Chapter 6

Girls in Crisis: Women's Perspectives in Late Weimar

At home, you know, they are always talking about the time that is coming when we shall need soldiers again, and mothers of soldiers.

—Christa Winsloe, *Girls in Uniform* (1930)[1]

Mass Culture, Downward Mobility, and Female Resistance

Irmgard Keun's Novel The Artificial Silk Girl *(1932)*

And so I was exactly what you call faithful. But then he had his Ph.D. and was finished studying—physics and all that. And went to Munich, where his parents live, he wanted to get married there—someone from his social background and a daughter of a professor—very famous, but not like Einstein, whose photograph you see in an awful lot of newspapers and you still don't get a good idea of. And I always think, whenever I see his picture with the cheerful eyes and the featherduster hair, that if I would see him in a cafe and happened to be wearing my coat with the fox collar and drop-dead elegant from top to bottom, then even he might tell me that he was in the movies and had unbelievable connections. And I would toss back at him, perfectly cool: H_2O is water—I learned that from Hubert and it would amaze him.[2]

—Irmgard Keun, The Artificial Silk Girl

Doris, the title character of Irmgard Keun's 1932 novel *The Artificial Silk Girl* (*Das Kunsteidene Mädchen*), ends this digression about Einstein in her diary with the next sentence, "But I was talking

about Hubert" ("Aber ich war bei Hubert," 13), and continues the story of her relationship with him, the young man who was her first love. Just as this conversational device is typical of the way Keun has her fictional diary writer end a digression, so the passage as a whole contains a number of thematic elements and stylistic traits characteristic of the novel as a whole. In terms of style, one notes here an approximation of the digressive logic both of free association and filmic montage as well as a hint of the restless tempo of Doris's stream of consciousness, which is in tune with the surface dynamism of the metropolitan culture of distraction so typical of the Weimar Republic. One also can appreciate the humor so typical of the novel, both in Doris's own consciously flippant, matter-of-fact style, as well as in the naiveté her remarks reveal, which demonstrates the limitations of her class and educational background.[3] The fact that in Doris we have an example of Weimar's New Woman, and that we learn about this New Woman from her own viewpoint—indeed, as Kerstin Barndt stresses, through what is represented as her own attempt to write about and make sense of her experiences—makes this novel a very significant one for those who study Weimar culture.

One finds as well in the passage above that preoccupation with superficial celebrity so prevalent in the illustrated press, especially as it addressed women readers. The passage also contains one of the explicit references to film on which critics like Lensing have focused. But it is mistaken to look at this passage as only revealing Doris's naiveté and her unwitting reflection of the metropolitan mass culture that seems to define her. Lensing especially seems to look at Doris with almost complete condescension, all the while arguing that this is the point of Keun's novel, which he praises as a detailed critique of the type of working woman caught up in consumerist and cinematic fantasies that Kracauer ridiculed so famously in his essay "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" ("Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino").[4] Yet this is precisely the type Keun claimed that she wanted to *counter* with her protagonist (qtd. in Kreis, 91). Lensing sees in the above passage nothing but a fantasy Doris has passively absorbed from *The Blue Angel:* an attractive young woman bowls over a repressed intellectual of a higher class (130). A closer look at the above passage, however, indicates that Doris is demonstrating much more skepticism about both men and cinematic fantasies. She speculates that the famous Einstein might indeed turn out to be like so many other men: finding her attractive, even he might use what is one of the most common lines used by the men she knows to impress women, that he has connections in the film industry (cf. 11). This is indeed what Marlene Dietrich represented in German popular

culture in the wake of the success of *Der blaue Engel:* the dream of being discovered, becoming a movie star, and going to Hollywood.[5] Instead of falling for a line about a chance to break into the movies, Doris will impress him with her knowledge of the chemical composition of water. She seems less interested in seducing him à la Lola Lola (using her "sex appeal") than to stun him with her (comically limited) scientific knowledge.

Whereas Lensing sees in Doris the sentimental shop girl, Lethen writes that Keun's novels are notable for their development of female versions of a new personality type in modernity, not what he calls the "cold persona," but what he labels the "radar type."[6] This type is not at all bound to bourgeois sentimentality and inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*), but rather totally oriented toward—and guided by—external social forces (*Verhaltenslehren,* 242–43). Whether embodying cheap sentimentality or a combination of emancipated pragmatism, narcissism, and conformism, Keun's protagonist is evaluated as superficial by both critics. Lethen understands a point made earlier by Livia Wittmann, that there is something especially provocative about these new types being embodied by a female character, and about using a female perspective as the viewpoint on the chaos of modernity. Nonetheless, he seems to downplay the complexity as well as the agency of this female type, even though agency is crucial to his very explanation of them as "Simultanspielerinnen," women who can play many games at once (games of chess or any other games demanding careful and clever planned moves toward a goal), women whose skillful mimicry of various social roles and expectations he defines as a *weapon*.

For as von Ankum notes, Doris is quite aware of her status as a commodity and indeed tries to use it to her advantage ("'Ich liebe Berlin,'" 377), yet precisely therein she demonstrates how little room to maneuver she has: for the most part she reinforces the very trap that has confined her. Nonetheless, there is in her agency a vitality that is empowering (cf. Rosenstein, 281); and, as Shafi stresses, Doris, always a skeptic about society, over the course of the novel begins to see through a number of her illusions (324). Her options remain very limited, but she does come to realize this—as she has indeed demonstrated in her reflexive inscription of her experiences in writing for the reader.[7] While she is "both commodity and consumer," as Gleber puts it, she also exposes those identities to a critical gaze that she herself wields (*The Art of Taking a Walk,* 204).

Rather than comparing Doris's story to the narrative of the one film Doris watches at the cinema in the course of the novel, the film *Mädchen in Uniform,* as Lensing does, I would like to compare her story to that of a

woman in another film, without denying the significance of Keun's direct reference to Sagan's 1931 film. Doris's story is that of a woman who consciously uses her sexuality in a bid to achieve both autonomy and upward mobility, yet she discovers that it is a commodity in a market over which she ultimately has little control, and as a commodity she loses value with almost every exchange, ending up homeless and with almost no alternative to prostitution in its clearest and least attractive form. Put this way, the parallel to the story of Lulu in G.W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (*Büchse der Pandora,* 1929) is obvious. The similarities and contrasts between the two narratives about female commodification are instructive in their illumination of the common topic—and the two very different perspectives on it. After comparing the trajectories of Doris and Lulu, I shall return to the question of the text in its relation to New Objective discourses on emancipation, sentimentality, and modernity. Finally, I will consider the text's ending to determine whether Doris's trajectory represents only defeat and regression, and what relation it bears to the options open to women at the end of the Weimar Republic, as the economy was collapsing.

DORIS VS. LULU: PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUAL COMMODIFICATION

Pabst's 1929 film adaptation changed Lulu, the central character of Frank Wedekind's two dramas, *Earth Spirit* (*Erdgeist,* 1895) and its continuation *Pandora's Box* (*Büchse der Pandora,* 1902), in some significant ways. He transformed Wedekind's turn-of-the-century "demonic woman" (*dämonisches Weib*) into a "New Woman" of the 1920s. While the film like the Wedekind original is in many ways an imaginary narrative, a very male fantasy about a mythical Woman, the reshaping of Lulu into what is very much a contemporary woman of the Weimar Republic by a film director noted for his realism makes it appropriate to examine this imaginary construction for its implicit commentary on contemporary women. Although Pabst's Lulu remains an ideal creature of male fantasy who incites desire and possessiveness in almost every male with whom she comes into contact (as well as in the lesbian character, Countess Geschwitz), she also is a commodity in circulation among men, a commodity that loses value with each exchange. Beginning as a wealthy man's mistress who inhabits a very luxurious, modern apartment, she ends the film reduced to the status of a prostitute on the streets of London (a fate she resists, but in that very resistance she meets her end as a victim of Jack the Ripper). Film scholars like Thomas Elsaesser

and Mary Ann Doane have tended to read Pabst's Lulu in terms of recent film theory as "pure image," a pure object of the filmic "gaze" (Elsaesser, "Lulu," 50–52; Doane, "The Erotic Barter," 67). Not only does such an interpretation ignore the moments of resistance and agency that the film does allow the character, it also misses the historical specificity of the image embodied by Lulu. To the extent she appears to be pure image, a mirror that reflects back the desire of the onlooker, she represents the New Objective fixation with pure surface and its denial of interiority. At the same time she exposes the ideal of pure surface as a myth, because that surface is itself a mask behind which there is a clever but anxious agency, certainly not an autonomous subject, but an individual will trying strategically to take advantage of commodified beauty while resisting—in vain—the downward trajectory toward which the total commodification of the female tends in a male-dominated sexual economy. And to the extent that "emancipated" sexuality in Weimar was merely a sexual cynicism that permitted transgression of many traditional taboos but ultimately accepted the status quo of power relations between the sexes (Doane, "The Erotic Barter," 63), that commodification was all the more total.[8]

Lulu's tragic journey of downward mobility bears some significant similarities—and contrasts—with the adventures of Doris in *The Artificial Silk Girl*. Starting out as a typical "New Woman" of the office work force, Doris exploits her desirability to keep her job but balks at actually submitting to the sexual favors her very undesirable boss thinks of as his due. Instead, she flees the drudgery of office work for a job as an extra in the theater. When her ambitions in the theater also bring her trouble, she flees her provincial city for Berlin, where she pursues her dream of becoming a "Glanz," the shimmering image of a beautiful woman propagated in late Weimar culture by its advertising and consumer culture, its fashion industry, as well as the star system of both the German film industry and of Hollywood. Doris in many senses wants to become the pure image Lulu seems to embody, and at one point in her Berlin adventures she does indeed briefly become the kept mistress of a wealthy man. Doris is hindered like Lulu by an insistence on the autonomy of her own desire, and she is just as fearful of being reduced to the cheapest commodity, the streetwalker, for which she is occasionally mistaken.

Doris's trajectory is much less linear than Lulu's: it has many ups and downs, and it does not have the pathos of such a tragic end. It is far less mythologized, and it documents much more accurately not just the plight of women in Weimar Germany, but the bitter reality of downward mobil-

ity in a severe economic depression (something no one would have guessed in early February 1929 at the premiere of Pabst's film). Keun's novel also tells the story from the perspective of an erstwhile New Woman herself: Doris narrates in the first person. One consequence is that the reader has no trouble glimpsing behind the image(s) Doris tries so hard to create. There is clearly distance between Keun and her protagonist—indeed, there is a critique in the novel of many ideals that Doris holds. But perhaps what is most subversive here is the unsentimental exposé of Weimar sexual cynicism from a female point of view. I shall attempt to elaborate this comparison of these two works, the male film director's mythic version of the New Woman, and the female novelist's critical depiction of the same myths and the realities behind them through her frank, funny—and sympathetic—main character.

While Doris is the narrator in Keun's novel, in Pabst's film the narrative perspective is distanced from Lulu, and if it can be identified with any characters at all, it would be with the male ones, as Elsaesser has demonstrated. Pabst's Lulu is an object of fascination for a number of male characters, as well as for the camera. Her own subjectivity is not completely denied (pace Elsaesser and Doane),[9] but it remains for the most part the fascinating enigma that "torments" her many admirers (including Geschwitz). Doris's subjectivity, on the other hand—which as I have noted can just as easily be relegated to pure "surface" by critics, as has been done to Lulu—is very clearly present from the first word of the text to the last, and the same holds true for its positioning with regard to gender. There is obviously much more to the fascination that Keun's book holds beyond the mere fact of gender—both of the eighteen-year old protagonist and the author, who was twenty-seven in 1932[10]—yet that shift in position alone cannot be minimized. For here the commodified object of desire speaks, and here her own perspective on the shift from lover to lover is provided.

Doris's perspective is not merely a female one, of course; it is very concrete in terms of its class, educational, and religious background, just as the trajectory of Doris's narrative is much less mythical, and much more realistic in its socio-economic specificity, than Lulu, who so obviously originates in Wedekind's fin-du-siecle "Erdgeist," an earth spirit representing some primordial female principle, at least in the fantasy of intellectual males.[11] Keun's greater social-historical specificity in crafting the origin and fate of her heroine can in part be explained by socio-economic changes that had occurred between early 1929 and 1932—in the third year of the world depression, it was harder to depict economic decline in anything but the

most real terms, as opposed to Lulu's soft-focus end in a far-off London that seems still to be the Victorian city Wedekind had used for his play.

Yet at the same time, Pabst's film is otherwise completely updated to the 1920s. This is especially true of the film's first part, set in Germany: notable are the fashionably Bauhaus/deco apartment in which Schoen keeps his mistress Lulu and the theatrical revue his son Alwa directs and in which Lulu stars.[12] Above all Pabst's Lulu is a completely "Americanized" New Woman, portrayed of course by the American Louise Brooks. Recent critics like Coates (55) and Elsaesser ("Lulu," 56) interpret the film as placing German expressive "inwardness" in conflict with the shimmering surfaces of an Americanized modernity that they see embodied in Brooks's Lulu. But Brook's performance is one of the reasons German critics in 1929 rejected the film, in part because they wanted a more "faithful" adaptation of Wedekind's original. They found Brooks too harmless, not "demonic" enough. Kracauer found the experiment of adapting the depths of Wedekind's play to the surfaces captured by film bold but largely unsuccessful. He praised Fritz Kortner's brooding performance as Schoen but saw in Louise Brooks too much the "Girl" ("Lulu").[13]

Doris, too, is in many ways a stereotypical New Woman: she is a sexually emancipated young woman who actually works as a typist in an office before running off to Berlin, where she—briefly—is kept by a wealthy man. Doris's origins are specified in detail, whereas Lulu's are much more shrouded in mist, except for Geschwitz's speech to the state prosecutor that implies that she had grown up in cafes and cabarets. But that was more or less the same milieu that Doris's mother had occupied until she became pregnant with Doris and married to give her a home; the identity of Doris's father cannot be ascertained, as her mother had apparently had a number of lovers (59).[14]

More significantly, both characters insist on their sexual autonomy, even though they are dependent on men, and both resist being reduced to the lot of a common prostitute, yet each is nonetheless forced into becoming, or nearly becoming one, and the reader/viewer is confronted with the dilemma of determining whether this actually occurs. As von Ankum notes, this can be seen as an allusion to the modern difficulty of discerning "streetwalkers" (the "oldest profession") from the ever-increasing numbers of women entering public space because of other (newer) types of employment outside the private sphere. How one ascertains who and what a prostitute is becomes an increasingly difficult task in urban modernity, even for the police (372–74).[15]

TRAJECTORIES OF DECLINING VALUE: COMPARING THE NARRATIVES

These and other points of similarity and contrast will be facilitated by short synopses of the two narratives. *Das Kunsteidene Mädchen* is told in three parts, the first titled "End of summer and the medium-sized city" ("Ende des Sommers und die mittlere Stadt," 5), the second "Late autumn—and the big city" ("Später Herbst—und die große Stadt," 43), and the third, "Lots of winter and a waiting room" ("Sehr viel Winter und ein Wartesaal," 91). Both the second and the third part take place in Berlin; the more medium-sized city in which the novel begins is more like Keun's own hometown, Cologne.[16] It is there that Doris begins the diary entries that make up the book: nine in Part 1, twenty-eight in Part 2, and forty-six in Part 3.[17] When she begins the diary, she is living at home with her mother and her stepfather, who is unemployed and depends on the money Doris gives him for room and board, which she earns as a typist. Doris has trouble with punctuation, especially with commas, and can only keep her job, she feels, by giving suggestive looks to her boss, seeming to indicate her interest in him. She realizes that eventually he will act on his misunderstanding that she is attracted to him, but she hopes to delay this as long as she can. When it eventually occurs, she quits rather than to have to gratify him sexually, at the same time asking him how he, an educated lawyer, could really believe that a young woman would be attracted to him:

> I kick him in the shin to get him to take his hands off me and ask: "Now tell me, you idiotic lawyer, what are you thinking about, really? How can someone who's gone to college like you be so stupid and think that a young pretty girl was crazy about him. Haven't you ever looked in the mirror? I'm just asking you, what kind of charms do you think you have?" (17)[18]

Her mother, who works checking coats and hats at a theater, manages to get Doris a job as an extra in a production of Schiller's *Wallenstein*. Somewhat amazed by the snobbery of the other extras, most of whom are from acting school, she manages to impress them by inventing an affair with the managing director of the theater, and then to take a comical revenge against one young actress who is the most arrogant to her. By locking the young woman in a lavatory, Doris causes the young woman to lose her single line—which is then awarded to Doris. After the opening night, however, it appears that her deceptions have been found out and her brief career is over. Meanwhile her first love, Hubert, a student who had left her

to marry in his own class, has arranged to see her again. She steals a fur coat hanging in the coat check room to impress him, but at their rendezvous it turns out that Hubert's marriage and career have fallen through, and he is hoping that she will support him. She is willing to help him, but his obvious disappointment at the news that she seems to have no lucrative future in the theater makes her realize that there is really nothing between them anymore.

She leaves Hubert, and with the stolen fur coat she heads for the big city. Part 2 begins with her arrival in Berlin, where she hopes to fulfill the dream she first articulated while working in the theater in the medium-sized city (cf. 29–31); that is, to become a "Glanz," a shimmering beauty or "luster," as Gleber translates it (*The Art of Taking a Walk,* 196). To Doris, this term appears to mean the kind of elegant, modern, fashionable, beautiful, wealthy, and (relatively) independent woman that is her ideal—not necessarily a movie star, by the way, but definitely a type she sees in Berlin.[19] She plans to achieve this status is by using her attractiveness to men, yet none of the men she meets advance her very far. This is in large part because she insists on following her own desires rather than cold calculation, sleeping in one instance with a man she desires instead of her wealthy employer, for whose children she is supposed to be a nanny. Thus, she loses the nanny position. Reflecting on this episode, she comments bitterly on the salient difference between what is considered a good German wife and a "whore":

> If a young woman with money marries an old man for his money and nothing else and sleeps with him for hours and looks pious, then she's a German mother with children and a decent woman. If a young woman without any money sleeps with someone without any money because he has smooth skin and she likes him, then she's a whore and a swine. (55)[20]

Socially sanctioned sex for money and without desire is thus rewarded, while desired but unsanctioned sex meets with scorn. Doris's next sexual involvement is with a blind man named Brenner, whom she tells of her adventures on the streets of Berlin. Brenner is by no means a handsome young man, but her affection for him is genuine. Neither wealthy nor powerful, Brenner is also about to be placed by his wife in a home for the blind—he is thus not the wisest choice of man for a would-be "shimmering beauty" or "Glanz."

Doris finally achieves the status of a "Glanz," but only briefly. She is kept by a rich businessman in an apartment, but all too soon he is arrested for shady business dealings. Returning to her friend Tilli's apartment causes a

strain because the latter's husband is now unemployed, bored, and interested in Doris; meanwhile she ponders the fate of Hulla, a prostitute in Tilli's building who commits suicide to escape the wrath of her pimp boyfriend. At first, Doris had had no understanding for Hulla, but now she can identify with her only too well. Leaving Tilli's to save the friendship, she lives with a journalist for awhile, but she leaves him and becomes homeless on Christmas Eve rather than to put up with his shabby treatment of her.

Part 3 begins on Christmas day, with Doris staying in the waiting room at the downtown train station near the Berlin Zoo. Homeless, but still with her fur, she meets Karl, an unemployed worker willing to let her work and live with him out in the garden colony where he now scrapes by. She still has too much ambition for that, yet is afraid that she will become a prostitute, for which she is constantly being mistaken. On New Year's Eve, she is so hungry that she agrees to go with a man who speaks to her on the street; this is Ernst, who takes her to his apartment and lets her stay, without asking for sex in return. Thus he "saves" her from prostitution at the moment she had decided to try it just once out of desperation. Ernst is an illustrator who works in advertising and has an ultramodern apartment. He is also lonely and heartbroken, because his wife has left him: once a dancer herself, she has fallen in love with a male dancer and run off with him.

Ernst takes care of Doris, and regaining her health, she starts to take care of him: she shops and cleans for him. Becoming the perfect housewife for him, she also begins to fall in love with him. Still obsessed with his wife, Ernst is hard to seduce, but Doris manages it, only to realize that she will not be able to make him forget his wife. She leaves him only to persuade his wife to return to him, and then she returns again to the waiting room at the train station. The ending of the novel is somewhat open, but Doris seems to decide to accept Karl's offer to live in the garden colony, as long as he will leave her alone sexually. The last sentence of the novel implies that she has revised her goal: "It doesn't really matter so terribly much about being a 'Glanz,' maybe" ("Auf den Glanz kommt es nämlich vielleicht gar nicht so furchtbar an," 140).

Lulu in *Pandora's Box,* in contrast, begins the film secure in her status as what Doris would call a "Glanz": kept in a stylish modern apartment (far more expensive than what Ernst could offer Doris), she does not seem bothered that Schoen, the man who is keeping her, will marry another. Indeed it would seem that she keeps the apartment anyway, with Schoen's newspaper meanwhile guaranteeing her success as the main spectacle of the revue being directed by his son Alwa. At the beginning of the story,

therefore, Lulu appears to have everything that Doris wants. In a fit of pique, Lulu manages to cause Schoen to lose his respectable fiancée and to marry her instead. But marriage to Lulu, as Schoen had predicted, leads to his death. Loving, and especially wanting to possess Lulu, is portrayed as extremely dangerous, not out of any malicious intent on the latter's part, but out of her strange, almost innocent indifference to the demands of the men around her.

At this level, she is of course primarily a male fantasy, a beautiful, narcissistic woman kind to almost any man but capable of no deep attachments. Yet it is clear that Lulu does have her own will and her own desires; if there is anything that she wants, it is the autonomy to be able to love whomever she chooses. And it is this autonomy that she insists upon even as her value as a commodity begins its long decline. Fleeing Berlin with Alwa after being convicted of manslaughter for Schoen's murder, Lulu ends up in France as a commodity unknowingly exploited by the evil Count Casti-Piani, who extorts money from Alwa with the threat of notifying the German police. When Alwa has no more money, Casti-Piani wants to sell her into (supposedly "high-class") prostitution in Egypt, and only at this point does Lulu understand the role Casti-Piani has been playing. Desperate to avoid this fate, she flees again with Alwa and Schigolch to London, where she winds up in the slums of London. Impoverished, she is apparently a prostitute, although when she goes down to the street, Alwa seems very upset, as though he still cannot accept the idea. But Lulu's old crony Schigolch holds him back. Lulu then unknowingly meets Jack the Ripper on the street, and it is at this point that her autonomy is her undoing: although Jack has no money, she takes him upstairs anyway because she likes him. Her kindness does disarm him—literally: he throws away his knife before going upstairs with her. But while embracing her he sees another knife gleaming on the table, and overcome, he murders her.

Lulu's trajectory of decline is thus much more direct than Doris's: in the beginning she has a status that Doris never really attains, and from that high point in Berlin there is only decline, first to the still somewhat glamorous underworld milieu of the gambling casino in the ship off France, and then to the slums of London.[21] Doris's trajectory leads her neither quite so high nor quite so low, and there are many more ups and downs, beginning with a mundane, low-paid office job, moving up to her brief stint as an extra in the theater, then "fleeing the law" (like Lulu, although in a much more comical and less melodramatic fashion), only to scrape by from man to man in Berlin. She briefly becomes the mistress of a wealthy man only to plunge further, all the way to complete homelessness and

hunger, then to be "saved," on the brink of prostitution, by Ernst, for whom she becomes an ersatz-housewife, and finally to leave him and confront the option again of homelessness, prostitution, or the retreat to the garden-colony in working-class solidarity with Karl—an end at once more open and much less melodramatic than that of Lulu.

Another obvious contrast has to do with the streets: whereas Doris hits the streets of Berlin—and is mistaken for a prostitute—as soon as she reaches Berlin, Lulu never appears on the streets until the very end of the film. Indeed, Lulu is seen almost entirely in more or less "private" spaces throughout the film, with only two exceptions. The first consists of a few moments of well-orchestrated public spectacle onstage during the revue, but even then we see her mostly backstage during the theater revue, and that of course is where the key action is, above all in the private confrontation with Schoen. The second exception is the courtroom scene, and here too she does not speak but is indeed the object of orations with conflicting interpretations of her life. Doris's plight is quite different: she continually faces homelessness in Berlin, having no secure private refuge at all for very long.[22]

Lulu in this sense is much less a "modern" or "new" woman than Doris, given the former's primarily private existence, as well as the fact that she flees the metropolis of Berlin for the hidden underworld of the French casino, ending up in a still somewhat Victorian-looking London, where she makes the briefest appearance on the street. Doris meanwhile identifies with Berlin so intensely that she implies that in having sex with the blind Brenner, she is giving him Berlin: "I bring him Berlin, which lies in my lap," (65).[23] While this might imply a very cliched equation of illicit female sexuality with the metropolis (such as the Whore of Babylon to which Döblin refers in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*), this is subverted by a much more original inversion of gender cliches: in her relationship with Brenner, Doris becomes his eyes—she becomes the "flaneur's" gaze upon the modern metropolis, as Gleber argues so persuasively (*The Art of Taking a Walk,* 200–04), a gaze that is so often considered exclusively male.

Identifying thus not just with the metropolis but with the modern specularity associated with the modern city, Doris resists as long as she can the idea of moving out of Berlin to its fringes, to Karl's hut in the garden colony, which is why von Ankum implies that this would mean regression and defeat for her (384). On the other hand her quest for the status of "Glanz," which in her mind of course consists of a very public glamour, leads her at best to much more private types of existence protected by men, as a kept woman (like Lulu) or as a would-be housewife, and at worst

to more public states like prostitution and homelessness. Her disenchantment with that quest must also be seen as proof of her ability to learn—another ability Lulu in her "natural innocence" does not appear to possess.

Lulu has been interpreted by Elsaesser ("Lulu," 55–56) and Coates (55, 59) as a symbol of Americanist modernity, and one that is sexually ambiguous as well. Both critics see her as therefore also representing the cinematic apparatus itself. But as Doane points out (71), and Elsaesser admits as well ("Lulu," 56), androgyny is clearly aligned with femininity here, and it is femininity as sexual fluidity that appears so threatening, especially to a masculinity conceived as the longing for solidity, stability, and clearly defined boundaries. And for all the play with androgyny and bisexuality in the desirable figure of Lulu, the film's position on these issues seems less than emancipatory: the portrayal of Geschwitz as a lesbian is, although mainly sympathetic, nonetheless stereotypically "masculine."

In any case, Lulu's autonomy, combined with the freedom and sexual fluidity (and ambiguity) that she embodies, brings only disaster—not just to the men who desire her, and to Geschwitz, but to Lulu herself as well. Because of her threat to the more traditional status quo, in the film represented by a brooding, anxious, possessive bourgeois masculinity, the latter seems compelled to control and destroy her. Pabst's film does not really blame Lulu, indeed if anything it sympathizes with her against a masculinity that appears pathological. But the film also seems to portray the destruction of Lulu as inevitable, for she represents a freedom too threatening to exist. The implicit comment about the supposedly destabilizing autonomy of the New Woman is clear, although Lulu's explicit function in the narrative would seem to be as a catalyst of male crisis, not really to address the situation of women in modernity.[24]

Doris's story does much more clearly address that situation, and it much more explicitly exposes the trap inherent in modern mass-cultural fantasies about the "power" women wield as desirable sexual commodities.[25] In many ways Doris's story is just as pessimistic with regard to certain myths about female sexual emancipation in Weimar modernity as is Pabst's film. Does Keun's novel end, indeed, with only resignation and defeat for Doris?

DORIS AND NEW OBJECTIVITY: SURFACE/SENTIMENTALITY/AGENCY?

The language with which the fictional protagonist Doris supposedly tells her story in *The Artificial Silk Girl* provides some classic—and often quite humorous—examples of an "objective" ("sachlich"), desentimentalized

prose, some of which I have quoted above. Lethen, who calls Keun's heroines "players of many games at once—without luck" ("Simultanspielerinnen ohne Fortune") asserts that their jargon demonstrates the "emphatic quality" ("Forciertheit") that must be produced in order not to collapse into sentimentality (242). As he implies, the seemingly tough exterior that Doris maintains through her wisecracking is in part a defensive posture, a mask that protects her vulnerable emotions.

Nonetheless, it is mistaken to frame the tension in this text (or in New Objectivity in general, I would argue) as merely the contrast between the clever, tough, cold pragmatism so beloved by the male avant-garde and the fatuous bourgeois sentimentalism it loved to deride—a derision that, as we have seen, reveals how much projection was involved in creating this dichotomy in the first place.[26] Doris is neither as cold and cynical as the avant-garde liked to style itself, nor should her underlying capacity for friendship, love, and solidarity be suspected of being merely sentimental or even reactionary as that avant-garde in its own projections might have assumed. While Doris is very skilled at seeing through and making frank remarks about bourgeois male hypocrisy and sexual double standards, she is not nearly as calculating or as cold as she would need to be to succeed truly as a "Glanz," let alone as a female equivalent of Brecht's Baal or one of Walter Serner's "con men" ("Hochstapler")—these being two primary examples of what Lethen calls the cold persona. In fact Doris is constantly giving of herself—to "Garage-Frank" ("Garagen-Franz"), to Brenner—and she continually sacrifices her own happiness and/or comfort for the sake of others: she leaves Tilli's apartment in order to avoid coming between Tilli and her husband, and she leaves Ernst because she realizes he will always love the wife who deserted him. In both of these instances her sacrifice entails becoming homeless.

Doris's "emancipation" is not the coldness to which the male avant-garde aspired and which they projected onto the vamps they found so fascinating. Doris is heartless in her verdict on bourgeois male-morality, and she indeed indicts the coldness of the women who in conforming to it secure their own social and economic well-being—the "decent" German mothers who marry rich old men they do not love (55). For Doris is not as calculating as they: although she realizes that love and desire are dangerous to her aspirations, in the end her sexual relationships are almost always motivated by love, desire, or affection.

Her skepticism about sexual double standards are as much rooted in her experience of class as of gender injustice. It is this skepticism that informs her own both amazed and mocking perspective on Ernst's melancholy cult

of love, based as it is on bourgeois notions of deep interiority, of high culture, and an unacknowledged level of material comfort. This is clear in Doris's reactions to Ernst's pronouncements about the beloved wife who has deserted him:

> "My wife could sing so very high and clearly."
>
> I sing—"That's the love of the sailors"—most wonderful song there is.
>
> "Schubert," he says. How is that? "She sang like Schubert composed." "That's the love of the sailors"—it's maybe garbage, a song like that, is it? What is Schubert, what does he mean? "That's the love—that's taken from real life, like my mother says about good movies. (109)[27]

> I buzz around with the vacuum cleaner—ssssss—I'm a thunderstorm. By accident I break the picture of his wife. They had so many words in common, he says—and there are such small, tender memories, completely inconsequential on their own. I say, "She's gone, and you have to direct your mind to other things."
>
> He says, "Nothing gives me joy anymore, for whom do I live, for whom do I work?"
>
> "Nothing's ever really gone wrong for you, has it?"
>
> "No, it has too." Well, I want to ask what he means by going wrong. There are people who shed tears for themselves out of self-pity if they still haven't had anything warm to eat by three in the afternoon." (110)[28]

> "You look really beat," I tell him. "Today bedtime will be at ten."
>
> "Oh, I don't sleep anyway," he sighs.
>
> Makes me furious. "Don't make up any such nonsense, what a bunch of lies, can't sleep at night because of sorrow and all that, when I hear you clearly every night, snoring in the next room" (112).[29]

Causing damage to his idolatrous cult of love as she zooms about with the vacuum cleaner, Doris is sensitive both to his economic privilege and his snobbery. She is defensive about her affinity for the popular culture "taken from real life" ("aus dem Leben gegriffen") and she is unwilling to put up with his refined melancholy (here one is unavoidably reminded of Kästner's Fabian). Yet in the end she decides to respect his love, as pretentious as it seems to her, leaving him and trying—successfully—to manipulate his wife into returning to him.[30] At the same time she notes the open cynicism that the wife confesses to Doris about her motives for returning to Ernst (136–37).

Besides identifying herself with a commodity—her *Feh,* the beloved fur coat she stole before fleeing to Berlin—Doris engages in a kind of objec-

tive "reification" of the people around her, humorously naming them in her diary in association with some object or concept, be it a possession, an unavoidable association, or simply a descriptive metaphor—that is, in a fashion sometimes metonymical, sometimes metaphorical: black rayon (*schwarzer Rayon*), big industry (*Großindustrie*), blond movie (*blondes Kino*),[31] red moon (*roter Mond*), pink sphere (*rosaroter Kugel,* green moss (*grünes Moos*), cork rug (*Korkteppich*), cardboard box (*Pappkarton*). This is a kind of reified shorthand in keeping with the book's modernist "telegram style," which imitates the rapid tempo of the metropolis and film montage (Kaes, *Kino-Debatte,* 4–9; von Ankum, "Ich liebe Berlin," 376).[32] But it is also a trait that characterizes Doris herself as much as the people she seemingly instrumentalizes by means of this shorthand; I would argue that its satiric humor, like Doris herself, is ultimately humane and self-critical, not really dehumanizing.[33] In the end Doris is much too humane to be very effective at instrumentalizing people, regardless of her wisecracking nicknames for them.

The same can be said about her identification with film and with popular culture—damned by Lensing as superficial or praised as modern and "externally directed" ("außengelenkt") by Lethen (*Verhaltenslehren,* 242–43). Lethen does not consider Doris a "cold persona," but rather the even more modern, other-directed "radar-type" who is no baroque masked type but rather a modern consumer guided by external forces and social pressures (above all the media). But Doris is neither merely a passive object resulting from modern reification nor simply a passive receiver of ideological messages beamed at her from the outside. She actively works within the limitations of modern consumer society and within older patriarchal constraints to create a sort of identity for herself; in this sense, she is more the "cold persona," or at any rate a woman who definitely practices a kind of "feminine masquerade." Her options are limited by the class and gender hierarchies of German society, and she cannot transcend these limitations; indeed she demonstrates the force of their power all the more clearly as her negotiations continue—but this is a process by which she too becomes aware of the limits of her dreams, as she states at the end of the novel (140). Furthermore, as Barndt stresses, it is a process that is represented as Doris's inscription of her experiences as writing, a writing that engages readers interested in negotiating their own identities (192–93).

Von Ankum interprets developments in the last part of the book as a "regression" from autonomy to the refuge of marriage, or its equivalent, first with Ernst, and then with the much poorer Karl—a regression that also means a flight from the metropolis, especially if she does indeed join

Karl in the garden colonies on the edge of Berlin ("'Ich liebe Berlin,'" 384). Perhaps it is instead both a rejection of the mass cultural/consumerist dreams of gaining female autonomy as a glamorous sexual commodity and at the same time a harshly accurate measure of shrinking possibilities, especially for women, as the Weimar economy collapsed.[34] Might not her implied choice of living with Karl in a sexless relationship[35] mean that she is choosing a class-conscious solidarity, as indicated in her final dialogue with the boy she calls "cardboard box" at the train station (138–39)? This interpretation might seem to imply the leftist idealism of the films *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (*Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück,* 1929) and *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), in which the female protagonists find love and happiness in working-class struggle,[36] yet at the same time it reflects a political attitude on the left at the time with which Keun seems to have sympathized. But the end of her novel can hardly be compared to the paternalistic enlightenment the young heroine of *Mother Krause* comes to accept. Nor for that matter is it mere socialist dogma about the value of "productive" labor—Doris still has no interest in going back into the work force (140)! In a time of severe worldwide economic depression, solidarity and collective action must have seemed much more reliable solutions than the consumerist/individualist dreams of upward mobility of the stabilized period. Doris has also learned solidarity with other women (with whom as a potential "Glanz" she had tried to compete); at the end of the novel she mentions again with affection and empathy even the battered prostitute Hulla (140).[37] The end of the novel implies the same awareness of the need for a "collective solidarity" ("solidarisches Miteinander") Rosenstein sees at the end of Keun's first novel *Gilgi—One of us* (*Gilgi—eine von uns,* 1931), as opposed to the competitive ambitions of atomized individuals (280).

Keun's novel is best understood as a materialist and realistic appraisal of women's situation in a time of general downward mobility, an appraisal that debunks both traditional and modern bourgeois notions of individual autonomy. And it is empowering because it shows the perspective of, and gives a voice to, the "new" type of woman constructed so often in the culture, giving that woman agency, wit, desire, skepticism, and the capacity to expose, to understand, and even to revise in some ways the limitations of the mass-cultural dreams (and other dominant social discourses) that have shaped her. Keun's novel provides this perspective in a way that thematizes a process of identity construction through writing that is at the same time a critical appropriation of an otherwise male "gaze" upon the modern metropolis and its chaos, dynamism, and fluidity. Doris is both commodity

and consumer, diary-writer and camera-eye, object and subject of the flaneur's gaze, embodiment of mass-cultural fantasies and a critical but accessible voice in a debate waged in popular culture in the early 1930s about women's identities.[38]

Coming Out of the Uniform

Political and Sexual Emancipation in Leontine Sagan's Film Mädchen in Uniform *(1931)*

> We sat together at the movies, it was a film about girls in uniform. They were high-class girls, but it was the same for them as for me. You care for someone, and what you get sometimes is tears and a red nose. You care for someone—it can't be understood at all, it makes no lousy difference whether it's a man or a woman or dear God almighty.[39]
>
> —Irmgard Keun, *The Artificial Silk Girl*

There have been many women filmmakers to emerge from Germany and Austria, especially since the late 1960s, but, unfortunately, the most well known German woman to direct films remains Leni Riefenstahl, whose work was primarily in the Third Reich. But before her famous propaganda film for the Nazis, *Triumph of the Will* (1935), and even before her directorial debut with the "mountain film" *The Blue Light* (1932), there was another film made by a woman, one that was not only a national but an international success, and one with very different politics. Given all the books and films by men in the Weimar Republic that thematized new models of gender and sexual behavior, depicting them usually in a negative light, it is important to discuss this film, the most famous film made by a woman during the Weimar Republic, especially because it celebrated an almost unspoken form of sexuality that threatened the status quo.

This 1931 film was called *Mädchen in Uniform* (or *Girls in Uniform*), and it was not only directed by a woman, Leontine Sagan, it was adapted from a popular stage drama written by a woman (Christa Winsloe), and acted by an all-female cast. It was a popular and entertaining film that nonetheless took a clear position in favor of Weimar's most democratic and emancipatory tendencies and in opposition to the authoritarian and repressive forces mobilizing to destroy the Republic in the crisis years of the early 1930s. For within a year and a half of the film's release, in January, 1933, Hitler came to power, a political event that put an end to the relative tolerance for

the blurring and transgression of traditional gender and sexual boundaries that had characterized popular culture in Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic (1918–1933).

Mädchen in Uniform is a film that is implicated within a number of progressive and emancipatory discourses of the late Weimar Republic: the movement for homosexual rights and the flourishing of urban, queer subcultures; "New Objectivity" and other avant-garde tendencies in the arts and popular culture; and the intersection of modernity, the movies, and democratic egalitarianism. It is with regard to such discourses about gender and sexuality as well as about aesthetics and politics that I will attempt to contextualize this film.

The film can indeed be read as an anti-fascist film; certainly its representation of authoritarian, militaristic "Prussianism" is clearly negative. While women in the film are by no means portrayed as innocent of Prussianism—the film's "villain" is after all the boarding school's headmistress—the film nonetheless depicts the school's values as patriarchal and antidemocratic. And the greatest threat to such a value system turns out to be emotional attachments that develop between women, which are portrayed as disruptive of the school's rules and hierarchy. The school's authoritarian values are shown in turn to be deadly.

As B. Ruby Rich asserted in her famous essay on the film, over the course of the film's reception, its anti-authoritarian stance was almost always emphasized, while its sexual politics were mostly ignored until the 1970s. This is evident in two of the most canonical verdicts on the film, written years later in exile by German critics who first saw the film in 1931: writing in 1947, Siegfried Kracauer discussed the film exclusively in terms of its anti-authoritarianism, which he found too meek, including it in a chapter on "Timid Heresies" *(Caligari,* 226–29). In *The Haunted Screen* (which originally appeared in French in 1952), Lotte Eisner was much more positive, calling it the "last word" on the repressive practices of the Prussian aristocracy. Eisner's main interest in this film (and all films) was aesthetic, but by implying that its stylistic beauty can be ascribed to Sagan's "feminine reading" of German film traditions, she anticipated some potential for a feminist interpretation. To the extent she dealt with the film's sexual politics, however, her reading was problematic (325–26).

For it is sexuality that has complicated the film's reception from the very beginning. Central to its narrative is a fairly overt homoeroticism. Critics for years tended to downplay the erotic aspect of the schoolgirl Manuela's infatuation for her teacher Fräulein von Bernburg. Kracauer, for instance,

in disagreeing with the critical consensus about the extent (and the "boldness") of the film's anti-authoritarianism, nonetheless manages to repress almost any allusion to the film's homoeroticism, leading one to suspect that for him Manuela's love for Bernburg was distasteful and a "trivialization" of any political message in the film.[40]

When the film was re-discovered in the 1970s, it became a cult film in the United States, England, and France among feminists. Many lesbians had a special appreciation for the film, considering it an early "coming-out" film that affirmed love between women. The reaction of many German feminists to this reception of the film was that it was too simple, that it ignored the film's politics and its original historical context (Gramann and Schlüpmann; Lenssen). In the early 1980s, Rich wrote a long and persuasive discussion of the film, with extensive research into its political and historical context; she maintained that the film is indeed a lesbian "coming-out" film, but that there is no contradiction between the film's sexual politics and its anti-fascism: in fact they are integrally related. More recently, Richard Dyer has done a thorough analysis of the film's place within gay and lesbian debates on homosexuality in the 1920s (31–60).

There are, however, critics and scholars who question reading the film as either a "coming out" film or as an anti-fascist film. Lisa Ohm has argued that the film is not at all a "coming out" film, and she comes to a much more negative reading of the film's politics with regard to fascism (more or less agreeing with Kracauer). She stresses the dominant influence of the film's producer, Carl Froelich, hardly an anti-fascist, as it would turn out. Froelich had great control over the look of the film and the shape of the narrative, and he created the happy ending of the film, which reversed the ending in Christa Winsloe's original play. Christa Reinig sees this changed ending as completely in contradiction to Winsloe's intentions. Other objections have to do with the issue of motherhood as it is depicted in the film: does Fräulein von Bernburg represent a substitute mother to Manuela, or an object of erotic desire for her—or both? A recent study connects the discourse on motherhood in the film to reactionary social ideologies and forces in the early 1930s.[41] Is the film about lesbianism, mothering, or both, and what difference does this make for the evaluation of the film's politics? Does the film attempt to subvert, or is it too "timid," or even in some sense complicit with the rise of fascism? Not unrelated to such questions is another fundamental one: how is this film relevant to the discussion of New Objectivity and the other discourses of modernity in the Weimar Republic we have been investigating?

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

The screenplay for *Mädchen in Uniform* was adapted from a play by Christa Winsloe that had gone through two versions. It was produced first in Leipzig as *The Knight Nerestan* (*Ritter Nerestan*) in 1930, directed by Otto Werther and starring Hertha Thiele as Manuela; then it was produced in Berlin as *Yesterday and Today* (*Gestern und Heute*) in 1931, directed by Leontine Sagan, first with Gina Falkenberg as Manuela, and then with Hertha Thiele in the lead role. Both versions were great popular successes, so much so that plans were made to film it. The film was completed later in 1931, and it was produced by Carl Froelich, who was listed in the credits as responsible for "artistic supervision" ("künstlerische Oberleitung"); he also chose the film's title, *Mädchen in Uniform*. With some supervision by Froelich, then, Sagan directed the film.[42] Winsloe co-wrote the screenplay with F.S. Andam, and Thiele played Manuela. The film too became a big hit, both within Germany and internationally, and the critics generally praised it as well: "One spoke of the best film of the year. In the United States, too, the critics were enthusiastic" (Wendtland, *Jahrgang*, 1931, 223).[43]

Like the original play, the film is the story of fourteen-and-a-half-year-old Manuela, whose mother has been dead for some time, and whose father is an officer. Manuela is brought by her aunt to a boarding school for the daughters of Prussian officers and nobility. The school is characterized by the rigid, authoritarian discipline demanded by its headmistress, who is determined to raise obedient "mothers of soldiers." The school also seems to be in rather bad financial straits, feeding and clothing its charges in an extremely stingy manner; the headmistress tries to portray this as a virtue, saying, "We Prussians have starved ourselves to greatness!" ("Wir Preußen haben uns groß gehungert!").

The only sympathetic teacher is Fräulein von Bernburg, who modifies her strictness with a fair amount of open kindness and affection, symbolized best perhaps by her ritual of giving a good-night kiss on the forehead to each one of the girls in her dormitory. Learning that Manuela has lost her mother, Bernburg shows her some special attention, and Manuela responds to this unaccustomed kindness by breaking the unspoken rules of the ritualized good-night kiss on the first night she experiences it. She throws her arms around Bernburg, and Bernburg then kisses her on the lips in one of the most famous close-ups of the film. Manuela becomes so infatuated with Bernburg that she cannot perform well in her class. Bernburg, learning from the staff that Manuela's underclothes are in

woeful shape, gives the pupil a chemise to wear from her own underwear drawer.

Manuela gives an outstanding performance in the school play, dressed as a man in the leading role of Schiller's *Don Carlos.* Getting drunk on spiked punch at the party after the play, she tells the other girls of the chemise from Bernburg that she is wearing, and she proclaims her love for the teacher. The headmistress witnesses this proclamation and declares a scandal; she has Manuela isolated from all contact with the other girls (see Figure 6.1)—and she also forbids Bernburg to see her again. Bernburg does talk to Manuela, but only to explain why it is best that they do not see each other anymore. The headmistress berates Bernburg for doing even that much, and this leads to a showdown between the two women. Bernburg defends Manuela's feelings as love, not sin, and she declares that she will resign rather than continue to watch the headmistress turn the girls into scared and timid creatures. Meanwhile those very girls, concerned about Manuela, break the rules and begin to search for her. Bernburg too has a premonition that something is wrong, and she joins them just as they have found Manuela—just as they

Figure 6.1 Clinical confinement in chiaroscuro: in Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931), Manuela (Hertha Thiele) has been in isolation after her drunken profession of love for Bernburg; to her left, the school's Headmistress (Emilia Unda), admonishes her as a servant stands at attention to the right. Photo courtesy of Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin.

succeed in stopping her at the last minute from jumping to her death from the top of the school's central stairwell. Bernburg confronts the headmistress with the tragedy that was only barely averted. Stunned and for the first time silenced, the headmistress walks away down the corridor, seemingly defeated; meanwhile the military bugles of Potsdam sound outside the school.

Kracauer mentions the bugles at the end of the film to make his point that the revolt at the end of the film was merely a "timid heresy": the authority structure outside the school remains unchanged by anything that had gone on inside it. The only thing that happens inside the school is the victory of Bernburg, who has only attempted to humanize its authoritarian system, something that Kracauer sees as "in the interest of its preservation" (*Caligari,* 228–29). This interpretation, however, overlooks the transformation of Bernburg at the end of the film: as Rich argues, up to this point she has indeed played "good cop" to the headmistress's "bad cop" (68–69), but in her final debate with the headmistress she decides to quit the "system" altogether, now fully aware of the toll it takes on the girls. Upon learning that her complicity with the system has nearly killed Manuela, she only becomes more defiant, not less (Rich, 76–78). As for Kracauer's charge that the "happy" ending of the film ignores larger political forces, the fact is that his point about outside forces is made by the film itself. It relativizes the headmistress's defeat with those very bugles, reminding us of the powerful patriarchal militarism beyond the walls of the school.[44] The ending is more open than he would have it: Manuela survives, but what happens next is unclear.

The political warning in the film about the situation in Germany is actually fairly explicit. Edelgard, the schoolgirl whose pedigree is the most aristocratic of all her classmates, states: "At home, you know, they are always talking about the time that is coming when we shall need soldiers again, and mothers of soldiers."[45] This makes the implications of the headmistress's views about the purpose of educating her charges very clear in the context of Germany in the early 1930s—and the accuracy of the prediction is uncanny. For earlier in the film, the headmistress stressed the goal of creating "mothers of soldiers"—and the film's opposition to all that the headmistress stands for is unmistakable. Also relevant is the fact that most of the important figures who made the film—Winsloe, Sagan, Thiele—went into exile soon after the Nazi seizure of power (*Machtergreifung*) in 1933.

One person who did not go into exile and who played a very important role in making the film was Carl Froelich, who continued his filmmaking career successfully through the Third Reich. After his production of the

anti-Prussian *Mädchen in Uniform,* Froelich would go on to direct *The Hymn of Leuthen* (*Der Choral von Leuthen,* 1933), one of the many films (from the 1920s into the 1940s) that catered to nationalist tastes by glorifying Prussian history.[46] According to Herta Thiele in a 1981 interview, Froelich was involved in the decision that banned her from film acting in the Third Reich. She also stated that in making *Madchen in Uniform,* it had been Froelich who tried to mute the play's homoeroticism for commercial reasons (34).

The only person among the people who made the film definitely known to be lesbian was Winsloe, who was actually "coming out" during the very years that the various versions of the story were written (Dyer, 35).[47] But the argument for a lesbian reading of *Mädchen in Uniform* is based on much more than this biographical fact. Thiele explained that in the first production of the play, the Leipzig production, its lesbian aspect had been more or less avoided, but that Leontine Sagan's Berlin production of the play was different: "Sagan had directed the play back then in the theater as purely lesbian."[48] Margarete Melzer played Bernburg in the Berlin play, and Thiele characterized Melzer as "a completely masculine type" ("ein absolut männlicher Typ," 32). One of Froelich's attempts to mute the lesbianism of the Berlin production was thus to replace Melzer with the much more stereotypically "feminine" Dorothea Wieck. As first noted by Gramann and Schlüpmann (30), who interviewed Thiele, one gets the impression from Thiele's comments that there was a split between the makers of the film, Sagan and Winsloe being on one side and Froelich on the other, with Froelich having the advantage of technical knowledge of film production and control of the film crew on his side.[49]

MÄDCHEN *AND NEW OBJECTIVITY?*

Lotte Eisner's only reference to questions of sexual identity in *Mädchen in Uniform* "contrives to make the film sound somewhat anti-lesbian" (Dyer, 32). She asserts that the film touches on a mere adolescent "phase," implying that the school is to blame for misreading an otherwise normal adolescent phase of confusion (326).[50] Eisner ascribes the film's high aesthetic quality to Sagan's "femine reading of the *Kammerspielfilm* [chamber play film] which "led her to turn her back on the 'new objectivity'" (325). There can be no doubt that New Objectivity was in many ways perceived as a very "masculine" sensibility, and that *Mädchen in Uniform* can be read as a very "feminine" film—Dyer especially does a thorough job demonstrating this (38–41). The *Kammerspielfilm* tradition Eisner mentions, however,

was arguably a fairly naturalistic form, although in the early 1920s, in a film like Leopold Jessner's Backstairs (Hintertreppe, 1921), for instance, it was undoubtedly combined with a certain expressionistic exaggeration in acting style and set design. But little of that can be found in *Mädchen in Uniform*.

Beyond such quibbles about genre and style, however, the film can be related to New Objectivity and various discourses associated with it in a number of ways. For a start, of course, one only needs to mention the emancipatory sexual politics in the film that Eisner manages to distort. In addition, the film manifests a number of specific, positive attitudes toward phenomena commonly associated with modernity in Weimar: jazz, the adulation of film stars, "trashy" popular novels, and "sex appeal."[51]

The film sets up a number of clear oppositions both on the narrative and the stylistic level, all of which work to portray the aristocratic "old order" negatively, and a new, emerging "modern" order in positive terms. The hierarchical, militaristic and anti-democratic order that the school upholds is obviously embodied by the headmistress, whose bearing, medallion, gait, and cane are obvious allusions to Frederick the Great of Prussia, as commentators since Eggebrecht (11) in 1931 have noted (cf. Kracauer, *Caligari,* 226) have noted. Next in the hierarchy comes the headmistress's toady, Fräulein von Kesten, and then the intimidated, insecure, competitive staff of teachers. The obvious exception is Bernburg, whose reformist humanism leads her eventually to revolt and side with the pupils, the young girls who best embody an emerging modern, democratic, egalitarian order. It is the world of the girls that provide the strongest contrast to the stifling military discipline, the archaic pomp, and the hypocrisy of the school and all it represents. The girls are characterized by their pranks, their love of modern mass culture, their insouciant rebelliousness (exemplified best by the character Ilse), their enthusiasm and emotion, their crushes on each other, and ultimately their insurrectionary solidarity, which saves Manuela from suicide.

The association of the girls with modernity and mass culture is clear: in the locker room Ilse proudly shows off her hidden collage of photos of the film star Hans Albers, arguing that he has more "sex appeal"—she uses the English term—than the actress Henny Porten, who is apparently the favorite film star of some of the other girls. Meanwhile there is an amusing visual reference to Weimar's obsession with sports and body culture, as two other girls giggle at pin-ups of scantily clad male athletes.[52] Finding the romantic novel Manuela is reading, Ilse grabs it, opens it, and reads a "racy" passage aloud to the girls. The girls are obviously attracted to "trivial" romance novels and other mass cultural pleasures, all of which are forbid-

den them. At the party after Manuela's bravura performance of Schiller (high culture, but in drag),[53] the girls quickly tire of waltzes and demand jazz from their fellow pupil at the piano. The headmistress and the school are tied to an older high culture, and even that culture appears to be a censored, very narrow, rather uncomprehending version of German classicism. As the headmistress has tea with the aristocratic alumnae, they worry about Schiller writing too "freely."

In stylistic terms, the film—like most German films of the era—is indebted to the chiaroscuro effects created by lighting techniques first developed during Expressionism. Some of the ways in which the film uses lighting do correspond to a dualistic scheme opposing innocence to evil, as exemplified most obviously by the bright close-ups of blond Manuela in contrast to the dark costumes of the headmistress and the staff, and the shadowy, confining spaces of the school, or the looming abyss of the staircase so central to the structure of both the school and the narrative. But even with regard to the filming of the staircase there is ambiguity in the use of shadows, for it is here that Bernburg first sees Manuela, before the latter notices her. As Bernburg looks over the pupil approvingly (indeed, with a mixture of voyeurism and desire), the shadows over the stairwell seem to convey both something ominous as well as an erotic tension.[54] Even more ambiguous, and not at all chiaroscuro, is the muted lighting of the dormitory after Bernburg dims the lights to begin the nightly ritual of the good night kiss: here there is little that is ominous, only the creation of an aura that has something of religious ritual yet also has romantic and erotic undertones.

As in many early German sound films, there is some music and some singing. There is martial music over the opening montage, and it will continue to be associated with those visual images of Prussian order, so that when the bugles are heard at the end of the film, those images will be evoked without being shown. The martial music is undermined from the very beginning of the film, however, by undertones in the music expressing a fanciful lightness that can be associated with the girls who are such unwilling initiates into this militaristic order. This is also emphasized when the girls are shown singing—the beauty of their voices reminds us of the song heard outside the classroom window in *The Blue Angel,* but here we see the girls singing. The patriotism of the lyrics of this song glorifying Prussia is undermined by the close-up of Ilse and the amplification of her voice as she turns praise for Prussia into a complaint about the meager diet at the school. And of course there is jazz, associated with the party when "innocent Manuela" makes her rebellious declaration of love.

It is the style of montage that opens the film, however, that best illustrates how distinct it is from Expressionist style—and how much it, like so many other German films since the mid-1920s, betrays the influence of Soviet filmmaking, which since the success of Eisenstein's *Potemkin* had been as great as the influence of Chaplin and the American cinema. As Rich notes (63, 83), the montage that depicts the authoritarian Prussian grandeur of Potsdam not only provides a dynamic contrast to the more theatrical interior scenes of the film, with its moving camera and quick cutting; it also performs an important narrative function as well. At the very beginning of the film it establishes the oppressive social context of which the school is an integral part, and it is to an economically brief reprise of similar shots of that outside world to which the film returns at two crucial moments in the film: just after the close-up of Bernburg kissing Manuela on the lips, and again after she gives her the chemise. Thus after two of the most important events in the narrative of the love developing between Bernburg and Manuela, the film reminds the viewer of the dominant authoritarian (and patriarchal) order violated by these erotic infractions.

Also significant is the contrast between the visual content of the opening montage and the style with which it is filmed. The neoclassical palaces and statues of Potsdam with their obvious attempt to claim a timeless authority for a relatively young aristocratic order are filmed with a constructivist tension that in effect "deconstructs" their symmetrical harmony and their pompous veneer of high culture. These architectural structures could not be more distinct from favored constructivist (and social realist) subjects: cranes, factories, modern buildings, construction sites (there is such a sequence in Brecht and Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* of 1932, which also featured Herta Thiele). But while the content of the opening images is neoclassical, the manner in which they are filmed accentuates angles and diagonals in tension. Structures designed to emanate classical harmony are framed so as to make them seem grotesque and asymmetrical, and this technique can also be noted in the shots of the famous stairwell in the school. The building used in the film was Potsdam's Kaiserin-Augusta Stift, the very boarding school Winsloe herself had attended as a child (Thiele, 34).[55] The school's stairwell, like the building itself, was built in a style that emphasized neoclassical grace and harmony, but the stairwell is shot from high above and from such oblique angles that it appears quite ominous, and almost abstract.

There is thus an obvious polarization in the film on both stylistic and narrative levels: between an authoritarian regime garbed in neoclassical grace and a modern dissonant style of camerawork and editing;[56] between that

repressive order on the outside of the school and the anti-authoritarian—and sexual—revolt breaking out on the inside of the school; between the Prussian rigidity of the headmistress and the spirited, democratic anarchy of the girls over whom she presides. To this polarization might be added the stylistic contrast between, on the one hand, the film's use of originally Expressionist lighting techniques, and, on the other hand, the film's use of montage and "documentary" footage of Potsdam and the school. In addition, one could mention the use of so many non-actresses to portray the pupils,[57] all of which provide evidence of its connection to trends in New Objective/"realist" filmmaking in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Some aspects of all this tension and polarization in the film may reflect the political polarization in the aftermath of the economic depression that began in late 1929: the tension between the Right and Left, between authoritarian and democratic forces. In looking at the politics specifically depicted in the film, one might perhaps concur with Kracauer that the film is too "timid" with regard to the depiction of class in the film: the focus here is on a school for upper-class girls, after all. But the critique of the hierarchical values of the school is fairly clear in the film: the servants in the school are portrayed positively, and, like the girls, are shown to be irreverent about the attitudes of the people who run the school. The cross-cutting after the play which juxtaposes the celebration of the girls with that of the servants aligns those two groups against the staid tea party held by the Headmistress with the aristocratic patronesses of the school.

And this tension between the authoritarian values of the school and the more democratic values of the students and the servants is clearly related to the deep political polarization that had characterized the Weimar Republic from the beginning. It may have eased a bit during the "stabilized" prosperity after 1924, but it had never disappeared, as the crisis after 1929 made quite clear. On the narrative level, at any rate, this is clearly what the film is "about," whether one agrees with Kracauer that it is too timid in its attack on reactionary forces or not. This is also why (pace Freiburg) it is not merely due to hindsight that it is persuasive to read the film as anti-fascist. The tensions within the film articulate political tensions between the Right and the Left that were quite real at the time. These were not new tensions, and they had very much to do with the struggle for power soon to be won by the fascists in Germany.

However, it is also true that the polarization between reactionary evil and emancipated modernity as established in the film may be a bit too simple, indeed suspect, as Kracauer maintained. I would also assert that the

polarization in the film can be related to other contentious debates about the film, not just with regard to whether it is truly anti-fascist, but whether its politics on female identity and sexual identity are as progressive as we might like to think.[58]

FEMALE IDENTITY: LESBIANISM AND/OR MOTHERHOOD?

For of course, as mentioned above, it has been asserted that the film is neither anti-fascist nor emancipatory in its sexual politics, in contradiction to Rich and Dyer, who assert that it is both. Again: to what extent, if at all, is the film "lesbian"? As we have seen, the people most responsible for the film were working to some extent at cross purposes: Winsloe and Sagan seem to have been committed to an openly lesbian film, at least from Thiele's characterization of the Berlin production of the play (32), whereas Froelich wanted to make the thematization of lesbian love less overt (34). Perhaps this topic is not completely explicit in the resulting film, yet many early critics acknowledged it, even though they often tried to dismiss it as something harmless, an adolescent phase. Most critics praised the film; in a more negative review, there is perhaps more forthrightness: the conservative *Kinematograph* objected mostly to the satirization of Potsdam (and national values), which it found unnecessary and in bad taste. But its review also contains the somewhat acid remark that viewers who have not been initiated into all "erotic specialties" might not understand what the film is about. Herbert Ihering, however, who was very positive about the film ("One of the best, cleanest, clearest films of the year . . .") was even more forthright, calling it a tragedy with a "slightly lesbian emphasis"(ctd. in Wendtland, *Jahrgang 1931,* 223).[59]

Why was this lesbian aspect to the narrative only *slightly* emphasized? This may have been more the result of the fact that the filmmakers were working at cross-purposes than of anything specific that Froelich did. For some of the changes we know him to have made, in spite of his reputed intention to tone down any overt homoeroticism in the interest of commercial success, do not necessarily have the effect of lessening the lesbian component to the film, as Dyer demonstrates, at least within the context of lesbian and gay debates about homosexuality in the Weimar period. In that context, the replacement of Melzer with Wieck in the role of Bernburg can be seen to signify the replacement of an androgynous, "butch" or *Bubi*-style of lesbianism with a "female-identified" type of lesbianism.

According to Dyer's characterization of that specific historical context in Weimar, there were within both the male and female homosexual com-

munities two main philosophies or discourses of homosexuality, as it were, each opposing the other but both part of the broader community. One was the androgynous, "in-betweenist" model, the "third sex" in Magnus Hirschfeld's famous formulation, including "masculinized" (or "butch") women and "feminized" men; the other was the same-sex identified model, that is, of male-identified ("butch") gay men and female-identified ("femme") lesbians. The advantage of the latter model for lesbians in a homophobic society was greater invisibility, and homophobia was increasing in late Weimar. Beyond this pragmatic consideration, however, the fact that in a film like *Mädchen in Uniform* the central relationship "can be seen as simultaneously a pupil-teacher, mother-daughter, and a lesbian one," is, as Dyer writes, an ambiguity that is "a source of delight" (39).[60] Thus the film appeals both to a general female solidarity and to lesbian sensitivities in such a way as to make it difficult to separate the two—a pleasurable ambiguity that today would be considered queer.

Furthermore, Dyer argues that one cannot avoid the lesbianism of the narrative by stressing motherless Manuela's search for a replacement mother figure. This stress on motherhood was the strategy behind the attempts Thiele describes for muting the film's lesbianism in the Leipzig production, and it remains the interpretive emphasis of a critic such as Ohm, who disputes that the film thematizes lesbianism in an emancipatory way. But Dyer asserts that the "mother-daughter quality" of the relationship between Manuela and Bernburg only makes the film "*more* lesbian, not less"—especially since it is a typical feature of early 20th-century lesbian novels (55).

Nonetheless, the "female-identified" strategy could have negative political consequences for the film. Dyer rather clearly associates the "male-identified" tendency with reactionary tendencies in Weimar, namely a homosocial "masculinism" clearly aligned with the Right, and specifically with the Nazis.[61] But he admits no such problem with regard to the glorification of essential femininity within the "female-identified" tendency. In an era in which a very traditional cult of German womanhood, in combination with the cult of German motherhood, was about to triumph, however, this glorification seems more problematic. Indeed, in the early 1930s a return to traditional femininity was already triumphing over the fashionable trends a few years earlier associated with the "masculinized" New Woman.

On the simplest level: to the extent the lesbianism of the film remains camouflaged, it can be denied. This is what Lotte Eisner does: she compliments the film's "feminine" qualities while making it appear that Manuela's infatuation is merely a "phase" exacerbated in an "unhealthy" way by the

school. And to the extent that the lesbianism is denied, the film's radicality fades. This is a dynamic, of course, that is still at work in much more recent films: "The unconscious deployment . . . of a cinematic lesbian continuum organized around the figure of the femme is politically and erotically ambiguous, both presenting and erasing lesbian identities and sexualities" (Holmlund ctd. in Doty, 44).

In the context of Germany in the early 1930s, there is an even more troubling possibility: a much more conservative concept, that of a "separate sphere" for women, might be relevant to the film in a way that undermines its reputed anti-fascism. The concept of a "separate sphere" is what Claudia Koonz found so fundamental to explaining the willingness of women to cooperate with fascists. The attraction to the idea of a "separate sphere" for women was characteristic of many middle-class women, especially women involved in church groups and opposed to (or threatened by) any "emancipation," but also women in the bourgeois women's movement, especially its conservative wing. This attraction was connected to a number of elements: a distaste for the more "masculine" New Woman of the 1920s who worked in the "man's world"; a fear of the loss of middle-class privilege, which having to work often connoted for middle-class women; but also, as Koonz asserts, a somewhat realistic appraisal of how little equality with men had actually been won compared to what the Weimar Constitution had promised women (1–17). Competing with men seemed undesirable and/or futile, and the idea of a return to some mythic past wherein women could achieve some autonomy in their "traditional" sphere of influence seemed positive to such women. Koonz maintains that this attitude helps to explain why so many women put up so little resistance to the victory of such an obviously misogynous movement like the Nazis—and indeed why some women enthusiastically joined the Nazi movement.

If this sort of "separate sphere" were indeed glorified in *Mädchen in Uniform,* it would indeed be troubling, but this is not the case. Such a sphere is arguably thematized in the film, but it is criticized, not valorized. For the boarding school itself serves as—and to some extent represents—such a traditional "female sphere," and it is this aspect against which Manuela and Bernburg rebel: a school which keeps girls separate in order to train them to be obedient wives who will give birth to soldiers—precisely the role for women which National Socialism would soon gloriously proclaim.[62] Here the erotic love of Manuela for Bernburg makes the rebellion all the more radical, for what could be a greater threat to the traditional female role than lesbianism, especially when that traditional role was defined so explicitly (both within the film and in the Weimar Republic in general, at least in its

latter years) in terms of motherhood, pro-natalism, and militarism—giving birth to soldiers?

Lesbianism would certainly be a threat to a worldview whose goal for women above all is that they give birth, increase the birth rate. Like most women, most lesbians are of course able to give birth, and there are many lesbians who are mothers, but this fact would probably not comfort the pronatalists, if it in fact occurred at all to them. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the discourse of motherhood pervades *Mädchen in Uniform:* certainly Bernburg describes her more nurturing teaching philosophy as explicitly "maternal," and her decision to stand up for Manuela is not only a courageous "coming out" but also a stand on behalf of all the young women whose spirits are being crushed by the school. Freiburg and Reisdorfer (192–203) both see maternalism as central to the film, with the latter reading it positively in the tradition of German feminism, while Freiburg reads it negatively, connected ultimately to the reactionary gender politics of the Nazis.

The bourgeois ideology of motherhood had been used by feminists since the nineteenth century in Germany and elsewhere as strategy for increasing women's sphere of activity—the concept of "social motherhood," for instance, which justified women's move into professions like teaching, nursing, and social work. This strategy was pragmatic in the nineteenth century and not necessarily reactionary, but it was also not unrelated to more reactionary tendencies, which would indeed lead to the cult of motherhood in fascism. It seems to me, however, that moving from a strict biological/reproductive understanding of motherhood obviously loosens the concept from biologically determinist/essentialist notions of femininity. Arguably, even "social motherhood" already establishes some distance from such notions. Lesbianism, however, when combined with a "maternal" concern for the welfare of younger women, certainly does it much more clearly—and in a way that the fascist cult of motherhood most definitely does *not*. Is not the "mothering" in *Mädchen in Uniform* actually a form of female solidarity that includes a defense of homoerotic love—and a defense that is mounted not only by lesbians?

It is true that—as Rich asserts—so long as Bernburg plays "good cop" by directing all the homoerotic impulses of the girls toward herself, thus making them both harmless and beneficial to the institution with which she is identified, Bernburg is complicit in shoring up the school as a traditionalist "separate sphere." But as soon as Manuela's love transgresses the bounds of what is allowed, Bernburg, after a somewhat craven period of

hesitation, defiantly chooses to quit the school and openly to side with Manuela.

Thus, we must return to the question of how much the film mutes the explicitly lesbian nature of Manuela's love for Bernburg. Why does the headmistress scream "Skandal!" when she hears Manuela's speech about the chemise from Bernburg—and about her love for Bernburg? Why does she demand Manuela be isolated and worry about "contagion"? Why does her chief flunky, Fräulein von Kesten, tell Edelgard that she is too young to understand exactly why Manuela must be isolated?[63] Why does the headmistress tell Bernburg that Manuela's attitude is a "sin," and why does Bernburg defiantly reply that what the headmistress calls "sin" is "the great spirit of love which has a thousand forms"? While the film may allow some viewers to ignore or downplay its lesbianism (in harmony with Froelich's commercial motivations and intentions), the narrative really does not make sense without it.

There has nonetheless been some disagreement as to whether the film actually depicts Bernburg's coming out (as opposed to Manuela's). Rich asserts that it is, but Gramann and Schlüpmann are not so sure. The logic of the two famous superimpositions of Manuela's face over Bernburg's face, however, is that they are from Bernburg's perspective, thus indicating that she too is haunted by Manuela and, therefore, that she too is in love. The first of the two superimpositions, it should be added, happens as Manuela begins to recite a psalm from the Songs of Solomon; the passionate words of this song can easily be taken for the expression of secular love as well as of religious devotion.[64] Manuela begins reciting its words as Bernburg watches her from the front of the classroom. It is from a reaction shot of Bernburg that the superimposition of Manuela's image begins.

Another point of controversy has been the film's "happy ending," another mostly commercial choice by Froelich, who thought a suicide at the end of the film would be "grotesque" (Thiele, 35). Does this affirmative ending undermine either the film's lesbianism or its anti-authoritarianism? Whatever Froelich's intentions, the fact that Manuela does not commit suicide is a great improvement on the conventional ending of traditional lesbian novels: "deviance" punished with the suicide of the "deviant."[65]

That the film was both accessible and extremely popular is proof of the fact that popular culture at the end of the Weimar Republic was not invariably reactionary, as so many critics have assumed.[66] The fact that the suicide is averted at the end of the film by the open rebellion and solidarity of the other schoolgirls and Bernburg underscores the anti-

authoritarian reading; the revolt against authority is all the more radical when the lesbianism is taken into account.[67] The two discourses—anti-authoritarianism and lesbian rights—are intertwined, and not only within the text of the film. To separate issues of sexual freedom from other political struggles is a mistake, as feminists above all have so long emphasized. Homophobia was a crucial aspect of fascism, and it remains one of the most important weapons of some of the most patriarchal, reactionary, oppressive, and ultimately anti-democratic forces at work today. Its defeat in this film, however momentary, is one that should cheer us all.