sprechen, niemand darf ihm die Tageszeit bieten. Unsere Kinder sollen nicht mit seinen Kindern sprechen, und unsere Frauen sollen nicht mit seiner Frau reden.' (BBB, p.18) Similarly, the boycott of Altholm does not constitute an impulsive, voluntary expression of community solidarity. Instead, it quickly begins to crumble, particularly after the leading figures in the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* are charged with the bombings, as Büttner reports: 'Ja, mit

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<sup>87</sup> Eissfeldt points to Fallada's portrait of a 'negativen Solidarität' amongst the farmers, but the critic does not relate this to modernization nor does he suggest it is part of an overall critique of the credibility afforded to certain types of discourse within the novel. Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, p.156.

dem Boykott . . . Das wird nun auch schwer halten. Das bröckelt schon ab.' (BBB, p.290) Henning, a right-wing paramilitary agitating amongst the farmers, recommends arbitrarily targeting farmers for ostracization in order to enforce solidarity and to distract attention from the bombings:

Ihr sollt mal sehen, in jedem dritten Dorf ein geächteter Bauer, und immer feste davon geredet, immerzu allen erzählen, was ihr angefangen habt mit ihm — und der ganze Bombenquatsch ist vergessen. Alles backt wieder zusammen! (BBB, p.291)

The networks of gossip and rumour in rural areas are employed and this tactic presupposes that social relations are still largely embedded in a local context. Therefore, far from suggesting that the farmers automatically and willingly act in unison as an organic body as some critics have claimed, Fallada stresses that the uniformity of behaviour and solidarity amongst the farmers is enforced. The farmers' economic and social dependence upon traditional social relations in the local community is deliberately manipulated in order to create the appearance of a common political stance.

Fallada illustrates how this manipulation operates in practice with the case of farmer Bartels. The narrator emphasizes the representative value of this individual case, stating: 'Er ist genau wie die andern Bauern in Poseritz'. (BBB, p.297) The reader is thus encouraged to perceive Bartels' situation and his reaction as typical rather than an isolated case of one non-conformist amongst an otherwise unified community. Bartels buys a clock from his in-laws in Altholm, believing that he can circumvent the boycott by carrying out the actual transaction in Stolpe. However, the locals suddenly avoid all social contact with him, his farmhands and maids resign *en masse*, and the dairy rejects his milk on spurious grounds. Despite his attempts to hold out, Bartels can neither manage the farm alone nor sell his milk, whilst items crucial to the operation of the farm, such as the water pump, are subject to malicious damage. Having been forcibly



confronted with his continued social and economic dependence upon the local community, Bartels bows to the pressure and is compelled by Büttner to pay a large fine, publicly burn his clock and apologize in front of the whole village for breaking the boycott. Rather than presenting these pre-modern social relations in the provinces as idyllic or desirable, Fallada demonstrates how these social relations are systematically exploited in order to compel the farmers to act uniformly and to produce the appearance of a united community.

Significantly, Fallada's assessment of how uniformity of opinion and behaviour was secured amongst the farmers, appears to correspond to historical analyses of how the historical *Landvolkbewegung* enforced conformity of behaviour.<sup>88</sup> Timothy Tilton claims that this strategy was later taken over by the NSDAP and his account echoes Fallada's description of the way Bartels is blacklisted and excluded: 'National Socialists in Dithmarschen refused to hire servants and farm workers who were not party members. In one case a Meldorf beer distributor and party leader used a boycott to put a competitor out of business.'<sup>89</sup> Through the episode with Bartels, Fallada exposes a central aspect of the uneven development of modernizing processes which created particular susceptibility towards right-wing radicalism and which was used to great effect by the *Landvolkbewegung* and subsequently by the NSDAP.

It is not only the myth of a united community which Fallada unveils as an artificial construct. The spontaneity associated with the farmers' movement is also called into question in the novel, whilst the anti-modern message conceals the movement's extensive reliance upon modern forms of communication, transportation and organization. The adherents of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* are keen to emphasize that it is indeed a movement, representing the antithesis of

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<sup>88</sup> Heberle, *From Democracy*, p.67; Tilton, *Nazism*, p.69.

<sup>89</sup> Tilton, *Nazism*, p.69.

what is seen as an overly cumbersome and bureaucratic state administration. They accentuate the spontaneous nature of the movement and its ostensibly loose organizational structures. However, despite this propaganda, much of the movement's activity actually involves precisely that carefully orchestrated planning and rationalized, formal organization which they profess to despise. For example, having promised Gareis that he will bring the leaders of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* to the mayor for discussions on the day of the demonstration, Altholm farmer Vadder Benthin tries to persuade one such leader, Rohwer, to accompany him to see Gareis. Rohwer refuses on the grounds that no such formal leadership and organization exists within their spontaneous movement: 'Wir sind keine Partei, Benthin, laß dir sagen, wir sind kein Verein. Und Führer gibt es schon gar nicht.' (BBB, p.103) Kurt Eissfeldt cites Rohwer's assertion as evidence that Fallada had not represented the *Landvolkbewegung* realistically in his novel, because the historical movement was highly reliant upon the organization provided by its leaders and collapsed following their arrest.<sup>90</sup> However, within two pages in the novel, Rohwer invites Benthin to attend a 'Führerbesprechung', and he counters Benthin's evident surprise with 'Na ja, was man so nennt. Richtige Führer sind das nicht.' (BBB, p.105) Moreover, Rehder has already referred to himself, Rohwer and Reimers as 'wir drei bestellten Führer von der Bewegung'. (BBB, p.56) Therefore, Fallada does include instances of careful planning and leadership, which undermine proclamations such as the one made by Rohwer and which indicate that the author does not share the attitude of his characters. The paradoxical nature of the movement is betrayed by the conflicting statements of its adherents.

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<sup>90</sup> Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, p.245. See also H. Fischer's objection that Fallada portrays the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* as a loose organization. Fischer, 'Bauern'.



Further evidence of the organization behind the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* emerges in the astute use of propaganda. Moreover, this propaganda reveals the enthusiasm with which the movement embraces modern technology and means of communication, in spite of their anti-modern attitudes. From the start, Reimers is aware of the crucial nature of propaganda to muster support and he enthusiastically embraces certain aspects of technological modernity useful for mobilizing people and forming opinion, such as the photograph, the telephone and the newspaper.<sup>91</sup> The prospect of his arrest for starting the fire at Gramzow represents a vital opportunity for publicity to Reimers and he instructs Henning to make arrangements to maximise interest in his arrest and any subsequent trial. This is both to create a striking visual impression and the sense of a spontaneously aggrieved agricultural community:

Sorge, daß die Bauern Bescheid wissen. Telefoniere von den umliegenden Dörfern heran, was Beine hat. Sag den Sendboten Bescheid, daß sie es im Bezirk erfahren. Oh Georg, wenn sie mich fesseln würden, wenn sie mich in Ketten ins Auto schaffen würden! Einen Fotografen her und Bilder in die nächste Ausgabe der Bauernschaft. (BBB, p.46)

The existence of an established network of messengers who can be summoned at speed suggests that the movement is extremely well-organized. Furthermore, Reimers' instructions illustrate his awareness of the effectiveness of the photo opportunity in mobilizing public opinion, and he attempts to send a similar message to Henning to organize photographers to be present at his release. The latest means for overcoming time and space are employed in order to construct a myth of spontaneous protest.

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<sup>91</sup> A similarly paradoxical attitude towards modernity was demonstrated by those involved in the petrol blockades in Britain in September 2000, where protests about the actions of international oil companies and an allegedly remote, disinterested urban-based national government were carefully organized via mobile phones and the internet and through use of the press.

Fallada also reveals how certain ostensibly time-honoured rituals or forms of language which emphasize the longevity of the farmers' traditions and their attachment to the land, are in fact recent innovations. For example, the movement's propaganda sheet, *Die Bauernschaft*, advertises a farmers' gathering or 'Landesthing', at which the farmers are to judge the actions of Altholm's inhabitants during the demonstration. The term 'Thing' is defined in *Duden* as follows: 'bei den Germanen Volks-, Heeres- u. Gerichtsversammlung, auf der alle Rechtsangelegenheiten eines Stammes behandelt wurden.'<sup>92</sup> It therefore suggests a custom which has been continually practised for centuries by the farmers and implies an unbroken link between the farmers in the Weimar Republic and ancient Germanic tribes. Nonetheless, the 'Landesthing' has been recently reanimated, by Padberg, editor of the *Bauernschaft* newspaper. Padberg also chooses the location for the meeting amidst gorse and megalithic graves, deliberately eschewing commercial urban venues for social interaction and appealing to a sense of tradition and longevity: 'Hinaus aus den Tanzsälen der Wirtschaften mit den verblaßten Papiergirlanden, dem Geruch von Bier und Tabak, dem grünen Bretterwerk der Emporen, den Erinnerungen an Weiber und Musike!' (BBB, p.168) Fallada stresses the artificiality involved in the reconstruction of a link with nature that is disappearing.

The narrator also draws attention to the creation of an illusory tradition through the use of antiquated, quasi-biblical language and ritual to publicise the forthcoming 'Landesthing'. Although announced in the newspaper, the location and timing of the gathering are only provided by word of mouth, as specially dressed messengers ride across the countryside and announce their presence

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<sup>92</sup> *Duden. Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, ed. by the Wissenschaftlichen Rat der Dudenredaktion, 3rd edn., 10 vols. Mannheim/Leipzig/Vienna/Zurich, Dudenverlag, 1999, IX: *Tach-Vida*, p.3899.



formally with a horn or a whip. They subsequently summon the farmers 'zu kommen am Mittwoch dieser Woche an den Ginsterort, nahe Lohstedt, wo die Hünensteine liegen, Gericht zu halten über jeden, sei er hoch oder niedrig, der Schuld trägt am Blutmontag in Altholm.' (BBB, p.168) The unusual, complex syntax and antiquated form of expression make this language distinctive and are designed to reinforce group solidarity through exclusion of non-group members, in much the same way as the threat of ostracization and boycott of non-collaborators. Several reviewers complain that by comparison with the realistic dialogue in the rest of the novel, the language employed to advertise and conduct the *Landesthing* appears artificial and unnatural.<sup>93</sup> However, these critics miss the point that this language is not intended to be realistic. In fact, the narrator explicitly draws attention to the artificial nature and novelty of this old-fashioned language: 'Wer die altertümlichen Wendungen einführte, weiß schon keiner mehr, so jung die Bewegung auch ist.' (BBB, p.168) As in *Käsebier*, a nostalgic desire for pre-modern relations is shown to create an interest in the authentic. This invention of seemingly authentic language is also practised by other journalists in the novel, as will be outlined later.

The discourse of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* is not only exclusive and artificially antiquated, but also deeply anti-Semitic and anti-Republican. This emerges, for example, in an open letter to the *Regierungspräsident* Temborius, which is published in the *Bauernschaft* newspaper and distributed during the reconciliation talks between the town and some agricultural representatives with the express purpose of preventing the boycott from being lifted. The letter is in fact almost identical with one printed in *Das Landvolk*, which Fallada had kept amongst his

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<sup>93</sup> [no author], 'Bauern', *Der Angriff*, Caspar, *Fallada-Studien*, pp.35-36; Wrobel, 'Bauern', p.496.

notes for the novel.<sup>94</sup> In the novel, the letter demonstrates the political radicalization of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* and the extent to which its ideology is connected to that of radical right-wing and fascist groups: 'Diese Kampfmethode des jüdischen Ausaugungssystems, dessen hervorragende Vertreter Sie sind, ist uns bekannt. Blutgemäß sind Sie besonders befähigt, dies System zu vertreten.' (BBB, p.257) The connection between the response to modernization and this political radicalization is clear. The Weimar Republic or 'System' is perceived by the *Bauernschaft* as a parasite, draining the province of its resources through an administration remote in time and space from the local context. Moreover, in this reactionary discourse, the Jews are configured in stereotyped, negative terms as embodying the commercial and international aspects of modernity which are the object of the farmers' antipathies. As such, they are contrasted in the *Bauernschaft* letter with the 'Volk', those supposedly rooted in a particular locale, linking the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* to the Nazi ideology of *Blut und Boden*.<sup>95</sup> 'Das von Ihnen ausgesogene und mit Füßen getretene Volk lehnt es ab, sich mit seinen Feinden an einen Tisch zu setzen.' (BBB, p.257) The letter has the desired effect, as those representing agricultural groups or interests leave the reconciliation talks immediately. One such representative observes that the letter expresses the views of a large number of farmers: 'denn gedacht, gefühlt ist er im Herzen von tausend Bauern.' (BBB, pp.260-261) Therefore, Fallada emphasizes that these anti-Semitic and anti-Republican sentiments are widespread amongst the farmers and not just held by the leaders of the movement.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Manuscript in the Hans-Fallada-Archiv, Materialsammlung (2) zu *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*, Seite 5a.

<sup>95</sup> On the development of ideas relating to *Blut und Boden*, see Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil. Richard Walter Darré and Hitler's Green Party*. Abbotsbrook, Kensal, 1985, p.34.

<sup>96</sup> Eissfeldt evaluates this comment in a similar manner. Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, p.155.



Caspar is critical of Fallada's incorporation of this letter into his novel without any direct narratorial condemnation, arguing that it is all too easy to read this as the author's own opinion, although he attributes this to Fallada's political naivety.<sup>97</sup> Since the narrator does make direct value judgements and comments at certain points, then it is perhaps justified to ask why such judgements do not appear in this case. Crucially, Fallada stresses how hollow these racist stereotypes are, albeit not with direct narratorial condemnation, but through ironic juxtaposition of conversations, which anticipate that the reader will draw a particular conclusion, a technique which is frequently deployed in the novel. In a cruel twist, the letter is read aloud to those assembled for the negotiations by the only Jewish figure in the whole novel, Assessor Meier. Immediately prior to this, Temborius makes a revealing comment to Assessor Meier on the difficulties for Jewish applicants in obtaining positions in the civil service, illustrating that, far from being controlled by Jews, as the letter in the *Bauernschaft* maintains, the state administration remains inaccessible to them. These comments reveal Temborius' own prejudices:

Habe ich Ihnen nicht schon mal gesagt, es geht auch mit Ihnen in der Preußischen Verwaltung? Warum sollen denn alle jüdischen Juristen Rechtsanwälte werden? Auch in der Verwaltung können wir Sie brauchen.' (BBB, p.255)

The placing of this conversation immediately before the letter in the *Bauernschaft* undermines the anti-Semitic claims in the letter. Moreover, the political opportunist Temborius distances himself from Meier as soon as the letter has been read, indicating that the latter's hard-won position in the regional administration was always fragile, even amongst his apparent supporters. Tucholsky praises Fallada's novel for emphasizing this obvious absence or lack of

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<sup>97</sup> Caspar, *Fallada-Studien*, p.50.

influence in the town of those groups or individuals typically singled out as scapegoats by the radical right-wing:

Begeistert wird die kleine Stadt von seiner Schilderung grade nicht sein — nicht davon, wie er sie entblößt; wie er aufzeigt, daß weit und breit keine Juden da sind, die man für alles verantwortlich machen könnte; weit und breit keine Kommunisten, die etwas bewirken.<sup>98</sup>

Nonetheless, Caspar's criticism highlights the problematic aspects and dangers of failing to take issue more explicitly with such opinions and of expecting the reader to draw the correct conclusions, particularly in such a politically volatile climate as that of the late Weimar Republic.

Overall, Fallada's depiction of the farmers indicates the problems caused by what Peukert terms 'den schmerzlichen Durchbruch der Modernisierung in der Provinz'.<sup>99</sup> Like Bloch, he demonstrates how the farmers' living conditions and ideology are at odds with more advanced modernizing processes. In addition, Fallada highlights how anxieties about these new developments are exploited by the astute use of propaganda which invents supposedly authentic traditions, language, and customs, and promotes radical right-wing and even racist politics.

## 6. Middle Classes in the Provincial Small Town

For all the discussion amongst the politicians in the novel about Altholm's status as an industrial town and its large working class population, the proletariat is remarkable for its absence in *Bauern*. Instead, Fallada focuses upon the middle classes, upon the old bourgeoisie, proprietors of small businesses, civil servants and white-collar workers in the small town. Fallada highlights the disenchantment with the Weimar Republic amongst Altholm's middle classes and traces the

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<sup>98</sup> Wrobel, 'Bauern', p.501.

<sup>99</sup> Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, p.230.



increasing political radicalization of some of the members of this group. The lives of both groups are shown to have undergone some modernizing processes in the novel and they are not as bound to pre-modern conditions as the farmers are, although they have not embraced the most advanced aspects of modernization as Gareis does. On the whole, the middle classes and white-collar workers appear inimical to, and alienated from, the form of modernization embodied by the Republican political and social order.

### *6.1 Radicalization of the Old Mittelstand.*

Bloch notes that the post-war economic crises have driven the middle class into idealized memories of their pre-war existence and produced a distrust of parliamentary democracy as the protector and promoter of large enterprises in advanced capitalism. Similarly, Fallada's middle class characters yearn for the Imperial past in times of hardship and, resentful of the political and economic modernization which is embodied by the Weimar Republic, they fragment into ineffectual small-interest groups.

The disaffection with the Weimar Republic is particularly evident amongst the civil servants of Altholm. Stuff persuades Kalübbe, a tax inspector, to change his testimony about the arsonists at Gramzow by playing on his suspicions towards the Weimar Republic. He claims that Kalübbe is going to be transferred as punishment for not following the correct procedure during the forced auction, which Kalübbe, displaying his anti-Republican sentiments, can easily believe of the post-war administration: 'Ich habe es mir überlegt: vielleicht werde ich wirklich strafversetzt. Die machen das heute so. Verantwortung haben nur wir Untern.' (BBB, p.28) Kalübbe's regular Skat partners also evince anti-Republican sentiments. Gruen, a prison officer, was shot by revolutionaries in 1918 and

carries a deep-seated animosity towards the Republic together with a nostalgia for the Imperial past, as Stuff informs Wenk: 'Du mußt mal aufpassen, wenn die Rechten schwarzweißrot flaggen, dann kann er an keiner Flagge vorüber. Zieht den Hut und verkündet: „Unter dieser Fahne haben wir nicht gehungert.“' (BBB, p.26) Gruen becomes increasingly radicalised politically through contact with the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* and ultimately develops a paranoid delusion about a vast Republican plot to corrupt all his associates, which prompts him to attempt to assassinate Gareis. (BBB, p.284) The third Skat player, a train driver named Thienelt, refuses to wear a uniform that bears the Republican eagle.

Amongst the police, antipathy towards the Social Democratic party leads many to ignore orders or obstruct operations. For instance, Frerksen has doubts about Gareis' plans to use undercover policemen as spies on the day of the demonstration, arguing that they mostly have right-wing sympathies. (BBB, p.92) Frerksen's fears prove to be justified when Perduzke and Bering choose not to reveal important information they have overheard from the farmers: 'Dafür schicken wir das fette Schwein, den Gareis, und den Frerksen in die Hölle, wenn wir unsere Spesenrechnung einreichen und haben nichts gehört.' (BBB, p.103) Through these figures Fallada draws attention to the deeply entrenched and open hostility towards the Republic prevalent amongst all branches of the provincial civil service, amongst those who are supposed to be administering the new state. The form of political modernization manifested by the Weimar Republic has not been well-received amongst Altholm's middle-classes.

As a result, the bourgeois electorate in Altholm has deserted its traditional parties of the right and centre in favour of special-interest groups and splinter parties. This type of electoral behaviour is identified by Peukert as typical of the



provincial middle classes during this period.<sup>100</sup> Fallada highlights the paralysing effect on political life generated by the proliferation of tiny interest group parties and he satirizes the limited outlook and personal animosities they produce. At a meeting to discuss Altholm's response to the boycott, the representatives of bourgeois interests all exploit this opportunity to score points against each other and to air long-standing grievances which are at best tangentially related to the boycott. Dr. Lienau warns of the perils of compromising with the Social Democrats, whilst the Protestant church leader, Schwarz, preaches upon the dangers of lying and the necessity for peace and reconciliation. Gropius, representing private home owners and the *Reichswirtschaftspartei*, uses the occasion to make irrelevant complaints about the construction of five new public toilets and to demand lower taxes alongside a reduction in public spending: 'Meine Herren, wir haben unsere warnende Stimme erhoben, als die Kollegien dem Bau von fünf neuen Bedürfnisanstalten zustimmten.' (BBB, p.186) Gropius' self-importance in discussing something as mundane as the toilets is comic and his proclamation reveals the blinkered focus of economic interest groups. Moreover, Fallada emphasizes the ineffectual nature of such small-interest groups through a town council meeting which illustrates that the fragmented bourgeois parties cannot co-operate to achieve a common goal. The conservative *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* requires an extra vote from another party in order to table a question about the administration's plans to lift the boycott, a discussion which would be in the interest of all the bourgeois representatives in Altholm: 'Werden sich nicht alle Bürgerlichen erheben wie ein Mann? Ein dritter Mann wird gesucht!' (BBB, p.294) Despite the shared interest which should produce common action, the fragmented parties do not co-operate and the meeting is

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<sup>100</sup> Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, p.228.

closed. According to Tilton, such failure to collaborate was characteristic amongst these minority-interest parties in the provinces.<sup>101</sup> Fallada's portrayal of the contemporary political trends amongst the traditional middle classes in the small town therefore corresponds with historical analyses of electoral trends amongst this group.

## 6.2 White-Collar Workers in the Provincial Trap

Fallada's portrayal of the situation of white-collar workers in the small town at a time when rationalization is being introduced on a small scale provides an interesting complement to the presentation of white-collar workers in Berlin in *Käsebier*, as well as to Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*. To my mind, the different settings produce rather different emphases in these writers' portraits of the contemporary experience and attitudes of white-collar workers, related to the slower development of modernization in the provinces.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Kracauer focuses upon metropolitan milieux, reasoning that these are the sites where the modernizing processes which have generated the fivefold increase in the numbers of white-collar workers since 1918 are most advanced. It is in the cities, Kracauer argues, and especially in Berlin, that the large companies and organisations are concentrated and that the rationalization of white-collar workers' jobs to routine, monotonous tasks has progressed the furthest. Moreover, he asserts that in Berlin the so-called *Angestelltenkultur* of mass entertainment and leisure, which Kracauer views as pivotal in perpetuating the false consciousness of white-collar workers, is most highly developed:

Hier ist der wirtschaftliche Prozeß, der die Angestelltenmassen aus sich herausgesetzt hat, am weitesten gediehen; hier finden die

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<sup>101</sup> Tilton, *Nazism*, p.36.



entscheidenden praktischen und ideologischen Auseinandersetzungen statt; hier wird besonders auffällig die Gestalt des öffentlichen Lebens von den Bedürfnissen der Angestellten und denen bestimmt, die ihrerseits diese Bedürfnisse bestimmen möchten.<sup>102</sup>

Berlin is thus singled out as the site where the situation of white-collar workers was most advanced and, hence, as most indicative of future trends for the rest of Germany. One central aspect of the experience of modern white-collar workers identified by Kracauer is the loss of social ties and sense of being cut adrift which is only possible in the capital: 'Nur in Berlin, wo die Bindungen an Herkunft und Scholle so weit zurückgedrängt sind, daß das Weekend große Mode werden kann, ist die Wirklichkeit der Angestellten zu erfassen.'<sup>103</sup> For Kracauer, the existence of white-collar workers can only be fully comprehended in the context of what Anthony Giddens refers to as modern, disembedded social relations.<sup>104</sup>

Yet it is precisely this form of modern social relations which is absent from the experience of Fallada's white-collar workers in *Bauern*. The 'Bindungen an Herkunft und Scholle' still obtain in Altholm's relatively small community of 40,000 inhabitants, so that it becomes impossible for the white-collar workers in the small town to develop the homogeneity and anonymity which Kracauer discerns amongst this group in the cities. Fallada's *Angestellte* are recognized as unique individuals in the town and their past history is known to those they encounter on a daily basis. This claustrophobic atmosphere generates particular strains and tensions for Fallada's white-collar workers as the economic modernizing processes begin to filter into the small town.

The type of economic structural transformations to which Kracauer attributes the growth in the numbers of *Angestellten* in Berlin has only just begun

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<sup>102</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten. Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, p.15.

<sup>103</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p.15.

<sup>104</sup> See pp.20-21 above.

to trickle through to Altholm in modified form. The takeover of the *Chronik* newspaper by its larger competitor, the *Nachrichten*, to form part of Gebhardt's mini-publishing group represents, on a small scale, part of the trend towards large enterprises and economic restructuring described by Kracauer. Furthermore, the *Chronik* is subject to rationalization following the takeover, as Gebhardt decides that the *Nachrichten* can supply articles for the local news section in the *Chronik* (BBB, p.325) and he imposes centralized editorial control. Gebhardt also seeks to reduce staffing costs, firstly forcing Stuff to accept a 20 per cent cut in his salary and subsequently replacing him as editor with the advertising and subscriptions agent, Tredup, who is promised just over half of Stuff's reduced salary. In turn, it seems likely that Tredup will be replaced with a younger and more inexperienced editor.<sup>105</sup> Here Fallada highlights a trend in the provinces which Kracauer also identifies as a key experience for the urban *Angestellten*, namely the increasing priority given to the young in the labour market. Moreover, these developments at the *Chronik* echo, on a much smaller level, Frächter's rationalization at the *Berliner Rundschau* in *Käsebier*, which involves replacing the older, more expensive staff with reporters barely out of school. (K, p.247)

However, economic restructuring and rationalization in the small town is constrained by the continued existence of pre-modern social relations and therefore retains a personal dimension which is absent in the city. In this way, the situation of Fallada's white-collar worker characters represents a continuation of that experienced by the *Angestellten* in the late nineteenth century who often lived with their employers' families and who experienced a personal relationship with their employers that had disappeared in the anonymity of large organizations.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Heinsius' twenty-two year old nephew appears to be a likely candidate. (BBB, pp.348-349)

<sup>106</sup> See p.25 above.



Although both Gebhardt and Frächter have the same desire to rationalize their operations and reduce overheads in dismissing their employees, they proceed quite differently. In *Käsebier*, Frächter acts anonymously and impersonally, simply crossing the names of employees he has never met from a list. (K, p.223) Gebhardt, however, feels unable to simply fire his workers and seeks pretexts based on gossip and rumour to force Stuff and Tredup from their positions. When Gareis publicly castigates Tredup for allegedly sensationalist reporting, Gebhardt seizes upon this as a useful pretext to dismiss Tredup: 'Es ist eine gute Art, Tredup loszuwerden.' (BBB, p.349) In a face-to-face meeting, Trautmann stresses Tredup's personal failings: 'Erst das Gerede wegen der Bilder, und dann die Untersuchungshaft. Gut, Sie waren unschuldig, aber etwas bleibt immer hängen.' (BBB, p.350) The personal dimension of the nineteenth-century relationship between employer and employee persists in the small town. This phenomenon also affects Pinneberg in Fallada's subsequent novel *Kleiner Mann — was nun?* (1932) who is sacked twice for personal reasons when living in the small town but who loses his job in Berlin because of new quota methods to measure employee performance.<sup>107</sup>

By contrast, figures from fiction contemporary to Fallada's novel but set in Berlin experience rationalization as a more impersonal force. Miermann in *Käsebier* and the protagonist of Kästner's *Fabian* (1931) both receive their notice via letters, by a means which avoids face-to-face interaction.<sup>108</sup> Fabian's employers stress that his performance is not a decisive factor in his dismissal:

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<sup>107</sup> Hans Fallada, *Kleiner Mann — was nun? Roman*. Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1993, pp.45-47 and p.272-277. The final reason for Pinneberg's dismissal from the department store in Berlin is his desperate plea to the actor Schlüter to buy something to make up his quota for the month.

<sup>108</sup> K, p.239. Erich Kästner, *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*. Munich, dtv, 1997, p.107.

Wir [...] wollen auch an dieser Stelle gern bekunden, daß Sie für die propagandistische Tätigkeit besonders qualifiziert erscheinen. Die Kündigung ist eine bedauerliche Folge der vom Aufsichtsrat beschlossenen Senkung des Reklamebudgets.<sup>109</sup>

The letter emphasizes the impersonal, objective causes for the dismissal and Fabian himself does not perceive the termination of his contract as a personal failure, saying to his colleague Fischer: 'Ihr Gehalt ist kleiner [...]. Sie dürfen bleiben.'<sup>110</sup> Fallada's portrayal of the experience of rationalization in a small town firm therefore differs from the presentation of similar experiences in the city in contemporary fiction. The continued existence of social relations which are firmly embedded in a local context in the provinces transforms the experience of economic restructuring into a personal assault for the white-collar worker characters in *Bauern*.

In addition, the lack of anonymity in the small town creates a stifling and unforgiving atmosphere which exacerbates the pressures of the white-collar workers' precarious financial situations. This echoes Bloch's description of the dusty and festering milieu for white-collar workers in the small town. For instance, Fräulein Heinze, the receptionist at the *Chronik* augments her pitiful salary of 50M per month through prostitution towards the end of the month. However, she cannot keep this secret in the small town and Tredup regularly delights in taunting Heinze with his knowledge of how she supplements her income: 'Ich habe Sie heute nacht aus der Grotte kommen sehen.' (BBB, p.7) Whilst Kracauer comments upon the detachment of white-collar workers in Berlin from their background, Fallada illustrates that Heinze has no opportunities to lose herself in the anonymity of mass culture or to evade the prying eyes, gossip and censorious public morality in the small town.

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<sup>109</sup> Kästner, *Fabian*, p.107.

<sup>110</sup> Kästner, *Fabian*, p.107.



Tredup too experiences the claustrophobic nature of small town society. He has moved to Altholm from elsewhere and retains the stigma of being an outsider. When Gareis reprimands Tredup in court for sensationalist reporting, he labels the article 'das unkontrollierte Geschmier eines Außenseiters'. (BBB, p.347) The mayor thus clearly attributes Tredup's failings to his status as an outsider, implying that the reporter is unfamiliar with the local codes of conduct and social interaction. It is this phrase which sticks in Heinsius' mind as he rushes to report the incident to Gebhardt: 'Gewissenloses Geschmier eines Außenseiters.' (BBB, p.348) Realizing that he no longer has any employment prospects in a place where his past is known to all, Tredup does indeed decide to migrate elsewhere. (BBB, p.352) In Marieluise Fleißer's *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier*, which also has a small town setting, the title character undergoes a similar experience when she breaks the prevailing moral codes and offends the petty local hierarchy, although she is physically threatened as well as having her livelihood destroyed, and the narrator notes: 'Nur zu gern sind die Menschen bereit einem, den sie als Außenseiter erkannt haben, den Brotkorb höher zu hängen.'<sup>111</sup> Relations in a local context therefore determine the economic security of Frieda and Tredup. In sharp contrast, anonymity characterizes the lives of white-collar workers in Berlin in fiction published in the late Weimar Republic. In *Fabian*, for example, when Cornelia leads Fabian back to her lodgings, both characters are unaware that they live on the same floor of the same building.<sup>112</sup> It would appear that the continuing existence of pre-modern social relations and the lack of anonymity in the provinces constituted a key factor which differentiated the experience of

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<sup>111</sup> Marieluise Fleißer, *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier. Roman vom Rauchen, Sporteln, Lieben und Verkaufen*. Berlin, Kiepenhauer, 1931, p.310.

<sup>112</sup> Kästner, *Fabian*, pp.101-102.

white-collar workers in the small towns from that of their urban counterparts in the late Weimar Republic.

Significantly, Fallada also illustrates how the false consciousness of the white-collar workers leads to right-wing radicalization. For example, Thiel's belief that his employer undervalues his loyalty and that he is subject to unfair and summary disciplinary action leads him to throw in his lot with the farmers. Participating in the bombings provides him with a new sense of status which he contrasts favourably with his former lack of prestige and self-importance: 'Ja, ich war ein kleiner Angestellter und wußte nichts wie Zahlen. Und plötzlich bin ich etwas ganz anderes und es ist auch so recht.' (BBB, p.152) Unlike Miermann and Gohlisch in *Käsebier*, Stuff, the cynical editor of the *Chronik*, initially has no illusions about his status as an independent intellectual: 'Das schweinischste Handwerk auf der Welt: Lokalredakteur sein in der Provinz.' (BBB, p.14) He displays a profound antipathy towards the Weimar Republic and especially the form of political and economic modernization offered by the Social Democrats, but contents himself with bringing its representatives into disrepute until the farmers' movement provides him with a positive alternative and reawakens a sense of purpose as a campaigning journalist. His disappointment at the centralized control imposed by Gebhardt just as he has gained some belief in his vocation is therefore acute: 'Es wäre der schönste Lebensabend gewesen, noch einmal, verbrauchter, glaubensloser Pressenhengst, der er ist, mit gutem Glauben den Kampf für eine gute Sache führen zu dürfen.' (BBB, p.150) He begins to rail against his position as a white-collar worker performing routine tasks which are controlled centrally in a larger organisation in terms which echo those used by Tergit's journalists: 'Tintenkuli ist man bloß für die Affen von den Nachrichten.'



(BBB, p.248)<sup>113</sup> In other words, he displays his false consciousness and many of his decisions are designed to reassert his independence from his proprietor and to shore up his sense of prestige and social status. For this reason, he defects to the *Bauernschaft*, hoping that this newspaper will allow him to freely voice his opinions. However, he has been deceived by the anti-modern rhetoric of the newspaper and discovers that the same modernizing and standardizing tendencies from which he sought refuge are affecting this publication too: 'Im Grunde ist es genau derselbe Brezelladen wie hier. Nur daß mir noch mehr in meinen Kram reinreden.' (BBB, p.421) Through figures such as Thiel and Stuff, Fallada illustrates how the false consciousness of the white-collar workers can be harnessed into right-wing radicalization.

False consciousness is also associated with a need to create hierarchies amongst the white-collar workers in Fallada's novel. Tredup, who initially works on a commission basis as advertising and subscriptions agent for the *Chronik*, is mocked by his superiors from their more secure position with fixed salaries about the low number of advertisements he brings in. In turn, Tredup taunts the receptionist Fräulein Heinze, with the knowledge that she supplements her paltry wage through prostitution towards the end of the month. Heinze berates Tredup for his lack of solidarity with her plight:

Wenn ich mich von fünfzig Mark im Monat kleiden und nähren und bewohnen soll, dann such ich mir eben nach dem Zwanzigsten ein paar Herren. Traurig genug, daß keiner von Ihnen die Courage hat und sagt es dem Gebhardt, daß es so nicht weiter geht mit mir. Und das vergleichen Sie mit so einem Schwein wie der schiefen Elli, die mit jedem losläuft und sich liederlich macht und alle acht Wochen im Krankenhaus liegt . . .  
(BBB, p.194)

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<sup>113</sup> Gohlisch protests: 'Ich bin kein Tintenkuli. Ich bin ein treuer Diener des Gedankens.' (K, p.10)

With her sense of status and prestige threatened, Heinze in turn seeks to differentiate herself from the full-time prostitute Elli, in contrast to Doris in Keun's second novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* who becomes aware of the precarious nature of such distinctions.<sup>114</sup> Both Bloch and Kracauer identify such attempts amongst white-collar workers to establish superiority over other white-collar workers and the proletariat to be characteristic of this social group.<sup>115</sup>

In his presentation of white-collar workers in the small town, Fallada emphasizes their situation in a kind of half-way house, subject to the gradual introduction of economic modernization, but still caught in older forms of social relations and still driven by aspirations and expectations held by white-collar workers in Imperial Germany. Moreover, in Fallada's eyes, the existence of the white-collar worker in the small town barely rises above the basic struggle for existence. Nor does it have any of the compensations or possibilities of escape offered by the mass culture of the cities, in which the characters in *Käsebier* and *Gilgi* participate. The sense of opportunity, excitement and enjoyment of their work displayed by Fräulein Dr. Kohler and by Gilgi is largely absent in Fallada's novel. Heinze is the only female white-collar worker in *Bauern*, who not only remains a marginal figure, but is shown to experience greater economic hardship and social humiliation in the small town than her male counterparts. Instead, Fallada highlights the opportunity side of modernity and the potential way out of the contemporary crisis through the figure of Gareis, Altholm's Social Democratic deputy mayor. However, unlike these female characters, Gareis also embodies some of the crueller and more disturbing aspects of modernity which make him a problematic figure.

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<sup>114</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. Roman. Munich, dtv, 1996, pp.106-107 and pp.134-135.

<sup>115</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p.83.



## 7. Positive Propaganda: Gareis and the Opportunities of Modernity

While the farmers are presented in Fallada's novel as existing in largely pre-modern socio-economic relations, and the middle classes and white-collar workers flee to an idealized past from the limited modernizing processes they have experienced, Gareis enthusiastically embraces the most advanced aspects of modernization in the late Weimar Republic. He represents the advantageous sides of modernity in the novel and offers a positive alternative form of propaganda which endeavours to win over the forces of reaction.

Rather like Frächter in Tergit's novel, Gareis is a veritable dynamo of activity and energy, as the narrator comments: 'Man kann Bürgermeister Gareis totschiagen, seine Aktivität lähmen kann man nicht.' (BBB, p.131) Gareis is frequently frustrated by obstacles, particularly by slow procedural regulations which prevent the rapid achievement of his aims, and he claims the only thing he has ever wished for is 'reibungslöse Arbeit. Aber das ist genauso, als wünschte man sich Perpetuum mobile.' (BBB, p.425) Gareis's dream is to remove all friction — the kind of desire which drives forth modernizing processes in David Harvey's account of modernity — although he acknowledges the impossibility of ever completely achieving this goal.<sup>116</sup>

In common with Frächter, Gareis is aware of the crucial importance of speed for success and to outpace his opponents. When Temborius outmanoeuvres Gareis by publicly announcing the suspension of police inspector Frerksen, Gareis realizes that he did not move fast enough: 'Temborius war rascher. Ich dachte wunder wie schlau ich war, als ich sofort zum Minister fuhr.' (BBB, p.236) Moreover, much like Frächter, Gareis skillfully utilizes the new technologies which facilitate speed, particularly the telephone and the motor car.

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<sup>116</sup> See Chapter 1, p.19.

Nonetheless, his reliance upon these technologies also proves to be his downfall, since it is deliberately exploited by his political enemies. Just as Muschler is compelled by the telegram to act hastily and without due thought in *Käsebier*, so Gareis is rushed into ordering rapid police intervention during the demonstration by the telephone call he receives from Kommissar Tunk, who, with a disguised voice, deliberately exaggerates the extent of the violence. Gareis's swift response to this news sparks off a chain of events which he cannot halt. Although he phones the police station to confirm the report, he is in too much of a hurry to listen to the entire explanation, accepting the police officer's confusion as support for Tunk's account. His subsequent calls illustrate his masterly use of time with the telephone, as he tells the switchboard operator to contact his secretary Piekbusch and:

sobald ich das Gespräch trenne, verbinden Sie mich mit der Gastwirtschaft von Mendel in Grünhof. – Noch eins, Ihre Kollegin soll unterdes die Bahnhofswache anrufen und dort Bescheid sagen, daß Frerksen oder Kallene mich in zehn Minuten erwarten. Und dann recherchieren Sie, wer mich eben angerufen hat. – Alles verstanden? Also los! (BBB, p.131)

However, having ordered his car to arrive at top speed, Gareis is cut off from Piekbusch before the latter has time to read out the secret instructions from Temborius determining the use of police powers in an emergency: 'Sie sollen vorlesen! Mensch, wo sind Sie?! Was machen Sie für Sachen Fräulein?! Verfluchter Idiotenkram! – Wer ist dort? Oberleutnant Wrede?' (BBB, p.131) The technology (or its operator) fails, but Gareis is still bound by the pace and the tight timetable it has allowed him to set, leaving him no time to rectify errors. Following his conversation with Wrede, when Gareis orders the use of the extra police, his car is already hooting outside and he has to leave immediately without calling Piekbusch again to discover the contents of the instructions. It is precisely Gareis's ignorance of these instructions which is later used to force him from



office. Furthermore, Gareis feels unable to halt the juggernaut of events he has now set in motion, although he soon realizes his mistake: 'Sie haben die Suppe angerührt [...] Wir müssen weiter davon essen. Stehen bleiben darf sie jetzt nicht.' (BBB, p.133) Maintaining momentum in affairs relating to the demonstration remains his policy throughout the novel. Thus, although speed and manipulating the new technologies of communication and transport in the main ensures Gareis's success, it also ultimately proves his susceptible point. Both Fallada and Tergit therefore express concern about the over-hasty actions which can be prompted by the telephone.

Fallada's depiction of Gareis differs from Tergit's presentation of Frächter in one key respect: Gareis is motivated by a genuine concern for the welfare of others rather than for his own career. He has time for every individual who visits his office, however small their concerns, and his frustration with the endless discussion about the demonstration and boycott stems from the fact that it diverts attention and energy from those cold, hungry and unemployed inhabitants who seek his assistance: 'Es gab etwas zu tun, etwas zu beschaffen. Die Stadt wollte versorgt sein. Und die saßen zusammen, dreihundert Menschen, täglich neun bis zehn Stunden in der Turnhalle und draschen leeres Stroh.' (BBB, p.368) Modernizing the town's institutions and introducing new welfare policies to benefit others are part of his record of achievement which he lists with pride when he is forced from office:

Denk an unser Altersheim mit dem großen Gutsbetrieb und der Schule zur Umstellung erwerbsloser Industriearbeiter auf die Landwirtschaft. Denk an unser Säuglingsheim. An das Kinderheim. An das Ledigenheim. An das Lehrlingsheim. Denke daran, daß es in der Stadt Altholm keine Fürsorgeerziehung mehr gibt, daß wir jetzt die Kinder behalten und Menschen aus ihnen machen. (BBB, p.388)

Through the figure of Gareis, Fallada thus demonstrates the opportunities and the beneficial repercussions which modernizing processes can generate. Moreover, Gareis upholds an optimistic belief in the educative and emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment project. He is appalled when a doctor in the children's home asserts that it is a futile expenditure of effort to care for disabled or chronically ill children, or for those whose parents were alcoholics or criminals, the kind of children, the doctor maintains, who would have been killed in Sparta. Gareis is haunted by this suggestion: 'Es fällt ihm ein, wie er monatelang nicht über die Worte hat fortkommen können: „Eigentlich alles unproduktive Arbeit, Bürgermeister.“' (BBB, p.391) Gareis rejects the fatalistic determinism and enthusiasm for eugenic policies which commanded a sizeable following within the medical establishment and in various political parties, including the SPD, during the Weimar Republic.<sup>117</sup> Aspects of this discourse, especially the Social Darwinist element, are also called into question by Keun. Gareis emphasizes the state's responsibility towards its weaker citizens, an attitude which contrasts starkly with Frächter's opportunistic individualism.

However, Gareis does share a ruthless streak with Frächter, despite his overall good intentions. Outmanoeuvred by Temborius, he decides grimly: 'jetzt gibt es keine Gnade, jetzt trete ich den Leuten vor den Bauch, wenn sie nicht tun, was ich will.' (BBB, p.236) He regularly manipulates other powerful figures in the novel through blackmail and intrigue and he skillfully employs his imposing physical stature to intimidate others at crucial junctures. For instance, he initially remains seated so as not to overwhelm newspaper proprietor Gebhardt during a meeting. However, when Gebhardt proves recalcitrant and is on the verge of

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<sup>117</sup> On the spread of eugenic ideas during the Weimar Republic, see Cornelia Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany. Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties*. Basingstoke/London, Macmillan, 1992, especially pp.133-147.



leaving, Gareis 'steht auch. Er ist ganz groß. Er ist unglaublich massiv. Er denkt nicht mehr an Schonung.' (BBB, p.262) Gareis's victims are generally the members of the bourgeoisie or other town dignitaries, although his attack on Tredup in court for sensationalized reporting utterly destroys Tredup's self-confidence and morale. Moreover, Gareis's bullying tactics and his unshakeable, even arrogant confidence in the justness of his actions makes him highly unpopular, especially within the SPD:

Du bist groß und stark, du knöpfst dir einen einzelnen vor und redest ihm ein Loch in den Bauch. Und weil der Ja zu dir sagt, denkst du, er meint wirklich Ja. Dann gehen sie von dir weg und hinter deinem Rücken schreien sie dreimal Nein, zehnmal Nein und nennen dich Mussolini. (BBB, p.389)

The reference to Mussolini pinpoints a further problematic aspect of Gareis's character, namely the cult of a strong, vital and charismatic leader figure. Although Gareis's own politics are clearly delimited from a fascist or National Socialist ideology, Fallada does imply with this largely sympathetic and positive character that the way out of the crisis of modernity is through such strong individual figures with a powerful will. No comparable suggestions can be found in *Käsebier* and the possibility of escaping the crisis through the sheer force of individual will is presented in a critical light in *Gilgi*. Moreover, this represents a key distinction between *Bauern* and *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, where Bloch unmistakably links such charismatic leader figures with the exploitation of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* by the forces of reaction and irrationalism.

Nonetheless, through the figure of Gareis, Fallada also emphasizes the need for the SPD to broaden its appeal and target its propaganda at groups outside the working-classes, so as to avoid radicalizing or alienating these groups entirely. Fallada criticizes an entrenched, dogmatic siege mentality in the SPD which drives others to more extremist positions and allows other parties and

movements to gather these dissatisfied individuals into their fold. This aspect of Gareis's behaviour does display parallels with Bloch's appeal to the Communists to develop specific strategies to deal with *Ungleichzeitigkeit* and to overcome reactionary elements, rather than applying a blanket policy for all.

Well-informed about local issues and relationships, Gareis is able to explain his opinions to the most varied individuals in terms or contexts to which they can easily relate and usually he wins them round to his point of view. In addition, he carefully remembers details about his constituents' personal lives or their interests which is flattering and disarming. Seeking contact with the farmers on an unofficial level, he walks through the villages until he espies someone with whom he is acquainted: 'Den Namen wußte er nicht, aber er erinnerte sich noch gut des Falles, durch den er den Mann kennengelernt hatte.' (BBB, p.383) Gareis greets him in dialect and enquires about the outcome of the case in which he had intervened on the farmer's behalf, and once in conversation explains Frerksen's actions during the demonstration in terms of an agricultural parallel, which the farmer in question, as well as those curious onlookers who have gathered around, can identify with. This tactic works and wins him an invitation to informal negotiations from the local community representative: 'Ich glaub keinen Augenblick, daß Sie für uns sind. Sie sind ein Schweinehund wie alle Roten. Aber Sie sind ein Schweinehund, mit dem man eine Sache bereden kann.' (BBB, p.384) In this way, Gareis is able to open a channel of communication with the farmers and to appeal to them, to recover an element of control in the conflict on behalf of the town, whereas the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* had previously been dictating the course of events. This implies that the farmers could ultimately be dissuaded from their reactionary stance, if Gareis were allowed to pursue his policies. Gareis employs a similar tactic to persuade a fractious Reimers to give up his resistance



to being transported to Stettin for release, and the prison director cannot but admire his skill: 'Wo Sie hinkommen, Herr Bürgermeister, schlichtet sich das Widerhaarige, das Unebene wird glatt.' (BBB, p.81) Gareis achieves his aim, but without alienating the opposite party thoroughly.

On the other hand, such tactics alienate other members of his own party, who evaluate all concessions to others, of whatever political persuasion, as a betrayal. Other SPD officials severely disapprove of Gareis's decision not to break up a KPD meeting and to use the police to prevent clashes with Nazis: 'Die Partei wird es dir übelnehmen, Genosse Gareis, die Mißstimmung in der Partei gegen dich wächst ständig. Das ist keine Sache, daß du die Sowjetjünger auf dem Marktplatz unter unserm Schutz Versammlung abhalten läßt.' (BBB, p.318) Gareis protests that all have the right to demonstrate, which was also his reason for allowing the farmers' demonstration to go ahead. However, other officials insist upon an exclusive focus upon the working-class and upon the Party: 'Führ einen Kurs gefälligst, den der Arbeiter versteht, nicht solche Geschichten, die nicht Fisch und Fleisch sind.' (BBB, p.336) These entrenched attitudes are presented as narrow-minded and unsuccessful within the novel, particularly via the portrait of Gareis's main rival in the SPD, *Regierungspräsident* Temborius. The narrator comments that Temborius has been raised to his current position by party nepotism, introducing him as: 'Dieser von der Gunst seiner Partei, ein wenig Verwaltungskennntnis und viel Beziehungen emporgetragene Beamte'. (BBB, p.38) Temborius has little interest in others and his prime preoccupation is to consolidate his position and curry favour with influential party figures, as indicated by his response upon hearing of the farmers' unrest: 'Und daß es gerade mein Bezirk sein muß – ! [...] Ich habe den Eindruck, daß man in Berlin sehr unzufrieden mit der hiesigen Entwicklung ist.' (BBB, p.39) His behaviour verges

on the paranoid and he ensures that Assessor Meier records details of all his meetings 'für einen Aktenvermerk, zur Sicherung'. (BBB, p.38) In addition, Temborius is constantly associated with closed, darkened rooms which reflect his blinkered, remote and secretive style of government:

Das Allerheiligste des Regierungspräsidenten Temborius ist ein langer, dunkel getäfelter Raum. Immer ist dort das Licht gedämpft. Die mit Wappenschildern und bunten Putten gezierten Scheiben schwächen den hellsten Sommertag. (BBB, p.38)

In sharp contrast, Gareis's rooms are open, light and airy and '[d]urch die großen Fenster brechen Fluten fröhlichen Lichtes'. (BBB, p.70) Assessor Meier reports that Temborius demands 'ein exzeptionell scharfes Vorgehen gegen diese Bauernlümmel' (BBB, p.75) as a response to the unrest, an aggressive tactic which only serves to escalate the entire situation. Gareis never forgets that his main aim is to improve the lot of the workers and the socially disadvantaged, but he manages to couch his message in ways which appeal to and win the trust of those outside his party. The overall sympathetic portrait of Gareis together with the clear emphasis on the success of his strategies implies that Fallada disapproved of the siege mentality displayed in entrenched positions and dogmatic politics in the Weimar Republic. Fallada presents a plea for a form of politics and propaganda which would be deliberately targeted at other social groups and which would not simply dismiss or estrange groups other than the working class. This bears some similarities to Bloch's argument that Communism must develop propaganda strategies specifically to tackle reactionary tendencies, rather than abandoning such groups to the propaganda machine of the Nazis.

Fallada's novel ends with Gareis waiting for his train to depart to Breda, where he will take up a new office. Gareis criticizes the behaviour of all those involved in the events in Altholm: 'Nichts um der Sache willen. Immer aus irgendwelchen mickrigen Interessen.' (BBB, p.427) He admits that his own



behaviour has hardly been beyond blame, but it is not clear whether he includes his bullying and blackmailing tactics here. His answer to Stein's question about whether everything will be different in Breda, delivered as the train races out of the station, provides a slim ray of optimism for the future: '*Ich hoffe stark.*' (BBB, p.427, Fallada's emphasis) Nonetheless, the suggestion that only a charismatic leader with a strong will can find the way out of the crisis of modernity puts a problematic spin on the bearer of this optimism in Fallada's novel and on his vision of a positive model of modernity. By contrast, this type of figure is associated with a ruthless opportunism that feeds into National Socialism in *Käsebier* and the belief in individual will-power is placed in a critical light at the end of *Gilgi*.

#### **8. Exemplary Objectivity? Eye-Witnesses, Photographers and Reporters<sup>118</sup>**

As noted in the discussion of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, it is not only a preoccupation with the connection between political reaction and the uneven development of modernization across class and different geographical boundaries which *Bauern* share with Bloch's text. Both writers also display a concern with the distorted presentation of events in newspapers and increasing use of imaginative or fictional articles which obscure the truth. This section will explore how Fallada fosters a critical view of supposedly objective discourses which are often used to conceal particular financial interests, subjective biases and the fictional origins of certain items.

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<sup>118</sup> Some parts of this section have already appeared in modified form in Fiona Littlejohn, '„Sachliche Berichterstattung?“ Zur Problematisierung neusachlicher Ästhetik in Hans Falladas *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*', *Hans Fallada Jahrbuch*, 3 (2000), 204-215.

### 8.1. Fabricating Objectivity

Fallada had first expressed interest in writing a novel about the use of trials to formulate public opinion as early as 1925, in his report on the Tscheka trial for *Das Tage-Buch*.<sup>119</sup> Although this article was written five years before Fallada began work on *Bauern* and cannot be taken as a statement of his intentions in that novel, it exhibits similar preoccupations to the novel and offers an interesting insight into Fallada's attitudes towards the way in which the supposedly neutral and objective official discourses of the press and the judiciary are exploited by those with distinctly partisan interests.

In 'Tscheka-Impressionen', Fallada displays a profound concern about the unreliability of the newspaper report, the photograph and the eye-witness account. As outlined in Chapter 2, all of these were advocated as models for the objective and accurate presentation of the truth in the programmatic writings about *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Fallada questions the impartiality of these forms in the year after the publication of Kisch's *Der rasende Reporter* at a time which is frequently considered to be the heyday of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Moreover, Fallada's article expresses shock and dismay that precisely those journalistic and legal institutions whose ostensible aim is to establish the truth through rational investigation have instead become instrumental in obscuring the truth: 'In diesem Prozeß kann man melancholische Betrachtungen über „die Macht der Presse“ anstellen. Ueber ihre Macht die Wahrheit zu verbergen.'<sup>120</sup> Fallada thus expresses the type of anxiety which Richard Sheppard discerns in many modernist works that certain key institutions based upon Enlightenment principles of

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<sup>119</sup> Hans Fallada, 'Tscheka-Impressionen', *Das Tage-Buch*, 6 (1925), 522-526.

<sup>120</sup> Fallada, 'Tscheka-Impressionen', p.524.



emancipation, rationality and security have taken a dialectical turn against their fundamental values and are in danger of turning into their opposites.<sup>121</sup>

He describes in detail three examples of the tools of this power, the first of which involves a misleading photograph and caption; the second, a deliberate misquotation; and the third, a highly selective report which omits a vital piece of information: 'Diese drei Beispiele zeigen die drei Wege der Macht: vollkommen Neues erfinden, Geschehenes verfälschen, Gehörtes unterdrücken. Alle drei Wege werden eifrig benutzt.'<sup>122</sup> As will be illustrated below, these three methods of securing power through invention, falsification and deliberate suppression of crucial information are also deployed by the press in *Bauern*. Crucially, Fallada stresses in 'Tscheke-Impressionen' that these abuses are of significance, because of their political impact: 'Diese wären Kleinigkeiten? Bitte schön, im Zuhörerraum des Staatsgerichtshofs haben rund hundert Personen Platz, die ausschließlich Rechtsblätter lesen [...]'<sup>123</sup> This quotation also indicates that — at this point in time at least — Fallada's political sympathies do not lie with the right-wing.

Fallada condemns the abuses of legal discourse and protocol in this article. Manipulation and mastery of legal rhetoric now take precedence over ascertaining the truth, he claims: 'Dieser Gerichtshof ist — wie jeder Gerichtshof — dazu eingesetzt, die Wahrheit zu finden. [...] Ich höre immer: Nach § . . . Wortentziehung . . . Gerichtsbeschluß . . . Protokollierung . . .'<sup>124</sup> Control of this discourse allows biased versions of events to become the authoritative version. Eye-witness accounts are perceived by Fallada to be as unreliable as the professional discourse, because the witnesses have often been pressured to

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<sup>121</sup> See Chapter 1, p.16 above.

<sup>122</sup> Fallada, 'Tscheke-Impressionen', p.525.

<sup>123</sup> Fallada, 'Tscheke-Impressionen', p.524.

<sup>124</sup> Fallada, 'Tscheke-Impressionen', p.522.

provide false testimony or confessions. Like the photograph and the newspaper report, the eye-witness account is thus presented in this article as a thoroughly unreliable means of establishing the truth about any particular incident.

Fallada concludes that the trial has ceased to be about the crimes themselves and instead the crucial issue is how political capital is being made out of the trial:

Es handelt sich ja nicht so sehr um die Straftaten der Angeklagten, [...], es handelt sich hier darum, wie diese einzelnen Taten zu einer allgemeinen Gefahr ausgerufen worden sind, wie dieser ganze Prozeß inszeniert worden ist, seine Aufbauschung, seine einseitig parteipolitische Frisierung, um den ganzen Fragenkomplex: wie ist dieser Prozeß ‚gemacht‘ worden? Und wer hat ihn gemacht?<sup>125</sup>

Fallada's interest in the trial therefore stems from the way in which it has been staged, sensationalized and exploited for political ends. Interestingly, Fallada postulates writing a novel on this topic: 'Es wäre von Interesse, einmal das Buch zu schreiben: Wie inszeniert man politische Prozesse, A. gegen rechts, B. gegen links. Es wurde ein sehr phantastisches Buch abgeben, völlig romanhaft.'<sup>126</sup> At this speculative stage, Fallada is interested not in writing about the specifics of a particular trial, but in the mechanics of political propaganda-making, much as Tergit is not concerned with the character of Käsebier himself, but rather devised him to be 'der ganz gleichgültige Aufhänger' for her satire of merchandising and marketing.<sup>127</sup> Fallada intends to thematize the manipulation of official discourses and the modern media in order to secure the acceptance of a particular version of events. Furthermore, Fallada does not envisage producing a factually accurate, objective report of a given historical event, but writing a piece of imaginative fiction.

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<sup>125</sup> Fallada, 'Tschecha-Impressionen', pp.525-526.

<sup>126</sup> Fallada, 'Tschecha-Impressionen', p.526.

<sup>127</sup> Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt. Erinnerungen*. Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein, 1983, p.78.



In 'Tscheka-Impressionen', Fallada thus displays scepticism towards the reliability and objectivity of the newspaper report, the photograph and the eye-witness account, which were held up as stylistic models in programmatic writings about *Neue Sachlichkeit*. He demonstrates a clear preoccupation with the way in which objective and official discourses which ostensibly rely on rational investigation are exploited to advance distinctly partisan interests. This can be read as a perception that key institutions of modernity are in a state of crisis.

Although there is no direct link between 'Tscheka-Impressionen' and *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*, the same concerns of the 1925 article surface four years later in Fallada's article for *Das Tage-Buch* on the clash between the *Landvolkbewegung* and Neumünster. He points out that the farmers did not appear particularly concerned by the events during the demonstration until they realized its potential propaganda value: 'Allmählich aber kam man dahinter, daß sich aus dieser Sache doch schönster Agitationsstoff herausholen lassen könne.'<sup>128</sup> Fallada is particularly critical of the way in which the press has exacerbated anxieties about the boycott and propagated the fiction that extending a fraternal hand would suffice to pacify the farmers, because this has determined the subsequent course of events: 'Auf diese Fiktion hin wurden Resolutionen gefaßt, die einzelnen bürgerlichen Parteien eiferten gegeneinander.'<sup>129</sup> This bears some similarities to Bloch's concerns about the fictional elements which dominate the political sections of the newspapers. The power of the press to influence political decision-making even when it fails to report the facts objectively thus continues to preoccupy Fallada in the context of the *Landvolkbewegung*. Further evidence of this can be found in the early manuscripts of the novel, which show that *Bauern* began

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<sup>128</sup> Hans Fallada, 'Bauern-Krieg wider Neumünster', *Das Tage-Buch*, 10 (1929), 1516-1519 (p.1518).

<sup>129</sup> Fallada, 'Bauern-Krieg', p.1518.

life as a critique of newspaper articles relating to the demonstration and the boycott, in which Fallada 'corrected' what he perceived to be false information in the articles or provided additional information regarding the machinations which led to the publication of particular articles. This took a diary form, whereby newspaper articles were pasted under a dated sheet and the author's detailed comments appeared in typescript below the article. An example of one such comment is given below:

2. Satz: Diese Meldung ist unrichtig, die Demonstration war von der Polizei gestattet worden. Es hatten Besprechungen zwischen dem Polizei-Oberinspektor Braker und dem Landwirt Schwarzloh, Neumünster stattgefunden, in denen die Einzelheiten der Demonstration festgelegt worden waren.<sup>130</sup>

The novel therefore initially constituted a supplementary commentary to provide a more balanced perspective upon what Fallada perceived to be falsifications or distortions in the reporting of the demonstration and the events surrounding it.

In my view, this remains the central preoccupation of the published novel. Rather than attempting to produce a faithful, objective account of a particular set of historical circumstances in his novel, as many critics have argued, Fallada emphasizes the problematic nature of such endeavours. The rest of this section will outline how Fallada seeks to foster a critical questioning towards claims of truth and objectivity in the readers, firstly, at a thematic level and, secondly, on a formal level.

## 8.2 Fictionalizing Reportage

As in 'Tscheka-Impressionen', Fallada focuses in *Bauern* upon the unreliability of the photograph, the eye-witness statement and the newspaper report. In the first place, the value of the photograph as an objective document is

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<sup>130</sup> Hans-Fallada-Archiv, Materialsammlung (2) zu *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*, p.2.



undermined by the subjective interests of the photographer and by the ease with which the represented scene can be staged. For example, Tredup sells his pictures of the arsonists at the Gramzow cattle auction to the highest bidder in order to ease his dire financial situation. Moreover, as described in section 4, the pictures of Reimers' arrest do not represent an event which the photographer happened upon by chance, but rather a carefully staged scene, as is evident from the instructions which Reimers gives to Henning. In this case, the photograph is employed purely as a propaganda tool, as Reimers hopes the image will spur the farmers into further action. Similarly, he writes to Henning from prison telling him to organize 'Filmapparate, Geldsammlungen' (BBB, p.82) for the demonstration. Reimers therefore cynically exploits the credibility which the photograph gains through its apparently objective medium. The readers are therefore encouraged to question the reliability of the photograph.

Secondly, Fallada highlights the unreliability of eye-witness accounts both within the context of newspaper reporting and legal proceedings. In almost every case a subjective point of view is shown to shape the creation of eye-witness accounts. Kommissar Tunk, for instance, is the focalizer for the attack on the dentist Czibulla during the demonstration, when he observes the following incident:

Da faßt der kleine Bärtige [Czibulla] Mut, er streckt die Hand aus  
und zupft von hinten einen Beamten am Rock.  
Was geschieht, ist wie das Einschlagen eines Blitzes.  
Der Beamte, ein Polizist, fährt herum, als sei ihm ein Messer durch  
den Leib gestoßen. In seiner Hand blitzt es, weiß und glänzend.  
Der Säbel fährt durch die Luft, quer in das Gesicht des Kleinen.  
(BBB, p.125)

However, in court Tunk claims that Czibulla attacked the policeman with a walking-stick or an umbrella (BBB, p.399), drawing the reader's attention to the extent to which he falsifies his testimony. Nonetheless, Tunk insists upon the

veracity of the account he gives in court of the role played by Czibulla and by other individuals, dismissing the contradictions between his own evidence and that of other witnesses, by emphasizing his long professional training in the field of observation: 'Ich bin es gewohnt, exakte Beobachtungen anzustellen. Meine Beobachtungen stimmen. [...] Laienbeobachtungen sagen gar nichts.' (BBB, p.397) The term 'Beobachtungen' connects Tunk's activity to that of the journalists, as will be demonstrated below, as does his description of his task during the demonstration as 'Spezialberichterstatter der Regierung' (BBB, p.396). Moreover, the tasks of 'berichten' and 'beobachten' were the key activities associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing during the Weimar Republic.

The lay witnesses strengthen the impression of the unreliability of the eye-witness in the novel. Although Kalübbe recognizes the arsonists at Gramzow and is in a position to identify them, he allows himself to be influenced by Stuff and to change his testimony. (BBB, pp.28-29) Moreover, Banz's testimony about the demonstration differs in various key respects from what he actually witnessed. During the demonstration, Banz spies a policeman trying to clear the streets and sees an opportunity to attack him:

Da dünkt es ihm feige, den Mann von hinten niederzuschlagen, er versetzt ihm einen kräftigen Tritt gegen das Schienbein.  
Der Polizist fährt herum, sieht ihn wild an. 'Straße frei!' blökt er.  
'Straße frei!' höhnt Banz zurück. 'Du Bluthund! Straße frei. . . '  
Und trifft ihn mit der Stockkrücke gegen die Schläfe, daß der Mann, mit hoch erhobenen Armen, sich wild um die eigene Achse dreht und dann krachend niederstürzt. (BBB, pp.123-124)

Subsequently, Banz is himself struck on the head from behind and loses consciousness. In court, however, he omits his own act of violence, describing the incident as follows:

Und plötzlich stürzt da so ein Blauer auf mich zu und schreit: 'Ihr Hunde, geht ihr auseinander!' Und ich sage ganz ruhig: 'Wir sind zwar keine Hunde, Herr Wachtmeister, aber gehorchen muß man seiner Obrigkeit. Ich gehe mir ein Glas Bier kaufen.' Und dreh



mich um und geh schon zum Krug, und bin schon auf der Treppe vom Krug, da krieg ich einen Schlag über den Schädel. (BBB, p.355)

Banz paints himself as the victim rather than the aggressor and attributes insults to the policeman, which he himself used. The narrator makes no explicit comments, but the differences are striking and the unreliability of the account is immediately apparent to the readers.

The presentation of eye-witnesses in *Bauern* displays similarities to Joseph Roth's attack on the credibility afforded to the eye-witness account in his article of 1930, 'Schluß mit der Neuen Sachlichkeit'.<sup>131</sup> Roth argues that the eye-witness account explains more about the eye-witness themselves and their subjective opinions than about the event in question. In *Erfolg*, false testimony is employed by both sides in the trial of Martin Krüger, who is, ironically, charged with perjury. Therefore, Fallada was not the only author conventionally associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* who questioned the incorruptibility and objectivity attributed to the eye-witness account in the programmatic writings of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Similarly, the impartiality and credibility of the newspaper report was also questioned by other novelists in the late Weimar Republic: not only by Tergit as described in the previous chapter, but also by Erik Reger, who analyses the insidious power of company newspapers in *Union der festen Hand*, and by Kästner's portrait of newspaper editor Münzer in *Fabian*, who invents stories about deaths resulting from political unrest in Calcutta in order to fill space in the newspaper.<sup>132</sup> Fallada thus shares a widespread doubt amongst his liberal contemporaries

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<sup>131</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Schluß mit der „Neuen Sachlichkeit“', in Joseph Roth, *Werke*, 6 vols. Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch; Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1991, III: *Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*, ed. by Klaus Westermann, pp.153-164, (pp.153-155).

<sup>132</sup> Kästner, *Fabian*, p.30.

towards the myth of neutrality and objectivity which was frequently associated with the newspaper report in the 1920s.

The claims of truth and impartiality made by the reporters in *Bauern* are shown to conceal strong subjective biases and material or financial interests. Furthermore, the reporters invent and imagine stories, publishing what is essentially fiction, which gains credibility through the medium of the newspaper. This echoes Bloch's concerns relating to the increasing number of imaginative and invented items which are ousting factual, accurate newspaper reporting in the Weimar Republic and the influence of capital upon the contents of the newspaper. Like Bloch, Fallada is preoccupied with the power such fictionalized items gain through the reflexive nature of the press.

The editor of the *Chronik*, Stuff, has shed all illusions about being impartial or even ensuring the veracity of his reports, resorting instead to the imaginative invention scorned in the programmatic writings of *Neue Sachlichkeit* or prefaces to *neusachlich* novels. Since he is only allowed to write favourable film reviews so as not to endanger the valuable advertising revenue from the cinemas, Stuff elects not to see the films themselves, but rather to draw inspiration from the publicity posters and invent the reviews. The way in which the newspaper is financed is thus explicitly connected with the increasing lack of objectivity in the newspaper, as it is by Bloch. Similarly, Stuff's imagination provides the material for the damning review of the Zirkus Monte in revenge for their refusal to advertise in the *Chronik*. Stuff even writes a report of Reimers' arrest for a Berlin newspaper based entirely on Henning's account of the incident, although he is fully aware of the fabricated nature of Henning's account, praising him for his 'Hübsche Phantasie'. (BBB, p.49) As with Kästner's character Münzer, the tasks of creative writer and journalist are inverted here, since the contents of the



newspaper result from invention and imaginative creativity rather than impartial observation and recording of reality. Nevertheless, the medium of the newspaper provides a context in which these fictions acquire the aura of factual reportage for the readers.

The power which can be exerted by a work of the imagination in a medium that ostensibly guarantees objectivity is evident from the repercussions of the reader's letter, which is supposedly sent in by the owner of a small business, but which is in fact fabricated by Tredup. In this letter, Tredup mentions the notion of the boycott, an idea which is entirely the product of his imagination as indicated by the title of the chapter: 'Die Erfindung des Boykotts.' (BBB, p.155) However, the phantom conjured up by Tredup soon becomes concrete reality and feeds back into the future course of events in the next chapter; 'Der Boykott wird Wirklichkeit.' (BBB, p.168) At the 'Landesthing', Padberg holds up the issue of the *Chronik* containing the letter, arguing that the fear of a boycott reveals the townspeople's guilty conscience and would thus constitute a suitable punishment. Fallada's reporters do not simply record honestly and objectively an already given reality, but rather employ fictional or creative writing in the guise of authentic documents in order to shape the future course of events. This undermines the ideal of the reporter in *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Significantly, given the emphasis in the reception of the novel on the authenticity of the language, it is the apparently genuine, authentic nature of the letter which makes its impact so extensive. Stuff comments on the convincing tone of the letter, praising Tredup for capturing the clumsy form of expression and lay language of an outraged small businessman: '„Das klingt echt“, stellt Stuff fest: „In der ganzen Stadt in unserer Vaterstadt. Sehr gut.“' (BBB, p.167) The authenticity of the language appears to guarantee the perspective of the lay person

— the very perspective presented as a model for *Neue Sachlichkeit* authors — but is in fact the product of professional writers. The idiom of the letter appears so authentic that it filters through into every day usage. The term 'Blutmontag' coined by Tredup in the letter gains such widespread currency that Gareis, who is aware of the term's origins, complains about its pernicious effect: 'der Blutmontag, wie ihn der abwesende Herr Pressevertreter so wirkungsvoll für die Interessen unserer Stadt getauft hat'. (BBB, p.181) Just as the antiquated quasi-biblical language of the *Bauernschaftsbewegung* turns out to be a brand new invention, so the seemingly authentic language in the letter proves to be a calculated piece of artifice, which acquires extraordinary power through the context of its publication in the press. Akin to Tergit, Fallada thus emphasizes the exploitation of a desire for the authentic in the press by the mechanism and individuals which are responsible for the erosion of authenticity in the first place.

Unlike Stuff, Tredup does still harbour aspirations to produce objective reportage and surrounds his work with claims of truth and impartiality, much like those contained in the forewords and prologues of *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels. Shookman argues that Tredup is presented by Fallada as an innocent and naive reporter 'with the best intentions' and on the basis of this assessment Shookman concludes that Fallada sought to dupe his readership and conceal the partisan nature of his novel: 'This pathetic character resembling Fallada thus literally publishes and perishes with the best intentions. By inviting readers to equate him with this guileless surrogate, Fallada artfully denies his own narrative bias.'<sup>133</sup> Aside from the fact that Fallada's identity was unknown to the majority of readers and reviewers in the Weimar Republic (of all the original reviews, only the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung* mentions the possible connection between

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<sup>133</sup> Shookman, 'Making History', p.475.



Tredup and Fallada), Tredup is not presented in the innocent light which Shookman suggests. Instead, this character is shown to practise a high level of self-deception in his aims of producing *sachlich* articles. Moreover, Tredup displays the failings of the press noted by Fallada in 'Tscheka-Impressionen': he invents completely new events, he falsifies what has happened and omits key pieces of information which would provide a fuller or more balanced picture of events.

Having taken over as editor of the *Chronik* from Stuff, Tredup resolves to write fair and impartial articles, but quickly demonstrates a tendency to sensationalize and dramatize his work. He tells his wife Elise with pride of how he has made his report about the clash between the Nazis and the Communists in Altholm '[g]anz dramatisch'. (BBB, p.325) Yet when embarrassed by Stein's accusations of sensationalism and the distorted presentation of events, Tredup insists upon the objectivity of his report: 'Ich habe ganz sachlich berichtet.' (BBB, p.335) A similar pattern emerges during Tredup's coverage of the trial. Beforehand, Tredup once more resolves to restrict himself to the camera-like recording and registration of the events in the courtroom: 'Das soll ein guter Bericht werden, ich werde wirklich schreiben, was im Saal passiert.' (BBB, p.325) However, his sense for what will make the paper sell overrides his ambitions for professional objectivity:

Das ist doch was, da wird sich Bürgermeister Gareis freuen, wenn er das liest. Allerdings, eigentlich sind diese Angeklagten alle ganz nette Kerle, vor allem Henning ist wirklich nett, aber kann man sich so etwas entgehen lassen? Das grade lesen die Leute gern. (BBB, p.328)

The same motive of selling papers lies behind the layout of Tredup's report on Gareis' refusal to testify, when Tredup again insists upon the accuracy and impartiality of his report, although the paper's business manager, Wenk, believes it to be sensationalized: 'Es ist doch so, wie ich schreibe.' (BBB, p.341) In court the

next day, Gareis complains specifically about the lack of objective reportage in the article: 'Ich erhebe Protest gegen eine derart unwahrhafte, unsachliche Art der Berichterstattung.' (BBB, p.347) The frequent repetition of the adjectives 'sachlich/unsachlich' in relation to Tredup's reporting suggests that Fallada was deliberately referring to the programmatic writings of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Overall, the presentation of the reporter, photographer and eye-witness in *Bauern* heightens the readers' awareness of the problematic nature of claims to be objective or 'sachlich'. The models advocated for *Neue Sachlichkeit* authors are deliberately manipulated in the novel in order to conceal fictionalization, financial interests or particular biases. This critical presentation at the thematic level of the novel is reinforced by various formal techniques which undercut the narrator's ostentatious gestures towards objectivity.

### 8.3 Reportage, Distortion or Fiction?

Fallada's preface to the novel deliberately plays with the notion of fictionality and objectivity, setting up a tension between these ideas which persists throughout the novel. Although the author acknowledges that *Bauern* is based upon actual events, he insists that the novel is 'ein Roman, also ein Werk der Phantasie'. (BBB, p.5) By accentuating imagination and invention, Fallada inverts the claims to reportage, faithful observation and veracity together with the prioritization of the 'Bericht' over the 'Roman' in the prefaces to some *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels, such as Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* or Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, Fallada consciously distances himself from claims to historical exactitude, asserting instead his lack of interest in photographic documentary-style recording of events: 'Die Gestalten

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<sup>134</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 2, pp.50-52.



des Romans sind keine Fotografien, sie sind Versuche, Menschengesichter unter Verzicht auf billige Ähnlichkeit sichtbar zu machen.' (BBB, p.5) This emphasizes that the novel is not intended to be a *Schlüsselroman*, in the way that it has often been read. Fallada claims that the details of the historical events have been 'willkürlich verändert' (BBB, p.5) to fit the demands of the fictional plot. He asserts that the old materials he has employed have been assembled into a new structure of his own design: 'Wie man aus den Steinen eines abgebrochenen Hauses ein neues bauen kann, das dem alten in nichts gleicht, außer dem Material, so ist beim Bau dieses Werkes verfahren.' (BBB, p.5) Nonetheless, Fallada insists that he is still aiming for 'höchste Naturtreue' (BBB, p.5) through the use of fiction, a position which is reminiscent of some of the critiques of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Fallada's preface thus inverts and plays with the preference for observing and reporting over inventing and creating in prefaces to some *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels.

The architectural metaphor which Fallada uses to describe his technique in the preface recalls Alfred Döblin's understanding of writing as construction, particularly as articulated in 'Der Bau des epischen Werks', a lecture delivered at Berlin University in 1928 while Döblin was working on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.<sup>135</sup> Döblin argues that the readers should not be presented with a single interpretation of events imposed by the author, but with a plurality of perspectives which demands constant reflection, comparison and re-evaluation on the reader's part. To this end, he advocates the elimination of a dominant and overly intrusive narrator whose opinion and assessment of events is accepted by the readers. In *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Döblin uses a montage technique, taking

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<sup>135</sup> Alfred Döblin, 'Der Bau des epischen Werks', in Alfred Döblin, *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur*, ed. by Erich Kleinschmidt, Olten/Freiburg im Breisgau, Walter, 1989, pp.215-245.

materials and documents actually to be found in use in contemporary Berlin, such as lists of tram-routes, train timetables, regulations for prison life and for public transport, and advertising slogans, which he built into a new edifice.<sup>136</sup> As each new element is introduced into the montage, it provides a new perspective on the others. The process of reading thereby becomes dynamic and the shifting perspective precludes the imposition of a fixed interpretation upon the text. Moreover, these montage elements relativize the comments and authority of Döblin's narrator, who continues to make value judgements, particularly about Biberkopf's actions.

As noted above, *Bauern* started out as a commentary upon articles which were literally pasted into a kind of journal or dated record of events. (Döblin too pasted fragments of documents into his manuscript, a technique also used in montage in the visual arts.) Some of these, including articles which Fallada had written himself in his role as reporter for the *General-Anzeiger* in Altholm, are taken over practically verbatim into the published version of the novel. However, Fallada also includes items written by others, which differentiates his technique from Tergit's extensive use of her own feuilletons in *Käsebier*.

The use of contemporary documents and newspaper articles in *Bauern* has often been interpreted in the secondary literature as evidence that the novel constitutes an authentic, objective report. Caspar claims that Fallada employs such items in order to support the authenticity of his report and to document the course of historical events in the novel 'mit minutiöser Genauigkeit'.<sup>137</sup> Contradicting this interpretation, Gerhard Schmidt-Henkel highlights the modernist dimension of this narrative technique and makes the vital connection

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<sup>136</sup> The use of these items in contemporary Berlin is documented in Werner Stauffacher, 'Anmerkungen', in Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz. Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf*, ed. by Werner Stauffacher. Zurich, Walter, 1996, pp.481-554.

<sup>137</sup> Caspar, *Fallada-Studien*, p.40.



between Fallada and Döblin, and even Dos Passos: 'Wichtiger aber ist, daß Fallada mit seiner szenischen Montagetechnik in den Stiefeln von John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, und Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, steht.'<sup>138</sup> This suggestion, which Schmidt-Henkel unfortunately does not develop within the context of that article, appears to me to represent the most plausible analysis of the use of such documents.

Moreover, it appears that Fallada was attempting to develop a technique in *Bauern* that would avoid presenting the readers with a round and ready interpretation of events and would therefore elicit a more active response from the readers: 'Nach meinen ungeliebten Erstlingen, die gar zu persönlich waren, sollte der Autor disemal im Buch ganz fehlen. Mit keinem Wort sollte er andeuten, was er selbst über das Erzählte dachte, das war Sache des Lesers.'<sup>139</sup> As with the contemporary documents, this quotation has often been used to support the perception of the novel as an objective, unbiased document. For instance, Kurt Eissfeldt claims that it is impossible for the readers to question the covert extradiegetic narrator's reliability or authority:

Dadurch, daß ein persönlicher Erzähler fehlt, wird dem Leser des Romans die Möglichkeit verwehrt, an der Glaubwürdigkeit des Erzählers zu zweifeln. Der Autor bleibt durch die Illusion von Wirklichkeitsnähe unangreifbar.<sup>140</sup>

Shookman notes that the objectivity of the narrator is particularly insidious, because it presents what Shookman views as Fallada's highly biased account as a neutral, honest report. In my view, however, the credibility of the narrator is not as unassailable as such critics suggest. The narrator does make some rather

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<sup>138</sup> Schmidt-Henkel, 'Hans Falladas Roman *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*', p.55.

<sup>139</sup> It must be noted that this quotation appears in a semi-fictional autobiography by Fallada, in which the narrator admits to fictionalizing and changing certain events, as the subtitle indicates. Hans Fallada, *Heute bei uns zu Haus. Ein anderes Buch. Erfahrenes und Erfundenes*. Stuttgart/Berlin, Rowohlt, 1943, p.30.

<sup>140</sup> Eissfeldt, *Fatalismus*, pp.95-96. See also Pfanner, 'Die „Provinzliteratur“', p.243.

ostentatious gestures towards objectivity, seeming at times to be observing events as they unfold and discovering information simultaneously with the readers. However, this impression of objectivity is undercut by subjective evaluations from the narrator and evidence of prior knowledge of events.

In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary first of all to outline the aspects of the narration which are often cited as contributing to the impression of objectivity and impartiality. In many cases, the narrator often restricts his activity to setting the scene and the focalization remains external: 'Es ist abends gegen elf. Stuff ist eben aus dem Kino gekommen und hat sich im „Tucher“ zu Wenk an den Tisch gesetzt.' (BBB, p.25) After this short introduction, the rest of this particular scene is made up of dialogue, apart from brief observations about Stuff drinking ('Pause. Stuff trinkt ausgiebig' (BBB, p.26)) and Stuff's departure from the table which closes the scene: 'Und Stuff geht schwerfällig dem Kalübbe nach'. (BBB, p.27) Alfred Gessler compares these short narratorial interpolations into lengthy extracts of dialogue to stage directions, and they could also be extracts from a film script.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, the narrative often possesses the kind of dynamism which can be conveyed by film, together with a powerful sense of the visual. This is so pervasive that Schmidt-Henkel comments: 'Erschiene der Roman heute, würde man ihm sowieso attestieren oder gar vorwerfen, er sei mit dem Seitenblick auf eine Verfilmung konzipiert worden.'<sup>142</sup> The opening lines of the novel provide a flavour of the filmic qualities of the novel:

Ein junger Mann stürmt den Burstah entlang. Während des Laufens schießt er wütende, schiefe Blicke nach den Schaufenstern der Läden, die in dieser Hauptstraße von Altholm dicht an dicht liegen.

Der junge Mann, um die 25, verheiratet und nicht häßlich, trägt einen alten schwarzen Rockpaletot, blandgescheuert, einen

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<sup>141</sup> Alfred Gessler, *Hans Fallada. Schriftsteller der Gegenwart*. Berlin, Volk und Wissen, 1976, p.36.

<sup>142</sup> Schmidt-Henkel, 'Hans Falladas Roman *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben*', p.47.



breitkrempigen schwarzen Filz und schwarz umränderte Brille.  
(BBB, p.7)

The young man's rapid movement provides the narrative with momentum and, when he reaches the last house in the street, the narrator follows him inside. The narrator concentrates mostly upon external appearances, gestures or facial expressions of his characters, although there is a subjective evaluation in the comment that the young man, who turns out to be Tredup, is 'nicht häßlich'. For the most part though, this externalization creates the impression of the narrator as a camera-like observer, who merely records what appears before him.

This impression is reinforced by the extensive use of dialogue, which constitutes almost two-thirds of the novel, according to Eissfeldt.<sup>143</sup> The large amount of dialogue generates the impression that the events and characters are being presented objectively without the intervention of a narrator and it also creates a sense of immediacy for the readers — precisely those qualities which were prized in the programmatic writings on *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Moreover, this effect is heightened in Fallada's novel as the narrator often pretends to have no prior knowledge of the characters and the readers discover the identity of characters or information about the characters' past through the dialogue rather than through narratorial statements. For instance, Kalübbe and Thiel are designated as 'der Alte' or 'der Junge' until they address each other in conversation as 'Herr Kalübbe' and 'Thiel'. (BBB, pp.15-16) Such information is employed by the narrator after it has occurred in the course of conversation, implying that the narrator is discovering information simultaneously with the readers. This means of identifying characters provides the readers with a sense of

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<sup>143</sup> Eissfeld, *Fatalismus*, p.96.

immediacy and suspense, undoubtedly creating the gripping quality which readers such as Kurt Tucholsky so admired in Fallada's text.<sup>144</sup>

Nonetheless, these devices which suggest an entirely objective, impartial narrator are undercut by other elements. Not every figure is introduced in the same way as Kalübbe and Thiel. Temborius's housekeeper is introduced by name directly by the narrator and information about her past history is provided:

Wirtschafterin Klara Gehl ist in Stolpe eine bekannte und angesehene Persönlichkeit. Jedermann weiß, daß sie einmal ein ganz einfaches Küchenmädchen war. Tüchtigkeit und Klugheit im Umgang mit Menschen haben sie emporgeführt, so daß sie jetzt den großen Haushalt des Junggesellen Temborius leitet. (BBB, p.51)

Other figures who are directly introduced by the narrator include Perduzke, Banz, Graf Bandekow, Manzow and Herr Gebhardt, to name but a few. Moreover, the narrator does not refrain from making value judgements, for instance, describing Temborius as '[d]ieser von der Gunst seiner Partei, ein wenig Verwaltungskennntnis und viel Beziehungen emporgetragene Beamte'. (BBB, p.38) Moreover, as shown at various points in the preceding section, direct narratorial comments occur frequently. Such direct subjective evaluations illustrate that the narrator is neither as impartial nor as unassailable as some commentators have suggested.

Furthermore, the focalized is not always presented from without, through dialogue and descriptions of gestures and outward appearances which the readers must interpret. Instead, the readers gain access to the inner thought processes of the characters through the narrator, who has a privileged insight into their motives and actions, as during Tredup's first meeting with Gareis: 'Plötzlich hat Tredup das Gefühl, daß er diesem Mann alles sagen kann, daß er für alles Verständnis hat. Ein Gefühl wie Rührung, eine heiße begeisterte Bewunderung

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<sup>144</sup> Wrobel, 'Bauern', pp.497-498.



wallt in ihm auf.' (BBB, p.35) In other cases, it is not clear whether value judgements are made by the narrator or the character, as in the following example where Gareis is trying to come to a difficult decision:

Er hat nie bedingungslos [*sic*] an den Satz geglaubt, daß der Zweck die Mittel heiligt, heute meint er beinahe, daß er nie richtig ist. Gleichgültig, er kann nicht mehr umlernen. Was schlimmer ist: er will es nicht mehr. Er geht zum Telefon und greift nach dem Hörer. (BBB, p.84)

The phrases 'gleichgültig' and 'was schlimmer ist', which place value judgements on the actions of Gareis, could be interpreted as free indirect speech, but they could also be ascribed to the narrator, an ambiguity which elicits a questioning attitude towards the narrator in the readers.

In addition, although the dialogue provides a sense of immediacy and objectivity, this is clearly an illusion, as some degree of narratorial control and judgement is involved in selecting the sections of conversation. Furthermore, the dialogue does not necessarily serve to reinforce the credibility of the information imparted to the readers and, in many cases, the reader's attention is forcibly drawn to the unreliability of information provided by what is, in effect, a set of intradiegetic narrators whose statements must be constantly balanced against each other and against the readers' previous knowledge of these internal narrators. This process was described in relation to the eye-witness testimony above. At this level, the readers are already sensitized to the unreliability of supposedly authoritative sources and seemingly credible narrators.

In conclusion, the extradiegetic narrator is not as impartial or objective as often asserted in the secondary literature on *Bauern*. Instead, the narrator occupies a position which oscillates between seeking to create the impression of objectivity and of observing events in tandem with the readers, but also makes subjective value judgements and has an extensive knowledge of the characters' internal

thought processes, feelings and past histories. In conjunction with the thematization of the problematic aspects of objective reportage, this oscillating standpoint fosters a critical and sceptical attitude in the readers.

## 9. Conclusion

Although *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* has often been evaluated as an objective, accurate picture of a particular set of historical events, a particular perspective on modernity clearly emerges from Fallada's novel. The rural setting of *Bauern* produces a rather different portrait of modernity from that in Tergit's novel with its focus on Berlin. In *Käsebier*, the repercussions of advanced rationalization and technological modernity impact upon the working conditions and daily lives of all the characters: to borrow Bloch's terminology, they all exist in the same 'now'. Even those who would rather avoid these developments, such as Lambeck and Miermann, cannot escape the influence of the relentless pace at the cutting edge of modernity on the conditions in which they produce their writing. In Fallada's novel, these modernizing processes have only begun to affect the lives of farmers, such as Banz, while the white-collar worker characters are caught between the incipient moves towards economic rationalization and the continued existence of older social relations. Rationalization is thus not all-pervasive as it is shown to be in *Käsebier* and *Gilgi*. The clash of these older ways of life and ideas with more advanced aspects of modernity is shown by Fallada to produce anxieties which are being skilfully exploited by radical right-wing groupings, but ignored by other political parties. The political radicalization of the farmers and the white-collar workers is not presented as the inevitable outcome of the uneven development of modernization in provincial areas, but as the result of a



standardized politics which fails to take such disjunctions into account and abandons these groups to the forces of reaction.

In this respect, Fallada expresses a sense that key institutions of modernity such as the law and the press are failing. Instead of guaranteeing an impartial investigation of the truth and furthering the use of critical reason, they are producing the very opposite effect. Yet by fostering the use of critical reason amongst readers of his novel, Fallada demonstrates a continued faith in the ideals of the Enlightenment, which need to be wrested back onto their rightful course. This adherence to the educative and emancipatory principles of the Enlightenment is mirrored in the novel itself, where Gareis attempts to overcome the forces of irrationalism and reaction through carefully targeted rational explanations.

Nonetheless, Gareis is also strong-willed, charismatic and sometimes ruthless, and the use of such a figure to imply a way out of the critical situation modernity has reached can be seen as a point of overlap with the approach of National Socialism. Akin to *Käsebier*, Fallada's novel received favourable reviews in publications associated with the National Socialists and other radical right-wing groups upon its original publication, a fact which has often been used to condemn Fallada by critics in more recent years. However, on the whole, the novel is highly critical of various ideas and policies associated with radical right-wing groups, including the National Socialists. Rather than supporting the 'Volksgemeinschaftslüge', Fallada exposes this notion as a construct, fabricated for propaganda purposes and supported by threats of ostracization and violence to property and people. Moreover, the largely positive portrait of an SPD mayor who is horrified by Social Darwinist eugenic policies and who displays a powerful sense of responsibility towards the disadvantaged in society provides a strong

indication of Fallada's political sympathies. In addition, the overall thrust of the novel in promoting a questioning attitude amongst readers towards the media forms a stark contrast to the Nazi propaganda machine.

Fallada's effort to foster critical reason in his readers, alongside his presentation of the possibilities of rational explanation from a gifted educator such as Gareis to counter the forces of reaction and irrationalism, indicates a continued attachment to the ideals of the Enlightenment. For Fallada, these ideals need to be brought back on course and invested with a greater degree of compassion and concern for others, instead of being advanced 'aus irgendwelchen mickrigen Interessen'. (BBB, p.427) Keun is also preoccupied by the predominance of egoistic individualism in modern society, but her analysis develops a more sophisticated critique of the project of modernity and the ideals of the Enlightenment themselves than that offered by Fallada.



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# CHAPTER FIVE

## ***Mannequins and Masquerades:***

***Modernity and the Body in Irmgard  
Keun's Gilgi - eine von uns***

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## 1. Introduction

Human bodies in a multitude of shapes and forms feature prominently in Irmgard Keun's first novel, *Gilgi — eine von uns*, published in 1931.<sup>1</sup> Keun repeatedly draws attention to physical characteristics, displaying an array of bodies from Gilgi's own lean, lithe physique to her adoptive mother's abundant corpulence; from the unhealthy, yellowing crowd of bodies in the labour exchange to the soigné elegance of Gilgi's wealthy birth mother; or from the scabby mouths of Hans and Hertha's children to the beautiful mannequin images in the glossy magazines *Uhu* and *Elegante Welt*. Moreover, the protagonist displays an almost obsessive interest in the external appearance of others and her own slender, well-toned body is transformed during the course of the novel.

Keun's preoccupation with bodies may appear to signal a concern with superficial or private matters and the novel has been criticized for displaying a small-scale, individual focus.<sup>2</sup> It follows the fortunes of Gilgi Kron, a female office worker in Cologne, whose ambitious plans for professional advancement are disrupted by the discovery that she is adopted, and by an intense love affair. Gilgi lacks the broad sweep of *Käsebier* and *Bauern* and, unlike these two novels, focuses closely upon the internal conflict of the main protagonist rather than upon the public arena. Viewed from this perspective, Keun's novel at first sight might well seem to disregard political and social perspectives in favour of subjective, individual interests. However, as Cornelia Osborne has argued, the Weimar era constitutes 'a time when the body had become highly political', as issues such as reproduction and fertility came to be perceived as legitimate

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<sup>1</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Gilgi — eine von uns*. Hildesheim, Claassen, 1993. Abbreviated in references as G.

<sup>2</sup> Christa Jordan, *Zwischen Zerstreuung und Berausung. Die Angestellten in der Erzählprosa am Ende der Weimarer Republik*. Frankfurt am Main and others, Lang, 1988, p.61.



spheres for public debate and state intervention.<sup>3</sup> Usborne connects this development to displaced anxieties about the repercussions of rapid modernization which were projected onto the screen of the human body. As a result of fears elicited by modernity, discourse about the body shifted during the Weimar years from the private to the public sphere. This chapter will argue that Keun's emphasis upon human bodies in her first novel taps into the new political import of the body and goes right to the heart of preoccupations with modernity in the Weimar Republic.

Nevertheless, the main focus of my discussion will not be upon the matters of reproduction and sexuality identified by Usborne, since much critical attention has already been devoted to Keun's presentation of the body within the framework of controversial debates in Weimar about the *Neue Frau*, female sexuality, motherhood and abortion.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I contend that such analyses tend to underestimate the significance of other facets of the body in *Gilgi* for assessing Keun's attitude towards a perceived crisis of modernity. My main aim is to illustrate that Keun draws upon images of, and discourses surrounding, the body which circulated widely within the Weimar Germany. I argue that Keun employs such images to provide a critique of certain prevalent but one-sided responses towards modernity, just as Tergit and Fallada also call into question polarized, rigid, or dogmatic reactions to a sense of crisis. A comparison with Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* will be used to highlight Keun's rejection

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<sup>3</sup> Cornelia Usborne, *The Politics of the Body in the Weimar Republic. Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties*. Basingstoke/London, Macmillan, 1992, p.xi.

<sup>4</sup> Katharina von Ankum, 'Motherhood and the "New Woman": Vicki Baum's *stud. chem. Helene Willfüer* and Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi - eine von uns*', *Women in German Yearbook*, 11 (1995), 171-188; Barbara Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters and Modernity: Irmgard Keun's *Gilgi, eine von uns*', *German Quarterly*, 68 (1985), 271-286; Ursula Krechel, 'Die Zerstörung der kalten Ordnung: Auch ein Versuch über das Vergessen weiblicher Kulturleistungen', *Literaturmagazin*, 10 (1979), 103-128; Elke Matijevich, *The 'Zeitroman' of the Late Weimar Republic*. New York & others, Lang, 1995.

of rigid boundaries, closure and the dominance of rationalized culture in the Weimar Republic. A further important aim of this chapter will be to demonstrate that contrasting perceptions of the body even structure the narrative and stylistic features of the novel. In common with the other two selected texts, *Gilgi* problematizes key aspects of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, in this case through the presentation of the body and related discourses in the novel. Nonetheless, this critique has largely been obscured in the reception of the novel. Akin to *Käsebier* and *Bauern*, Keun's first novel has frequently been labelled as a typical example of *Neue Sachlichkeit* or interpreted in ways which are structured by the debates about this movement, as will be outlined in the next section.

## 2. 'Eine von uns' or 'Keine von uns'? The Reception of *Gilgi*.

Although Keun's novel is not based upon a recognizable set of historical events or particular well-known individuals which gave rise to the *Schlüsselroman* label for *Käsebier* and *Bauern*, the novel is set within the immediate past in the first few months of 1931 and in identifiable streets and buildings in the city of Cologne. Moreover, it deals with aspects of a female white-collar worker's everyday experiences in the workplace and during unemployment. Hence, questions about how Keun had tied together fact and fiction, the question of the realistic nature of the novel have been as central to debates about *Gilgi* as they have to those about *Bauern* and *Käsebier*.

For the most part, the Weimar reception of *Gilgi* which is still available praises the aspects of the novel which can be designated as 'sachlich', but is critical of other elements that undo the initial impression of sober objectivity. The Weimar reviews thus demonstrate the extent to which *Neue Sachlichkeit* still

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Brentano, 'Keine von uns. Ein Wort an die Leser des „Vorwärts“', *Linkskurve*, 4 (October 1932), 27-28.



functioned as a yardstick by which new novels were measured. Max Herrmann-Neisse praises Keun's style as 'konkret' and he is enthusiastic about the sense of immediacy and vitality he experiences when reading *Gilgi*. Like *Käsebier* and *Bauern*, *Gilgi* is applauded for capturing a slice of life as it really is: 'Hier ist saftig und leibhaftig eine kleine Welt wirklich da, hier erlebt man das ganze Drum und Dran der Existenz so einer Büroangestellten.'<sup>6</sup> Neisse approves of the overall sober, pragmatic attitude and the rejection of emotional hand-wringing: 'die immer wieder betonte Fairness, die Ablehnung jeglicher „Beleidigungstragödie“ und Schuldkonstruktion'.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, he considers the ending to be 'ein bisschen zufällig und krass', lacking a clear resolution.<sup>8</sup> Kadidja Wedekind also applauds the treatment of a contemporary theme and the documentary value of the novel. *Gilgi* is '[e]in Buch, das interessieren muß, weil es ein Zeitdokument ist: ein Dokument jener sachlich verstörten, kärglich bizarren Zeit, in der man lebt'.<sup>9</sup> Although he considers Keun to be young and inexperienced, Fallada applauds the novel: 'dieses ganz ungekonnte Buch ist ein herrlich tapferes, junges, gläubiges, ehrliches, anständiges Buch.'<sup>10</sup> Another reviewer criticizes Keun for presenting a random section of *Gilgi*'s life rather than providing a structured story working up to a definite ending, which he attributes to Keun's youth and lack of experience: 'ein typisches Erstlingsbuch'.<sup>11</sup> Lack of experience and youth are also the causes of a sudden lapse into sentimentality and 'eine fatale Diktion' in Tucholsky's view: 'Nein, so spricht man eben nicht'.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of *Bauern*, Tucholsky values the

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<sup>6</sup> Max Herrmann-Neisse, 'Zwei Romane: Das Mädchen von heute', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 1 November 1931, supplement 5.

<sup>7</sup> Herrmann-Neisse, 'Zwei Romane'.

<sup>8</sup> Herrmann-Neisse, 'Zwei Romane'.

<sup>9</sup> Kadidja Wedekind, 'Gilgi, eine von uns', *Der Querschnitt*, 12 (1932), 74.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Fallada, 'Fünf Frauen schreiben', typewritten manuscript in Hans-Fallada-Archiv, Bücherbesprechung, 87, four pages (p.2).

<sup>11</sup> O.A. Palitzsch, 'Irmgard Keun: „Gilgi, eine von uns“' [no publication details].

<sup>12</sup> Peter Panter [i.e. Kurt Tucholsky], 'Auf dem Nachttisch', in Kurt Tucholsky, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Mary Gerold-Tucholsky and Fritz J. Raddatz, 10 vols.

realistic, authentic and well-observed dialogue and episodes in the first half of the novel: 'Sehr gute Beobachtungen von der Straße'.<sup>13</sup> Any deviation from this realistic language is seen as a failing. Kadidja Wedekind too complains about the extravagant use of punctuation and language in the second half of the novel, which again is ascribed to Keun's youth: 'aber vielleicht sind es nur die Zeichen eines sehr jungen Temperaments, das im übrigen dem Buch zum Vorteil gereicht.'<sup>14</sup> Keun is praised insofar as her novel adheres to some of the principles of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. I argue that the shift in language in the novel is part of Keun's problematization of the kind of language and body type associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

By contrast, Brentano argues that Keun has omitted too many of the unpleasant aspects of life to make her novel realistic. Recalling criticisms of *Bauern*, he emphasizes the novel's role in reinforcing the false consciousness and illusions of the white-collar workers. He claims that *Gilgi* has been filmed by Ufa and serialized in *Vorwärts* because the attempts of the ruling class to airbrush out contemporary misery: 'Denn diese Gruppe hat ein elementares Interesse daran, eine elende Lüge der Wahrheit des Elends vorzuziehen'.<sup>15</sup> Keun's novel satisfies the longing amongst many white-collar workers to be successful, independent and confident, in Brentano's view. Whilst Brentano insists that *Gilgi* is 'keine von uns', an article in *Der Weg der Frau*, a publication of the *Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* organization, refers to the protagonist as 'eine vom „Vorwärts“'.<sup>16</sup> It is not only the failure to accurately record reality in the novel which irritates this writer, but

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Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1975, X: 1932, pp.24-29, (p.29).

<sup>13</sup> Panter, 'Auf dem Nachttisch', p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Wedekind, 'Gilgi'.

<sup>15</sup> Brentano, 'Keine von uns', p.28.

<sup>16</sup> [no author], 'Gilgi — eine vom „Vorwärts“', *Der Weg der Frau*, (1933), no. 1. Reprinted in *Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Kunstamt Kreuzberg, Berlin, and the Institut für Theaterwissenschaft der Universität Köln. Berlin/Hamburg, Elefanten Press, 1977, p.484.



the decision of the editors of the SPD *Vorwärts* to lend credibility to the fabrication through serializing the novel. *Der Weg der Frau* reports the complaints made by women white-collar workers to *Vorwärts* that Gilgi was not representative of them, because she lacked solidarity with others and was egotistical: 'die Gilgis der Wirklichkeit haben sich gewehrt'.<sup>17</sup> The magazine decides to set real-life stories against the fictional character to provide a more accurate picture of the situation of female white-collar workers: 'Wie die weiblichen Angestellten wirklich leben — mit dieser Schilderung beginnen wir den neuen Jahrgang unseres Blattes'.<sup>18</sup> As far as can be established from the limited number of reviews still available, the question of the accuracy with which Keun's text depicts the reality of the situation at this stage of the Weimar Republic shifts across the political spectrum. This echoes the reception of Fallada's novel rather than the mixed political response to *Käsebier*. Yet unlike either of the other selected texts, the question of Keun's politics only really surfaces in the Communist publications: otherwise Keun's political opinion is not mentioned, which can probably be attributed to the fact that Keun does not focus upon the public arena in the same way as Tergit and Fallada do.

Within the post-1945 secondary literature no consensus emerges on the connections between *Gilgi* and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which can partly be ascribed to the terminological confusion surrounding this concept that was outlined in Chapter 2. With the notable exception of Doris Rosenstein, those critics who relate *Gilgi* to *Neue Sachlichkeit* tend to operate with implied assumptions and fail to specify how they are using the label, probably because this does not constitute the main focus of their analyses. Often no attempt is made to distinguish between *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary tendency and as a widespread mentality of

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<sup>17</sup> 'Gilgi', *Der Weg der Frau*.

<sup>18</sup> 'Gilgi', *Der Weg der Frau*.

pragmatism which was affirmative of rationalization and technological modernity. There is agreement that the protagonist somehow embodies *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a mentality, but views diverge on whether Keun embraces or questions this mentality and on whether this makes *Gilgi* an archetypal novel of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary tendency.

Christa Jordan argues that despite some peripheral critical comments on the cult of cars, youth and the radio, Keun simply affirms *Gilgi*'s identification with a prevailing attitude of *Sachlichkeit* and the false consciousness of white-collar workers: 'Eine andere als die gesellschaftliche Rationalität, eine andere als die neusachliche Sachlichkeit, ein andere als der amerikanische Rationalismus scheinen im Horizont des Romans nicht auf.'<sup>19</sup> Jordan reaches this conclusion by comparing *Gilgi* unfavourably with the theories of Kracauer and Benjamin, whereas Livia Z. Wittmann asserts that Keun offers a critical evaluation of the ideology of white-collar workers which places the novel on a par with Kracauer's works.<sup>20</sup> These two critics are clearly working with different definitions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in literature, since in Jordan's eyes, the confirmation of the status quo she discerns in *Gilgi* constitutes a quintessential feature of *Neue Sachlichkeit* writings, whilst Wittmann contends that the novel's critical tone is characteristic of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature. J.M. Ritchie also places *Gilgi* squarely within the category of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, operating with a view of this term which endorses Tucholsky's assessment that 'the "New Objectivity" can mean a hard exterior with a soft centre, a street-wise sarcasm and smart wit which can collapse into

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<sup>19</sup> Jordan, *Zerstreuung*, p.75.

<sup>20</sup> Livia Z. Wittmann, 'Der Stein des Anstoßes. Zu einem Problemkomplex in berühmten und gerühmten Romanen der Neuen Sachlichkeit', *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik*, 14 (1982), 56-78. See especially p.57, pp.60-61 and p.77. Kosta also argues that Keun criticizes the 'repressive pragmatism of New Objectivity'. Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters', p.280.



sickening sentimentality'.<sup>21</sup> Elke Matijevich considers *Gilgi* as somewhat naive in its optimism and a characteristic product of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, both in terms of style and content.<sup>22</sup> Ursula Krechel, on the other hand, distinguishes between *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a typical mentality in the Weimar Republic and as a stylistic tendency, maintaining that whilst Keun's characters subscribe to 'dem Lebensgefühl der jungen Generation von 1930, der Neuen Sachlichkeit', the novels themselves are too rich, exciting and witty to be placed in this category in literary terms.<sup>23</sup>

The most rigorous consideration of how *Gilgi* relates to *Neue Sachlichkeit* is offered by Rosenstein, who adumbrates the parameters of the concept, distinguishing between the use of the term to denote a literary or artistic tendency and to denote a positive, affirmative attitude towards rationalization or modernity. Rosenstein claims that Keun creates a protagonist who personifies *Neue Sachlichkeit* as mentality, only to pursue 'eine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit dem sachlich-nüchternen Lebenskonzept'.<sup>24</sup> According to Rosenstein, Keun is critical of the mediated mass culture of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and exposes the false consciousness of white-collar workers, thereby subverting *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a mentality. Considering the relationship of *Gilgi* to *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary movement, Rosenstein argues that Keun combines some stylistic elements and subject matter of *Neue Sachlichkeit* with motifs from trivial literature and realism. A

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<sup>21</sup> J.M. Ritchie, 'Irmgard Keun's Weimar Girls', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 60 (1989-90), 1991, 63-79 (p.66). This imagery also recalls Benjamin's criticisms of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in 'Linke Melancholie'.

<sup>22</sup> Matijevich, *Zeitroman*, p.91.

<sup>23</sup> Krechel, 'Zerstörung', p.113.

<sup>24</sup> Doris Rosenstein, '„Mit der Wirklichkeit auf du und du?“ Zu Irmgard Keuns Romanen „Gilgi, eine von uns“ und „Das kunstseidene Mädchen“', in *Neue Sachlichkeit im Roman. Neue Interpretationen zum Roman der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Sabina Becker and Christoph Weiß. Stuttgart/Weimar, Metzler, 1995, pp.273-290 (p.279). This article furthers the arguments of Rosenstein's 1991 monograph: Doris Rosenstein, *Irmgard Keun. Das Erzählwerk der dreißiger Jahre*. Frankfurt and others, Lang, 1991.

distinctive feature of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Rosenstein contends, is the treatment in the novel of concrete political, social and cultural issues of the day which would have been instantly recognizable to her readership, such as abortion, the New Woman, white-collar workers and upward mobility. This fulfills the programmatic demands of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to make fiction accessible to a large audience, in Rosenstein's view, as does the use of everyday language. However, Rosenstein argues that this language has been creatively enriched and transformed: together with stylistic techniques such as the use of humour and irony, or the shifting focalization which allows access to Gilgi's inner thoughts, Rosenstein asserts that this linguistic inventiveness does not accord with the programmatic demands of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

This chapter will build on Rosenstein's argument that Keun presents a critical view of technological modernity and rationalization, in order to indicate other areas, particularly in relation to the mannequin and physiognomy in which this critique is evident. However, Rosenstein's contention that the combination of stylistic elements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* with other techniques simply renders the categorization of the novel within *Neue Sachlichkeit* questionable must be taken one stage further. The final section of this chapter will argue that, like *Bauern* and *Käsebier*, Keun's text actively and deliberately problematizes the programmatic demands of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as a literary movement through the connections of body type and language which are established during the course of the novel.

The initial part of the discussion will focus upon aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque tradition together with his understanding of the new bodily canon and the grotesque body in *Rabelais and His World*.<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin connects the dominance of the new bodily canon in art and the

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.



repression of the grotesque body to the development of modernity. In the early part of the novel, Gilgi's perceptions of her subjectivity, body, language and her attitudes to modernization are modelled upon criteria which recall those ascribed by Bakhtin to the new bodily canon. However, from the start of the Cologne *Karneval*, the protagonist's values undergo a radical shift to approximate more closely to those associated with the grotesque body by Bakhtin.

### **3. Carnival, Parsimonious Physiques and Bulging Bodies**

Connections between modernity, the development of rationality and different concepts of the body are made by Bakhtin in his study of the carnivalesque tradition in the work of sixteenth-century French writer, François Rabelais. Bakhtin connects two contrasting modes of representing the body with differing concepts of subjectivity in a very similar way to Keun. He distinguishes between what he terms the grotesque body and the new bodily canon. He argues that the latter depicts the fully matured individual in the prime of life, equidistant from birth and death. It thus represents a rounded, developed individual rather than a being in the process of growth or decay; it is 'finished, completed man, cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development'.<sup>26</sup> According to Bakhtin, the new bodily canon portrays the body as autonomous, as a self-contained hermetic unit with a smooth finished surface distinct from other bodies. Moreover, Bakhtin argues, attention is focused upon the head and upper body parts which are associated with reason and intellect. Bakhtin also claims that the evenly proportioned body parts stress its harmonious, although distinct position in relation to the external world:

In the new bodily canon the leading role is attributed to the individually characteristic and expressive parts of the body: the

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<sup>26</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.25.

head, face, eyes, lips, to the muscular system, and to the place of the body in the external world. The exact position and movements of this finished body in the finished outside world are brought out, so that the limits between them are not weakened.<sup>27</sup>

This finished body with distinct boundaries which occupies a fixed position in the outside world exhibits clear similarities with Gilgi's body image in the early stages of the novel, as will be demonstrated below.

Although Bakhtin acknowledges that images of the body in Classical Antiquity provided the foundation for this new bodily canon, he contends that it is only since the Renaissance that it became the dominant mode of representing the body in the 'high' tradition of European art and literature: 'This limited canon never prevailed in antique literature. In the official literature of European peoples it has existed only for the last four hundred years.'<sup>28</sup> Bakhtin argues that the new canon 'represents the bourgeois conception of the completed atomized being'.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this new view of the body is modelled on the Renaissance and Enlightenment view of the rational autonomous individual as the stable centre of a logically ordered universe, the type of individualism to which Gilgi subscribes in the first section of the novel, as will be outlined below.

Bakhtin contrasts the image of the body in the new bodily canon with that of the grotesque canon. Representations of the grotesque body accentuate those body parts which are associated with non-rational aspects of the personality, with sexual pleasure and physical appetites, such as the breasts, buttocks, belly and genitals. In contrast to the sealed, flawless surface of the body in the new bodily canon, the grotesque body emphasizes everything which bulges and protrudes and the orifices which connect the body to the world beyond, signifying a continuous process of interaction between the body and its environment:

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<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.321.

<sup>28</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.319.

<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.24.



The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, the grotesque body is a body in the process of growth, transformation and becoming, not a finished product like the mature individual of the new bodily canon. Bakhtin describes figurines of 'senile pregnant hags' which appear in a crowd and which embody death and renewal. Representations of the grotesque body blur the demarcation lines between individual bodies and underline its heterogeneous nature.<sup>31</sup> If the new bodily canon entails a concept of the self as unified and stable in a rational ordered universe, the grotesque body encapsulates a fragmented labile self, a heterodox subjectivity in the process of exchange and development.

The different notion of the subject encapsulated in these bodily types foregrounds a sense of the modernist 'problématique' as outlined by Richard Sheppard. Whereas the new bodily canon literally embodies concepts arising from the Renaissance and Enlightenment view of the stable, rational, autonomous human subject in a fixed relationship to a clearly ordered world, the grotesque body portrays a decentred, heterodox subject in a dynamic, shifting relationship with a fluctuating reality. The latter view of human nature, reality and their interaction recalls the changing understanding of these categories towards the end of the nineteenth century, the epistemological shift which generated a perception that modernity was in a state of crisis.<sup>32</sup> Although Bakhtin develops the concept of the grotesque body in relation to the popular cultural tradition of the medieval era

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<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.26.

<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.25.

<sup>32</sup> See pp.15-16 above.

which culminated, in Bakhtin's view, in the work of a sixteenth-century writer, *Rabelais and His World*, is, after all, a work of the modernist era.<sup>33</sup>

Significantly, Bakhtin connects the grotesque body with the carnivalesque tradition. He interprets carnival as an intricate part of medieval life that provided respite from, and a challenge to, the dominant, dogmatic culture of the Catholic church, which offered a one-sided, serious view of the world. The many carnivals and popular festivals which punctuated the medieval calendar 'opposed the protective timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology and stressed the element of change and renewal'.<sup>34</sup> If church teachings urged self-denial in favour of fulfilment in the hereafter and concentrated exclusively upon the spiritual or intellectual dimension of human nature, carnival was a period of joyful self-indulgence in earthy, physical pleasures of eating, drinking and sex. Bakhtin argues that carnival countered the seriousness of official medieval culture with laughter. Under the protection of disguise, social conventions were suspended, the rigid social hierarchies were temporarily inverted and typical authority figures were ridiculed, for example, through the election of mock kings or bishops. Furthermore, Bakhtin associates carnival with release from the usual linguistic taboos and formalities and the liberty to employ abusive language and curses. This liberated, bold and inventive speech of carnival exhibits the formal patterns of the grotesque body and draws upon its imagery, whilst the rationally structured discourse and verbal norms of official culture are determined by the outline and formal values of the classical body. Hence, the formal values of the different bodily canons are associated with language too. Overall, carnival in

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<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin developed his ideas during the 1930s and originally submitted the work as a thesis in 1940 but, for political reasons, it remained unpublished until 1965. See Michael Holquist, 'Prologue' in Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp.xix-xxi.

<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.81.



Bakhtin's eyes represents a celebration of the irrational aspects of the self and the world.

In my view, it is the repression of precisely these aspects of the self in the increasingly rationalized and standardized culture of the Weimar Republic which constitutes Keun's central preoccupation in her first novel. I argue that Gilgi's body image in the early part of the novel displays key similarities to Bakhtin's description of the new bodily canon, particularly as her perception of her body is intricately connected with her understanding of the self as a rational autonomous agent which has a clearly defined place in a rationalized world. However, this identity is destabilized during the course of the novel and, as will be demonstrated below, Gilgi's perception of her own body, the bodies of others and her subjectivity shifts to correspond to the notions which Bakhtin associates with the grotesque body. This process is triggered by two key events which represent the irrational and repressed bursting into Gilgi's seemingly ordered and stable world. The first is an external force, namely the revelation on her twenty-first birthday that the Krons had adopted Gilgi as a baby: on the day traditionally associated with the assumption of a complete adult identity, Gilgi begins to experience doubts about that identity. The second event involves the irruption of irrational, unconscious forces within Gilgi herself, as she falls unexpectedly and passionately in love with Martin Bruck, a bourgeois intellectual drifter some twenty years her senior. Significantly, these two critical events which destabilize Gilgi's concept of a centred, stable autonomous ego and provoke a questioning of the dominance of rationality occur during the Cologne *Karneval*.<sup>35</sup> It is during *Karneval* that Gilgi begins to encounter bodies which recall the grotesque body, bodies which appear in multiple form and which are shown interacting with the external world and

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<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin mentions Cologne as one of the great European centres of the carnival tradition. Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp.218-219.

each other. Furthermore, like Bakhtin, Keun draws connections between the formal values of the different body types and discourse: Gilgi's attitude towards language is modelled upon her criteria for evaluating the body and undergoes a parallel transformation. I argue that the shift in Gilgi's discursive values involves a critique both of the language of modernization and of the formal criteria of *Neue Sachlichkeit* which also draws upon interconnections of body type and language. Keun foregrounds a sense that modernity is in a state of crisis through Gilgi's shifting subjectivity, perception of her body and language.

I consider four key ways in which Gilgi's initial perception of the body and the corresponding view of human subjectivity and modernity are called into question by Keun. Each of these involves an effort to relativize the dominance of rationality and a rejection of attempts to create or reinforce distinct boundaries and clear categorizations. Firstly, I argue that Keun employs the mannequin-machine image in order to engage in a critical way with technological modernity and the persistence of gendered and class-based power relations in the Weimar Republic. In addition, the mannequin figure is used in the novel to problematize an overly simplistic response to a perceived crisis of modernity which is manifested in this form of representing the human body. The next section outlines how Keun takes issue with the obsessive fixation with taxonomies and physiognomy in Weimar and undermines the claims of such disciplines to interpret personality traits accurately from external signs. Not only does this illustrate the problematic nature of responses to modernity which seek certainties and clear boundaries in a fluctuating and uncertain world, but it also contains an implicit critique of the realist tradition upon which *Neue Sachlichkeit* is based. Subsequently, I analyse Gilgi's encounter with aspects of the grotesque body during *Karneval*, which foregrounds a sense that the project of modernity has



entered a state of crisis. The final section traces the nexus of body and language in the novel with the aims of highlighting Keun's concerns about rationalized discourse and of questioning the categorization of *Gilgi* as a typical product of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

#### **4. Machine Body**

Gilgi's identity is initially constructed upon the firm belief in the power of the rational autonomous ego to subordinate and control irrational, unconscious forces. She seeks to dominate her physical impulses and to transform her organic body into a finely honed tool or machine which will allow her to function efficiently and productively in the technologically advanced workplace. Moreover, this attempt is motivated by the belief that control over her body represents the only path towards individual autonomy and emancipation open to a young modern woman who wishes to avoid traditional female roles. Gilgi thus enacts at an individual level on her own body the Enlightenment project, propelled by emancipatory impulses, of using reason to master nature and harness it to productive purposes. This project had, of course, entered an intensified phase during the so-called period of stabilization in the Weimar Republic with the introduction of Taylorist rationalization and Fordist production line techniques. In the early stages of the novel, Gilgi still displays a whole-hearted optimism towards the liberating potential of technological modernity, which is manifested through her attempts to transform her body into a machine or automaton. This section will highlight the connections between Gilgi's initial attitude towards her body and desire to participate in the attractive side of modernity and the opportunities offered by rationalization. However, Keun's presentation of Gilgi's body later in the novel calls this form of emancipation into question and

demonstrates a keen awareness of the downsides of wholeheartedly embracing technological modernity. Since unreserved enthusiasm for technology and rationalization has often been perceived to be a distinguishing feature of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in literature and art, Keun's problematization of technological modernity through her presentation of Gilgi's body calls into question the categorization of the novel within this literary tendency.<sup>36</sup>

Like the body type in Bakhtin's description of the new bodily canon, Gilgi has a well-proportioned, muscular physique, pared of all superfluous fat and excess bulges. Moreover, her slender, boyish figure, bobbed hair and modern clothes mark her out as a *Neue Frau*. Significantly, 'hart' is the most common attribute used to refer to parts of Gilgi's body: for example, reference is made to her 'dünnen, muskelharten Glieder' (G, p.6), to 'die Zeigefinger mit den hartgetippten Kuppen' (G, p.135), to her 'hartem Griff' (G, p.172) and to her 'harte kleine Schritte' (G, p.250). In contrast to the grotesque body described by Bakhtin, Gilgi does not indulge in extravagant food, but keeps to an almost Lenten diet. For breakfast, she consumes 'eine Tasse Kaffee, ißt ein mager gestrichenes Brötchen' (G, p.12) and, after a meal with her boss, 'Gilgi hat das Gefühl, zu Abend gegessen, Herr Reuter das Gefühl, soupiert zu haben'. (G, p.25) Moreover, in addition to swimming in the summer, Gilgi follows a rigorously disciplined morning routine of exercises and beauty care. At the end of this, she contemplates her body image in the mirror with pride, musing 'Gepflegt ist mehr als hübsch, es ist eigenes Verdienst'. (G, p.6) In Gilgi's eyes, prettiness involves a

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<sup>36</sup> The argument that *Neue Sachlichkeit* propounds an unreflected belief in technological progress is advanced by Andreas Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*', in Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. London, Macmillan, 1988; Helmut Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des „Weißen Sozialismus“*. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1970; Carl Wege, 'Gleisdreieck, Tank und Motor. Figuren und Denkfiguren aus der Technosphäre der Neuen Sachlichkeit', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 68 (1994), 307-332.



genetic component and would imply some obligation to her parents, whereas a carefully groomed appearance reflects the power of the rational mind and individual agency alone.

It has often been noted that the opening scenes of Keun's novel describing Gilgi's routine immediately focuses the reader's attention upon the protagonist's 'powerful mechanism of self-control'.<sup>37</sup> Gilgi's smart, well-toned physique constitutes the outward sign of her belief in active self-determination and in her capacity to control every aspect of her life. The conviction that she is entirely the product of her own creation has even prompted her to cast aside her given name of Gisela in favour of the self-invented moniker Gilgi, which she considers more appropriate to the physique she has fashioned through her exercises: '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.' (G, p.5) Through her body and name, Gilgi forges an identity which asserts her right to self-determination and autonomy. Like the smooth, distinct, individual body of Bakhtin's new bodily canon, Gilgi's well-toned physique represents the prioritization of the rational autonomous ego over irrational forces and physical pleasure. Moreover, Gilgi interprets other people's overweight or unhealthy bodies as a sign of deficient rational self-control. She watches with horror as her adoptive mother Frau Kron devours 'ohne Rücksicht auf ihr Monumentalgewicht ganze Himalajagebirge von Cremeschnittchen, Mohrenköpfen und Obsttortlets'. (G, p.61) Gilgi's shifting attitude towards manifestations of the grotesque body will be discussed at length in section 8 below.

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<sup>37</sup> von Ankum, 'Motherhood', p.181; see also Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters', p.272.

By controlling her body and reducing it to the status of an instrument, Gilgi hopes to achieve emancipation from traditional female roles. She has no desire to utilize her body as her only, or even her prime capital investment, as she would if she relinquished her rights over her body to a husband in exchange for economic security or marketed her body as an actress or beauty queen: 'außer Ehe, Filmschauspielerin und Schönheitskönigin zieht sie jede Existenzmöglichkeit in Betracht'. (G, p.22) Instead she concentrates upon acquiring other marketable qualities, such as language skills or the necessary tools for her trade, like her beloved Erika portable typewriter, although she continues to exploit her physical attractiveness as one instrument in her repertoire for professional advancement. When Gilgi secures an evening job typing the memoirs of a former officer, she believes that the combination of skills, physical allure and the possession of tools is a crucial factor in her success:

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. [...] Können allein entscheidet nicht, Mätzchen allein entschieden nicht - beides zusammen entscheidet meistens. (G, pp.82-83)

Moreover, Gilgi believes her attitude to be unique and individual. On the way to work, she differentiates herself from her fellow passengers in the tram: 'sie hat nichts mit ihnen gemein, sie gehört nicht zu ihnen, will nicht zu ihnen gehören. [...] Sie glaubt nur an das, was sie schafft und erwirbt.' (G, p.15) Gilgi thus seeks a route towards emancipation through economic independence which she believes is unique.

Gilgi's chosen route to emancipation designed to increase her earning power comes at the price of a Lenten self-denial of her irrational desires and yearning for physical pleasure. Gilgi must overcome the longing for the physical comfort of showering in warm water and has to admonish herself: 'Nicht



abweichen vom System. Nicht schlapp machen.' (G, p.6) In addition to her full-time secretarial work, Gilgi attends daily classes in English, French and Spanish and spends the remainder of her evenings practising translation skills, which she hopes will improve her employment prospects, but which requires strict self-discipline: 'Gilgi wirft begehrlche Blicke auf den breiten, weichgelegenen Diwan. Sie ist ein bißchen müde, soll sie . . . nur eine halbe Stunde . . . ? Keine Zeit.' (G, p.21) Gilgi even strives to eradicate the possible distraction of her sexuality, noting with satisfaction that she has managed to eliminate all trace of desire from the memory of a kiss with Olga's brother: 'Der Junge war nett. Der Kuß war nett. Nicht mehr. Er brennt nicht nach. Gut so.' (G, p.8) This echoes the rationalized sexuality of local swimming-star Gustl Gillich in Fleißer's novel *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier*, who, until he meets Frieda, confines his sexual encounters to winter in order to train more productively and efficiently in summer. Gilgi denies all those physical pleasures and the contact with others which Bakhtin associates with the grotesque body.

Moreover, Gilgi's body in the early stages of the novel appears impenetrable and impervious to the processes of becoming which Bakhtin associates with the grotesque body. She has been so successful in downplaying the organic aspects of her body that it appears almost machine-like. As von Ankum observes, Gilgi's exercise regime is 'part of her efforts to "steel" her body and become a functional element in the machinery of the modern office'.<sup>38</sup> The emotional attachment she withholds from human beings is displaced on to her office accoutrements: 'Beinahe liebevoll holt sie ihren Stenogrammblock aus der Schublade.' (G, p.65) Gilgi's body is perfectly adapted to the typewriter, that potent symbol of technological modernization, so that body and machine

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<sup>38</sup> von Ankum, 'Motherhood', p.181.

function smoothly together: 'Ihre braunen, kleinen Hände mit den braven, kurzsnäglich getippten Zeigefingern gehören zu der Maschine, und die Maschine gehört zu ihnen.' (G, p.16) Gilgi thus streamlines her body so that she can operate with maximum productivity in the rationalized world of work, again indicating her subservience to the exigencies of the rational mind.

By conforming to the dictates of rationalization in this way, it is clear that Gilgi has internalized and absorbed much of the prevailing mentality of Weimar culture, despite her belief that no external influences have shaped her body or personality. As Kosta and Jordan observe, Gilgi's self-imposed 'Tagesplan' (G, p.6) demonstrates the extent to which the protagonist has internalized the drive towards Taylorist rationalization and discipline in the workplace.<sup>39</sup> In addition, adapting the human body to function optimally in the technologically modern and rationalized workplace was perceived by Siegfried Kracauer to be a development fostered by advanced capitalism in order to overcome obstacles to profit and calculability:

Da das Prinzip *des kapitalistischen Produktionsprozesses* nicht rein der Natur entstammt, muß es die natürlichen Organismen sprengen, die ihm Mittel oder Widerstände sind. [...] der Mensch als Massenteilchen allein kann reibungslos an Tabellen emporklettern und Maschinen bedienen.<sup>40</sup>

In Kracauer's view, advanced capitalist production demands the elimination of the organic, irrational and individual facets of human beings in order to promote the uninterrupted operation of the rationalized workplace. Gilgi's attitude towards her sexuality can also be perceived as part of a wider tendency during the Weimar Republic: according to Atina Grossmann, the extension of rationalization into the spheres of sexuality and domestic life was a key development in Weimar

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<sup>39</sup> Jordan, *Zerstreuung*, p.72; Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters', p.272.

<sup>40</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse', in Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays. Mit einem Nachwort von Karsten Witte*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, pp.50-63 (p.53, italics in original)



Germany.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the general public was encouraged to perceive the processes of the body in terms of capitalist production: the first popular scientific attempt to explain the invisible workings of the human body, *Das Leben der Menschen*, the first five volumes of which were published between 1926 and 1931, employed a striking visual metaphor of Taylorism and Fordist production lines. In this work,

wird der Mensch als Industriepalast in einem Querschnitt gezeigt, in dem wir kleine Ingenieure vor ihren Instrumenten im Kopfraum entdecken, die von dort aus die Fließbandarbeit der Verdauung steuern.<sup>42</sup>

Gilgi's attempts to suppress her organic existence and irrational desires in order to maximize her economic output and productivity do not therefore spring from a unique and individual philosophy. Instead, her behaviour appears typical of a tendency during the Weimar Republic to internalize the principles of technological rationalization and enact them in the private sphere and on the body.

Like Tergit, Keun problematizes the all-pervasive nature of rationalization in the Weimar Republic, which appears to have filtered through into every aspect of life and is critical of this aspect of modernity. Keun foregrounds a preoccupation, shared by Bakhtin, that the dominant culture of rationality is closing off large parts of non-rational human experience, which represents an impoverishment of the human condition. While Gilgi's reduction of her body to the status of an instrument or tool enables her to participate in the attractive and liberating side of modernity, it also paradoxically renders her vulnerable to the

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<sup>41</sup>Atina Grossmann, 'The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany', in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson. London, Virago, 1984, pp.190-208.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Puttnies, *Das Gesicht der Weimarer Republik. Menschenbild und Bildkultur 1918-1933*. Katalog einer Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums, Berlin, und des Einstein Forums, Potsdam, 2000, p.71.

objectification of her body by her lover Martin. Accustomed to viewing her body as an instrument or object, even as a machine, Gilgi is more easily able to accept Martin's perception of her body as a mannequin or automaton, which eventually undermines her hard-won independence. Instead of providing the key to emancipation, as she hopes, Gilgi's concept of the body as machine and her conformation to the standardizing dictates of rationalization proves to be her Achilles' heel.

## **5. Mannequins and Modernity**

### *5.1 Models of Standardization*

Gilgi's original independence and desire for emancipation is undermined by the unexpected event of falling in love with Martin, a bourgeois intellectual drifter some twenty years her senior. A striking and recurrent feature of Martin's behaviour towards Gilgi is his treatment of her as a mannequin or puppet whose appearance he may alter at will. Images of the mannequin are not only prominent in Martin's relationship with Gilgi, but also feature during Gilgi's meetings with her first foster mother, Fräulein Täschler, and her birth mother, Frau Greif. In this section, I argue that Keun uses the mannequin image in order to engage in a critical way with Gilgi's initial identification with rationalization and technological modernity and with the patriarchal values that persist in Weimar society. In other words, Keun subverts elements of the dominant culture and she questions values associated by Bakhtin with the new bodily canon. Keun highlights the discrepancy between the bodies of actual women and the mannequin image in order to offer a critique of gendered and class-based power relations in an advanced, capitalist society. Furthermore, she connects Martin's attempts to construct Gilgi's appearance as a mannequin with a particular nostalgic and one-sided response to



modernity exhibited in the works of male writers and artists in Weimar. In order to establish this, it is necessary to consider briefly the status of the mannequin within Weimar culture and its connection with modernization.

The mannequin played a significant role in the growth of urban consumerism during the 1920s as part of the seductive spectacle and display designed to elicit the desire to buy. The mannequin can be seen as both an expression of, and a contributing factor to, the increasing standardization over a wide range of facets in the public domain to create a mass appeal during the Weimar Republic. Peukert describes how the development of mass production, mass culture, mass spectacles and mass construction produced a growing tendency towards uniform and standard units.<sup>43</sup> The connection between the Taylorist rationalization of factory production and the rationalization and fragmentation of the human body in mass entertainment is famously made by Kracauer in 'Das Ornament der Masse' (1927). Kracauer argues that the Tiller Girls are no longer individual human beings, but interchangeable standardized components of a mass figure like machine operators on an assembly line: 'Arme, Schenkel und andere Teilstrecken sind die kleinsten Bestandstücke der Komposition.'<sup>44</sup> Such standardized and sealed bodies are the very opposite of Bakhtin's account of the grotesque body.

Mannequin figures in magazine advertisements, posters and shop windows were part of this standardization. According to Marsha Meskimmon, mannequin figures were composed of interchangeable, identical parts, set in uniform poses and often devoid of facial features.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, new products were

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<sup>43</sup> Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1987, pp.163-164.

<sup>44</sup> Kracauer, 'Das Ornament der Masse', p.53.

<sup>45</sup> Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough. Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*. London/New York, Tauris, 1999. See especially pp.57-68 and pp.183-185.

often displayed on isolated body parts rather than entire bodies: tights were shown on single legs<sup>46</sup> and new make-up or hair styles on head-and-shoulder images.<sup>47</sup> Hans Puttnies connects this fragmentation of the human body with advertising: 'Diese Konzentration auf ein expressives Detail beflügelte vor allem die werbliche Grafik'.<sup>48</sup> These fashionable, illustrated magazines were of course mostly targeted at and read by women and presented models of identification for women. The uniform image of the mannequin, often in fragmented form, was thus a central feature in the visual culture of modern, urban consumerism in the Weimar Republic.<sup>49</sup>

## 5.2 Mothers and Mannequins

Keun draws attention to the powerful influence of the mannequin as a model of identification and the class or economic boundaries which determine access to the commodities displayed on the mannequin during Gilgi's search for her birth mother. Gilgi's visit to the impoverished Täschler highlights the gap between women's actual bodies and the mannequin figure. As a dressmaker, Täschler owns a tailor's dummy in the form of a fragmented torso: 'eine schwarze Probierpuppe, die Dame ohne Unterleib.' (G, p.40) In addition, she spreads out illustrated fashion journals which display mannequin figures, including *Elegante Welt*, for Gilgi's perusal. These two sets of mannequin images contrast starkly with Täschler's own appearance, which on one level seems to be a grotesque parody of a mannequin. On the one hand, her body is old, wrinkled and thin and her greying

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<sup>46</sup> See the images in Puttnies, *Das Gesicht*, pp.80-81, including A. Vallée's picture of a forest of bestockinged female legs '„Wer hat dich, du schöner Wald...?“'

<sup>47</sup> Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.59.

<sup>48</sup> Puttnies, *Das Gesicht*, p.75.

<sup>49</sup> The motif of fragmented bodies also had a darker side in the Weimar Republic, owing to the large numbers of war veterans who had lost body parts, some of whom had artificial replacements. cf. Puttnies, *Das Gesicht*, pp.75-76.



hair hangs in limp strands, but, on the other hand, Gilgi cannot make out her facial features, thus linking Täschler to the deindividualized, faceless figures in magazine advertisements, as described by Meskimmon: 'Das ist sie. Sie ist mager und vertrocknet, und ein Gesicht hat sie gar nicht, das hat sie verloren. Sie hat eine Bademütze, eine helle Bademütze auf dem Kopf, graugelbe Haarsträhnen hängen drunter vor.' (G, p.41) The swimming cap, which functions as a headache cure according to Täschler, is a fashionable symbol of a healthy body and *Körperkultur*, which seems utterly out of place on this patently unhealthy body. It jars with the rest of her appearance, as if Täschler were composed of separate mannequin parts which each displayed different items. The juxtaposition of mannequin and non-mannequin features highlights the discrepancy between the bodies of real women and the mannequin images to which they try to approximate. Gilgi cannot bear to look at the reality of the human body and turns instead to the mannequin images: she 'besieht sich die Modejournale, die die Hexenfinger vor ihr ausbreiten. Man kann doch nicht aufgucken [...]' (G, p.41). Conversely, Täschler identifies Gilgi with the magazine figures and, looking at a picture of Miss Germany 1931, cheerfully asserts, 'das hättense auch werden können Fröllein!' (G, p.41) The scene with Täschler illustrates both the discrepancy between the bodies of real women and mannequins and the powerful desire to identify with such figures which is elicited by their ubiquity in the visual culture of Weimar Germany. In Täschler's case, the gap is caused by the desire for the products presented on the mannequin and her inability to purchase them.

By contrast, Gilgi's wealthy birth mother, Magda Greif, approximates so closely to the mannequin image that Gilgi refers to her during their meeting as 'die Magazindame'. (G, p.228) Gilgi perceives Greif as a composite set of contemporary images of the female body, referring to her mother as a mixture of

a tennis champion and film actress or as 'halb kühl fesches Americangirl, halb mager getanzte ältere Gigolo-Mäzenin'. (G, p.228) Greif's appearance conforms to the standardizing dictates of fashion, as she is wearing the 'üblich geschmackvolle, aber unintime Standarduniform einer Erster-Klasse-Reisenden'. (G, p.228) Wealth allows participation in consumer culture, bridging the gap between the desire to have the items modelled on mannequins and possessing them, which is denied to Täschler. Nevertheless, this has produced a conflation of the mannequin image and the individual woman in Greif's case: Greif has *become* the inanimate mannequin and is treated as a commodity for exchange by her husband and lover. She laments to Gilgi that all her relationships are defined by money and material gifts and that she longs for genuine intimacy and emotion. The two mother figures reveal problematic aspects of the mannequin as a model of identification for women: in Täschler's case it generates desires which cannot be satisfied because of poverty, whilst Greif's complete assumption of the mannequin image is linked to her alienation and objectification by men. Through Gilgi's encounters with these mother figures, Keun presents a problematic view of the mannequin image upon which Gilgi originally models her body and which mediates her identification with the dominant culture.

### *5.3 Male Artists and Mannequins.*

Keun also uses the mannequin image to cast a critical light upon the response towards modernity displayed by some of her male contemporaries, much as Tergit problematizes the reactions of Miermann and Lambeck. In particular, Keun highlights the interconnections between anxieties about modernity and the attempt to manipulate the female body in order to affirm the power of the rational mind and to shore up a threatened social status.



Meskimmon argues that a prominent and recurrent feature in the works of male artists and writers in the Weimar Republic, was the elision of the mannequin image with that of a sexually alluring woman, often a prostitute. Meskimmon cites Walter Benjamin's comments as a typical example:

In der Gestalt, die die Prostitution in den großen Städten angenommen hat, erscheint die Frau nicht nur als Ware sondern im prägnanten Sinne als Massenartikel. Durch die artifizielle Verkleidung des individuellen Ausdrucks zugunsten eines professionellen, wie er als Werk der Schminke zustande kommt, wird das angedeutet.<sup>50</sup>

One also thinks of the opening sequence of Joe May's film *Asphalt*, where an attractive woman wearing heavy make-up and underwear in a shop window pulls on stockings with coquettish looks at the excited crowd gathered outside. This scene conflates a real, sexually alluring woman with the role of a mannequin displaying goods. Joseph Roth's article of 1929, 'Die Puppen' provides a good example of the connections between male anxieties about modernity and mannequins. Roth writes nostalgically of wax display models in a hair salon which he remembers from his childhood. The models' faces 'unterschieden sich nicht von einander', a quality which he transposed onto women: apart from hair colour, 'waren alle Frauen einander gleich'.<sup>51</sup> These models seemed to Roth to breathe and the pink wax exuded 'fleischliche Weiblichkeit'.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, modern mannequins made of steel, wood or plastic have no such sensual, soft appeal:

Ein Hochmut aus nichttröstendem Stahl, eine „Nirosta“-Arroganz ist eingegraben mitten in die sachliche Intelligenz dieser

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1974, I.2, pp.509-690 (p.686). Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.58 (in English).

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Roth, 'Die Puppen', in Joseph Roth, *Werke*, 6 vols. Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch; Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1991, III: *Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*, ed. by Klaus Westermann, pp.105-107 (p.105, p.106). First publ. in *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 13 October 1929.

<sup>52</sup> Roth, 'Die Puppen', p.106.

Physiognomien, die gewiß von der Kenntnis der Automobilmarken und des Sportbetriebs gebildet wurden.<sup>53</sup>

Roth associates these indestructible, machine-like bodies with the development of technological modernity (the construction of cars) and the growth of *Körperkultur* and sport as a business or industry: the changes in the mannequin's shape and material go hand-in-hand with technological rationalization in Roth's eyes. Moreover, Roth identifies such developments with the *Neue Frau*, female emancipation and the growth of mass culture, when he admits that he cannot distinguish the robotic bodies of the mannequins from those of actual women: 'Es ist, als ob die Damen nicht in ihren rotlackierten Automobilchen nach Hause gefahren, sondern in die Schaufenster eingekehrt wären, um ihre verchromte Schönheit zu publizieren.'<sup>54</sup> Women are the consumers of technological modernity associated with mannequins (they drive the cars whose production Roth associates with the new mannequin) and rather than retreating to the private domestic sphere at the end of the day, it seems as if they display their robotic bodies in the urban public sites of mass consumption. Moreover, the description of the way they parade their bodies also implies prostitution and the objectification of human relationships.<sup>55</sup> Unlike the sensual, malleable wax models, the 'gepanzerte Sinnlichkeit' of the modern mannequin-machine-prostitute is not only inaccessible to male control, but threatens destruction, war and death. Roth associates these figures with the mechanized slaughter of the First World War: 'Denn schon in ihren Gesichtern steht geschrieben, daß sie gestählte Herzmuskeln haben und Beine aus jenem Nitroglyzerin, aus dem die

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<sup>53</sup> Roth, 'Die Puppen', p.107.

<sup>54</sup> Roth, 'Die Puppen', p.107. In *Käsebier*, Lambeck also associates women with cars.

<sup>55</sup> According to Meskimmon, the conflated prostitute/mannequin image often functioned as a metaphor for mass production, commodity exchange and the monetization of human relationships for male artists and writers in the Weimar Republic. Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.57.



Kunstseide erzeugt wird – – und das Giftgas . . .' Concerns about technological rationalization, mass consumption (of nylon stockings, for example) and the shifting role of women are thus collapsed for Roth in the image of the mannequin and contrasted with the warmth, sensuality and security of his childhood encounters with mannequins. A visual counterpart to Roth's article can be found in Otto Dix's *Großstadt (Tryptikon)* (1928), in the centre of which mannequin-like women with standardized facial features dance alongside men to jazz music, whilst in the outer panels prostitutes flaunting their bodies are juxtaposed with mutilated men.<sup>56</sup> The ascent of the cruel, indifferent machine-mannequin-prostitute is connected with the rationalized mutilation of bodies in the First World War in Dix's painting as in Roth's essay.

It has often been claimed in relation to Weimar films, painting and literature that both female sexuality and technology represent the mysterious potentially destructive Other which threatens male control and dominance and which must be subjugated in order to maintain order and ensure the smooth operation of rationalized society.<sup>57</sup> Meskimmon argues that exerting control over the prostitute/mannequin image in art reinforced a threatened masculine subjectivity, which she claims accounts for the obsessive fixation on this image in the works of male artists, writers and intellectuals in the Weimar Republic.

By contrast, Meskimmon claims, women artists such as Lea Grundig, Gerta Overbeck, Jeanne Mammen and Hannah Höch, emphasized the difference and distance between the figures of mannequins, prostitutes and female

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<sup>56</sup> Otto Dix, *Großstadt (Tryptikon)* (1928), Galerie der Stadt Köln.

<sup>57</sup> See for example, Huyssen, 'The Vamp'; Janet Langstrum, 'Metropolis and the Technosexual Woman of German Modernity', in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, pp.128-144; Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995.

consumers, thereby creating 'an informed critique of gendered power relations'.<sup>58</sup> Meskimmon attributes this split along gender lines in the approaches to these images in Weimar art to the differing historical status of women and men artists. As discussed above in relation to *Käsebier*, the widespread commodification of art during the Weimar Republic shattered the illusion of many male middle-class artists, writers or intellectuals that they were somehow aloof and independent from the sphere of commodity capitalism. It thereby undermined their social status and identity, according to Meskimmon, whereas women artists 'had little of this former "aura" or status to lose working as they did, most frequently, outside the coopting situation of the high-profile art market'.<sup>59</sup> Women artists were thus able to view these figures more critically, Meskimmon concludes. In Meskimmon's view, the recurrent appearance of the prostitute/mannequin image thus represented a displaced response from male producers of culture to technological modernization and the effects of advanced rationalized capitalism.

Like the female artists described by Meskimmon, Keun stresses the distinction between actual women and the mannequin image. Through Martin's perception and manipulation of Gilgi's body as a mannequin, Keun traces the process whereby male bourgeois artists conflate images of individual women with mannequin types. Moreover, she specifically connects this to Martin's response to modernizing processes which threaten his established sense of status and identity. Significantly, Keun also highlights the degree to which Gilgi's initial conception of her body as an instrument or machine renders her particularly vulnerable to the imposition of the mannequin image by Martin. However, through her relationship with Martin, Gilgi develops a critical awareness of the extent to which she has internalized dominant cultural norms and takes a crucial step towards liberating

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<sup>58</sup> Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.63.

<sup>59</sup> Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.63.



herself from these norms. In this way, Keun questions the form of emancipation to which Gilgi subscribes in the early stages of the novel. The rest of this section will consider firstly Martin's imposition of the mannequin image and subsequently, Gilgi's recognition that she has internalized this image.

Keun's characterization of Martin locates him squarely within the group of male writers, artists and intellectuals who are reluctant to acknowledge their dependence upon the market. In many ways, Martin's response to modernity has much in common with that of Tergit's male *flâneurs* and is presented in a similarly critical light. He has spent most of his adult life trying to escape from modernization, travelling to places such as Colombia, the Congo and the South Seas in search of authentic, individual experience. In common with Expressionist artists like Max Pechstein and Emil Nolde, Martin appears fascinated by the exotic primitive and is writing a book about 'Sitten und Gebräuche der Südseeinsulanern'. (G, p.150) He prefers to meander through the old town of Cologne, looking at the '[k]rumm gezogene, altersschwache Häuser, Miniaturgeschäfte, Ladenscheiben nicht größer als ein Kopfkissen', (G, p.142) which could not be more different from the huge window displays of modern Berlin department stores.<sup>60</sup> As in the South Seas, Martin seeks out an idealized exotic primitive in the old town and has 'eine Vision von einem wunderschönen, geheimnisvollen Judenmädchen mit schwarzen Lackhaaren und sanften Mondaugen'. (G, p.143) Moreover, he also seeks out authentic works of art within Cologne, developing for example what Gilgi refers to as an 'Apostelkirche-Komplex'. (G, p.134) Such a yearning for communities untouched by modernization and unique works of art has similarities with Lambeck's interest

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<sup>60</sup> Roth prefers the tiny window of the hairdresser's salon to the new modern shop windows. On the new designs of Berlin department stores, see Michael Bienert, *Die eingebildete Metropole. Berlin im Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik*. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1992, especially pp.111-118.

in Käsebier's performance as the authentic expression of working class experience, or Miermann's search for urban spaces untouched by modernization.

Akin to Lambeck and Miermann, Martin also experiences the shock of discovering his dependence upon advanced capitalism. An inheritance has enabled him to lead a leisured, bohemian existence and he is accustomed to thinking of himself as detached and independent from the mundane world of modern capitalism. Like Lambeck, Martin does not view his writings as a commodity to be sold on the art market: 'Er schrieb zwei Bücher, die einen guten literarischen Erfolg hatten. Geld brachten sie nicht ein. Brauchten sie ja auch nicht.' (G, p.76) Faced with dwindling resources, however, he has been compelled to become involved in commerce by investing his remaining capital in his brother's factory which provides him with a monthly income of 200M. Keun establishes Martin as an intellectual and writer who has been suddenly confronted with his connection to the economic sphere of production and consumption, but who seeks to suppress this revelation.

Keun highlights Martin's anxieties concerning modernity during his walk through the more modern parts of Cologne. Martin's *flânerie* is different from that of Lambeck in Berlin, since Keun's character finds himself confronted not by the seductive urban spectacle of consumption, but with the signs of a provincial city suffering from the depression where the bright lights of modernity have quite literally been dimmed: 'Mißvergnügt blinzeln die Lichtreklamen auf dem Hohenzollernring durch den Nebel.' (G, p.96) Cologne's bars and cafés are largely empty, offering only shivering doormen, bored clients, and waiters lamenting the poor state of business, while little remains of the aspirations of Cologne's premier street to match the glamorous, alluring status of Berlin's Kurfürstendamm: 'Nur ein hübscher kleiner Zigarettensboy repräsentiert unbeirrbar hochmütig und



standesbewußt die Kurfürstendamm-Ambition der Kölner Ringstraße.' (G, p.96)

Consequently, Martin is not overwhelmed by the external stimuli as his counterpart Lambeck is in Berlin. He discovers seductive window displays in the commercial district, but they present essential food items rather than the most modern consumer goods. Yet these attractive images are simultaneously threatening, shot through with a sense of death and decay that recalls Miermann's melancholy view of Berlin as a dead city:

Metzgerläden illuminieren reizvoll ihre sinnig arrangierten Auslagen. Zwischen blutigen Fleischfetzen ängstigen sich blasse Narzissensträußchen. Wollige, kleine Hasen starren vorwurfsvoll aus toten verglasten Augen. Aus Fischgeschäften strömt der Rachegehalt silberbäuchiger Hechte und Schellfische. (G, p.97)

The vision becomes increasingly bleak as Martin observes the victims of the depression and unable to escape these obvious signs of the crisis in Germany, Martin's (in)activity as a *flâneur* loses its allure and he retreats to a harbour bar to forget the misery around him: 'Es scheint so, als ob in diesem Land Nichtstun kein Genuß sein, eher Qual werden könnte. Sparenmüssen ist auch kein reines Vergnügen, er hat sich für genügsamer gehalten als er ist.' (G, p.98) The seeming idleness of the *flâneur* derives its charm from the contrast with the purposeful movement of other individuals on the street going about their business.<sup>61</sup> However, in the economically depressed city, many of the street's occupants are experiencing the enforced inactivity of unemployment. Martin's journey through Cologne only offers him a glimpse of the bleaker, flip-side of advanced, rationalized capitalism rather than a bewitching display of commodities. Moreover, his perception of the city also reflects his own straitened financial circumstances and his sense of gloom at realizing his immediate dependence upon

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 3, pp.112-113.

the market. Martin's *flânerie* therefore establishes his fears about the impact of modernization.

At this juncture, when Martin's sense of self is under attack, his thoughts turn to Gilgi through whom he hopes to re-establish and confirm that very sense of self, as the narrator makes abundantly clear: 'Er freut sich, daß Gilgi ihn mag, daß er ihr gefällt, legt heute besonders viel Wert drauf, gern gemocht zu werden, fühlt sich sehr angewiesen auf Anerkennung, Bestätigung ...' (G, pp.98-99). Crucially, it is not Gilgi's individual traits that he values, but the role her affection for him plays in reasserting his sense of self. By locating this hope that Gilgi will confirm his subjectivity as the culmination of Martin's *flânerie* through Cologne, Keun emphasizes the connections between modernization, the male intellectual's threatened sense of self and the manipulation of a female figure to shore up this identity and to assert control. At the end of his *flânerie*, Lambeck too replaces his vision of confident, alluring women on the Kurfürstendamm with thoughts of the passive, suffering wife of Andreas Schlüter.

Gilgi is, however, no passive subordinate individual: the narrative cuts at this juncture to an image of Gilgi typing at her evening job, confidently engaged in the economic sphere and operating technical apparatus. Earlier, Martin was shocked by her active, assured sexuality when she asked him to dispense with any charade that he might have invited her to his apartment to sample a particularly fine whisky or book. In order to reassert his threatened dominant, authoritative role, Martin must first disassemble the empowered economic agent and sexually active woman and reconstruct her as passive and malleable, and he does this through creating and manipulating her image.<sup>62</sup> This behaviour is established

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<sup>62</sup> Kosta observes that 'Martin constructs and consumes, literally dresses and infantilizes Gilgi, as she surrenders to his desire.' Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters', p.279. However, she neither offers any further analysis of this behaviour nor connects it to Martin's own threatened subjectivity and the mannequin/doll



during their first meeting alone, when Martin removes Gilgi's cap, whimsically adjusting her clothing and appearance as a window-dresser might alter items on a display model to create a more attractive image: 'So gefallen Sie mir noch besser.' (G, p.92) Throughout their relationship he selects Gilgi's clothes and make-up to create a pleasurable, visual spectacle for his own consumption, thus providing himself with the illusion of power and control over Gilgi, the embodiment of the modernity which he finds so threatening. He thereby affirms the power of individual consciousness to control the disorder represented by active female sexuality as Lambeck does.

One incident which illustrates the connection between Martin's fears about modernization and his attempt to transform Gilgi's body into a commodified mannequin occurs when she tries to persuade him to take up some form of paid employment. He responds by instructing her to put on particular items of clothing and make-up:

Du mußt mir nicht mit solch demoralisierenden Vorschlägen kommen, Gilgichen. - Reich gelebt - arm gestorben! - Geh', zieh' dein rotes Kleid an, schmink' dir die Lippen - junge, hübsche Frauen macht Schminke noch hübscher - alte und häßliche noch häßlicher. Eine der lebenswürdigen Ungerechtigkeiten des Lebens. Geh', Gilgichen, mach' dich schön heute abend.' (G, pp.133-134)

Once again, Martin is confronted with the uncomfortable fact that he cannot remain aloof and cushioned from the economic sphere. He reacts to the sense of impotence evoked by Gilgi's own status as an independent economic agent by displacing his anxiety onto Gilgi's body, seeking to reassert some control over the commodity elements of her appearance and hence over the aspect of modernity he fears. Moreover, he emphasizes the standardizing effects of make-up on all women, which de-individualizes Gilgi and reduces her to a mere interchangeable image.

manifestation of a type, a generic pretty young woman. Sexual allure and the standardized mannequin image are conflated here in the way Meskimmon describes.

Another such episode arises when Gilgi settles Martin's bill with the tobacconist, which he is unable to pay. She thus unwittingly but forcefully brings Martin face-to-face with both her economic empowerment and his weakened and dependent position. Martin's rage upon discovering that she has settled his account reduces Gilgi into a sobbing heap in the corner. Having thus asserted his dominant status, he assumes complete control over her body, picking her up and placing her in a position of display on the window-sill, as a window-dresser might arrange a mannequin's pose: 'Er hebt sie aufs Fensterbrett, es macht ihm Spaß mit ihr zu hantieren wie mit einer Puppe.' (G, p.128) The designation 'Puppe' connects Gilgi to a display model or 'Schaufensterpuppe'. Martin proceeds to consider Gilgi's physique in fragmented form, studying her legs as if they were inanimate like the disembodied limbs of a mannequin: 'So schön und vollkommen ist die sanfte, weiche Linie der Waden, so klar gemeißelt das Knie, daß man Freude dran haben kann, ohne begehrllich zu werden.' (G, p.129) He thus disassembles her body, just as representations of the female body were often fragmented in works of male artists, according to Meskimmon. Martin thereby denies Gilgi her agency, since this admiration of Gilgi's legs suggests that an agent outside Gilgi has sculpted their pleasing lines, whereas their shape is at least partly Gilgi's own creation, the result of her rigorous exercise programme. By transforming Gilgi's body into an inanimate work of art rather than a living organic body, Martin obscures the active self-determination and will-power which her body represents to Gilgi.



By explicitly connecting Martin's treatment of Gilgi as a mannequin with fears about modernization and the threat to the identity of the male intellectual, Keun identifies the processes of displacement and projection which produce the obsession with the mannequin image and fragmented female body parts in the works of male artists, writers and intellectuals of the Weimar era. Like Tergit, Keun thereby offers a critique of the responses amongst her contemporaries to a sense that modernity is in a state of crisis.

#### *5.4 Mannequins and Modes of Perception*

Keun additionally highlights the way in which Gilgi internalizes this male mode of viewing her appearance and develops a perception of her body seen 'durch die Brille des Mannes'.<sup>63</sup> Through Martin's attempts to impose the mannequin image upon her, Gilgi comes to realize the extent to which she had already absorbed male cultural norms of looking at her body.

Gilgi initially resists Martin's efforts to objectify, fragment and control her body. She writhes under the dissecting gaze directed towards her legs as isolated, independent body parts, complaining

Sind doch keine selbständigen Lebewesen, sind doch ein Teil von ihr, der tut gerade als wär's anders. „Ich wünscht, du hättest mich lieb, Martin - verstehst du - mich!“ Versteht er natürlich nicht, und sie kann's nicht erklären. (G, p.129)

Gilgi asks to be regarded not as a set of interchangeable body parts or a standardized mannequin, but as a living individual. Yet, as Ritta Jo Horsley has noted, the protagonist lacks the adequate linguistic resources to articulate new and unfamiliar concepts such as her treatment as a sex object.<sup>64</sup> Gilgi therefore cannot

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<sup>63</sup> Sigrid Weigel, 'Der schielende Blick. Thesen zur Geschichte weiblicher Schreibpraxis', in *Die verborgene Frau. 6 Beiträge zu einer feministischen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. by Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel. Berlin, Argument, 1985, pp. 83-137 (p.85).

<sup>64</sup> Ritta-Jo Horsley, '„Warum habe ich keine Worte ... Kein Wort trifft zutiefst

express the discrepancy between her own self-image and the image which Martin is trying to impose upon her. Gilgi's difficulties with linguistic expression will be expanded upon in section 6 below. Martin, on the other hand, has the means of expression at his disposal to protest vociferously when Gilgi tries to change his appearance by buying him new shirts and an overcoat: 'Ist egal, einen neuen Mantel will ich nicht. Bin ich ein Gigolo?' (G, p.127) Gilgi's attempts to dress him only serve to undermine the self-confirmation which he seeks from manipulating her appearance.

Without the means to articulate her protest, Gilgi gradually succumbs. Dressed and made-up according to Martin's precise instructions, Gilgi can no longer study her reflection with the same sense of pride in her achievement as she did at the close of her morning routine, although she is able to appreciate the beauty of the image he has crafted:

Sie steht vorm Spiegel, pudert sich Nacken und Schultern, sieht schlank und zerbrechlich und fremd aus. Taglos. Unwirklich. Weißes Gesicht mit dunklen Augen, sehr rotem Mund - ich bin sehr hübsch heute - jetzt - ich darf das sagen, ich gehöre mir ja nicht mehr. Das, was ich im Spiegel seh', hat ein anderer aus mir gemacht, ich kann nicht stolz darauf sein. (G, pp.134-135)

Gilgi has clearly internalized Martin's criteria for observing and evaluating her body with a degree of distance and detachment, as a beautiful and inanimate object.<sup>65</sup> Like Martin, she now considers her features in fragmented form and the components which she believes add up to the pretty picture are all defined by the standardizing, commodifying colours of make-up: her white powdered face and the red lipstick which Martin has instructed her to wear. Gilgi seems inanimate and de-individualized like a mannequin. Yet Gilgi is distinctly uneasy and has not

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hinein". The Problematics of Language in the Early Novels of Irmgard Keun', *Colloquia Germanica*, 23 (1990), 297-313 (p. 301).

<sup>65</sup> Von Ankum also observes that 'Looking at herself in the mirror she no longer perceives her reflection as a self-made object of her own physical discipline, but as an object dependent on the male gaze'. Von Ankum, 'Motherhood', p.182.



yet reconciled herself entirely to this mode of viewing her body, as suggested by the almost surreal qualities of her reflection and the fragility of the image. Moreover, she still prefers the two toughened typing fingers, 'gewöhnliche, robust Arbeitsinstrumente' (G, p.135) to the rest of her body and admonishes Martin for the change he has wrought upon her.

This moment of insight and the expression of resistance to Martin's treatment of her body as a mannequin proves too exhausting to sustain and Gilgi finally identifies completely with Martin's mode of observing her to the extent that she even finds it endearing as she stands kitted out from head to toe in items he has purchased: 'rührend niedlich, die Art, wie so ein Mann Frauenkleider betrachtet - mit einem Auge den Inhalt, mit dem andren das Kleid - so mit halbem Verständnis.' (G, p.163) As with a mannequin, the dress is regarded and evaluated separately from the body underneath. Gilgi's reduction of her body to the status of a machine has rendered her peculiarly vulnerable to its objectification by another. This suggests a certain degree of compliance in the process of internalizing normative male images of women.

Significantly, it is another encounter with her reflection which enables Gilgi to liberate herself from the objectified mannequin image Martin has created. In the flat of her friends Hans and Hertha, for whose suicide she feels partly responsible, Gilgi overcomes her own impulse to take her life and immediately moves to observe her reflection. She feels utterly alienated from the image in the mirror and decides to remove it from the glass: 'das Gesicht im Spiegel ist grau und verfallen. Lange sieht Gilgi in das fremde Spiegelgesicht. Preßt die Lippen zu einem schmalen, harten Strich zusammen. Von vorne anfangen, Gilgi!' (G, p.250) During her long contemplation of her reflection, Gilgi recognizes her entrapment within the mode of observing her body derived from the dominant male culture

whilst simultaneously postulating a strategy to remove that image from the mirror. At this crucial moment, staring at the image Martin has created, Gilgi takes the decision to leave Martin and strike out on her own in Berlin. She thereby assumes what Sigrid Weigel terms 'de[n] schielende[n] Blick', a recognition that her self-image is determined by male cultural norms which is coupled with a forward-looking gaze and the aspiration to develop new models. The 'schielende Blick' is an intermediary situation, according to Weigel, a moment in which although the images of women derived from dominant cultural norms have been erased from the glass, a new model of a fully liberated woman has not yet been envisaged:

Um in diesem Zwischenraum, im '*nicht mehr*' und im '*noch nicht*' zu überleben, ohne verrückt oder toll zu werden, muß die Frau den schielenden Blick erlernen, d.h. die Widersprüche zum Sprechen bringen, sie sehen, begreifen und in ihnen, mit ihnen leben - und Kraft schöpfen aus der Rebellion gegen das Gestern und aus der Antizipation des Morgen.<sup>66</sup>

This statement seems to encapsulate Gilgi's situation at the novel's conclusion. She has achieved a greater degree of self-awareness and recognized the extent to which she had internalized a self-image projected by male norms. Yet, as she waits for the train to Berlin, Gilgi has no concrete vision of the future and has failed to resolve the contradictions she experiences and the conflicting demands of work and love. She cannot posit an entirely new reflection for herself. Instead, she oscillates between the fear of being obliterated by technology, conveyed by the image of a tiny orange, a product of nature, about to be crushed by that great symbol of technological modernization, the train, and aspirations for her productive re-integration back into the rationalized and technologically advanced world of work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Weigel, 'Der schielende Blick', p.105, italics in original.

<sup>67</sup> cf. Horsley, 'Warum', p.304 and Heidi Soltau, *Trennungen. Frauenliteratur der zwanziger Jahre*. Frankfurt am Main, Extrabuchverlag, 1984.



vor der Lokomotive liegt 'ne kleine, gelbe Apfelsine . . . Eine winzige Freude zuckt auf - Sekundenblitz: man wird wieder dazugehören - eingereiht sein in Pflicht und geschaffenem Räderwerk - man wird wieder geschützt sein im gewünschten Zwang erarbeiteter Tage, in dem gewollten Gesetz eigenen Schaffens - - vor der Lokomotive liegt 'ne . . . ah, man wird wieder dazugehören. (G, p.261)

Keun has been criticized for failing to offer a positive, concrete alternative for Gilgi at the end of the novel, but viewed within the context of Weigel's article, the conclusion can at least be seen as a step in the right direction, a problematization of the mannequin image and the effort to shift away from complete identification with this figure.

In this context, a comparison with Huyssen's interpretation of the close of Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) is illuminating. Huyssen argues that the menacing, uncontrollable aspects of technological modernization and female sexuality are purged at the end of the film through the destruction of the female automaton, leaving 'a serene view of technology as a harbinger of social progress'.<sup>68</sup> Both woman and technology have been tamed and the conventional power relations and social order have been restored. By contrast, Keun does not offer any such easy resolution at the end of her novel. The 'real woman' Gilgi has escaped the projected mannequin image and the passive subordinate role to which Maria is reduced in *Metropolis*. Huyssen maintains that the sanitized, optimistic view of rationalization and technological modernity reinforced at the close of Lang's work is characteristic of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. However, Keun problematizes these issues and avoids any such pat solutions, suggesting that her novel cannot easily be categorized as a typical example of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. This categorization is also unsettled by Keun's illustration of the unreliable nature of physiognomy.

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<sup>68</sup> Huyssen, 'The Vamp', p.81.

## 6. Faces of Modernity: Typology and Physiognomy in the Weimar Republic

### 6.1 Popularizing Physiognomy

In the early section of the novel, Gilgi tends to judge others on the basis of their bodies and clothes, believing that she can deduce reliable and significant information about people, especially strangers, from their physical appearance. In particular, she evaluates their capacity to survive in the competitive economic climate and even their value to society on the basis of her visual observations of their physical characteristics. However, as will be outlined below, Gilgi's frequent mistakes in assessing others in this way cause her to question the reliability of this strategy for making swift judgements in the modern world. Keun's critique of Gilgi's confidence in physiognomical details to provide accurate information about specific personality traits is especially pertinent given the obsessive fixation with physiognomy in particular, and the growing orientation towards a more visual culture in general, in Weimar Germany. As I shall show, the startling interest in typologies and physiognomy is a manifestation of anxieties about modernity, a response which seeks to impose distinct, fixed and unquestionable boundaries between individuals and groups. It is the very reverse of the fluid boundaries and rejection of closure associated by Bakhtin with the grotesque body. By questioning the rigid borders developed by physiognomy, Keun once more undermines a powerful element of the dominant culture and relativizes the values of the new bodily canon. Moreover, the sceptical portrait of physiognomy in the novel calls into question the view of *Gilgi* as a typical work of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In order to understand the full implications of Keun's treatment of physiognomy, a preliminary outline of the status of physiognomy and visual culture in the Weimar Republic is required, together with an indication of how these developments are correlated with anxieties relating to modernity.



As discussed in relation to *Käsebier*, there was an increasing orientation towards a visual culture during the Weimar Republic. The enormous popularity of the cinema transformed expectations of the visual and affected more traditional forms of entertainment:

Die optische Bereicherung, die das Leben auch der einfachsten Menschen in den zwanziger Jahren durch den Spielfilm erfuhr, ließ auch die traditionellen Formen der Unterhaltung und der Wissensvermittlung nicht unverändert. Am deutlichsten ist der Einbruch des Visuellen bei den Büchern zu spüren.<sup>69</sup>

New typefaces were designed to be easier on the eye than gothic script, whilst advertising posters and neon signs vied with each other for consumers' attention.<sup>70</sup> In addition, during this period the public transport system was substantially enlarged and developed, whose growth, as Georg Simmel had observed as early as 1903, provided people with greater scope than ever before to sit passively and observe other passengers.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, with the expansion of the service sector during the 1920s employers began to give increasing priority to a youthful, pleasing and attractive appearance in their white-collar workers, which was believed to appeal to consumers.<sup>72</sup> Kracauer emphasizes in particular the importance which physiognomical and graphological analyses acquire in procedures for recruiting white-collar workers in the Weimar Republic.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Puttnies, *Das Gesicht*, p.14. See also Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets. Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, for a detailed discussion on changing modes of perception and the turn to a visual culture.

<sup>70</sup> The introduction and impact of new typefaces are described in F.C. Foster, 'The Press of the Weimar Republic and its Representation in German Literature', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bristol University, 1996, see especially pp.210-214.

<sup>71</sup> Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, VII: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, ed. by Rüdiger Kramme and others, 2 vols, I, pp.116-131 (First publ. 1903).

<sup>72</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, pp.23-25.

<sup>73</sup> Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, p.20.

These latter two developments are closely linked to the enormous popularity of physiognomy and typologies in the Weimar Republic. Physiognomy, or the evaluation and classification of internal personality traits on the basis of observable external physical characteristics, had first received widespread public attention in the eighteenth century via the writings of Johann Caspar Lavater, who was a celebrated figure throughout Europe.<sup>74</sup> Physiognomy had played a significant role in the establishment of criminal anthropology in Europe during the late nineteenth century, particularly as developed and propounded by Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso.<sup>75</sup> According to Helmut Lethen, physiognomy acquired a tremendous significance in many areas of Weimar society:

Die alten Künste der Physiognomik gewannen im neusachlichen Jahrzehnt eine brisante Aktualität. Ihre Rolle im Geschäftsleben, in der Wahlpropaganda und bei der Organisation von Großraumbüros war so offensichtlich wie ihre Rolle bei der Fahndung nach Verbrechern, der Feststellung von Krankheitsbildern, Definition von Rassen und dem Erkennen von Genies.<sup>76</sup>

Lethen notes how handbooks on physiognomy with titles such as *Sieh dir den Menschen an!* ran to several editions, which demonstrates the huge interest in this topic amongst the general public during this era.<sup>77</sup> *Sieh dir den Menschen an!* was

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<sup>74</sup> On Lavater's fame and his role in popularizing physiognomy, see Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel. Faces and Fortunes*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982.

<sup>75</sup> Helmut Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik. Gegen den Schrecken der ungewissen Zeit', *Der Deutsch Unterricht*, 49 (1997), no. 2, 6-19 (p.7). See also Mark M. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes. Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, pp.145-155; Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration. A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

<sup>76</sup> Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik', p.9.

<sup>77</sup> Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik', p.9. Lethen refers to Gerhard Venzmer, *Sieh dir den Menschen an! Die Gestalt deiner Freunde, deiner Vorgesetzten und Untergebenen verrät dir ihren Charakter*. Stuttgart, 1931. Lynne Frame also discusses the influence of these handbooks, although she refers to an earlier edition of Venzmer's work with a slightly different title: Gerhard Venzmer, *Sieh dir die Menschen an! Was die biologische Verwandtschaft zwischen Körperform und Wesenskern des Menschen verrät*. Stuttgart, Franckh'sche Verlagshandlung, 1930. See Lynne Frame, 'Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman', in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by



aimed at the lay reader and sought to popularize the principles in Ernst Kretschmer's *Körperbau und Charakter* (1921), which argued that psychological type and physical body type were both genetically determined and therefore the latter functioned as a reliable indicator of the former.<sup>78</sup> *Antlitz dieser Zeit* (1929), August Sander's collection of photographic portraits organized according to social class and occupation was also advertised as 'Ein Buch von guten Bekannten, die Sie nie gesehen haben', thereby playing upon the desire to improve visual literacy.<sup>79</sup> Intellectuals were also enthusiastic about physiognomy. Walter Benjamin, for example, perceives Sander's work as 'ein Übungsatlas' to school visual literacy, which he believes to be essential in the current age: 'Machtverschiebungen, wie sie bei uns fällig geworden sind, pflegen die Ausbildung, Schärfung der physiognomischen Auffassung zur vitalen Notwendigkeit werden zu lassen.'<sup>80</sup> Magazine articles and advertising also made physiognomy fashionable, as in the series of portraits supposedly embodying particular values, experiences or attitudes produced by Hans Neumann for a cigarette campaign.<sup>81</sup> Weimar Germany appears to have been a culture 'obsessed with taxonomies' in all spheres.<sup>82</sup>

Both Lethen and Lynne Frame perceive the widespread fixation with physiognomy as a reaction to the uncertainties created by modernizing processes.<sup>83</sup> Lethen argues that physiognomy seemed to offer a practical, reliable

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Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1997, pp.12-40 (p.16 and 21).

<sup>78</sup> Accounts of Kretschmer's book are given in Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik', p.9; Frame, 'Gretchen', p.16.

<sup>79</sup> Advertisement in *Die Weltbühne*, 26 (2 December 1930), 844.

<sup>80</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, II.1, pp.368-385 (p.381).

<sup>81</sup> Puttnies, *Das Gesicht*, p.112.

<sup>82</sup> Frame, 'Gretchen', p.13.

<sup>83</sup> Complex interconnections between modernity, a perception of crisis and aspects of physiognomy in France, Italy and England during the nineteenth

guide to social interaction and behaviour in a time of profound epistemological crisis generated by the disintegration of traditional social institutions and value systems. He contends that, as the pace of life increased and demands on time became ever greater, physiognomy appeared to be a handy hermeneutic tool which provided a basis for swift decision-making and brevity of expression. In addition, Lethen points to technological developments in photography and film which opened up new possibilities for observation and illustration of physical characteristics. Therefore, new technologies coupled with the uncertainties and pressures engendered by rapid modernization created a climate for the popularization of physiognomy during the 1920s as a strategy to cope with unfamiliar sensory overload and as a response to a sense of crisis. Frame emphasizes the origins of the Weimar typologies in the work of nineteenth-century biomedical discourse about population policies and eugenics which constituted a response to 'the pressures of social, economic, demographic, and political change similar to the upheavals later experienced in even greater magnitude in postwar Germany'.<sup>84</sup> It was in this radicalized phase of modernity in the 1920s, according to Frame, that such ideas crossed over from medical and philosophical discourses into both political practice and popular typologies, where they were deployed to make judgements about the supposed value to society of these types. Significantly, Frame highlights how these typologies often focused upon women and upon negatively categorizing the new roles which modern women were seeking to forge for themselves outside the domestic and family sphere. Like the obsessive interest in the mannequin image, the prevalence of physiognomy during the Weimar Republic expresses displaced concerns about modernity, which are projected on to women's bodies in particular.

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century are also charted in Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*.

<sup>84</sup> Frame, *Das Gesicht*, p.14.



Keun's focus upon physiognomy in *Gilgi - eine von uns* therefore draws upon a central and highly pervasive phenomenon in the Weimar Republic which represented a response to contemporary anxieties about modernity. As the following discussion will illustrate, Keun employs physiognomical typing in her first novel in order to draw attention to the dangerous nature of what she clearly perceives as an all too simplistic response to the contemporary sense of crisis. As Lethen is quick to highlight, the rise of popular physiognomy had alarming implications: in particular, nineteenth-century theories about the existence of a biological criminal type, whose supposedly innate disposition to commit crime could allegedly be deduced from external markers common to all criminals, fed into the establishment of racist typologies and the development of fascist ideas in the Weimar period.<sup>85</sup> In *Gilgi*, Keun exposes the fallibility of physiognomical criteria for evaluating individuals and thus attacks a concept which in its most extreme form became a central plank of National Socialist ideology. Furthermore, Keun's rejection of physiognomical typing undermines a technique which is frequently associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* and, indeed, with realist literature in general, as will be illustrated below.

## 6.2 The Appearance of Failure: Prostitutes, Poverty and Physiognomy

In the early stages of the novel, *Gilgi* uses her observation of other people's bodily characteristics in order to make judgements about their psychological traits and hence to ascertain their value to society and even, in the most extreme case, their right to exist. In *Gilgi's* eyes, physical appearance is the external manifestation of an individual's will-power, self-discipline, ambition and

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<sup>85</sup> Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik', p.7. Mark M. Anderson also argues that the theories of biological or racial types developed by physiognomists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century laid the foundations for the Nazi criminal justice system. Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, p.170.

energy. She believes initially that such mental attributes in turn determine an individual's material success or failure, the yardstick by which Gilgi measures his or her value to society. For Gilgi, physical appearance is thus linked to a Social Darwinist doctrine of success and used to evaluate and classify individuals in an index of supposed social worth when she first meets them. However, during the course of the novel she discovers that the correlation between external and internal characteristics is not as stable as she initially believes and she often encounters conflicting visual clues which unsettle her clearly defined system of classification, particularly with relation to the prevailing female stereotypes of the prostitute, the mother and the *Neue Frau*.

In a scene at the start of the novel which recalls Simmel's arguments about the links between the growth of public transport and the promotion of visual culture, Gilgi scrutinizes her fellow passengers on the tram. She seeks to identify types who share particular psychological attributes with her through observing their physical characteristics: 'Ist denn keiner von euch jung wie ich, freut sich keiner wie ich? Doch. Ein - zwei - drei Gesichter. Junge, straffe Züge, harte, kleine Stirnfalten, unternehmungsbereites Kinn, wache Augen.' (G, p.16) It is evident that Gilgi interprets individual bodily features as reliable indicators of particular personality traits. The physical qualities which Gilgi associates with desirable inner characteristics, and which therefore spell success to her, contain echoes of Ernst Kretschmer's *Tatenmensch*, whose muscular build revealed the 'man of action'.<sup>86</sup> Young, healthy, well-trained bodies, like the protagonist's own machine-like body, rank highly on Gilgi's index of success and failure in this early part of the novel.

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<sup>86</sup> Frame, 'Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne', p.16.



By extension, overweight or weak bodies, shabbily clothed bodies and unhealthy bodies all betray an inherent deficiency in character in Gilgi's view, an innate lack of vitality and will-power which places them on the lowest rung of her scale of social worth. This tendency is also foregrounded during Gilgi's visit to Fräulein Täschler, who has a weak, thin, shrivelled body, 'einen schrumpfligen, vertrockneten Körper'. (G, p.42) Looking at the sempstress's face, Gilgi places the blame for this physical degeneration squarely at Täschler's door: 'Ein graues Gesicht mit klobiger Nase, entzündeten Lidern, lippenlosem Mund und faulen Zähnen. [...] So ein Gesicht zu bekommen! Warum hast du dir das gefallen lassen?' (G, p.44) Gilgi thus reads an ugly and unhealthy physique as a reflection of inner characteristics, as a sign of inertia and degeneration, which is typical of much nineteenth-century criminology and physiognomy.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, she considers Täschler's environment, her impoverished living conditions, to be a similar indicator of a particular attitude to life: 'Du, du, du - warum läßt du dir das gefallen! Warum wohnst du hier, warum lebst du hier? Totschlagen sollte man dich, wenn du zufrieden bist!' (G, p.42) Gilgi's perception that poverty is a matter of individual responsibility and choice leads to alarming conclusions as she reasons that Täschler does not have the right to live, given her failure, according to Gilgi's index, and apparent acceptance of her situation. This ominously foreshadows the consequences of physical typologies constructed by the Nazis.

Moreover, viewing Täschler's physique and living conditions as manifestations of her internal personality traits conveniently exculpates Gilgi from any sense of social responsibility or from the idea that external circumstances beyond the older woman's control have resulted in her poverty. Keun emphasizes the inaccuracy of Gilgi's reading of Täschler's physique as a sign of inadequate

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<sup>87</sup> cf. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*.

drive and resolve to escape poverty: when Täschler relates the circumstances surrounding Gilgi's birth and adoption, it becomes clear that she has been exploited by Gilgi's wealthy birth family and by her lover and that her destitution results, despite her financial prudence, from the period of hyper-inflation in Germany following the 1914-1918 war. It is social and economic conditions which have produced Täschler's poverty rather than a form of 'self-willed degradation'.<sup>88</sup>

The unreliability of linking bodily appearance with individual inner character is further emphasized during Gilgi's encounter with Lenchen, a prostitute who joins Gilgi uninvited at her table in the dive where Pit plays piano. The prostitute was one of the key types which nineteenth-century European criminology and psychiatry sought to identify and separate from the general population, to remove from the circulation and exchange of the modern metropolis.<sup>89</sup> More specifically, the difficulty of distinguishing prostitutes from so-called 'respectable' women in the urban public spaces was high on the public order agenda in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to Katharina von Ankum: newspapers frequently reported incidents of bourgeois women being misrecognized as prostitutes, and policemen were given special instructions in the treatment of women suspected of prostitution to prevent such mistaken identity.<sup>90</sup> During the Weimar Republic, the maintenance of the stereotypes surrounding prostitutes reflected anxieties about the changing

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<sup>88</sup> Stallybrass and White use this phrase to describe the attitude of Victorian social reformer Henry Mayhew to living and working conditions of the poor. See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London, Methuen, 1986, p.132.

<sup>89</sup> Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p.43, p.73 and pp.85-86.

<sup>90</sup> Katharina von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*', in *Women in the Metropolis. Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. by Katharina von Ankum. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, pp.162-184 (pp.166-168).



status of women. A study such as Elga Kern's survey of prostitutes' lives, which emphasized the role of social and economic circumstances in driving women to prostitution, constituted an exception to 'the biological determinism of the day which sought "genetic" imperatives to explain the "decadence" of these "naturally bad" women and to separate them all the more distinctly from "good" women'.<sup>91</sup> Yet the boundaries were, in reality, often fluid and efforts to categorize prostitutes did not reflect the situation whereby women would sometimes turn to prostitution during periods of economic hardship 'without risking their social positions as wives, mothers and workers in other areas of the labour market'.<sup>92</sup> Keun's first novel is therefore unusual within this context, since it undermines these stereotypes which emphasize the biological difference of the prostitute.

As Gilgi makes her way to visit Täschler, the narrator subverts the prevailing image in Weimar of the prostitute as decadent and distinct from other women: 'An der Passage stehen ein paar trübselige Nutten, sie sehen brav, bieder und schlecht gelaunt aus, ohne Schminke und Attropin könnte man sie für entlassene Telefonbeamtinnen halten.' (G, p.38) The narrator highlights the visual similarity of the prostitutes to women working in the white-collar sector, who might be driven to prostitution because of unemployment or financial hardship, whilst the attributes 'brav' and 'bieder' suggest virtue and respectability which challenges directly widespread contemporary views of the prostitute as decadent and different. Once in the bar, Gilgi is perplexed by the conflicting visual signs in the appearance of Lenchen, a prostitute who sits at her table:

Die Nutte hat ein Korallenkettchen um den Hals, ihre Strickjacke ist an den Ellbogen sauber gestopft - ob sie das selber getan hat? -

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<sup>91</sup> Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.27. Meskimmon refers to Elga Kern, *Wie Sie dazu kamen: 35 Lebensfragmente bordellierte Mädchen nach Untersuchungen in badischen Bordellen*. Munich, Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1928. See also Margot Klages-Stange, 'Prostitution', *Die Weltbühne*, 22 (13 April 1926), 579-580.

<sup>92</sup> Meskimmon, *We Weren't*, p.31.

sie hat die breiten, schmutzigen Fingernägel dick mit Nagellack beschmiert. (G, p.56)

The dirty nails and badly applied nail varnish reinforce the stereotypical view of the slovenly prostitute and are interpreted by Gilgi as indicators of a lazy personality and lack of will-power: 'Wenn einer so'n Dreckpamps aus seinem Leben macht, ist's seine eigne Schuld.' (G, p.56) Yet this categorization of Lenchen is undermined by the carefully darned elbows in her cardigan, which imply a certain pride in her appearance, and bourgeois values such as financial prudence and respectability, even domestic virtue; these are the signs of the 'virtuous' woman, not the prostitute, according to prevailing attitudes in Weimar. Gilgi is perplexed by these contradictory signs which undermine the boundaries of her classificatory system and has 'das dunkle Empfinden, daß ein Mädchen, das seine Strickjacke sauber stopft nicht Straßendirne zu sein hat'. (G, p.57) Doubts begin to arise in Gilgi's mind about her Social Darwinist doctrine of success: 'nur nicht immer denken, es wäre so ganz und gar eignes Verdienst, wenn man was besseres ist.' (G, p.57) Through her encounter with Lenchen, Gilgi begins to realize that individuals do not fall into easy categorizations of physical types which correlate to particular personality traits. Moreover, Keun emphasizes that the project of seeking to identify and categorize prostitutes as a particular type is flawed and untenable.<sup>93</sup>

Gilgi becomes aware that she has confused the relationship between internal characteristics, physical appearance and material success or failure when she applies successfully for an evening job. Her initial sense of triumph wanes during a conversation with a disappointed candidate who has been unemployed for five months following the collapse of the company which employed her. The

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<sup>93</sup> This becomes a central preoccupation in Keun's second novel, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*. cf. von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces'.



evidently desperate financial situation of the other candidate troubles Gilgi's conscience and shakes her confidence in the myth of equality of opportunity and upward mobility to all possessed of sufficient resolve in a society still riddled with structural inequalities: 'Die hat ja die gleiche Chance gehabt. So? Hat sie? Mit dem krunkligen, alten Gesicht, der latschigen Haltung, mit den matten blicklosen Augen und den häßlichen Kleidern??? [*sic*] Wer nimmt die denn noch?' (G, p.84) It dawns on Gilgi that material success is not simply a matter of will-power which manifests itself in an individual's physical appearance, but also of the social and economic starting point of the individual. Those with means in the first place were in a better position to participate in the consumer culture and purchase cosmetics and fashionable clothes which contributed towards maintaining an attractive appearance. Particularly in the service sector in the Weimar Republic, employers placed great emphasis upon a young, pleasing appearance, which they believed was more likely to entice customers.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, those possessed of a youthful, healthy and attractive appearance do indeed have better chances in the employment market, but not because a beautiful physique is an expression of some innate characteristics or disposition to success. Although Gilgi's association between material success and a particular external appearance is justified to a certain extent, she begins to realize that she has inverted the causal relationship between the two and mistakenly considered particular physical characteristics to be the external manifestation of certain personality traits.

However, it is the transformation in the bodies of her old friends Hans and Hertha which provides the final blow to Gilgi's belief in the correspondence between external appearance and character. When Hans, whom Gilgi originally met through the swimming club, appears at her door four years later selling tins of

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<sup>94</sup> cf. Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, pp.19-25; pp.44-53.

floor polish, Gilgi fails to recognize him at first and is subsequently stunned by the change in his appearance, thinking ‘dies abgehärmte, wächserne Gesicht war mal so jung und frisch und leuchtend...’ (G, p.186) She remembers his previously healthy, handsome physique: ‘So blondes Haar hatte er und blitzblaue Augen und wunderbare Muskeln. Ja, auf die war er immer sehr stolz.’ (G, pp.187-188) This severe alteration has been wrought by the change in his financial circumstances: a single man with a secure job in his uncle’s factory when Gilgi first knew him, Hans now has a family to support and has struggled to find work since the closure of the factory over which he had no control. Hans’ physical appearance does not provide the key to his inner character; external circumstances beyond his control rather than a lack of individual resolve — his efforts to find work have continued unabated — have led to his impoverishment and material failure.

Moreover, after the birth of their first child, a prolonged illness meant that Hans’ wife, Hertha, was unable to return to her well-paid secretarial job. She too has lost her healthy, pretty looks as a result of motherhood and financial hardship, for which she resents Hans: ‘Wie habe ich ihn manchmal gehaßt, wenn ich im Spiegel sah, daß von der heiß geliebten Schönheit nichts mehr übrig war — welke graue Haut, schlaffe Mundwinkel, unklare Augen —’ (G, pp.205-206) Significantly, Hertha’s appearance prior to marriage and pregnancy would have been classified as the ideal feminine, maternal type in many Weimar taxonomies: Gilgi remembers her as ‘die hübsche blonde Hertha mit den weichen, mütterlichen Hüften’. (G, p.190) According to Venzmer’s classification of women as suitable marriage partners in *Sieh dir den Menschen an!*, the rounded female figure indicated the ideal personality type for marriage and reproduction, whilst Venzmer asserted that those with a slender, angular and boyish body type often experienced severe inner conflicts and ‘were risky marriage partners for any man



in search of peace and solidity in his relationship'.<sup>95</sup> Crucially, Keun inverts and undermines these widespread conceptions by associating Hertha's rounded, 'feminine' figure with her life as an independent, single, working woman and her thin, pale, unhealthy appearance with her confinement to the domestic sphere as wife and mother. In this way, Keun deliberately contradicts the female types with which her readers would have been familiar from the contemporary classification systems and she highlights the spurious nature of claims made by physiognomy to identify and classify character through body types, particularly as these claims were applied to women.

By tracing Gilgi's growing realization of the unreliability of physiognomy and character typing, Keun exposes the problematic nature of a widespread schema for evaluating others and for determining social interaction in the Weimar Republic. As a response to the contemporary crisis of modernity and sensory overload in modern cities, physiognomy is shown to be excessively simplistic in Keun's novel and to have dangerous ramifications, especially when connected to the ruthless ideology of the survival of the fittest which Gilgi initially espouses. Exposing the flaws inherent in these typologies became a recurrent preoccupation in Keun's writings: in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Keun ridicules racial typologies directly when the politically naive Doris thinks it will please her date if she tells him that she is Jewish, although she is not: 'Sagt er, er hätt es ja denken können bei meinem krausen Haar. Dabei sind es Dauerwellen und von Natur aalglatt.'<sup>96</sup> In *Nach Mitternacht* Sanna's friend Gerti, whose blue eyes and curly blonde hair attract the attentions of an SS officer, pretends to be Jewish to evade the officer's advances. Gerti taunts him for being deceived by her appearance: 'er solle sich an

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<sup>95</sup> Frame, 'Gretchen', p.16.

<sup>96</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen. Roman*. Munich, dtv, 1996, pp.34-35.

sein Blut wenden und sein Blut fragen, warum es nicht gesprochen habe, wie es sich gehöre.<sup>97</sup>

Significantly, Keun's subversion of physiognomy simultaneously calls into question one of the key means of characterization in the realist literary tradition. As critics have noted, the correspondence between an individual's external features and internal personality traits really came into its own as a means of characterization in the realist tradition of nineteenth-century European literature.<sup>98</sup> A reciprocal relationship existed between this means of literary characterization and proponents of physiognomy like Lombroso, who was even named in literary texts.<sup>99</sup> Descriptions of characters' features, posture and clothing are often used by nineteenth-century novelists to convey information about the characters' personality and their probable future behaviour. This is also a characteristic feature of Naturalist writing and persisted in literature published during the Weimar Republic: Willi Bredel, for instance, makes use of such typologies in *Maschinenfabrik N. & K.*, associating the Communists with the type of the muscular, dynamic virile young man and the passive, weak-willed Social Democrats with effeminate physical characteristics and soft and rounded figures.<sup>100</sup> Feuchtwanger also deploys these typologies: the unhealthy, clumsy Dr. Geyer with his 'schmalen, nervösen Händen', 'dickbebrillten Augen', 'zerarbeitetem Gesicht' and 'dünne blaßrosige Haut' is the type of the sickly

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<sup>97</sup> Irmgard Keun, *Nach Mitternacht. Roman*. Stuttgart/Düsseldorf/Leipzig, Klett, 1982, pp.29-30.

<sup>98</sup> Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, pp.155-158; Pick outlines how writers such as Balzac, Stevenson, Stoker, Tolstoy and Zola reflected and shaped the discourse of degeneration and physiognomy in *Faces of Degeneration*, pp.109-110 and pp.155-175.

<sup>99</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>100</sup> Willi Bredel, *Maschinenfabrik N&K. Ein Roman aus dem proletarischen Alltag*. Berlin, Oberbaumverlag, 1971. See also the solid appearance of Erna who leads a strike, in comparison with that of her colleagues in Rudolf Braune's *Das Mädchen von der Orga Privat*. Berlin: Neues Leben; Munich: Damnitz, 1975.



intellectual.<sup>101</sup> By contrast, Johanna Krain's 'schnellen, festen Beinen', her 'sportlich kräftig ebengewachsenen Leib' and her 'entschiedenen, grauen Augen' are physical manifestations of her tenacity, patience and strength in her attempts to secure Martin Krüger's freedom.<sup>102</sup> These physical features are associated with the characters throughout the novel. Lynne Frame outlines the way in which Vicki Baum's *stud. chem Helene Willfüer* uses only the briefest of visual clues to trigger a range of associations about a woman's character.<sup>103</sup> Frame argues that whilst Baum seeks to undermine the stereotypes of the masculinized modern woman, the text still implies that Helene's ultimate success is due to her biological type and hence a biologically determined fate. Crucially, Frame associates this type of biological typing with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

By contrast, Keun uses the links between character and physical appearance which were so well-established in the minds of the general public in order to subvert and criticize them. This places her within a particular modernist tradition of writing which also rejected these simplistic typologies and were aware of their inherent dangers. Alfred Döblin, for example, took issue with the literary tendency to decipher motives and attribute reasons for human behaviour through observation of external characteristics in his 1913 essay 'An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker'.<sup>104</sup> He advocated that writers should resign themselves to simply noting down external movements and features and abandon the attempt to connect such physical phenomena to internal motivation. Mark M. Anderson interprets Kafka's *Der Proceß* as a critique of the tendency to type individuals

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<sup>101</sup> Lion Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg. Drei Jahre Geschichte einer Provinz. Roman*. Berlin, Aufbau, 1999, p.117, p.54, p.63, p.70.

<sup>102</sup> Feuchtwanger, *Erfolg*, p.58.

<sup>103</sup> Frame, 'Gretchen', p.22-34.

<sup>104</sup> Alfred Döblin, 'An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker. Berliner Programm', in *Schriften zu Ästhetik, Poetik und Literatur*, ed. by Erich Kleinschmidt. Olten/Freiburg im Breisgau, Walter, 1989, pp.120-121.

according to their external characteristics, both in literature and in the legal system and the potential dangers it engendered.<sup>105</sup> Keun's rejection of this mode of characterization and her constant attempt to undercut the links between physical appearance and personality thus implies a questioning of realist literary techniques and associates her with a certain mode of modernist writing. This once more calls into question the categorization of Keun's novel within the ambit of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which, after all, draws upon a realist, and particularly the Naturalist, tradition.

The problematization of particular responses to modernity and of elements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature has been shown to be a common preoccupation in Keun's treatment of the mannequin image and of physiognomy, two predominant discourses relating to the body in Weimar culture. Keun undermines the dominant culture of rationalization and the desire for clear-cut certainties as well as distinct borders, advocating instead a flexibility and openness which have more in common with Bakhtin's grotesque body. In the following two sections, I argue that Keun's use of the carnival imagery and the body type associated with it similarly foregrounds a sense that the thoroughly rationalized culture of the Weimar Republic has somehow entered a state of crisis. She also demonstrates a preoccupation that language modelled on the formal criteria of the machine body is closing off large parts of human experience, a concern which is also central to Bakhtin's study.

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<sup>105</sup> 'Again and again *The Trial* demonstrates the fallaciousness and devastating consequences of Hanns Gross's claim that "the inner condition of men implies some outer expression."' Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, p.152. Pick also refers to the overt condemnation of Lombroso by anarchist Karl Yundt in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, pp.109-110.



## 7. Encountering the Grotesque Body

As discussed in section 3, Gilgi's original conception of the body and the self has much in common with the forms of body and subjectivity Bakhtin describes as the new bodily canon. However, during *Karneval*, Gilgi encounters bodies which recall Bakhtin's descriptions of the grotesque body and which pose a threat to her concept of a centred, stable ego and her autonomous individual will. Gradually, such encounters compel the protagonist to revise her understanding of the body and the human subject. The interconnections of carnival, different types of bodies and corresponding forms of subjectivity in Keun's novel echo those in Bakhtin's work. Keun offers a similarly critical view of the route modernity has taken, although she is also concerned by the problematic repercussions a heterodox subjectivity may have for agency and active engagement with the outside world. The rest of this section will trace the dissolution of Gilgi's arrogant adherence to her sovereign rational ego and hermetic, machine-like body within the novel, arguing that Keun thereby foregrounds a sense that the project of modernity has reached a point of crisis.

As soon as Gilgi has been informed of her adoption, she feels dislocated and tries to re-establish the secure connection with the external world: 'Immer schön fest auf den Füßen stehn, ja nicht wackeln.' (G, p.30) Later Gilgi feels that the ground beneath her feet is no longer secure: 'Wackelt da etwa schon der Boden unter den Füßen?' (G, p.36) The fixed relationship between the individual body and the outside world which Bakhtin considers to be characteristic of the new bodily canon has been disrupted by this utterly unexpected event beyond Gilgi's control. Body and environment are out of joint and, rather than acting as an impenetrable barrier against the external world, Gilgi begins to perceive her body as a weak point, constantly subject to transgression and intrusion by sensory

stimuli beyond her control, particularly through the orifices of nose and mouth. Significantly, these stimuli all provide evidence of the grotesque body and represent unavoidable reminders that far from being a perfected hermetic machine, the body is a living organism involved in an unceasing process of transformation, and subject to decay and dissolution. Moreover, these stimuli relativize the prioritization of the visual in the culture of Weimar Germany and in the new bodily canon, bringing into play all the senses as does the grotesque body.

The transgression of her body's borders becomes particularly clear during Gilgi's visit to Täschler. Entering the housing block, Gilgi is immediately confronted with evidence of the physical organic status of the human body through the pungent smell of unwashed laundry and putrid fish, which she is helpless to prevent entering her own body. She tries to stave off the stench of rancid margarine, the damp walls, rotting floor and Täschler's body odour: 'ich kann den Geruch nicht vertragen, ich muß mir 'ne Zigarette anstecken.' (G, p.42) Täschler's own shrivelled body manifests signs of ill-health and ageing: she has '[e]in graues Gesicht mit klobiger Nase, entzündeten Lidern, lippenlosem Mund und faulen Zähnen.' (G, p.44) Gilgi takes refuge from the sight of organic decay by looking away at familiar and reassuring images of the new bodily canon, individual bodies in fashion magazines. Her pretext for visiting Täschler is that she wants to commission a dress and jacket from the sempstress. Yet the experience of being touched by Täschler whilst being measured for the clothes induces symptoms of physical illness in Gilgi: 'Sie wird grauweiß wie das schmierige Handtuch neben dem Waschtisch, als die schrumpfigen Finger ihr an der Taille rumfummeln und übelriechender Atem ihr ins Gesicht weht.' (G, p.42) Finally, the noise of music from next door prompts her to invite Täschler to join her for dinner in a nearby pub, a move to regain some control over the situation.



However, even in the pub, Gilgi is unable to escape the sense that her body has been invaded, believing that she can not only taste the cold leftovers she espied in Täschler's room, but that they are tangibly present in her mouth: 'Gilgi wird das Gefühl nicht los, eine von diesen Bratkartoffelscheiben im Mund zu haben.' (G, p.45) Gilgi's fear, initiated by her adoption, that the boundaries of the self have been breached by external forces beyond her control is therefore manifested through the anxiety that the physical borders of the body have been transgressed. Her body no longer appears to be a hermetic unit, but acquires the contours of the grotesque body through confronting elements of the grotesque body and Gilgi responds by seeking to defend and reassert her previous identity.

At the masquerade ball she attends with her family, Gilgi does not revel in the celebration, but observes the behaviour of those around her with loathing and contempt:

Summen, Scharren, Kreischen, Lachen - man muß betrunken sein und richtungslos verliebt, wenn's einem hier gefallen soll. Pfui Teufel, der Gestank in einem Raubtierkäfig ist appetitlicher als dieser Menschenmassengeruch. Mit jedem Atemzug schluckt man Staub und Rauch. Ein wüst tätowierter Jüngling packt Gilgi um die Taille: 'Komm, tanz' mit mir.' 'Nee, hab' keine Lust.' - 'Warum willst du nich - is doch Karneval...' Ist doch Karneval, ist doch Karneval, Himmelkreuzdonnerwetter nochmal. (G, pp.90-91)

Noise, smells and unwelcome physical contact from the crowd invade the private space of Gilgi's body, assaulting her with unwelcome stimuli and threatening to eliminate the boundaries between her body and the masses. In the midst of the revelling crowd, Gilgi can no longer exert sovereign control over the body which she considers to be an external manifestation of her individual identity and will power, but feels that she is being decentred. Again, Gilgi responds defensively, refusing to participate in what other revellers clearly perceive as a pleasurable experience. This incident reiterates the connections between carnival, the

destabilization of Gilgi's autonomous ego and the type of body in the process of exchange with the environment, which Bakhtin labels the grotesque body.

The more Gilgi attempts to cling to her original view of the self, the more perilously exposed she is to irrational forces. Gilgi yields completely to these previously suppressed forces during her relationship with Martin: 'Und schlägt harte Aktivität, fester Lebenswille schon mal um, dann ins wirkliche Gegenteil — nicht in Passivität — in eine Art Selbstzerstörungswut.' (G, p.141) Her attempt to explain her new decentred, fragmented sense of self to her friend Pit again foregrounds the loss of boundaries and the fluid relationship between her body, other bodies and the external world:

ich habe keine Grenze mehr und keinen Willen, ich kann von heute auf morgen nicht mehr für mich garantieren. [...] Ich ahnte ja nicht, daß ich so sein könnte - ich verbrenne - ich habe eine quälend körperliche Beziehung zu allen Dingen - wenn ich die Kante des Tisches umschließe, wenn ich eine Blume sehe - wenn ich über diesen Pelz hier streiche . . . (G, p.171)

Gilgi has lost all sense of individual agency and control over her actions, which are now determined by random encounters in the physical world. This is reiterated during Gilgi's visit to the labour exchange where she experiences a profound sense of being physically decentred and dissolving into the mass of bodies: 'Und jetzt dringt alles in einen hinein - dringt Geruch in einen hinein - Menschen in einen hinein - Raum in einen hinein. Man schmilzt auf in ungesichtiger Menge - was ist man jetzt noch?' (G, p.183) Gilgi has lost any sense of individual responsibility: in the crowd of pressing bodies, she attributes her desperation, melancholy mood and passivity to contamination with these alien sentiments exuded by others, in the same way as she might catch a physical disease, rather than seeking the cause in her own situation: 'Das geringste Schwachwerden, das allergeringste Sichgehenlassen macht offen für alles — fremde Gedanken dringen einem in die Poren, fremde Wünsche, fremde Lust,



fremde Schwermut [...].’ (G, pp.183-184) Gilgi projects and externalizes her own most feared weaknesses onto others, but her reflections also indicate that the slightest lapse in vigilance and self-discipline can open the flood-gates to uncontrollable forces.

Such a complete relinquishment of individual agency and responsibility, however, vitiates the potentially positive repercussions of Gilgi’s altered view of the self, as the incident culminating in the suicide of Hans and Hertha shows. Previously proud of her indifference towards others, Gilgi now finds herself moved by the plight of the luckless Hans and Hertha, because of her sense of connection with others through the grotesque body. When Hans asks for assistance to repay embezzled funds, it is the memory of the sight of and physical contact with Hans and Hertha’s young children which prompts her to act:

Nein, nein, man muß zusammenhalten - einmal muß man sich beweisen, einmal darf man nicht an sich denken, einmal nicht. Es gibt doch auch heute noch Taten, muß doch auch heute noch Taten geben. Und sie sieht das häßliche kleine Kind und spürt körperlich gegenwärtig den vertrauenden Druck des silberblonden kleinen Kopfes gegen ihre streichelnde Hand - - - (G, p.215)

The new concept of the body in exchange with the external environment and with other individuals directly fuels her sense of responsibility towards others, since immediately after this she promises to help Hans. Yet in order to achieve this goal, she must employ the powers of her rational mind and her firm resolve; the imperative to act which is uppermost in Gilgi’s mind cannot be achieved without the individual agency and will which has now been undermined. On her quest to obtain the money, there are resonances of the old identity and ‘plötzlich ist sie für Augenblicke wieder die smarte kleine Gilgi von früher’. (G, p.217) However, when she has finally obtained the money, the pull of irrational forces prevents her from reaching the desperate couple in time: constantly thinking of Martin, she makes a brief detour to inform him of her whereabouts and stays to assuage his

jealousy. She arrives the next day at Hans and Hertha's apartment only to find they have committed suicide. Passivity and a lack of individual agency preclude action, thereby undermining the possibility of transforming her sense of social responsibility into practical, effective assistance.

At this juncture Gilgi contemplates the ultimate dissolution of the self in death. She envisages falling from the window in Hans and Hertha's apartment and the borders of her body bursting open and spilling out her internal organs and blood, which then blend and merge with the outside world:

ein zerflossener Brei von Fleisch und Blut und Knochen — alles fließt aus einem heraus — das ganze Blut und Hirn und das Untragbare. Das ist gar nicht ekelhaft — das ist sehr schön — so rotes Blut auf dem schmutzigen, grauen Pflaster — (G, p.249)

This is the antithesis of Gilgi's original concept of her body with sealed borders. Faced with the powerful temptation to surrender the rational, autonomous ego completely, to acknowledge the organic nature of her body and yield to the pull of the irrational, however, Gilgi reasserts the power of her own individual agency and the rational mind once more. The sense of dislocation from the world around her which was expressed through the sensation that either the ground or her body were unsteady disappears: 'meine Füße sind so schwer - lösen sich nicht vom Boden - ich habe rote Schuhe an, rote Schuhe - die sind an den Boden genagelt . . .' (G, p.249) Gilgi feels reconnected to the external world and able to exert her individual agency and will-power. The encounter with death and the vision of the complete disintegration of her body prompts her resolve to engage actively with the world again, as she decides at this moment to leave Martin to make a new life for herself and her child in Berlin.

The final pages of the novel have generally been interpreted as a return to the perception of the self to which Gilgi had adhered at the beginning of the body or as the overall confirmation of Gilgi's original self-identity, but countered by a



newly integrated sense of compassion. Jordan, for instance, claims that Gilgi returns to her initial hardened sense of self: “‘Hart und entschlossen’ [...] ist sie zu ihrer ursprünglichen Lebensmoral zurückgekehrt.”<sup>106</sup> However, this would be more true of Gustl Gillich, in Fleißer’s *Mehltreisende Frieda Geier*, who returns to the male collective of his sports club, to his disciplined self-control and hardened body, ‘um die Wunde in seinem Selbstbewußtsein zu heilen’, thus restoring his identity to that at the start of the novel.<sup>107</sup> Gilgi’s identity, however, undergoes no such restoration at the end of the novel. Von Ankum contends that Gilgi has achieved ‘the ideal combination of self-discipline and humanitarianism that might allow her to sustain the pressures of an increasingly competitive labor market’.<sup>108</sup> It is true that Gilgi protests to Pit that she will succeed in the harsh economic climate because of her tremendous will-power and envisages reintegrating back into the rationalized workplace: ‘Man gehört ja in das Allgemeingefüge, man ist nicht geschaffen, außen zu stehn [...]’ (G, p.261) Nevertheless, such confident statements are intercut with statements which suggest that Gilgi has not reconciled her internal conflict and the self remains a cluster of multiple fragments, mysterious and incomprehensible:

Warum das Gesetz der Nacht im Blut - der ewig verlangende  
Schoß - in tausend Stücke bin ich geteilt - mein Verstand sagt ja zu  
Ordnung und Tag und Helle. Und meine Hände sind ratlos und  
wissen nicht, wohin sie gehören - meine Schenkel, meine Knie  
warten . . . (G, p.260)

Gilgi continues to associate different body parts with different fragments of the self which are irreconcilable and in constant conflict. Such conflict leaves her paralysed and unable to act, symbolized in the uncertainty of her hands. As she boards the train, the outside world threatens to overwhelm and destabilize the

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<sup>106</sup> Jordan, *Zerstreuung*, p.62.

<sup>107</sup> Fleißer, *Mehltreisende*, p.316.

<sup>108</sup> von Ankum, ‘Motherhood’, pp.183-184.

boundaries of her body once more: 'Einen Augenblick schwankt sie - ein dünnes, zitterndes, kleines Nichts im Riesengewölbe von Stein, Glas und Eisen . . .' (G, p.262) Gilgi has not reached an 'ideal combination' or sense of balance, whereby the two poles of the self have been happily integrated together. Instead, as Horsley notes, there is an uneasy resolution, continuing tension and sense of uncertainty.<sup>109</sup> Far from setting off to Berlin brimming with assured confidence in her future success, she can barely suppress her longing to return to Martin, her uncertainties and anxieties, encapsulated in the smile she manages for Pit, 'das halb gelingt' (G, p.262), which constitute the novel's final words. As the train pulls out of the station, Gilgi travels with considerably less optimism and less faith in the power of her individual rational mind and will than Gareis when his train races out of the station at the end of Fallada's novel. In Keun's text, the questions of individual autonomy, responsibility and action appear more problematic and complex than in *Bauern*.

The conclusion of *Gilgi* thus remains open-ended and highly ambivalent like the grotesque body itself. The oscillation between the demands of the individual and society, activism and acquiescence, the rational and the irrational is reminiscent of the ambiguous ending of Alfred Döblin's novel of 1929, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. Döblin's novel, too, shows how a dissolution into a heterodox subjectivity precludes all forms of action, but an exclusive focus upon the demands of reason produces a hardened egotism. Like Gilgi, Franz Biberkopf is compelled to revise his view of the body and the self, and an encounter with death, during which the old self is hacked to pieces, provides the decisive turning point for a greater degree of self-awareness and social reintegration. Although Keun does not provide any easy or resolute alternatives to the perceived crisis of

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<sup>109</sup> Horsley, 'Warum', p.304.



modernity, she does warn against simplistic, dogmatic responses and puts forward a plea for other aspects of the human personality to be placed on a par with reason.

#### **8. Unravelling the Verbal Corpus: Bodies, Language and *Neue Sachlichkeit*.**

As argued above, the Weimar preoccupation with physiognomy signalled a desire for succinct modes of expression or 'zur Aufwandsparnis, um es ökonomisch auszudrücken'.<sup>110</sup> Whereas words and a written culture seemed to demand vast quantities of time and individual exertion, it was thought that physiognomy and a visual culture enabled individuals to communicate large amounts of information with a minimum expenditure of effort. The popularity of physiognomy therefore indicates that the desire to maximise resources and time which lay at the heart of the Weimar drive towards rationalization and modernization had filtered from the sphere of the economy into communication and language.

This section will demonstrate that the same impulse towards rationalization governs Gilgi's speech in the early part of the novel. Just as Gilgi's initial physical ideal embodies particular modernizing tendencies predicated upon the notion of a rational, autonomous human ego, so her early attitude to language is shaped by a belief in a rational, logically ordered discourse and in a stable, unified self. Moreover, Keun specifically connects her protagonist's attitude towards language to her criteria for evaluating the body. As with her model of the body, Gilgi's faith in a rationalized, functional language which focuses upon the tangible, external world disintegrates when she is compelled into inward, subjective reflection by the destabilization of her identity. Indeed, one of the

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<sup>110</sup> Lethen, 'Neusachliche Physiognomik', p.11.

central obstacles to resolving her emotional turmoil arises from the lack of linguistic resources to articulate the long-ignored inner world. Christa Jordan contends that rationalistic discourse is never called into question in this novel: 'Härte, vor allem gegen sich selbst, schlägt sich in der Wortwahl wie in der Syntax nieder, wird zwar an verschiedenen Stellen als übertrieben kritisiert, aber nirgends grundsätzlich in Frage gestellt.'<sup>111</sup> However, I argue that, through her portrayal of Gilgi's struggle to find an adequate form of expression, Keun questions the wholesale adoption of a rational discourse in Weimar culture. She thereby foregrounds a sense that fundamental aspects of the project of modernity are now in a state of crisis. This parallels the anxieties about language and the increasingly limited possibilities for expressing complex, meaningful or non-rational events or aspects of the personality demonstrated in *Käsebier* and *Bauern*. Moreover, Keun's style in *Gilgi* has often been designated as characteristic of *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing, but, as this section will illustrate, both Gilgi's difficulties in the sphere of language and Keun's own narrative technique contain an implicit critique of one of the key aims of *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing, which was brevity of expression and the use of simple, functional language.

In the early parts of the novel, Gilgi derives her criteria for evaluating language from the Lenten body type or the new bodily canon. Just as she admires bodies stripped of all superfluous fat and excess bulges, so she favours language pared down to a bare minimum. She approves of brevity, precision and clarity, complaining to Martin that the language of the generation over thirty is inflated and ornate: 'Ach, und die haben sich und uns überfüttert mit ihren fetten Worten und ihrem ewigen Gequatsche.' (G, p.103) This image of gorging on fatty words illustrates that Gilgi considers the verbose discourse of the generation over thirty

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<sup>111</sup> Jordan, *Zerstreuung*, p.74.



with the same disdain as she regards Frau Kron's unhealthy and overweight body: in Gilgi's eyes, the excess and lack of clearly defined contours in such language betray a lack of self-discipline, which contrasts with Gilgi's own parsimonious, functional speech. She perceives no need to speak with her adoptive parents at breakfast and is contemptuous of Frau Kron meeting her friends for 'Kaffeeklatsch', because gossip involves an excessive exchange of words. On the other hand, Gilgi approves of words such as 'Arbeit', since it is 'Ein hartes Wort. Gilgi liebt es um seiner Härte willen.' (G, p.11) It therefore appears to be concrete and clearly defined to Gilgi. As noted in section 4 above, 'hart' is an attribute which is also used in compounds in conjunction with parts of Gilgi's body. This suggests that Gilgi employs identical criteria to shape both her discourse and her body. Moreover, Gilgi views language in the same way that she views her body: as a tool to improve her economic productivity. Her motivation for learning three foreign languages simultaneously derives from the expectation that such knowledge will insure her against unemployment: 'Wenn man drei fremde Sprachen perfekt kann, ist man gegen Stellungslosigkeit wohl so ziemlich gesichert.' (G, p.22) This contrasts strikingly with her friend Olga's purely sensual enjoyment of foreign languages: 'Kannst du dir vorstellen, Gilgi, wie zauberhaft es ist, nur eine Melodie von Worten zu hören und den ganzen Quatsch, der dahinter steckt, nicht zu verstehen.' (G, p.69) Olga prefers to consider language from the level of physical pleasure rather than to decipher it with her rational mind, whereas Gilgi favours an economical use of language.

Furthermore, Gilgi's preferred form of discourse is the language of rationalization, the language of modernity. Significantly, the use of formal values derived from the Lenten body type to structure discourse has been linked to the development of modernity. Stallybrass and White argue that the formal values of

the new bodily canon (which they term the classical body, because it was based upon a purified vision of Classical Antiquity) underpinned the growing importance attached to logocentric cultural discourse and structured the dominant world view from the Renaissance onwards. The classical body

encoded those regulated systems which were closed, homogeneous, monumental, centred and symmetrical. It began to make 'parsimony' of explanation and 'economy' of utterance the measure of rationality, thus institutionalizing Lenten rule as a normative epistemological standard. Gradually these protocols of the classical body came to mark out the identity of progressive rationalism itself.<sup>112</sup>

The same interconnection of the formal values of a specific (Lenten) body type, rational discourse and modernity emerges in Gilgi's initial attitude to language and structures her mental conceptions. Moreover, this nexus is also apparent in the programmatic statements and reviews of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature, which was, after all, intended as a literature for an era of rapid modernization and advanced rationalization.<sup>113</sup>

Gilgi's initial disdain for the bombastic language of an older generation and her preference for succinct, functional linguistic communication echoes the contemporary calls by advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to abandon the over-inflated language of Expressionist literature in favour of concise, simple language, as described in Chapter 2. Crucially, the advocates of *Neue Sachlichkeit* also discussed the use of language in Expressionist and *Neue Sachlichkeit* writings in terms of fatty or svelte body types. For instance, Hermann von Wedderkop condemned that literary movement for '[den] Pomp der Diktion, das unnoble Unterstreichen, das Unpräzise, Unsaubere, Fettige des ganzen Geistes'.<sup>114</sup> Like Gilgi, von

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<sup>112</sup> Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, p.22.

<sup>113</sup> See p.44 above.

<sup>114</sup> Hermann von Wedderkop, 'Bühnenexpressionismus', cited in abbreviated form in Sabina Becker, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 2 vols. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, Böhlau, 2000, II: *Quellen und Dokumente*, pp.50-52. First publ. in *Der Neue Merkur*, 6 (1922), no. 2, 102-110.



Wedderkopp attacks the 'fattiness' of expression adopted by an older generation, contrasting it with the desired 'Beschränkung, Präzision, Knappheit'. Kurt Pinthus compares the brevity of expression in *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing to the same lean, lithe body type which Gilgi admires and upon which she models her discourse initially: 'Eher läßt sich diese Sprache: ohne lyrisches Fett, ohne gedankliche Schwerblütigkeit, hart, zäh, trainiert, dem Körper des Boxers vergleichen.'<sup>115</sup> The use of the word 'hart' in particular recalls the type of body and language which Gilgi favours. Moreover, sport and the sporting body were also frequently advocated during the Weimar era as models for literary subject matter and style.<sup>116</sup> Critics in the post-1945 era have also drawn on this bodily imagery to describe formal aspects of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature. Volker Klotz, for example, likens the form of *Neue Sachlichkeit* novels to the tendons and skeleton of the body rather than the fleshy form of earlier novels: 'Nur, was einmal epische Fülle hieß ist kein prangendes Fleisch, sondern eine Fülle von Gelenken, Sehnen, Röhrenknochen.'<sup>117</sup> The language initially favoured by Gilgi thus displays clear parallels with that associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

However, unlike the proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Keun's novel does not hold up such functional, rationalized language as an unproblematic model.

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<sup>115</sup> Kurt Pinthus, 'Männliche Literatur', cited in abbreviated form in *Weimarer Republik: Manifeste und Dokumente zur Deutschen Literatur 1918-1933*, ed. by Anton Kaes. Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983, pp.328-335 (p.328). First publ. in *Das Tage-Buch* 10 (1 June 1929), 903-911.

<sup>116</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Mehr guten Sport', in Bertolt Brecht, *Werke*, ed. by Werner Hecht and others. Berlin/Weimar, Aufbau; Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1992, XXI: *Schriften I: Schriften 1914-1933*, pp.119-122; Marieluise Fleißer, 'Sportgeist und Zeitkunst. Essay über den modernen Menschentyp', in *Gesammelte Werke*, 4 vols. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972, II: *Roman. Erzählende Prosa. Aufsätze*, ed. by Günther Rühle, pp.317-320; Hermann Kasack, 'Sport als Lebensgefühl', *Die Weltbühne*, 24 (9 October 1928), 557-560.

<sup>117</sup> Volker Klotz, 'Forcierte Prosa. Stilbeobachtungen an Bildern und Romanen der Neuen Sachlichkeit', in *Dialog. Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft im Zeichen deutsch-französischer Begegnung. Festgabe für Josef Kunz*, ed. by Rainer Schönhaar. Berlin, Schmidt, 1973, pp.244-271 (p.254).

Keun's text suggests that the monopoly secured by rational, externally focused discourse threatens to close off a whole realm of human experience in the irrational and subjective. Crucially, Stallybrass and White argue that the parsimonious, Lenten discourse achieved its dominant or normative position by excluding, devaluing and marginalizing non-rational forms of language, particularly the language of carnival which was repressed in conjunction with the carnivals and fairs themselves. Consequently, they perceive a gap in the language or available means of expression, particularly relating to the grotesque body, which silences the female patients of hysteria: 'The words to say it, in Marie Cardinal's account of her hysteria, were simply not there.'<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Gilgi feels a profound sense of inadequacy or deficiency in the language at her disposal to articulate her encounter with the non-rational, which denies the validity of Gilgi's experience and renders her task of acknowledging this aspect of the self extraordinarily difficult. Keun charts the process whereby the dominant logocentric discourse operates to suppress and exclude the Other through Gilgi's failed attempts to engage in dialogue with representatives of the educated bourgeoisie.

Gilgi experiences both the need to communicate with others and the lack of appropriate words immediately following the discovery that she has been adopted, wondering 'Wo andre Leute nur immer im richtigen Augenblick die richtigen Worte hernehmen mögen?' (G, p.32) Whereas she previously avoided lengthy conversations, she is suddenly overwhelmed by the desire to discuss her difficulties, which surprises her: 'Seit wann ist sie überhaupt so mitteilsamsbedürftig? Ein schlimmes Zeichen!' (G, p.36) Throughout the novel, Gilgi returns incessantly to these problems of finding a willing listener and

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<sup>118</sup> Stallybrass and White, *Transgression*, p.186.



suitable vocabulary to articulate her inner conflicts. In an illuminating article on the problematics of language in Keun's first two novels, Ritta Jo Horsley connects Gilgi's increasing uncertainty in the field of language to her marginal status as a woman in 'the patriarchal, bourgeois society of Weimar Germany'.<sup>119</sup> Horsley focuses in particular upon Gilgi's questioning of her identity as a self-sufficient New Woman and the conflicting demands made by the traditional and newly emerging models of identification for women:

Significantly, Gilgi's struggle to reconcile contradictions in women's roles much thematized in the late Weimar Republic - between 'egoism' and altruism [*sic*], and between 'work' and 'love' - takes place largely in the arena of language, primarily in attempted dialogues with more highly educated males, and her ultimate failure to reach clear resolutions correlates to the suppression of women's speech in her society.<sup>120</sup>

As an outsider or member of a marginalized group, Gilgi looks to representatives of the dominant culture, namely men from the educated bourgeoisie, to gain access to new linguistic resources for unfamiliar experiences. However, Horsley argues, the character's repeated endeavours to participate in the dominant culture through these dialogues are frustrated, as Martin and Pit, a student who had left his wealthy family home to live according to his socialist beliefs, ignore or refuse to engage with her conversations. According to Horsley, these men prove unable and/or unwilling to hear Gilgi's concerns, which renders Gilgi silent and she resorts increasingly to interior monologues. Horsley also contends that the emerging discourse of rationalized, mass consumer culture fails to provide an appropriate alternative linguistic resource for women. In Horsley's view, the impossibility of communicating across the gender and class barrier indicates the marginalization and suppression of minority or outsider voices by the dominant patriarchal culture in Weimar Germany. It also highlights

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<sup>119</sup> Horsley, 'Warum', p.298.

<sup>120</sup> Horsley, 'Warum', p.299.

the limitations of more major discourses in late Weimar Germany. The reality of this Other has no place in them, so that the conflicts in social identity and role that Gilgi attempts to express and understand become inaudible, and thereby insoluble.<sup>121</sup>

In the following discussion of Gilgi's attempts to converse with Pit and Martin, I draw on Horsley's arguments, but wish to focus more closely upon the dangerous repercussions of excluding the Other in rational discourse, which Keun emphasizes, and to highlight the critique of modernity and *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Gilgi visits her friend Pit with the hope that he can provide her with the means of expression she requires to elucidate her confused feelings: 'der findet manchmal ein Wort, das alles hell macht, wie 'ne hundertkerzige Birne.' (G, p.36) However, Pit tries to suppress Gilgi's preoccupation with non-rational matters through recourse to the rational, logical discourse of socialist theory, on which he lectures Gilgi at length. This reasoned argument also serves to repress Pit's own fear of the irrational and his powerful sexual attraction to Gilgi, which threatens the precarious grip of his rational mind:

Das zuckt in den Händen, er möchte das Mädchen da prügeln. Langsam geht er an den Tisch zurück, stößt sich die Kante in die Hüfte. Ohrfeigen rechts und links. Ohrfeigen. Schweinerei. Ich muß klaren Kopf behalten, mein Verstand ist mir ohnehin schon zu schwach. (G, p.35)

Keun makes the connection between the repression of desire and its eruption in sado-masochistic violence abundantly clear in this paragraph. Moreover, the means by which Pit represses his desire is through rational, logical discourse, as he subsequently launches into a disquisition on socialism. When Gilgi meets with a similar response on a second attempt to discuss her adoption with Pit, she is silenced and loses all desire to narrate her story: 'Jetzt hat sie ihm immer noch nicht ihre Geschichte erzählt, hat auch keine Lust mehr dazu.' (G, p.60) The hegemony of the rational discourse which provides no outlet for the non-rational

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<sup>121</sup> Horsley, 'Warum', p.299.



is thus linked by Keun with isolating, dangerous and potentially violent repercussions.

Significantly, on the night of *Karneval*, Martin suddenly appears as the interested listener for whom Gilgi has been longing. During their previous meeting, she was fascinated by his facility with language, which contrasts sharply with the limited everyday range of expression she feels is at her disposal: 'Ach, meine kleinen, grauen Worte! Daß jemand so bunt sprechen kann!' (G, p.77)<sup>122</sup> His words release her imagination from its usual boundaries and convey an entirely new world to Gilgi: 'Gilgis Phantasie war immer ein artiges Kind: darfst ein bißchen auf der Straße spielen, aber nicht um die Ecke gehen. Jetzt läuft das artige Kind mal etwas weiter. Martin erzählt und Gilgi sieht'. (G, p.77) When they meet up unexpectedly again after Gilgi has left the masquerade ball, Martin invites her to talk about herself in detail, to narrate her story: 'Sie soll ihm erzählen, von sich sprechen, für jede Einzelheit interessiert er sich.' (G, p.92) For this evening, in the topsy-turvy world of *Karneval*, Gilgi enjoys a kind of 'Narrenfreiheit' which is otherwise denied to her throughout the novel. She is not only permitted but positively encouraged to speak about every aspect of her life, including the one she has been unable to discuss with anyone else: 'Sogar von der Elternsuche erzählt sie. Von den Krons und der Täschler.' (G, p.93) She maintains a veneer of indifference in her account, insisting that she is unsentimental and self-sufficient, but this is betrayed by the tight grip she maintains on Martin's hand 'gerade so als hätte sie Angst, er könnte plötzlich aufstehen und auf Nimmerwiedersehn verschwinden'. (G, p.93) This exceptional situation can perhaps also be attributed to Gilgi's masculine disguise on this evening, as she looks like 'ein schlanker Junge, ein lebendig gewordenes Gainsborough-Bild'. (G, p.94) Like the disguised

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<sup>122</sup> cf. Horsley, 'Warum', p.301.

fools who, according to Bakhtin, were allowed to speak the truth and subvert the dominant culture during carnival, Gilgi enjoys a brief moment of unhindered speech.<sup>123</sup>

However, after *Karneval*, Lenten rule is reinstated and Martin begins to impose his rational, discursive values on Gilgi, much as he remodels her body along the lines of the mannequin. The process commences on the morning Gilgi leaves home. Martin cuts short Gilgi's deliberations about whether to forge an independent existence for herself by moving into her rented attic room, or whether to stay with him, by making the decision on her behalf: 'Rücksichtslos in ihre Worte hinein klappt Martin den Kofferdeckel auf.' (G, p.116) That very afternoon, Martin begins his didactic efforts to impose his discursive values on Gilgi by selecting books for her to read and explaining his evaluative criteria: 'Mit liebevollem Eifer fischt Martin immer neue Bände aus dem Chaos, liest laut ein paar Seiten vor, findet etwas schön, erklärt Gilgi, warum er's schön findet - '. (G, p.117)<sup>124</sup> Eventually, Gilgi finds that far from accessing new linguistic resources through contact with Martin, her voice is smothered beneath his:

Tausend Worte Liebe, tausend dumme Worte, man sinkt darin unter, liegt unter einem Mantel von Worten, macht wohl noch letzte klägliche Anstrengungen lächerlich zu finden, formt eine freche, triviale kleine Bemerkung, die auf dem Wege vom Hirn zu den Lippen bereits verlorengelht. (G, p.141)

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<sup>123</sup> According to Bakhtin, the suspension of conventional hierarchies 'created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life' which overcame the usual distance between speech partners and liberated individuals 'from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times'. Bakhtin, 'Rabelais', p.10.

<sup>124</sup> In his analysis of the language in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Gerd Schank observes that men tend to assume a didactic and often patronizing stance towards Doris, which places her in the inferior role in the conversation. Gerd Schank, 'Das kunstseidene Mädchen von Irmgard Keun. Skizze einer Frauensprache,' in *Annäherungen, Studien zur deutschen Literaturwissenschaft im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hans Ester and Guillaume van Gemert. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1985, pp.35-64 (p.46).



The images of drowning and suffocating highlight the extent to which Gilgi's identity and individuality are stifled. The forced internalization or suppression of her inner conflicts denies Gilgi the possibility of finding answers to her questions:

Warum habe ich keine Worte - für Martin - und für mich auch nicht? - Da sind zwei Schichten in mir - und die obere, die diktiert - alltägliche Worte, alltägliche Handlung - kleines Mädchen, kleines Maschinenmädchen, kleines Uhrwerkmädchen - drunter die untere Schicht - immer ein Wollen, immer ein Suchen, immer Sehnsucht und Dunkel und Nichtwissen - kein Wissen um Wohin - kein Wissen um Woher. Ein Denken ohne Worte, ein Wissen hinter den Worten - (G, pp.212-213)

As Horsley notes, the mechanical words of the rationalized consumerist society which Gilgi employs in her everyday interaction are useless to express her internal conflicts. Gilgi cannot come to terms with the non-rational aspects of her personality and with her fluid, heterodox subjectivity, because the existence of such emotions is denied in the language: it is 'ein Denken ohne Worte', as words to describe it adequately have been suppressed or erased from the language. Within the confines of a logocentric discourse in an advanced rationalized society, the non-rational must remain unknowable and mysterious. Keun's novel therefore does not support the enthusiasm of the proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature to employ 'alltägliche Worte' to depict 'alltägliche Handlung'. Instead, *Gilgi* suggests that the exclusive use of such language denies whole areas of human experience and promotes alienation and even violence.

Keun's own narrative technique and use of language mirrors the protagonist's transformation. The early part of the novel contains many of the stylistic features of *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing and can be compared to the Lenten body, or the lean boxer's body which Pinthus uses to describe the style of *Neue Sachlichkeit* literature. However, a notable shift occurs in the second half of the novel where the syntax becomes reminiscent of Bakhtin's grotesque body. Kurt Tucholsky was highly critical of this shift, claiming that the latter half of the novel

contains 'eine fatale Diktion', which makes the characters sound as if they had breakfasted on Freud.<sup>125</sup> Kosta too condemns Keun's style here, claiming 'the language is most excessive in this part of the narrative and harks back to melodramatic romances familiar to nineteenth-century readers of pulp novels'.<sup>126</sup> However, I think this misses the more serious, critical point which Keun is making about modernity, although, as the following discussion will illustrate, Keun ultimately fails to offer any resolution to the problems she raises.

In the first section of the novel, the narrator focuses largely upon Gilgi's external actions. The sentences are short and for the most part contain main clause constructions with verbs predominantly in the active voice. The accumulation of such verbs in the following passage reflects Gilgi's unceasing activity and her busy schedule:

Halbsieben Uhr morgens. Das Mädchen Gilgi ist aufgestanden. Steht im winterkalten Zimmer, reckt sich, dehnt sich, reibt sich den Schlaf aus den blanken Augen. Turnt vor dem weitgeöffneten Fenster. Rumpfbeuge: auf - nieder, auf - nieder. Die Fingerspitzen berühren den Boden, die Knie bleiben gestreckt. So ist es richtig. Auf - nieder, auf - nieder. (G, p.5)

The omission of the grammatical subject where it can be inferred from the context implies a reluctance to provide superfluous information. The style is reminiscent of the new bodily canon: there is no ornate language, no unseemly proliferation or circumlocution. Instead, the full stops and succinct sentences suggest compact, self-contained units like the smooth, impenetrable surface of representations of the body in Bakhtin's new bodily canon. Furthermore, the focus is upon Gilgi's external actions rather than her internal thought processes, unless the last two sentences can be considered as free indirect speech. Even

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<sup>125</sup> Tucholsky, 'Auf dem Nachttisch', p.29. Elke Matijevich endorses this point, although with the reservation that 'outbursts like this are rare and disappear altogether in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*'. Matijevich, *Zeitroman*, p.91.

<sup>126</sup> Kosta, 'Unruly Daughters', p.279.



when the reader is given privileged access into Gilgi's mind, there is no intense self-reflection or complex internal examination, but rather the simple and repeated encouragement to impose her will on her body:

Sie zittert ein bißchen und ist wie allmorgendlich ein bißchen stolz auf ihre bescheidene Tapferkeit und Selbstüberwindung. Tagesplan einhalten. Nicht abweichen vom System. Nicht schlapp machen. In der kleinsten Kleinigkeit nicht. (G, p.6)

The narrative technique and form of language deployed by Keun reflects Gilgi's initial sense of self-control, invulnerability and security.

By contrast, later in the novel, these compact, terse sentences become lengthy and involved, sometimes running over a page. The grammatical subject and subordinate clauses now appear regularly, hyphenation has replaced the use of full-stops, and the increasingly frequent use of three dots indicates growing indecision and confusion, disjointed thoughts trailing off or suddenly being interrupted. The disintegration of the syntax mirrors the disintegration of Gilgi's strictly delineated subjectivity and sense that her rational, autonomous ego is in total control of her body's desires:

Und dabei ist Liebe doch gar nicht so wichtig - solange es Menschen gibt, die arbeiten wollen und nicht dürfen - solange es Menschen gibt, die man kein Geld verdienen läßt - solange es kleine Kinder gibt, die nicht genug zu essen haben . . . und immer die summende Sehnsucht - ich halte das nicht mehr aus, ich will tot sein - ich will das nicht mehr - ich will nicht - es ekelt mich an, daß ich so machtlos gegen meinen Körper bin. (G, p.195)

The pattern of this long sentence recalls the characteristics of Bakhtin's grotesque body. The clearly delineated and self-contained sentences with neat full-stops have yielded to spontaneous connections and free associations which blend and flow together, much as the boundaries of the grotesque body are blurred to emphasize its interaction with other bodies and the outside world. Instead of coherent, rational argumentation leading to clear conclusions, thoughts interrupt at unexpected junctures and proliferate like the outgrowths and bulges of the

grotesque body. Whilst Gilgi seeks at the beginning of this sentence to convince herself of the irrelevance of love in the face of wider problems such as unemployment and poverty, she cannot keep these problems distinct and separate from her irrational desire, which insinuates itself into her thoughts. Whereas the first passage above reveals Gilgi in firm control of her body, reflected in the controlled language, the second passage illustrates Gilgi's body in mutiny against her rational mind and affecting in turn the direction of her thoughts conveyed stylistically by the fragmented syntax. Gilgi expresses disgust and guilt about her failure to channel her thoughts separately 'und schämt sich, daß sich dem Gedanken an fremdes Elend die Sehnsucht nach Martin hinzumischt - und fließt ein winziges Tröpfchen Feindseligkeit in die Sehnsucht - '. (G, pp.195-196) The fluidity and blurred boundaries of her thoughts again echo the grotesque body. The transformation in the use of syntax and punctuation during the novel corresponds to the increasing focus upon Gilgi's inner conflict.

As described in the previous section, the endless reflection and focus upon the inner world ultimately saps Gilgi's ability to act and to engage with the outside world. Moreover, I argued that the conclusion does not represent a return to Gilgi's initial identity. This is reflected in the use of language at the close of the novel, which offers an uneasy mixture of syntax which alternates between the *Lenten* and the grotesque forms of discourse:

Im Schlafzimmer unterm Schrank steht Gilgis Koffer. Sie zieht ihn hervor. Packt ihre Kleider, ihre Wäsche hinein. Sehr schnell, sehr sicher hantiert sie. Sicher? Das winzigste Fragezeichen, das allergeringste Überlegen im Kopf macht die Hände zittern, unfähig sich zu bewegen, zu fassen, zu halten. Hart bleiben, hart bleiben - das Schwerste tun, das Richtige tun - Richtige? Warum richtig? . . . Ah, nicht denken . . . (G, p.250)

The short, clipped sentences and active verbs at the beginning of the above quotation echo the stylistic features in the early part of the novel, whilst the



longer, more fragmented syntax, hyphenation and dots recall those in the later part of the novel. This syntax reflects that the central conflicts of the novel remain unresolved.

Keun's treatment of Gilgi's loss of faith in language foregrounds a sense that the project of modernity has somehow entered a state of crisis. As Gilgi comes to realize that the self is not coherent and unified, but fluid and heterodox, she longs to reach beyond the exclusively rational discourse predicated on the belief in a stable, autonomous rational human ego which has become the dominant discourse of modernization. In a culture which is undergoing an intense period of modernization and seeking to rationalize language and other modes of expression even further, as illustrated by the goals of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and physiognomy, Gilgi has only 'Schreibmaschinenworte und Uhrwerkworte und Alletageworte' (G, p.148) at her disposal. The wholesale adoption of an exclusively rational discourse operates to suppress the non-rational, which in turn generates confusion, alienation and even violence by denying the individual the tools with which to reflect upon and articulate inner conflicts. Keun's concern about the impact of a thoroughly rationalized discourse echoes Tergit's preoccupation that language has become incapable of expressing anything significant or meaningful, because of the endless repetition of stock phrases fostered by the mass media. Similarly, Fallada is concerned by the loss and elimination of certain voices and different perspectives in the objective, rational discourses of the media and the law which impose single, fixed interpretations on events.

Like Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body, Keun's novel refuses final closure or a definitive resolution. Any such conclusion would undermine the criticism in the novel of one-sided responses to modernity; responses which seek

to reinforce boundaries, create hierarchies and reject difference whether it be through typologies, through standardization of mass culture, through an unquestioning acceptance of modernization or through a nostalgic retreat to the past. There is a profound sense that the emancipatory project of modernity has performed a dialectical turn and is creating ever more oppressive, rigid conditions. Yet the way out of the crisis implied in this novel is not to abandon modernity *per se*. Keun's model of modernity is one which spurns the kind of modernolatory often associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* writing, but which still seeks to be open to some of the possibilities of modernity rather than taking flight to an idealized past, to violent irrationalism or a dissolution into a decentred, passive subjectivity which precludes all forms of action. Gilgi's journey to Berlin at a time when many female characters in fiction, such as Fräulein Brückner in Christa Anita Brück's *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* (1930), were returning to the small town, signals a refusal to return to traditional female roles as well as a refusal to abandon the possibilities of modernity entirely. The ending to *Gilgi* is thus less bleak than that in *Käsebier* and it is not clouded by the worrying implications of a strong charismatic leader figure which hang over the ending of *Bauern*. Keun's illustration of the damaging repercussions of a rationalized culture built on the complete repression of non-rational aspects of the human personality, a culture which silences or erases difference, was to be confirmed in all too horrific terms when the Nazis took power.



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***Concluding Remarks***

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Examining the models of modernity in the novels — the conceptualization of modernity and the authors' response to the problems and opportunities this process raises — indicates that, far from being examples of sober, neutral representations of the age written by recording machines, the novels present a fascinating and complex assessment of a widespread sense of crisis which characterized the late Weimar Republic. The selected novels articulate diverse experiences of modernity, both within and beyond the metropolis and from different social, generational and gender perspectives. Moreover, the authors' evaluation of modernity is reflected in their use of formal and narrative techniques.

By comparing the novels with sociological, political, philosophical and literary theoretical writings, the novelists' evaluation of modernity emerges more clearly, whilst bringing into sharper relief the different alternatives offered by the novelists and the other key authors. Tergit offers a model of modernity which has much in common with Durkheim's concept of anomie, and, although she is ultimately at a loss to offer any new means of regulation, she conveys very vividly the role of the culture industry, a feature of modern and post-modern life whose significance is even more evident in our time. Fallada, too, still expresses a faith in the project of modernity overall, displaying an aspiration that it can somehow be brought back on track by a suitably dynamic individual. His concern with the effects of the uneven pace of modernization and the inappropriate response of the left in dealing with the resulting tensions demonstrates clear parallels with Bloch's notion of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*, although once again Fallada's response differs from that suggested by the theorist, in this case because of party-political beliefs. In contrast to Fallada, Keun presents a critique of aspects of the project of modernity itself through her focus on human bodies. Her critique displays



similarities to Bakhtin's ideas and place a question mark over the predominance accorded to the demands of the rational mind at the cost of repressing other aspects of the human personality. All three authors foreground a strong awareness of the impact of spatio-temporal transformations upon social and economic relations. They foreground a powerful sense that modernity is in crisis, but still retain a certain awareness of the opportunities offered by modernity.

One of the key critiques levelled at the novels has been that they failed to provide clear or overt party-political alternatives to the increasingly unstable political and economic situation towards the end of the Weimar Republic. Fallada's novel perhaps comes closest to presenting an alternative in such terms, albeit one which criticizes the official policies of the SPD. Be that as it may, all three novelists are centrally concerned with countering the polarization and cementing of positions which could arise from the search for security and clear direction in a turbulent age. To return to Richard Sheppard's discussion of the modernist 'problematic', the novelists perceive the problematic as complex and are therefore critical of those who present this problematic in excessively simple terms and who espouse one-sided responses. The authors take issue with certain discourses which circulated widely within the Weimar Republic and which reflected and shaped anxieties about the critical state of modernity, as well as potential reactions to it. Tergit, Fallada and Keun highlight not only the complexities which become concealed in, for example, debates about Berlin and the provinces, about the *Neue Frau* or about the authentic, but also how these polarizations occur and the insecurities which generate them. Keun's critique of the increasing popularity of physiognomy, Fallada's subversion of the myths of an organic community and of the possibility of objective reportage and Tergit's satire on the culture industry's blind spots are all attempts to counteract the search for

easy resolutions and to raise the readers' awareness of the highly complex nature of the crisis which they were experiencing. However, the subtlety of the authors' evaluation of the crisis in the late Weimar Republic in terms of modernity was often obscured by those seeking to appropriate part of that evaluation for their own propaganda purposes. Moreover, voices calling for reflection and warning against the dangers of seemingly straightforward solutions to intricate and tangled problems were soon to be drowned out by the route which was ultimately taken, out of the crisis-ridden Weimar Republic into a fascist dictatorship, which drove Torgit and Keun into exile abroad and from which Fallada increasingly took flight through drink and drugs. Nonetheless, looking back now, following the end of the Cold War and at the dawn of a new century, these novels come across as vivid evocations of a moment of crisis which was to shape the history of Germany and Europe through to the close of the twentieth century and the novels highlight central aspects of the nature of modernity which continue to impact upon our lives today.



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