

TOWARD A NEW SEXUALITY



HUGO BETTAUER – “The Erotic Revolution” (1924)

First published as "Die erotische Revolution," *Er und Sie* 1 (1924), 1-2.

Social contradictions have never been sharper: the direst housing shortage, the impoverishment of entire social strata through monetary devaluation, hatred between races and nations, Germany's struggle for existence, social upheaval, tax pogroms, capitalist self-assertion and the strivings of the lower classes not to lose what they have gained, and, meanwhile, tremendous technological progress—these are the things that occupy the world, that fill the newspapers, that are the center of all discussions. Upon

closer inspection they are only transitory problems, merely affairs of tomorrow and the day after, inessential compared to the eternal questions on which the development of humanity and the happiness of the coming generations depend.

So confused and benumbed are we by these daily concerns, these minor and major sensations, that we utterly fail to realize that we are living in the midst of the most powerful and fateful revolutions of all time. Without leaders and partisan debates, without the exertion of force and demagoguery, a revolution is pursuing its inexorable course which, more than the political one, will necessarily change the lives of those to come. It is the erotic revolution!

Since the triumph of Christianity, all the institutions in Europe that dealt directly or indirectly with sexual questions have remained stable and unchanged. Their fundamental principle: the erotic drives had to be restrained to only what was necessary. The adult male was to choose his life companion, who was to remain erotically linked with him until death. With this chosen companion he was to satisfy his erotic lust, with her he was to conceive children, wither, become unfruitful, and die. Every departure from this fundamental principle was more or less punishable, avenged by social ostracism, and accursed in its consequences. Adultery was a crime, the illegitimate child condemned, the girl who gave herself to a man outside of wedlock despised—or, when bitter need arose, the whore existed outside the law and without rights. [. . .]

The fundamental principle that the erotic belongs to marriage was created by men and takes no consideration of the woman. The woman is simply an object, a thing to marry; she exists up until marriage in subjection to her parents, then to her husband. If her erotic drive is stronger than her husband's, she necessarily goes psychologically and physically to ruin; if she fails to find a husband, she is deprived of all erotic activity and turns into a horrid, withered being suffering scorn and ridicule as an old virgin because she followed the fundamental principle established by men instead of circumventing it. If, however, she circumvents it in public, then she ceases being a member of society, becomes a whore whom people are allowed to spit upon and persecute. Only a clandestine circumvention of the fundamental principle is allowed. As in erotic matters altogether, only hypocrisy, lies, and betrayal are permitted, as the whole of public life, insofar as sexual questions are concerned, is built upon hypocrisy, lies, and betrayal.

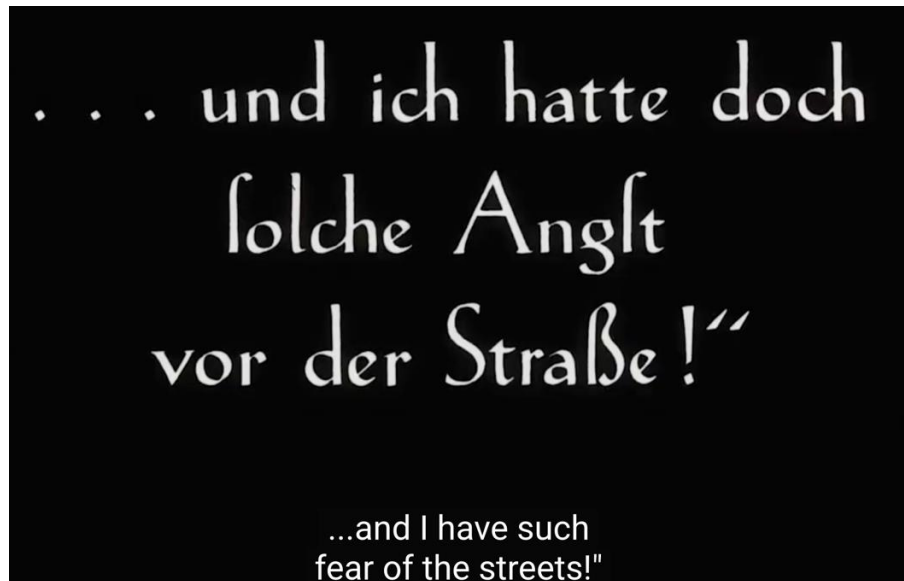
In changing times the fundamental principle has remained triumphant, and officially the relationship between man and woman has scarcely changed. As always, the man is allowed to choose the woman, but the woman cannot choose the man; as always, she must adapt her erotic nature to his; as always, the man is allowed to turn the single woman into a whore, with the whore having no claim to human rights; as always, the

man has access to free love through secret means whereas for the woman there is only subjection.

Only one thing has changed, and that fundamentally: with the advancing industrialization of the world the woman has been dragged out of the harem, the bower, the woman's quarters, the weaving, sewing, and children's rooms and into life, into the factory, the sweatshop, and the office. And, in unavoidable consequence, the woman could not be deprived of an apparent equality of rights. An apparent one. For if the woman can also ride, drive a car, go out alone, or travel; if she is permitted to become a doctor or legislator; if she is permitted, indeed compelled, to toil and slave like a man, she remains nonetheless his subject, dependent on him in her most exquisite and vitally important functions, and is vilified and condemned if she violates the fundamental principle. Things are not better now for the woman but worse than they were a hundred years ago. Back then, in seclusion, she learned contentment and discharged her eroticism as a childbearer. Today she is sexually stimulated, can move around freely for hours in an alcohol and nicotine haze, but only as far as a clearly drawn limit—a limit drawn by the man for purely egotistical reasons. [. . .]

Woman has become a beast of burden, like the man. This has not, however, won her sexual freedom. For the fundamental principle remains in force. Or remained in force. For the erotic revolution is underway; it is not to be stopped, despite all manner of ostrich policies. For two, perhaps three years now, things erotic are beginning to be rearranged, with the young starting to assail the fundamental principle. The working, producing people have begun, have taken the axe to an ancient system of hypocrisy and duplicity in the creation of which the name of the savior was misused. Whoever has open eyes, whoever is not so dumb as to believe that the occupation of the Ruhr and "broadcasting" are the most important things in the world, can see how the erotic revolution advances day by day. The erotic revolution that wants to create free, happy people. For it is simply the case, and no one can change it, that everything existing is based on eroticism; everything that is beautiful, good, and lovely on earth is bound up inseparably with eroticism. The flower in the meadow, the butterfly floating above it, the singing of the birds, the chirping of the crickets, the rustling of the trees, and the ripening of the fruit—erotic symbols, erotic purpose, erotic will. It was reserved to the greed, selfishness, stupidity, and maliciousness of people to brand the god Eros a criminal, to sully erotic play with filth.

This magazine, which has arisen under the sign of the erotic revolution, wants to join the struggle and to speak openly about things that the blinkered philistines continue to pass over. It will not shrink from discussing the most ticklish, delicate problems of life and will not be stopped from revealing open wounds that others want to veil in hypocrisy and lies.



MARGOT KLAGES-STANGE — Prostitution (1926)

First published as "Prostitution," *Die Weltbühne* 22, no. 15 (April 13, 1926), 579–580.

Discussing prostitution in public is still a ticklish affair in Germany. In other countries, particularly in Scandinavia, a freer and healthier view of things is manifest. Public health reaps the benefits of this popular enlightenment, for the fact is that prostitution and venereal diseases are not to be separated from each other.

Comprehensive documentation about those who "go out onto the street" still does not exist today, cannot exist, because only professional prostitutes are included in the statistics. These are either women whose behavior has attracted the attention of the vice squad or women who have submitted, voluntarily and unceremoniously, to supervision. Much larger, of course, is the number of prostitutes that constantly eludes the arm of the law, however vigilant it might be.

In Berlin at present there are approximately nine thousand prostitutes under supervision; the total number, including surreptitious streetwalkers, is estimated at about 100,000. These naked figures are proof enough of how matters stand concerning prostitution.

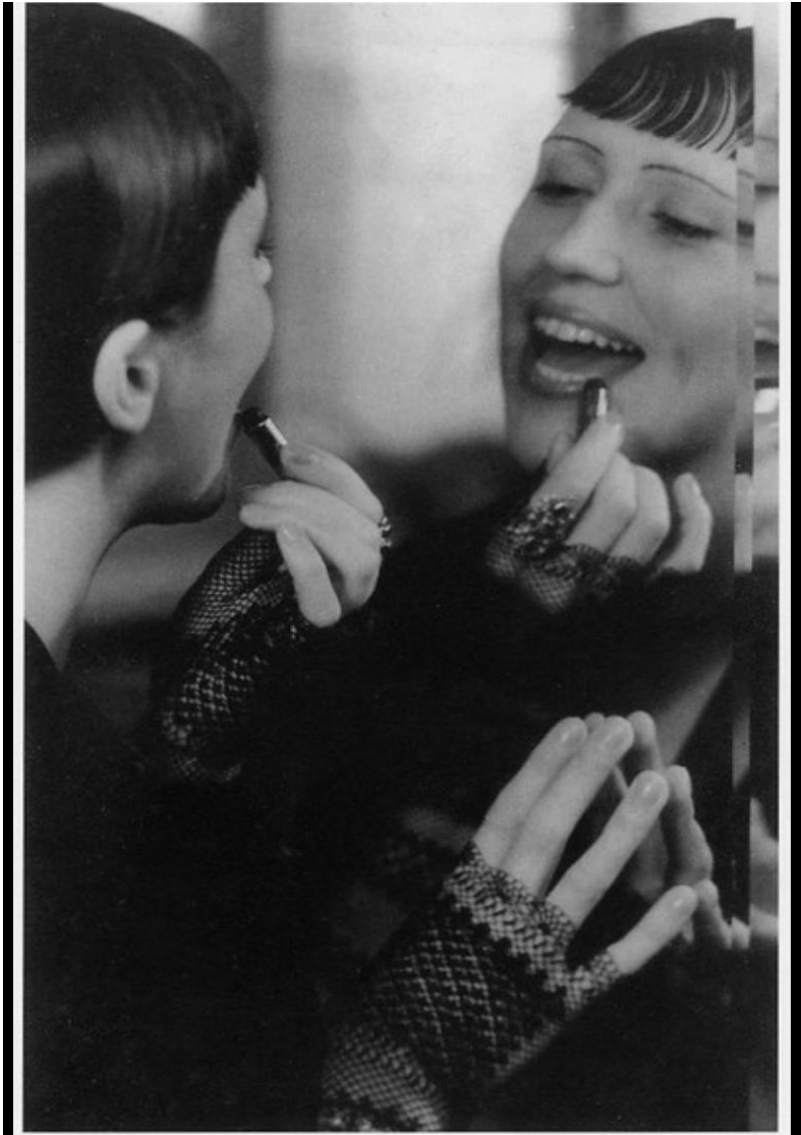
The bulk of the professional women under supervision come from the class of domestic servants. The girl from the country—and most of those employed in the home do not come from the city itself—have quite naive views on sexuality. They are threatened by venereal infections, and in many cases they have lost their positions as a consequence. Transplantation from the country into the city, moreover, entails a thorough change in accustomed habits and circumstances. Frequently the girl has no one in whom she can confide, and the need for support leads her astray. Wages are just barely sufficient to satisfy the heightened desire for finery, and the financial deficiency is made up "in other ways."

On average, one is justified in assuming that the majority of prostitutes come from the lower social strata. Among female workers, those lacking in skills represent the largest proportion. Singers, dancers, and barmaids are in the main dependent on side earnings from the outset, because they cannot possibly live on their wages. Things are similar in the clothing trade. In slack periods, when the firm's budgetary measures compel a reduction in staff, the contingent of prostitutes grows. Many girls then fail to find their way back to work; but the number of those who are eager to go back on the labor market as conditions improve is larger.

The next category—which admittedly only represents a small fraction of professional prostitutes—are salesgirls and stenotypists. Their professional life takes them out of their parents' home. Moreover, due to the economic competition between the sexes, the woman often develops the view, "what the man wants is fine with me," and so sees extramarital relations as her natural right. That is the case far beyond the bounds of actual prostitution.

Virginity maintained until marriage has ceased to exist in the big cities. This development has advanced rapidly since the war, since the number of girls who find a husband has sharply declined. Before the war there were for every 1,000 men in Germany 1,024 women. After the war the ratio was 1,000 to 1,084, and in the most important age groups, from fifteen to twenty, as much as 1,000 to 1,116. Thus are nearly 2.5 million women condemned to remain single and therefore to seek extramarital relations.

The great danger in this is the increase in venereal diseases, determined by the growing number of women who occasionally engage in prostitution.



Ringl + Pit, Eckstein with Lipstick (1931)

ANITA

Sex Appeal: A New Catchword for an Old Thing

First published as “Sex Appeal. Ein neues Schlagwort für eine alte Sache,” *Uhu* 5 (October 1928), 72–77.

Every generation has a catchword for the ideal of its time. Once the formula has been found it spreads like wildfire, for then the idea will be discussed, analyzed, and enthusiastically defended—until it is worn out. This time no German word was found for

the new ideal. Apparently there are things between heaven and earth for which only one solitary language can completely capture the deepest meaning and which are therefore taken over into the vocabulary of the world untranslated. To internationally valid terms like five o'clock, flirt, dancing, and cocktail, a new, extremely important one has been added: sex appeal. For years one called it "that certain something." What was meant was that magic that emanates from a being that cannot be simply subsumed under the rubric of beauty. And suddenly it came from America like an illumination—what it was is sex appeal.

Until recently the question about a woman was simply: does she have pretty legs? Now the burning question is: does she have sex appeal? To give the etymology of this word one can only resort to pictures and show those who have "it." But what do they have? That is where the difficulty of explanation begins. "Une belle laide," say the French. "She's got something," in the vernacular. "Not pretty, something more than that." All of these are rewrites for sex appeal. It is the perfect incarnation of the sex, whether male or female—for, although one thinks in this connection almost exclusively of women, the idea of sex appeal has to be valid for men too. One simply speaks less of the man—perhaps because successful men by definition have sex appeal. With women other factors, beauty, elegance, gracefulness, etc., still have their special meanings.

Every generation has the ambition to take out a new patent on its catchword. Later, with longer use, it becomes evident that exactly the same meaning has been registered under several other names. Sex appeal existed, of course, in times when no one yet spoke English. And in the Middle Ages people were simply burned for having too much sex appeal—in those times it was called witchcraft. ... When a very beautiful woman also has sex appeal—that is when earth-shattering things occur. At the least she will become a film star, the subject of dreams on five continents and the cause of complexes for an entire generation.

Our objective era searches for and finds the technical expression and the objective explanation for everything until it comes upon a point where, for the time being, it can go no further. That point is called atom, radio wave, sex appeal.



ALFRED DÖBLIN

Sexuality as Sport

First published as "Sexualität als Sport," *Der Querschnitt* (1931), 760—762.

I am supposed to say if sexuality is overestimated or underestimated. I have but a single certainty, garnered from observation, that the old saying is true: the world is driven by hunger and love. And by love I understand sexual love—love stemming from a sexual source. Therefore one cannot possibly overestimate sexuality. It is—according to the old saying—the second axis about which our existence turns. And perhaps our existence turns only about a single axis, and hunger and love belong together like nourishment and growth.

But you say, that is not what I want to know. You cannot do business with philosophy and I want to know practically: do not the people of today make too much fuss over naked sexuality? Should one not say openly that love is much more important than naked sexuality, this wicked drive, this base, mercilessly organic scourge of humanity from which, as a clever man has already remarked, one is only freed by age (and, incidentally, not even then, as some instances attest) [. . .]

So it is like this: one should neither overvalue nor undervalue sexuality plus or minus love, rather not value it very much at all, just accept it; it belongs to existence and one should not make a big hullabaloo about it; it is all just clamor from the hothouse of old appetites; half a taste is as good as a whole. A general indifference in things of love and sex has been gaining ground. Love has received a kick in the pants; it has become a fusty, old-fashioned matter (which it really was—that can be proved). And thus it is that we see the virgin boys and girls of all ages behaving today: they do not overestimate the matter nor do they underestimate it; neither from head to toe nor in the other direction are they focused on love; but they play tennis, drive cars, dance, go on the dole, engage in politics and love, and (let us use for once the proper word) they play sex as sport.

What do I have to say about it? In general, this trivialization of love exists, is also good, and was finally necessary. Active and half-militarized times like the present cannot busy themselves with love and perfume like others have. But meanwhile people are loving all over the place. It has decidedly taken on a healthier color. As to its objective nature... I do not believe in objective love—I mean among these boy and girl virgins. One should not be deceived by their grand gesture. It goes superbly with a technological, economic era. It belongs to the style of this era not to love, but simply to —. You have the word on the tip of your tongue. But there is something wrong about it. What? You must not ask me that. I am simply establishing the fact: something is wrong with it; more precisely, it does not exist, it is simply maintained for polemical purposes.

[. . .]

THE NEW WOMAN



Otto Umbehrr (Umbo), *Ohne Titel* (1927)

ELSA HERRMANN — *This is the New Woman*

First published as *So ist die neue Frau* (Hellerau: Avalon Verlag, 1929), 32–43.

To all appearances, the distinction between women in our day and those of previous times is to be sought only in formal terms, because the modern woman refuses to lead the life of a lady and a housewife, preferring to depart from the ordained path and go her own way. In fact, however, the attitude of the new woman toward traditional customs is the expression of a worldview that decisively influences the direction of her entire life. The difference between the way women conceived of their lives today as distinguished from yesterday is most clearly visible in the objectives of this life.

The woman of yesterday lived exclusively for, and geared her actions toward, the future. Already as a half-grown child she toiled and stocked her hope chest for her future

dowry. In the first years of marriage she did as much of the household work as possible herself to save on expenses, thereby laying the foundation for future prosperity, or at least a worry-free old age. In pursuit of these goals she helped her husband in his business or professional activities. She frequently accomplished incredible things by combining her work in the household with this professional work of her own, the success of which she could constantly observe and measure by the progress of their mutual prosperity. She believed she had fulfilled her life's purpose when income deriving from well-placed investments or from one or more houses allowed her and her husband to retire from business. Beyond this, the assets saved and accumulated were valued as the expression of her concern for the future of her children.

The woman of yesterday pursued the same goal of securing the future in all social spheres, varied only according to her specific conditions. The woman defined exclusively by her status as a lady determined the occasions when she would allow herself to be seen in public by considering the possible advantages to herself and her family—a standpoint that often determined the selection of the places she frequented and where she vacationed. Less well-off women often kept a so-called “big house.” They invited guests and took part in social functions to give the impression in their milieu that all the financial and social requisites for their husbands' career advancement were at hand. For every genuine woman of yesterday it was quite natural to make all manner of sacrifices in a completely selfless fashion, provided they served to advance the social ascent of the family or one of its members.

Her primary task, however, she naturally saw to be caring for the well-being of her children, the ultimate carriers of her thoughts on the future. Thus the purpose of her existence was in principle fulfilled once the existence of these children had been secured—that is, when she had settled the son in his work and gotten the daughter married. Then she collapsed completely, like a good racehorse collapses when it has maintained its exertions up to the very last minute. She changed quickly, succumbing to various physical ailments whose symptoms she had never before noticed or given any mind. The woman of yesterday was intent on the future; the woman of the day before yesterday was focused on the past. For the latter, in other words, there was no higher goal than honoring the achievements of the “good old days.” In their name she strove to ward off everything that could somehow disturb her accepted and recognized way of life.

In stark contrast, the woman of today is oriented exclusively toward the present. That which *is* is decisive for her, not that which *should be* or *should have been* according to tradition. She refuses to be regarded as a physically weak being in need of assistance—the role the woman of yesterday continued to adopt artificially—and therefore no longer lives by means supplied to her from elsewhere, whether income from her parents or her husband. For the sake of her economic independence, the

necessary precondition for the development of a self-reliant personality, she seeks to support herself through gainful employment.

It is only too obvious that, in contrast to earlier times, this conception of life necessarily involves a fundamental change in the orientation of women toward men, a change that acquires its basic tone from concerns of equality and comradeship. The new woman has set herself the goal of proving in her work and deeds that the representatives of the female sex are not second-class persons existing only in dependence and obedience, but are fully capable of satisfying the demands of their positions in life. The proof of her personal value and the proof of the value of her sex are therefore the maxims ruling the life of every single woman of our times, for the sake of herself and for the sake of the whole. [...]

The people of yesterday are strongly inclined to characterize the modern woman as unfeminine because she is no longer wrapped up in kitchen work and the chores that have to be done around the house. Such a conception is less informative about the object of the judgment than about the ones making it, who have adopted a view about the essence of the sexes based upon various accidental, external features. The concepts *female* and *male* have their ultimate origin in the erotic sphere and do not refer to the ways in which people might engage in activity. A woman is not female because she wields a cooking spoon and turns everything upside down while cleaning, but because she manifests characteristics that the man finds desirable—because she is kind, soft, understanding, appealing in her appearance, and so on. [...]

Despite the fact that every war from time immemorial has entailed the liberation of an intellectually, spiritually, or physically fettered social group, the war and postwar period of our recent past has brought women nothing extraordinary in the slightest, but only awakened them from their lethargy and laid upon them the responsibility for their own fate. Moreover, the activity of women in our recent time of need represented something new neither to themselves nor to the population as a whole, since people had long been theorizing the independence and equality of woman in her relationship to man.

The new woman is therefore no artificially conjured phenomenon, consciously conceived in opposition to an existing system; rather, she is organically bound up with the economic and cultural developments of the last few decades. Her task is to clear the way for equal rights for women in all areas of life. That does not mean that she stands for the complete equality of the representatives of both sexes. Her goal is much more to achieve recognition for the complete legitimacy of women as human beings, according to each the right to have her particular physical constitution and her accomplishments respected and, where necessary, protected.



Otto Dix, Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden, 1926

MAX BROD — Women and the New Objectivity”

First published as "Die Frau und die neue Sachlichkeit," *Die Frau von Morgen, wie wir sie wünschen*, ed. Friedrich M. Huebner (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1929), 38-48.

Recent literature has taken on an increasingly hard, cold, masculine tone, exactly the same as modern music, which sounds antiromantic and antisentimental. It is unacceptable either to sing or to speak of love; it is incompatible with “objectivity,” the supreme postulate of the present. This remarkable change of mind is a consequence of the following: since the beginning of the nineteenth century the times have assumed a hard and mechanical form, but writers adopted a position of protest. Flaubert certainly recognized the mercilessly sober, mechanical nature of our epoch, but his heroes (Bovary, like the sentimental Frédéric) grate against the time, for they cannot make themselves conform to the machine. This was in essence the fundamental posture of

the writer for decades. He secretly remained the enemy of modern development, of Americanism. The problem arises: have the new writers submitted to it? Have they given up their struggle in the name of the spirit? Has the sober era triumphed once and for all over the last remaining protest?

Love, the desire for love, used to mean a glimpse into the deeper meaning of existence. The passion of a woman magically illuminated interactions that lifted them above the duller senses of simply egoistic relations among people. (What is said here of love applies to all noble passions of the heart, those that strive to surpass daily routine.) As a result of the war, the younger generation justifiably learned to mistrust everything that partook of passions of the heart. Behind so much of what appeared to be lofty passion, behind the beautiful colors of patriotism, *ver sacrum*, nationalist and erotic flights, lay nothing but phrases—lay vexation worse than phrases: the base interests of war profiteers, capitalists conducting politics! It is then understandable that a generation grows up disillusioned. Once one has seen with Erich Maria Remarque and Ernst Glaeser how everything can be reduced to the common denominator of mortal fear and roast goose, once one has experienced such need and the unforgettable degradation of the human creature, then one certainly has the right to regard everything as a swindle—with the single exception of the drive to secure humanity from such abominable fortune in the future.

In a situation so reduced to elemental defense, love and woman and heart and soul have in fact no place. Youth only defends itself; experiences of the heart were always raids of conquest into unknown territory—according to today's writers, these experiences were luxury, distraction from the essential goal.

The young writers see only the quotidian—the document, the photograph, the report—objectivity, beyond which there is nothing to conquer, behind which there is no meaning to be sought. Religious interpretation of any kind appears to them an illusion. (Thus the clear distance between the New Objectivity and the older realism of, for example, Gerhart Hauptmann.) Modern authors fear nothing like they fear illusions. Through illusions we were dragged into war. To abstain from an affirmation of daily life, to see it in its utter hideousness, chaos, immorality—such a posture seems to carry the force of a law. From daily life, regarded as the only reality, behind which there is nothing more real, more benevolent, more loving (more womanly), one can seek distance only through humor and irony. Accordingly, irony becomes the single artistic tool of the youngest generation, in writing as in music. [...]

Insofar as the content of the New Objectivity includes the destruction of false glorification, it should fulfill its function to the utmost. For from this perspective it is a new impetus and a true beginning, a justified protest of the young against the war makers and despots who remain at the helm, the outcry and last hope of humanity. But if objectivity means Americanization—a refusal of the heart, of problems, of love—then it is not a protest against war but rather against its result, its continuation, and finally (see the recent German production of Maxwell Anderson's *What Price Glory?*) its approbation. It will be the task of the woman of tomorrow, full of instinct and cleverness, to distinguish the good components of the New Objectivity from the bad. In this task I see her significance, not simply for man and the masculine spirit (which, for the moment, is racing up a dead-end street with its masculine writing), but for the development of a genuine society, one no longer based on exploitation, but rather a true community of nations.



August Sander, Painter's Wife Helen Abelen (1926)

Enough is Enough! Against the Masculinization of Women

First published as "Nun aber genug! Gegen die Vermännlichung der Frau," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (March 29, 1925), 389.

What started as a playful game in women's fashion is gradually becoming a distressing aberration. At first it was like a charming novelty: that gentle, delicate women cut their long tresses and bobbed their hair; that the dresses they wore hung down in an almost perfectly straight line, denying the contours of the female body, the curve of the hips; that they shortened their skirts, exposing their slender legs up to calf level. Even the most traditional of men were not scandalized by this. A creature like this could have been warmly greeted with the now obsolete pet name *my angel*—for angels are asexual, yet they have always been represented in a pre-adolescent female form, even the archangel Gabriel.

But the male sensibility began to take offense as the fashion that was so becoming to young girls and their delicate figures was adopted by all women. It did an aesthetic disservice to stately and full-figured women. But the trend went even further; women no longer wanted to appear asexual; rather, fashion was increasingly calculated to make women's outward appearance more masculine. The practice of wearing men's nightclothes became increasingly widespread among women, even to the point of wearing them whenever possible for daytime lounging.

And we observe more often now that the bobbed haircut with its curls is disappearing, to be replaced by the modern, masculine hairstyle: sleek and brushed straight back. The new fashion in women's coats is also decidedly masculine: it would scarcely be noticed this spring if a woman absentmindedly put on her husband's coat. Fashion is like a pendulum swinging back and forth. With the hoop skirt the dictates of fashion brought the accentuation of the female form to an extreme, and now things are moving in the completely opposite direction.

It is high time that sound male judgment take a stand against these odious fashions, the excesses of which have been transplanted here from America. In the theater we might enjoy, one time, seeing an actress play a man's part if she is suitable for the role; but not every woman should venture to display herself in pants or shorts, be it on stage or at sporting events. And the masculinization of the female face replaces its natural allure with, at best, an unnatural one: the look of a sickeningly sweet boy is detested by every real boy or man.



FRANZ HESSEL — On Fashion

First published as “Von der Mode” in *Spazieren in Berlin* (Vienna and Leipzig: Epstein, 1929), 33–39.

Berlin’s big department stores are not bewildering bazaars overflowing with goods but clearly arranged sites of great organization. And they spoil the shopper with their high level of comfort. One might be purchasing a yard of pink rubber-band from a rotating stand of gleaming brass, but, waiting for the items to be entered on the sales slip, one’s gaze rests on marble or glides along mirrors and over the shining parquet. In lighted courtyards and winter gardens we sit on granite benches, our packages on our laps. Exhibits of art, which extend into the refreshment room, separate the toys from the section devoted to swimming needs. Under decorative canopies of velvet and silk we wander over to soaps and toothbrushes.

It is remarkable how little the taste for kitsch is satisfied in these department stores dedicated to the broad masses. Most things offered for sale are almost plain and simple. "Respectable"—the adjective that taste cannot resist. Only in the handicraft section and at the novelty goods do more questionable thoughts arise. The items one sees in the clothing department are exclusively dignified and unostentatious, clothes that approximate the fashionable with a certain hesitation and resistance, seeking more to hush it up than to make concessions. [...]

Berlin, seen from the standpoint of society, remains small, the elegance of the ladies a second-hand affair. But there is already appearing a new type of woman who is carrying the day against those whose tailors and cleaning ladies live in Tiergarten—the young avant-garde, the postwar woman of Berlin. Around 1920 there must have been a couple of very good years for births. They produced girls with subtly athletic shoulders. They walk so prettily, weightlessly, in their dresses; splendid is their skin, which their make-up seems only to have illuminated; refreshing their smiles around healthy teeth, and the self-confidence with which they push in pairs through the afternoon bustle of Tauentzienstraße and the Kurfürstendamm.

No, *push* is the wrong word. They do the crawl while others swim the breaststroke. Sharply and smoothly they steer over to the display windows. Just where did they get those pretty dresses, those hats and coats? Aside from the few large stores that have already spread this far, in the Bavarian Quarter, around Kurfürstenstraße, on the side streets of the Kurfürstendamm, is a whole bunch of small fashion shops. A first name frequently suffices on the sign. They likely have one, two Parisian models. *Vogue* and *Femina* stand out, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Art*, *Goût et Beauté*. The owner of the shop has a light touch and her customers an exact knowledge of their own figures, and both find fun in the interplay of fantasy and precision.

These young shoppers are beginning to find a style equally distant from the snobbism of the "trademark" and indifference, which makes do with retail goods. Is it already true, what people are beginning to assert ever more loudly and generally, that the women of Berlin can measure their elegance against the best of the Europeans? Why check too fussily how that really stands? It should be enough for us to see these bevvies of young and still-younger girls, this *défilé* of youth and freshness in short, tight-fitting skirts with a hat (and a curl peeking out from under), the springy step of long legs, to become convinced that Berlin is well on its way to becoming an elegant city...

TWILIGHT FOR WOMEN?



Lotte Laserstein, Abend über Potsdam (1930)

HILDE WALTER — Twilight for Women?

First published as "Frauendämmerung?" Die Weltbühne, no. 27 (July 7, 1931), 24–26.

Women have become unpopular. That is not good news because it touches on things that cannot be explained by reason alone. An uncomfortable atmosphere is gathering around all working women. A perhaps unorganized but very powerful countermovement is taking aim at all of them; individual women will be feeling its effects sooner or later. Along the entire spectrum from left to right the meaning of women's employment and their right to it are suddenly being questioned, more or less directly. At the moment it is not even the old discussion over so-called "equal rights," over "equal pay for equal work," that occupies the foreground. Suddenly we are obliged to counter the most primitive arguments against the gainful employment of women.

We are unfortunately not entirely blameless for the strength of this new wave of hostility: the phenomenon of working women in general is being twisted to meet the needs of a

variety of propagandistic goals. Perhaps only the hard-working proletarian woman, whose way of life is subject to no optimistic renderings of any kind, is being exempted from the general rage for falsification and rosy distortions. When people speak of “women’s work,” they are not usually thinking of the figures in Käthe Kollwitz’s pictures. For years now it has been much more the case that every type of women’s work has been proclaimed, photographed, and trivialized as an “accomplishment,” drenched in the sweet sauce of the eternal march of prosperity. The victory cry of the unlimited potential of women’s “abilities,” of the steady conquest of new positions in the work force, has issued in part from the representatives of newly acquired female professions. Anxiety and fear have gripped male colleagues, who have necessarily experienced the brilliant sheen of the new and unusual—possibly intensified by feminine charms—as unfair competition.

In addition, all the consumer-goods industries geared to female customers were very quick to recognize the attractiveness of such catchwords and make full use of them in their advertisements. Even the most poorly paid saleswoman or typist is an effective billboard; in a provocative get-up she becomes the emblem of endless weekend amusements and the eternal freshness of youth. Women’s moderate professional successes, often deficiently compensated, are glorified in annuals and wall calendars, if possible under the heading “Women for Women.” When was a machinist, ranking tenth on the income scale, ever portrayed to the world building a locomotive for his dear gender compatriots?

In the long run, that had to get on men’s nerves. Only on such a basis could the superstition have developed that the exclusion of women from the workplace would remedy mass unemployment. To argue against this objectively is like whistling into the wind. In vain has nearly every newspaper left of the D.A.Z. (Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung)—in the service of clarification and instruction—published the familiar figures from the occupational census proving without a doubt that the elimination of married women, for example, from the labor market would accomplish nothing. Fruitlessly have the independent trade unions repeatedly declared that the overwhelming majority of the 11.5 million working women are employed to mass-produce those consumer goods that were previously produced in the household; that 2.5 million married women work in family-owned agricultural and commercial enterprises; and that two million women of marriageable age would be left altogether unprovided for were they to be without work.

A mass psychosis cannot be exorcised by such reasonable, sober arguments, nor can they now stamp out the nearly mythical idea of the economic detriment caused by

working women. Psychologists must discover the sources from which this male emotional disturbance is constantly renewed. They could perhaps investigate the extent to which an unknown sexual fear prevents the majority of men from seeing economic facts objectively and clearly. An elucidation of the misrepresented social state of affairs, however, can only be accomplished by women themselves if they resolve to speak just as openly about their occupational fate as they do about their love life.

There is the successful upper stratum of our much-celebrated pioneers who, as representatives and higher civil servants, as leaders of large occupational groups, can count on an economically secure old age. They might wish to report on how old they were when they entered the economic competition, how much money had to be invested in their rise until, in the critical years, they were no longer dependent on superiors and co-workers who refused employment to every woman getting on in years. There are the young academicians, who got their positions as research assistants only because they could also type. The host of female white-collar workers who, to keep their positions, must maintain a standard of living corresponding to 250 marks a month on an income of 150. Additional duties, in some form or another, are usually an implicit part of their job.

Working women in general are blamed quite often for accidents in the workplace. If the daily rhythm of work is ever broken by the time-consuming effects of affairs of the heart, it seems to scream for the elimination of the disturbing female element—as if private emotional complications are not equally capable of interfering with male performance at work. Unfortunately, management science has not yet ascertained how much working women can enhance productivity by combining profession and love. The truth about the living and working conditions of the contemporary woman is partly to be found in the publications of occupational associations. A recent survey entitled *Working on Typewriters* determined that most stenographers and typists are completely exhausted after ten or fifteen years in the profession. But the best studies and most valuable monographs do not receive as much publicity as the eternal optimism that is always gushing forth from prominent positions in the name of the gender as a whole. When, for example, the public-speaking trainees of Madame von Kardorff take the stage as the new female youth to rediscover “women’s grand political mission,” then the appropriate male reaction can scarcely come as any surprise.

It is high time to do away with the fiction of the united front of all working women. All the propaganda for the vague concept of women’s work as such is distressingly mixed with the victory cry for gains long since accomplished and works only to destroy the good will of the other side. If women would quietly invest the same intensity in encouraging their

colleagues of both genders within individual occupations, better working conditions could probably be achieved for everyone.



Lotte Laserstein, Frau mit roter Baskenmütze (191)

STEPHANIE KAUL — Whose Fault Is the Long Dress?

First published as “Wer ist eigentlich an den langen Kleidern schuld?” *Uhu* 7 (October 1931), 32–36.

The new long dress is one of the more brilliant surprise attacks in the history of fashion. A few writers and journalists in Germany and England would have us believe that women are filled with indignation and disgust and are ready to join a protest strike against the new fashion. And even while they were screaming about this betrayal—about how the point of the long dresses is to rob women of their newly won freedoms behind their backs and make those athletically trained, comradely disposed women who have been hardened in the daily struggle once again into poor, slavish creatures, dependent and subordinate to men—they were themselves already wearing the long dress.

The fashion of short, very revealing dresses is only to be understood historically. In the years from 1914 to 1921, the force of living conditions caused women to become increasingly masculine. Amid the general storm of destruction, a voracious striving after the pleasures of life came into play. The shortage of money for elegant pleasures effected a simplification of dresses and a shortening of skirts so that dresses finally became the symbol of women's freedom. A shortage of food created an artificial thinness on the part of women, who were raised to the status of idols and remained so even after it was no longer necessary. Burst illusions, the failing foundations of life, and the effacement of social distinctions allowed, to a greater extent than ever before, the difference between men and women to grow ever fainter.

Women believed it necessary to demonstrate their new freedom; some of them styled themselves according to a female type that became known as the *garçonne*. At first men may have been pleased that women approached them so directly. This approach in camaraderie, this approach in fashion, did away with any and all distance. But the excess of fellowship eventually got on their nerves. Wherever one looked or listened there was objectivity: objectivity in the home, objectivity in the construction of buildings, objectivity in the conduct of life. Above all, objective women who wanted to conquer and demolish the whole world in objective speech.

Ultimately one could find a bit of romance or a bit of beauty only in the theater and in film. But somewhere deep inside, now perhaps carefully veiled with Europe's American

objectivity, there remained that small remnant of desire for tenderness, elegance, and affection, for beauty. Somewhere in man there remained the desire for a feminine woman, a feminine companion.

Fashion, the most sensitive barometer of all currents streaming through the world and the experience of the world, sensed this. Tired by so much masculinity, women once

again wanted to be pretty, once again wanted to be genuine women. And the fashion designers called attention to this turning point. They gave women a new exterior form that corresponded to their own will. Women quickly understood what a great new chance they were being offered. They recognized how advantageously the long dress reshaped them: how they appeared taller and thinner; how much more elegant, graceful, and ladylike they looked. They recognized that by dressing in this new way for men, their clothes would once again carry a new element of attraction.





Alice Rühle-Gerstel — Back to the Good Old Days?

First published as "Zurück zur guten alten Zeit?" *Die literarische Welt* 9, no. 4 (January 27, 1933), 5–6.

It began with a slight uneasiness; with a feeling that something was not right, was no longer right. About two or three years ago. Just at the time, incidentally, when the world crisis was first making itself known with the same slight, uneasy feeling. Gradually a few timid women's emancipationists retreated into the ranks of the opponents of women's emancipation, into the ranks of those who had always—already in 1870, already in

1920—said "that's as far as it can go" with the so-called liberation of women. It began, that is, as women began to cut an entirely new figure. A new economic figure who went

out into public economic life as an independent worker or wage-earner entering the free market that had up until then been free only for men. A new political figure who appeared in the parties and parliaments, at demonstrations and gatherings. A new physical figure who not only cut her hair and shortened her skirts but began to emancipate herself altogether from the physical limitations of being female. Finally, a new intellectual-psychological figure who fought her way out of the fog of sentimental ideologies and strove toward a clear, objective knowledge of the world and the self.

This new figure never became average, never became the mass female. There was no time for that. Until today this new figure has remained a pioneer, the standard-bearer—no, the female standard-bearer—of something that had yet to develop. But before she could evolve into a type and expand into an average, she once again ran up against barriers. Her old womanly fate—motherhood, love, family—trailed after her into the spheres of the new womanliness, which immediately presented itself as a new objectivity. And she therefore found herself not liberated, as she had naively assumed, but now doubly bound: conflicts between work and marriage now appeared, between uninhibited drives and inhibited mores, conflicts between the public and private aspects of her life, which could not be synthesized. There remained only the compromise: lukewarm and listless for herself and for those affected, or a decisive break with everything up to the previous generation that had signified woman's fate and woman's nature. It easily appeared as if the new freedom for women had achieved nothing. For those who saw only a small segment of our present, with no perspective on the past and future, they were justified in their view of the new woman in missing the nice balance of the modest mother, the sublime femininity of the tender of the hearth, the expression of a harmony complete within itself.

Women themselves missed it too: both as an attribute of gender as well as an ideological marker of womanliness—and above all, as the emotional content of life. For, with a little work, one can probably learn to think in perspective; but to feel in perspective, for that one needs to be embedded in vital currents of life, to be carried along by the steady flow of the future. The emancipated woman, having emerged from the muddy pond (or, if you will, the clear lake) of her previous state, found herself on a bleak shore, surrounded here and there by skyscrapers that blocked her view. She simply noted: I have less time than my mother had; I have less money, less joy, less hope, less consolation. And thus did she too, with quiet disillusion defiantly concealed, begin her cautious return to the ranks of the backward-looking.

Among the young girls and women of today there is a strong tendency toward marriage, toward motherhood, indeed, even toward cooking, a weariness of the “freedom”

experienced as futile, an emptiness in the present which only a few experience as provisional, only a few are capable of filling with a future. The pioneers have grown tired because they see that they cannot storm the bastions alone and because they have had to wait too long for help, for a push from society at large. That is why they seize upon it when the past, the good old days, beckon enticingly, paraded before them by good and bad advertising artists of all ages and both sexes. Bobbed hairdos and short skirts have beaten a retreat; economic conditions have done away with the office chair and the teacher's desk and closed the door in women's faces. And the ideology of the new womanliness hangs in the present vacuum, flat as yesterday's balloon.

Literature is able to demonstrate what transpires only after the fact. As long as it is happening, it is too unconscious to be seen. Thus the appearance of war books ten years after the war, and thus the well-intentioned books summoning women to go "back" a few years after they have begun to withdraw on their own; because they knew or because they had had enough of staying in front, where no one wanted to follow, or because they did not dare go farther.

