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ringl + pit: (Un)figuring the New Woman

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The photography of Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern of the studio ringl + pit consistently shirks established advertising formulas. The emphases on traditional gender roles and an exaggerated femininity in conventional Weimar advertisements reaffirm heterosexual male desire and attempt to combat the development of the modern female ‘type’ into the independent and androgynous masculine woman [*männliche Frau*]. The disparity between media-constructed Weimar-era femininity and the actual ways in which Germans at this time understood their own selves as women and individuals is evidenced by Auerbach and Stern’s advertisements, which challenge such objectifying and sexualizing imagery by suggestive figures in the absence of real bodies, formed from the very goods being sold.

Using theoretical frameworks derived from the work of Siegfried Kracauer, this article examines how ringl + pit’s advertisements for artificial silk and other new commercially available goods use substitution techniques to suggest a desire to create one’s self, while acknowledging the power of the commodity in identity formation. Stern and Auerbach’s photographs work as a reflection of their own understanding of the power of the commodity, whose uncanny beauty is revealed through detailed focus on texture and materiality, and surprising reconfigurations. Their revisioning of such materials suggests connotations of identity formation beyond the material being photographed. ringl + pit’s advertisements become semi-blank receptacles that allow numerous modern women, and even non-binary and queer individuals, to see themselves represented as possible consumers for such products, and thus be in control of their own identities.



ringl + pit: (Un)figuring the New Woman

The innovative photographs of ringl + pit, the studio formed by Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern, consistently shirk traditional advertising formulas found in German print media of the 1920s and 1930s. These photographs also challenge the emphases on traditional gender roles and an exaggerated and specific femininity in conventional Weimar-era (1918–1933) advertisements that reaffirm heterosexual male desire, and attempt to combat the development of the modern female ‘type’ into the independent and androgynous masculine woman [*männliche Frau*]. The disparity between media-constructed femininity and the actual ways in which Germans at this time understood their own selves as women and individuals is evidenced by ringl + pit’s advertisements, which challenge such objectifying and sexualizing imagery by presenting suggestive figures in the absence of real bodies, formed from the very goods being sold. This article examines how ringl + pit’s advertisements for artificial silk and other newly available commercial goods use substitution techniques to suggest a desire to create one’s self while acknowledging the power of the commodity in identity formation. Rather than affirming a sexualized femininity for the New Woman [*Neue Frau*], ringl + pit present the New Woman as fragmented constructs whose dimensions are roughly outlined from or replaced by the pieces of her many mass-produced parts. Building upon Maud Lavin’s (2001) argument that ringl + pit succeeded in ‘develop[ing] alternative images of femininity’ and Elizabeth Otto’s (2020) investigation of the duo’s ‘queerness’, I argue that ringl + pit’s advertisements can be read as semi-blank receptacles that allow numerous modern women, and even non-binary and queer individuals, to see themselves represented as possible consumers for such products, and thus be in control of their own identities.

Auerbach and Stern formed their Berlin-based studio ringl + pit in 1929, the foundation of which was bought from their former teacher and Bauhaus instructor Walter Peterhans.¹ Working under their nicknames ringl (Stern) and pit (Auerbach), both artists were independent, working women. As self-employed female photographers, their perspective was rather different from those that dominated the general mass of cosmetic and fashion advertisements, the latter typically offered projections of heteronormative and often sexualized constructions of femininity. ringl + pit’s relationship also traversed professional and platonic boundaries. In an unpublished

¹ Maud Lavin (1985; 2001) is among the earliest of scholars of studio ringl + pit. More recently, Inka Graeve Inglemann published *Ellen Auerbach: Das Dritte Auge, Leben und Werk / The Third Eye, Life and Work* as an exhibition catalogue held at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, and includes essays covering Auerbach’s life and work. In 2015, the Museum of Modern Art held the first major exhibition dedicated to the oeuvre of Grete Stern titled ‘From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola’. Roxana Marcoci and Sarah Meister compiled the accompanying catalogue of the same name, with Marcoci providing an essay on the life and work of Stern (2015: 21–36).

biography and in interviews from later in her life, Auerbach related details of hers and Stern's romantic involvement in the years coinciding with their time together in Berlin (Inglemann, 2006: 32–33).² In the four years before 1933, when ringl + pit fled Germany, the two women explored a sexual relationship with one another, although this was not an exclusive one as both participated in romantic relationships with men during this time.³ Both women were from conservative, middle-class Jewish backgrounds, and Elizabeth Otto asserts that 'queer desire [was] central to ringl + pit's strategies for freeing themselves from familial and societal expectations' (2020: 39). Auerbach later asserts that ringl + pit's advertisements were not 'about money ... [but were] a reaction against my really quite traditional, bourgeois upbringing, which really displeased me' (Otto, 2020: 55). ringl + pit were living and working in Berlin at a time when it was a center of queer society and, in many ways, of liberation. Berlin was the home of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. There, the physician and sexologist advocated for sexual minorities, publishing treatises on gender identity as distinct from sexual orientations, and even coined the terms *Transvestite* and *Transsexual*, which I discuss at further length below (Beachy, 2014: 170–72; Koellen, 2016: 11). Berlin's nightlife was also notable for its queerness, enlivened by burlesque shows that featured cross-dressing, some in same-sex bars and others not (Beachy, 2014: 198).⁴ Berlin offered ringl + pit an open and comparatively queer-friendly context in which they could explore expressions of femininity that were counter to those of the mainstream, presenting the products associated with femininity outside of traditional hetero- and bourgeois frameworks.

ringl + pit's photographs were featured in the 1 February 1931 issue of *Gebrauchsgraphik*, a Berlin-based monthly magazine that reviewed graphic design in advertising and other published media throughout the 1920s and 1930s (Aynsley 1992: 53).⁵ The first and last of the featured images depict an elegantly dressed woman shown from behind and portrait of a young girl, respectively, and the remaining seven images that illustrate this six-page article present isolated objects (textiles, sewing thread,

² Elizabeth Otto recently published 'ringl + pit and the Queer Art of Failure', detailing excerpts from Inglemann's 2006 publication and further contextualizing the bisexual relations of the two artists within their work (Otto, 2020).

³ As both women came from Jewish families, they were advised by Walter Auerbach, Ellen Auerbach's future husband, to leave Germany (Warren, 2005: 83). In 1933 Stern moved to London, then to Argentina three years later. Auerbach emigrated first to Tel Aviv, then to America in 1936 (Warren, 2005: 84).

⁴ The cross-dressing was just as often off-stage as on-stage. Upon one of his many interwar visits to Berlin, French film director Jean Renoir described the Grosses Ballhaus on Alexanderplatz as 'packed with a dense crowd of male and female dancers, but on looking a second time one realized that the "females" were males in "drag." What was disconcerting was their air of respectability' (Beachy, 2014: 199).

⁵ Jeremy Aynsley (1992) provides a succinct history of the journal in his article, 'Gebrauchsgraphik as an Early Graphic Design Journal, 1924–1938.

and vegetables). *Gebrauchsgraphik* was a graphic design journal dedicated to art in advertising though the images included among the nine photographs of the 1931 article are not labeled to identify the objects being sold. Most are identified as *Still Life Photo* [*Materialphoto*] even if they are elsewhere titled as the objects or company associated with the product being advertised.⁶ An example of this is the second image in the series, which shows a crumpled expanse of shimmering fabric with a visible sewn seam bisecting the image (**Figure 1**). In other contexts, the image is titled *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, referring to International Maratti Maschinenverkauf, a company known for trade in sewing and weaving machines and textiles.⁷ In the context of the advertising magazine, though, the image is renamed as an anonymous still life and is one image among other still life photographs of fabrics and vegetables, all objects associated with domestic femininity.

Swiss artist Traugott Schalcher (1931) provides the accompanying text which discusses the formal acuity and artistic daring of the two women. The brief article is laudatory of the photographers while outlining the debate concerning pictorialism versus straight photography in the realm of advertising, with ringl + pit's work aligning with the latter. According to Schalcher (1931: 35), Stern and Auerbach's work is daring, straightforward, and 'never re-touched'. He remarks on their 'feeling for line' and 'freshness of conception', suggesting an intuitive, youthful, and distinctly feminine fount from which the photographers muster their creativity (Schalcher, 1931: 33-35). Schalcher (1931: 35) describes Stern and Auerbach as having 'the inborn womanly instinct for the delicate nuances of textiles, and treat a bale of velvet, a bit of striped flannel or a spool of sewing silk with tireless and self-sacrificial affection until the thing delivers up its soul to make their picture'.

⁶ In the magazine, ringl + pit's photographs of fabric, vegetables, and thread spools are all titled as both '*Materialphoto*' and '*Still Life Photo*', likely attributed to the images by a *Gebrauchsgraphik* editor or the author of the review. I was not able to identify a clear origin of the term *Materialphoto*, though it appears in a later April issue of *Gebrauchsgraphik* from the same year to describe a Hans Finsler photograph of a swath of fabric. In the following year, the term appears in a supplement of the German typographer's trade journal *Typographische Mitteilungen*. The supplement is titled 'Der Typograph' and includes a section called 'Das Materialphoto des Typographen' by Karl Franke. This section is geared towards 'typographers who have just started photography' ['*Der photographierende Typograph, der aus den Anfängen heraus ist...*'] (Franke, 1932: 5). The term *Materialphoto* is not specifically defined but seems to describe images of fabric or other materials taken at a close enough focus so that one can see the details of its weave or construction. When describing a photograph of a men's hat sitting atop a coat, Franke points out that the 'type and structure of the material of the hat and coat are clearly recognizable' ['*Die Art und die Struktur des Materials in Hut und Mantel sind zur Genüge erkennbar*'] (Franke, 1932: 5).

⁷ This image is titled using the company name of Maratti and the product name (*Kunstseide*, referring to artificial silk or rayon) in numerous publications, as well as the Jewish Museum and the Robert Mann Gallery, New York. *Kunstseide* is translated as artificial silk, though it is better known in America and England as rayon. It is not truly synthetic or artificial as it is made from cellulose (Lane, 2010: 556).

When viewed as a totality, the choice of images, titles, and Schalcher's avoidance of placing the photographers in the context of their peers or of mentioning any specifics of their profession suggests that they are women photographers who work with traditionally feminine subjects and who use their feminine wiles and intuition to set themselves apart in the realm of photography. The sexism of Schalcher's compliment ignores the Bauhaus and New Objectivity [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] aesthetics from which ringl + pit's style was formed, as well as the acerbic wit so redolent of Weimar's female



Figure 1: ringl + pit (Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern). *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, 1931–1930. The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY. Accession Number: 2017–27.4. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery. © Robert Mann Gallery.

photographers and monteurs.⁸ Though he speaks of ringl + pit's formal expertise and ingenuity, this is couched in terms of their feminine intuition and youthful naiveté. Schalcher (1931: 35) singles out one image, titled *Fragment of a Bride*, dismissing the sharply-focused photograph of a crumpled and torn piece of fraying tulle as 'a bit of fun' with 'a bit of stuff', overlooking any serious commentary that might be suggested by ringl + pit's conflation of a woman with a scrap of fabric.⁹ There is no mention of Auerbach and Stern as businesswomen running their own studio, working in an overwhelmingly male sphere. Summarily, although the article is a positive one that praises the work of ringl + pit, it simultaneously belittles the photographers in the sexist language of the contemporary culture.

The photographers created images that denied the massified status of the New Woman as a single kind of femininity. Their work revels in surfaces, urging the viewer to decipher the superficial forms of ringl + pit's compositions that were intended to sell mass-produced goods to consumers accustomed to viewing the New Woman as an idealized fantasy in other advertisements. I argue that the emphasis on materiality and the commercial contexts that guided the aesthetic of ringl + pit's photography informed the formal precision of their work and was opposed to the expressionistic, thus 'feminine', aesthetic characteristic of fashion photography of the era. Unlike the softly-focused, dramatically-lit and sexually alluring models in fashion photography, ringl + pit's precisely photographed and untouched advertisements present the material trappings of the New Woman without issuing a definite or approved type of femininity, thus the feminine gender is made available to anyone who identifies as such. The ambiguity of what is precisely feminine in the images also widens the scope of femininity to include the especially threatening masculine woman [*männliche Frau*],

⁸ The evident interest in textural relationships in ringl + pit's photographs is rooted in the influence of the Bauhaus photography instructor Walter Peterhans. After moving to Berlin in 1927, Stern became a private student of Peterhans and it was in his studio that she met Auerbach the following year. Stern also attended Peterhans's photography course at the Dessau Bauhaus in 1930, and at the Berlin Bauhaus in 1932 and 1933 (Sandler and Mandelbaum, 2009). Peterhans served as the school's course leader of the photography curriculum, which had been officially established in 1929 under director Hannes Meyer. New Objectivity, which was not restricted to photography but encompassed literature, painting, and other forms of artistic expression, was a reaction to and rejection of expressionism, reliant on seemingly realistic (re)productions of objects and, to a greater extent in painting, people. In 1929, photography critic Kurt Wilhelm-Kästner describes the nuances of New Objectivity in regards to the photographic medium as producing clear, sharply-focused images with clearly rendered details and 'above all in preference for solid, clearly recordable objects with a readily apparent formal structure as pictorial motifs' (93-4). See also Pepper Stetler's (2011) 'The Object, the Archive and the Origins of Neue Sachlichkeit Photography' and Sergiusz Michalski's (2003) *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933*.

⁹ The original essay is printed in both English and German, and the English translation attributed to E. T. Scheffauer. Scheffauer translates Schalcher's German 'ein... Stück Gewebe' as 'a bit of stuff', though it could more specifically be translated as 'a piece of fabric'.

an androgynous classification of the New Woman discussed below, as well as any construct of along the spectrum of femininity.

In 1920s Germany, the emergence of the New Woman coincided with the stabilization of the German economy and the rise of mass culture and consumerism (Sharp, 2004: 120–121).¹⁰ New Women were both a cultural construction and a very real and newly emancipated part of German society.¹¹ They were urban, largely independent, employed, and were depicted across a range of types, from boyish androgyny to sexualized party girls. By the late 1920s, the boyish or masculine New Woman was often aligned with lesbianism, an identity embraced by many such masculine women [*männliche Frau*] (Lybeck, 2014: 151–52). The New Woman was certainly a model of modernity and emancipation for many but she was overwhelmingly perceived as a disruptor of the established gender order, a vilified figure of both masculinity and excessive sexuality that was far from the revered mother figure of Nazi propaganda to come (Sharp, 2004: 120–121). The transgressive power of the New Woman is comparable to that of the transvestite, an increasingly visible figure in Germany and specifically in Berlin.¹² Both the New Woman and the transvestite challenged the traditional gender roles that entrenched Wilhelmine German society. Transvestites who could ‘pass’ as women, therefore avoiding persecution under Paragraph 175, may have understood themselves as and have been viewed by others as New Women (Sutton, 2012: 337). The New Woman was very much a figure of interest during the Weimar years as the subject of novels, film, and discussed in countless magazine articles.¹³

¹⁰ The New Woman [*Neue Frau*] was a phenomenon of Europe, England, and America at the turn of the 20th century, though she came to prominence later in Germany, becoming a sensation in the 1920s (Sharp, 2004: 118). See Jochen Hung’s ‘The Modernized Gretchen: Transformations of the “New Woman” in the late Weimar Republic’ (2015).

¹¹ Article 109 of the Weimar Constitution granted equality to all Germans before the law, thus granting women the right to vote and all the same civil rights and duties previously granted only to men. Article 128 abolished gender discrimination among civil servants. While such discriminations certainly did not end, women did enjoy more freedoms with the creation of the Weimar constitution and it became increasingly more acceptable for young women to have their own incomes, apartments, to go out without chaperones, and to smoke in public.

¹² Sutton points out that Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term ‘transvestite’ in 1910 as a descriptor that categorized people who identified as the opposite sex to which they were assigned at birth, and that there was ‘criticism in both scientific and subcultural circles that the term was too focused on dress, although Hirschfeld insisted it encompassed a range of gendered expressions’ (2012: 350). At the time, the term would have included a varied demographics of transgendered individuals, including ‘cross-dressing male prostitutes, cabarettists, [and] entertainers’ (Sutton, 2012: 341).

¹³ *Uhu*’s 1929 anonymously-written article, ‘Controversy with the single woman’ is one example where the married woman’s daily life is compared to that of the single and employed woman who lives on her own, ‘Streit um die ledige Frau’, *Uhu* vol. 5, no. 6 (March 1929: 88–96). Another *Uhu* article is the 1928 ‘Beauty in the corner’, which positions the magazine as a prince seeking its Cinderella, features portraits of working women (secretaries, seamstresses, telephone operators, etc.) as a kind of commoner-turned-princess. The author declares that, ‘beyond doubt ...no profession is an obstacle to the development of real beauty’, ‘Schönheit im Winkel: Eine Entdeckungsfahrt des ‘Uhu’, *Uhu* vol. 5, no. 2 (November 1928: 24–28).

In Germany and elsewhere in Europe and America, femininity had come to be associated with consumption.¹⁴ Journalist and cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer (1998: 68), writing for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in December of 1929, describes the stereotypical female employee that was associated with the title of New Woman as ‘a certain standard type of salesgirl, draper’s assistant, shorthand typist and so on, which are portrayed at the same time cultivated in magazines and cinemas. They have entered the general consciousness, which from them forms its overall image of the new salaried stratum. The question is whether the image decisively catches reality’. Throughout his Weimar-era essays, Kracauer often generalizes the women he interviews and those he speaks of as associated with the world of mass consumption. He conflates the high-kicking and synchronized dancing of the Tiller Girls with the mechanized system of mass production and desire, and elsewhere describes the ‘little shop girls’ working in department stores as caught in the spectacle of projected femininity and consumption (Kracauer, 1995: 291–304).

Women, ‘New’ or otherwise, constituted a major percentage of purchasing power in Weimar Germany (75% according to advertising expert Hanns Kropff in 1926 and 85% according to *Gebrauchsgraphik* in 1932), and this intended audience for advertisements in the Weimar media was apparently divided between the New Woman and the housewife (Kropff, 1994: 660–62). While household supplies and cleaning agents often depicted women as mothers and homemakers, advertisements of the countless cosmetic and new fashions usually depicted the short-haired and short-hemmed New Woman. Such advertisements fill the appendices of the majority of Weimar-era magazines, presenting the New Woman as one who sought to improve her appearance for work and for the benefit of her boss in particular, and for after-work diversions.¹⁵

Photographic advertising was thought to be especially important in reaching women shoppers as long as it was believable. Kropff (1994: 661) asserts ‘The effect of the ad

¹⁴ To this day, this association persists in popular jokes that declare ‘women be shopping’. It even became a catchphrase in the 1996 film *The Nutty Professor*. Serena R. Zabin traces the history of the increasing association of women with shopping back to the 19th century (Hartigan-O’Connor and Materson, 2018: 335–354).

¹⁵ For example, a January 1931 advertisement for ‘Khasana Superb Lipstick’ in *Das Magazine* depicts a drawing of a feminine, short-haired woman seated across from an older man whose face we cannot see but whose age is suggested by his posture and hairline. The advertisement promotes the make-up as providing a youthful and naturalistic glow that lasts all day and night until it is washed off with soap. There is great emphasis on how natural and unobtrusive the cosmetic is, suggesting the negative association with overly made-up women. Attention given to the long-lasting qualities of the lipstick also suggests this make-up is intended for a busy woman who, with this Khasana lipstick, can move seamlessly from her daytime job to the events of the evening. Such advertisements do not align with the realist literature of the time, like that of Irmgard Keun or Hans Fallada, but reflect ideologies present in the 1931 film *Die Privat Sekretärin*, whose female protagonist is saved from her fate as an employee: a fate in which a secretary is destined to spinsterhood and/or redundancy until she marries a bank manager. Kracauer (1998: 73) uses the same trope in his ‘A Few Choice Specimen’ when he suggests that the female salariat who does not come from money would either ‘end up on the street or in the marriage bed’.

stands and falls with the picture. They [women] look first of all at the picture, and if it appeals to them, they read the text. Something incorrect in fashion ... everything that is ridiculous, impossible, or horrible to women occasions them to pass over the ad immediately in scorn and irritation'. Kropff (1994: 660) further assures his readers that women are too serious to appreciate humor in an advertisement when he states that 'to women humor is neither generally understood, nor congenial, nor persuasive'. Kropff's condescending account of his understanding of female consumer psychology does not offer any real examination of the impulses or motivations of the women to whom he refers. His comments reflect widespread attempts by men to understand or to define the dominant icon of the New Woman on their own terms. Though one cannot know how the presumably female audience of advertisements might have responded to those discussed below, the approach to consumer items in the work of ringl + pit challenges Kropff's assertion that women would reject any advertising photograph that is not a believable reproduction or romanticizing of appropriate Weimar womanhood. As such, ringl + pit's photographs provide 21st-century viewers with perspectives for rich analysis.

ringl + pit's image of artificial silk, *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, is clearly not a literal representation of a New Woman. Though it is not figural, there is a tangible connection between its representation and presentation of the New Woman at the center of Weimar culture. Its recognizable and distinctive texture is captured with precision by the photographic process. Artificial silk [*Kunstseide*], or rayon, became extremely popular in Germany after it was introduced to markets following the First World War, as it offered the appearance and feel of silk for half the cost (Lane, 2010: 545). Accordingly, we might read ringl + pit's image of Maratti's fabric as a substitute for the woman who would purchase and wear it, emphasizing the material as an important and symbolic fabric for Weimar women, promising faux luxury to the economical Weimar shopper.¹⁶ This image and others seek to sell the identity of the New Woman to the consumer. Arguably, all such images of cosmetics and fashion do this, but ringl + pit's advertising images, including *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, suggest that the identity of the New Woman is for sale while exposing that such an identity is a façade.

Artificial Silk from Maratti is seductively lush in its depiction of fabric regardless of its identity as an economical alternative to the luxury item it imitates. There is a tactility expressed by the clear, focused individual threads in the mass-produced material, particularly where the light articulates the crests of each crease. The sharp focus and sensuous surface of the material would have appealed to sensible female shoppers

¹⁶ The name of the image anticipates the title of Irmgard Keun's 1932 novel *The Artificial Silk Girl* [*Das Kunstseidene Mädchen*]. The novel describes the desperate and difficult life of urban Doris struggling to support herself in Berlin while also trying to understand her role in society.

wishing to evaluate a product's quality for themselves before making a purchase. The seduction of ringl + pit's photograph goes further than its rich depiction of texture: it is cropped to exclude everything but the abstract expanse of gently undulating fabric. The gleaming peaks of each fold are complemented by deep shadows, and when oriented vertically, the central hem and its accompanying creases suggest the anatomy of female genitalia.¹⁷ This ambiguity of signifying elements was central to what would come to be known as Surrealistic photographic practice at the time.¹⁸ The faux silk suggests Freudian fetishistic substitution both in its formal suggestion of female genitalia and in its clearly detailed texture that recalls trimmed pubic hair. While the fetish of Freud and Surrealists is perhaps relevant to *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, Karl Marx's commodity fetish is largely denied. Marx (2002: 33) declares the commodity as replacing the fetish idols of old, forming 'the religion of sensuous appetites' that offer a 'fantasy... [that] tricks the fetish worshipper into believing that an "inanimate object" will give up its natural character to gratify his desires'. Marx's fetish transmutes a fantasy associated with a commercial good to its purchaser.

As an abstract analogy of the feminine form, ringl + pit's work subverts the notion of femininity that preoccupied Weimar-era media.¹⁹ Their work does not present an embodied and sexualized femininity made so by the products that frame it. Traditional advertising, though, persisted in offering varieties of the New Woman fantasy in the form of overtly sexualized illustrations of ideal, happy, modern women enjoying common consumer products: images that aligned more closely with Marx's definition of commodity fetishism. For example, the female leg was becoming increasingly more visible as hemlines rose throughout the 1920s and it became a popular icon of visual media in interwar Germany. Often fragmented, either isolated or multiplied, the female leg is a persistent symbol in Weimar advertising and avant-garde photography. *Artificial Silk from Maratti* rejects this trope, instead suggesting that an appreciation of the tactile nuance and quality of the fabric being sold requires emphasis in an advertisement for fabric and hosiery.

An advertisement for rayon that predates *Artificial Silk from Maratti* provides a useful comparison. The image was created by Werner von Axster-Heudtlass for Bemberg

¹⁷ *Gebrauchsgraphik* published the image oriented horizontally but the Jewish Museum and other holders of the image always show the photograph oriented vertically, suggesting that this was how the artists intended it to be shown.

¹⁸ For example, the visual identification of a woman's up-stretched throat and jaw line becomes unstable in Man Ray's 1929 *Anatomies* as it also visually identifies as a phallus. Hal Foster has described such Surrealistic photography as having 'convulsive identities [and] compulsive beauty [that function as] reflections on the uncanny processes of mechanization and commodification' (1993: 145).

¹⁹ There are numerous examples of articles from illustrated magazines that look at the various types of New Women, and the most notable is Manfred Georg's 1927 'Drei Frauen stehen heute vor uns. Die drei Typen: Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne' (von Ankum, 1997: 12).

fabrics (**Figure 2**). This illustration features the lithe figure of a young woman cropped at the waist and framed by a black rectangle edged by thin parallel lines that cross-hatch at the corners in a decorative border. Her hair is a smooth cap of negative space as though her bobbed hairstyle [*Bubikopf*] has been cut out of the image. Her heavily

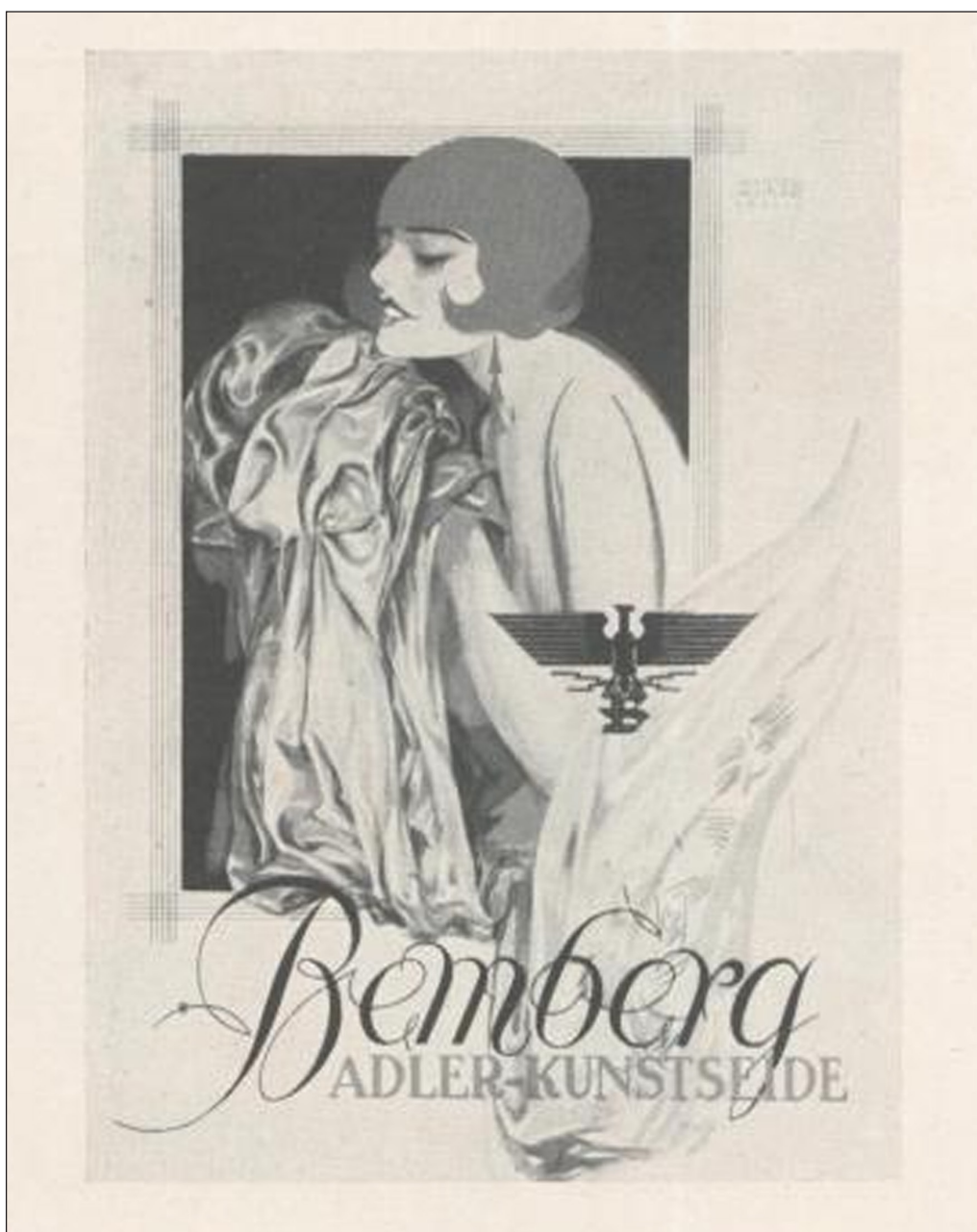


Figure 2: Werner von Axster-Heudtlass. Advertisement for Bemberg fabrics, 1927. Published in *Gebrauchsgraphik* vol. 4, no. 11 (1927), 62. Patrick Roessler Archive of the Illustrated Press, Erfurt, Germany. Arthistoricum.net. Public domain.

made-up eyes are closed and she holds up a bundle of crumpled and shimmering fabric to caress her chin, her lips parted in apparent ecstasy. The fabric spills from the frame to the bottom right, then becomes a kind of wing extending up and behind the woman.²⁰ The illustration is anchored by text declaring the company and product names. Like ringl + pit's photograph, the Bemberg advertisement does not attempt to portray a realistic representation of a woman. The illustrated woman in the Bemberg advertisement is cartoonish, articulated by elongated arcs that contrast with the whorls of mercurial fabric she cradles. This fictional Art Deco woman's modernity is signaled through streamlined forms, fashionable styling, and her coquettish pose. As with many contemporary advertisements featuring a New Woman, the Bemberg advertisement presents an idealized and non-threatening female consumer reveling in the luxurious experience of touching or using the advertised product.

In her analysis of commerce and femininity in the early 20th century, Rachel Bowlby (1985: 20), citing Marx and Baudrillard, asserts that the essential framework for such advertisements 'readily [fit] into the available ideological paradigm of a seduction of women by men, in which women would be addressed as yielding objects to the powerful male subject forming, and informing them of, their desires'. This suggests that advertisements such as Bemberg's were created by men using the familiar trope of female seduction in order to create an the image of the New Woman that satisfied patriarchal expectations, perhaps to assuage the threat her independence presented to damaged masculine identities of interwar Germany.²¹ The New Woman was clearly a source of anxiety within Weimar culture and this, as Maud Lavin (2001: 51) points out, was played out in advertisements. The producers of such advertisements hope for the work to become a kind of mirror within which the female shopper seeks to find herself, no doubt in a similar manner to advertising of the 20th and 21st centuries. These images normalize certain appearances and hope that the viewer will mold themselves in the models provided, and that they will partake in the massification of a prescribed and acceptable femininity.

Siegfried Kracauer (1995: 75–86) saw photography as especially pertinent to his investigations of the mass ornament, the 'inconspicuous surface-level expressions'

²⁰ Superimposed above the text naming the company (Bemberg) and product (Adler-Kunstseide, or 'Eagle Artificial silk') is the emblem of a black eagle clutching stylized lightning bolts in its claws, perhaps foreshadowing the illustrator's future work as a producer of Nazi propaganda.

²¹ Much has been written on the gender anxiety within Weimar society. An oft-quoted primary source is the anonymously-written 1925 'Enough is Enough! Against the Masculinization of Women', printed in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, 1994: 389). The *Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Kaes et al., 1994) contains a compilation of primary sources documenting the controversy surrounding the figure of the New Woman and a perceived crisis of marriage in Weimar Germany.

that, if concentrated upon and analyzed, may reveal the circumstances of reality beneath the ‘surface glamour’. Kracauer describes his most notable example of the mass ornament, the Tiller Girls’ dance formations, as the unification of ornament and function.²² The geometric ordering of their limbs dissolves their individuality and brings about the ‘emptying [of] all the substantial constructs of their contents...’ (Kracauer, 1995: 77). Where traditional Weimar-era advertising generally upholds the ‘traditional opposition of (merely decorative) applied ornament and functional structure’, ringl + pit’s works emphasize their materiality by combining the decorative and the functional aspects of their compositions (Kracauer, 1995: 18). *Artificial Silk from Maratti*, for example, scrutinizes the fabric and inspects the organization of its various threads and folds at the expense of presenting the product in its entirety or any of its labeling: elements usually prioritized (and necessary) to facilitate consumer appraisal. The patterns of construction are highlighted and the suggestion of texture is foregrounded. The design of the advertisement relies entirely on providing an unexpected perspective of the commercial good. The layered structure of ringl + pit’s other advertisements form a kind of three-dimensional collage in which the interplay of disparate materials simultaneously suggest bodily forms while denying their presence. In their ‘ornamentation of function’ and ‘functionalization of ornamentation’, to borrow terms from Kracauer, these advertisements offer the possibility of recognizing a divergence between the image of the New Woman and the actual consumers of such goods (Kracauer, 1995: 18).

This disenchantment is necessary, as Kracauer recognizes, to counter capitalist rationalization where the consumer blindly accepts the societal constructs ‘sold’ to them. By not including an actual, physical woman in their advertisements, ringl + pit reserve that space of identification for any type of woman who wishes to purchase the goods yet rejects the fantasy of femininity in interwar Germany. The disparity between mainstream media-constructed femininity and the actual ways in which Germans at this time understood their own selves as women and individuals is a ‘historiographical commonplace’ (Hung, 2015: 68). For example, during the Weimar Republic, Berlin was home to dozens of homosexual journals and periodicals, suggesting that there were sexually subversive subcultures within the metropolis that sought alternatives to the mainstream press (Beachy, 2014: 189–90).²³ Although still formative, sexologists were also questioning normative gender identity, evident in Hirschfeld’s work at his Institute and publications like the 1923 ‘The Intersexual Constitution’ [‘Die intersexuelle

²² The Tiller Girls were a dance troupe among many troupes in Germany at the time and they specialized in tap-and-kick routines similar to today’s Radio City Rockettes.

²³ Some titles include *Der Freundschaft*, *Der Eigene*, *Transvestit*, *Garçonne*, and *Frauen Liebe* (Beachy, 2014: 190).

Konstitution’] which distinguishes between ‘transvestites’ (crossdressers) and transsexuals.²⁴ By examining the works of female writers and artists like ringl + pit, one can begin to break down such disparities between mainstream gender expectations and those developing, and threatening, the status quo.

The emphases on traditional sexuality and an exaggerated femininity in traditional Weimar advertisements not only reaffirm traditional heterosexual male desire but also attempt to combat the development of the modern female ‘type’ into the androgynous masculine woman [*männliche Frau*] embodied in the film star Marlene Dietrich and lampooned in numerous magazine articles and cartoons of the period. This subversive type was upsetting to societal norms, as one anonymous *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* author describes the boyish style of some women as ‘displac[ing] masculinity’ and leaving befuddled men unmoored in their ‘ambush’ (Sutton, 2011: 1). The prevalence of the masculine woman in print media suggests the masculine woman loomed on the periphery of the New Woman identity formation throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, until the consolidation of Nazi power. In apparent reaction to modern women that embraced a more androgynous appearance, the masculine woman was often ridiculed in the press, as in the cartoon ‘Lotte at the Crossroads’, which shows a figure reminiscent of Peter Lorre in a shin-length skirt contemplating which restroom to use: for men or for women [*für Damen or für Herren*].²⁵ In stark contrast, there are those that chose to depict the New Woman in the guise of the softer, submissive, and sensual traditional femininity deemed appropriate and safe in a patriarchal society: this is seen in the 1929 *Das Magazin* photo-essay ‘The Two Faces of Our Beautiful Women’, which is organized around this juxtaposition.²⁶

This idealized and often sexualized projection of femininity that governs Weimar-era media is clearly evident in advertisements like Bemberg’s. These fantasy images, or ‘daydreams of society’, are powerful in that they are targeted towards women whose own desires and identities have not been consulted (Kracauer, 1995: 292). In her analysis of women in Weimar culture, Patrice Petro (1997: 58) locates the female as both spectacle and spectator whose ‘relationship to modernity and mass culture has ... been confused with male desire, and with male perceptions of gender difference’.

²⁴ Hirschfeld describes the transsexual as having ‘a desire that exceeds transvestism in not only adapting one’s “vestiture” to that of the other sex, but also adapting one’s body’ (Koellen, 2016: 11). Despite such a distinction, Emma Heaney’s 2017 *The New Woman: Literary Modernism Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* argues that the generalized treatment by Hirschfeld and other sexologists of trans women led to a singular trans feminine identity of a ‘woman trapped in a male body’ that was then exploited in narratives, thus offering a reductive trans feminine type that does not compare with the plurality of trans identities and experiences.

²⁵ ‘Lotte am Scheidewege’, *Simplicissimus* vol. 5 (May 1925: 79).

²⁶ Anton Kuh, ‘Die zwei Gesichter unserer schönen Frau’, *Das Magazine* vol. 5 no. 53 (January 1929: 3086–3090).

The formula dominating Weimar advertisements, as well as Weimar cinema, locates the new, modern woman in a very specifically feminine, sexualized, and subjective position that reflects hetero-male desire and the masculine privilege of forming public identities rather than feminine desire, self-definition, or identification. The sexualized female body that dominated the illustrated periodicals is one area in which men were trying to mold the New Woman into a familiar and non-threatening femininity that appealed to men's desires.

ringl + pit's work suggests that women and those identifying as such also had concerns about the contours of the New Woman as depicted in media. Such advertisements would appeal to a spectrum of individuals as it was not only biologically born women that presented as New Women. Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term transvestite in his 1910 study *Die Transvestiten* to describe hetero- and homosexual crossdressers, further asserting that sexual identity existed on an 'intricate spectrum' (Beachy, 2014: 87-88). In 1923, he further articulated his theory of 'sexual intermediacy' by indentifying transsexuals [*Transsexualismus*] as distinct from transvestites (Beachy, 2014: 178).²⁷ Whether performing as feminine or masculine, there were others that sought Hirschfeld's assistance in changing their biological sex. By the time ringl + pit were creating these advertisements, gender could be understood (at least by those in more progressive and queer-accepting circles) as a public performance. At the same time, it was also a battleground in which conservatives were fighting to maintain control over the public image of the New Woman and how she would be understood by the mainstream German public. That such battles are still being fought in the media today suggests the very radical notions of gender construction that underlie ringl + pit's work.

ringl + pit's Maratti advertisement offers a counterpoint to such formulaic advertisements. The photograph's picture plane is entirely filled by the creased arabesques of fabric, absent of text, and more akin to the studies in light, shadow, and texture associated with the product imagery of Albert Renger-Patzsch and other New Objectivity [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] photographers than advertisements. The distinct striated surface of the material nevertheless informs the viewer that this is rayon. The absence of a female body in the image challenges the function of the advertisement as mirror and avoids any suggestion that the buyers align themselves with any specific image of femininity. The body of the woman is replaced by the fabric and the latter becomes a substitution for the former: the photograph literally represents the fabric while suggesting a symbolic and figural connection with the female consumer.

²⁷ In the 1920s, Hirschfeld's Berlin institute performed some of the first sex-reassignment surgeries, though it should be noted that these early surgeries were very primitive and not without complications. Robert Beachy provides a succinct history of Hirschfeld's work in gender reassignment in *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (2014: 174-179).

Stern and Auerbach's rejection of and challenge to popular advertising formulas in favor of proto-feminist investigations of commercial products is evident in much of their Weimar-era work. This challenge is underscored by the overwhelmingly modern products associated with the New Woman that are featured in their photographs. Cigarettes, like artificial silk, were a product primarily bought and enjoyed by the youthful, salaried class that included the New Woman (Coyner, 1977: 316). This preference aligns with the New Woman's proclivity towards the new, modern, and mass-produced. Barbara Kosta (2006: 134-53) effectively argues that cigarettes were simultaneously symbolic of the modern New Woman and of degeneracy, an apt correlation as the New Woman was symbolic of both modernity and degeneracy depending on her critic.

Güldenring brand cigarettes are featured in a 1931 advertisement by ringl + pit, and here they once again diverge from the popular formula for advertising cigarettes to women (**Figure 3**). The photograph is dramatically lit and taken from above so as to isolate a crumpled sheath of cellophane, from which a single cigarette extends below. The background is an eggshell-textured paper, its coarse surface contrasting with the streaked gleam that highlights the cellophane. The shadow from the cellophane extends up and around the product like a dark halo. The only text is that which appears on the product. Once again, no figure is included, and, once again, texture and tactility give the image much of its power. It is a beautifully and carefully composed image depicting a product associated with the white-collar classes and the New Woman. The mass-produced object is made beautiful, rarified rather than serialized. The image focuses not on the cigarette itself, the form of which is mostly obscured, but on the gleaming cellophane. Although cellophane was invented in France in 1914, it did not come to replace tin cigarette containers until 1930 (the year before this photograph was made) and even then it was used to wrap paper boxes that held the cigarettes (Cross and Proctor, 2014: 44). ringl + pit made a conscious decision to remove the paper packaging in order to highlight the transparent nature of the cellophane. It is a photograph highlighting the new and mass-produced, yet ringl + pit have formed the image to suggest a precious and unique object. The product has been used: there is only one cigarette in the pack and the paper box is missing. The cigarettes are not in a full box, the way in which one would purchase them. Instead, their incomplete and fragmented state reflects use and intimacy. A figure is suggested by their absence: someone who has smoked the other cigarettes and left one remaining in its cellophane cocoon. It was not uncommon for cigarette advertisements to avoid figural representations, but unlike the previous example, the majority would show a pristine, newly opened pack with one to three cigarettes tipped from the box. These kinds of advertisements

were neutral, but cigarettes were also marketed to both sexes where either a man or a woman, or even a happy couple, would be featured as main actors in a scenario of leisurely enjoyment punctuated by the pleasure of smoking. Of those advertisements containing only women, a similar formula of seduction to that seen in the Bemberg advertisement is prevalent.



Figure 3: ringl + pit (Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern). *Guldenring Cigarettes*, 1931. The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY. Accession Number: 2017-27.11. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery. © Robert Mann Gallery.

A contemporaneous example is an advertisement for Manoli Gold, which shows the depiction of a glamorous and beautiful woman smoking (**Figure 4**). The image is once again an illustration showing the head, neck, and gloved hands of a bejeweled woman. She has short, curled hair worn under a hat, and she holds a long, red and yellow cigarette holder to her mouth, its opposite end filled with a smoking cigarette. Her other gloved hand holds aloft a closed package of Manoli Golds, and she gazes down at this, her eyes almost entirely closed in apparent pleasure. Luxury is suggested by the name of the product (gold) and by the obvious wealth of the woman smoking.



Figure 4: Julius Ussy Engelhard. Advertisement for Manoli Gold Tobacco, ca. 1930.
© INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo.

Another example is for Leichte Regatta, this time showing a sportier and less formal woman smoking (**Figure 5**). Again, we see her from only the shoulders up as she smiles and looks out towards us. A bandana ties her hair back as though to protect it against wind and water, suggesting she is active and outside. Her eyebrows are manicured and her pupils are barely visible in her heavily-lidded eyes. She holds a cigarette between the white teeth of her smiling mouth. A pack of cigarettes connects the image of the woman, contained in a dark, ambiguous rectangle, to the text below that describes the elegant slimness of this brand of cigarette. The cover of the pack shows the sails of a ship peaked above waves, providing a context for this sporty, yet beautiful woman. The

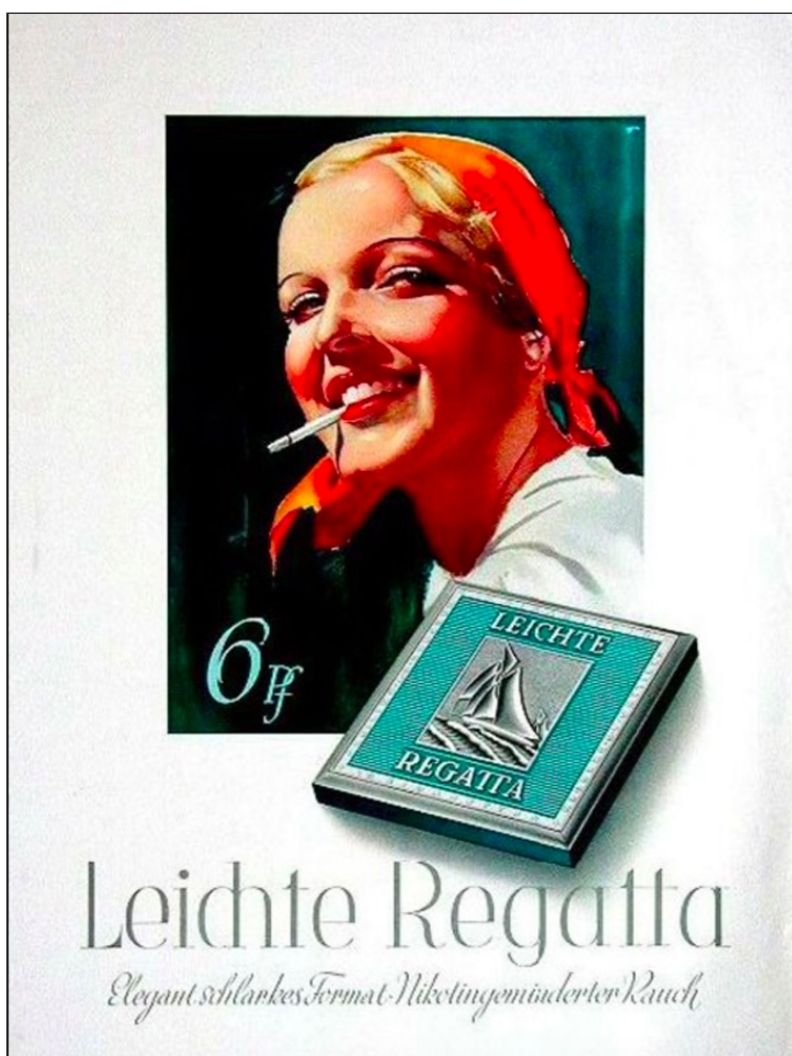


Figure 5: Advertisement for Leichte Regatta Cigarettes, 'Leichte Regatta - Elegant schlankes Format, nikotingeminderter,' ca. 1930. Art Resource, NY. Accession Number: 20011504. © Art Resource, NY.

fantasy women of these advertisements are depicted as both consumers enjoying the cigarettes as well as vehicles of pleasure to be enjoyed by the viewer.

In ringl + pit's advertisements, the products are alienated from their usual modes of display, but these photographs do suggest that the products have been handled and used. The viewer is not seduced by the fantasy of an imaginary self, they are instead seduced by the tactility suggested by the images because of the physical empathy they demand. As a result of the tactility reproduced in the photograph, the viewer wants to touch the objects shown and thus to possess them. ringl + pit do not just appeal to the base instinct of touch but the intellect of viewers is piqued by the beautiful compositions and the subtle suggestion of identity through substitution, though not necessarily a substitution based on fetishistic replacement of genitalia. In many of ringl + pit's photographs of commercial products aimed at female and female-presenting consumers, figures are suggested in the absence of real bodies, as formed from the very goods being sold, the products thus substituting for consumers.

ringl + pit's award-winning 1931 *Komol Haircoloring* is another clearly constructed assortment of layered materials that overtly suggests a faceless consumer using the product and departs from typical examples of the period (**Figure 6**).²⁸ As with the previous examples of their work, the photograph is taken from above the materials so that they seemingly float in a unadorned, shallow space. A rectangle of wire mesh hovers within the edges of the picture plane, its ends frayed and rough. Beneath the mesh, two paper cut-out silhouettes overlap: a silhouette of a darker hue extends in front of the upper white silhouette, the former like a shadow of the latter. In the mesh's upper-left corner, a smaller rectangle of paper or cardboard bears the capitalized letters of the company, Komol, in bold along the top border. Smaller and nearly illegible text ('*teinture pour cheveux*') extends below the 'K' and 'L' like two supportive posts to the 'Komol' lintel. A small brush and two smaller bottles fill the bottom-right of the mesh rectangle, occupying the space below the silhouettes' delicately pointed chins. Behind these, the background is made of a shiny metallic surface that highlights a third silhouette of shadow that defines the darker cutout. Above the mesh, a swatch of finger-curled, wavy hair rests atop the silhouette. It is situated so that it looks like it belongs to the profiled cutouts and is angled so that its central seam aligns with the diagonal emphasis created by the diagonally opposed 'Komol' text and dyeing products. The seam, which visually suggests the cutout figure's part line, separates white-blond waves on the left (or 'back' of the head) and dark waves of the right (or 'top' of the head). Thus, the advertisement suggests a feminine persona, or perhaps numerous

²⁸ The advertisement won first prize at the *Deuxième Exposition Internationale de la Photographie et du Cinéma* in Brussels in 1933 (Warren, 2005: 84).

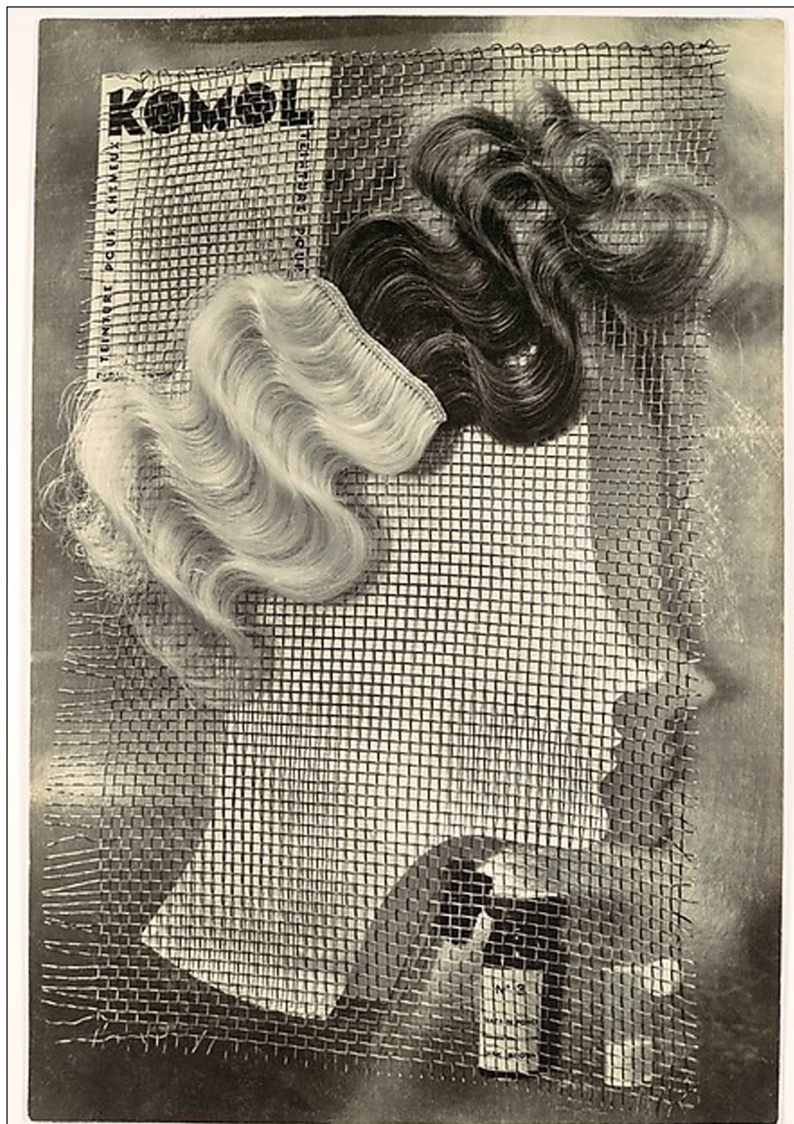


Figure 6: ringl + pit (Ellen Auerbach and Grete Stern). *Komol Haircoloring*, 1931. The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY. Accession Number: 2017-27.1. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery. © Robert Mann Gallery.

personae, but they are semi-blank receptacles that allow numerous individuals to see themselves represented as possible consumers for such hair products.

Weimar-era advertisements for women's hair products overwhelmingly featured the bobbed hairstyle [*Bubikopf*] and generally depict a range of hair colors. The bob, which varied in length but was generally no longer in the front than the top of the jawline, was frequently pressed into waves like those suggested in *Komol Haircoloring* (Lynn, 2008: 61). The short hair and tight waves pressed close to the head necessitated hair products to mold and hold such a shape, and the pages of illustrated magazines were filled with

glossy-haired and rosy-cheeked women declaring their loyalty to a brand of shampoo, hair dye, or hair crème. The cosmetic company Pixavon primarily sold hair products and used cartoons of youthful feminine types in their advertisements, naming them 'Daisy', 'Ethel', and 'Madge', etc. A 1927 advertisement features Daisy, her golden-brown waves pressed against her head like an undulating halo (Figure 7). She is depicted in a bust-length portrait, pearls peeking from her white collar. She wears bright red lipstick, has rouged cheeks, and her large, exaggerated blue eyes look wistfully up and off in the distance. A delicate line echoes the contours of her hair, creating another kind of halo, its ends looping in figure eights on either side of her jaw and forming arches,

Illustrierte Zeitung
Leipzig, Berlin, Wien, Budapest.

Nr. 4 01. 169. Band. Die Illustrierte Zeitung erscheint alle zwei Tage und kann durch ihre Verbreitung und Popularität bei den Lesern schon von der Bedeutung der Illustrierten Zeitung in Europa C. 1. Heftlicher Einzelhefte 1-7, bezogen werden. Der Preis beträgt für den 20- und 25-jährigen 13.50 Reichsmark vierteljährlich bezogen 4.50 Reichsmark monatlich, jährlich 50 Reichsmark. Preis des Heftes Nummer 1: 20 Reichsmark. *Veränderung bei Ausgaben nach Zahl, bei Preisveränderung fortwährende Heftpreise.

18. August 1927.

„Mir ging es wie vielen Damen, ich mußte lange experimentieren, ehe ich das richtige Pflegemittel für meinen Bubikopf fand. Natürlich ging es nicht ohne böse Erfahrungen ab; jetzt aber habe ich das Richtige gefunden: PIXAVON, das ich regelmäßig jede Woche anwende. Mancher Blick, der mein Haar trifft, beweist mir, daß seine seidige Fülle, sein schimmernder Glanz und sein schmiegsamer Fall angenehm bemerkt werden. Und was mir die Blicke Fremder stumm und doch berechtigt verraten, sagen mir meine Freunde offen oder diskret...“

PIXAVON

DIE LOCKENDE LINIE

Daisy

PIXAVON-Haarwäsche wird in allen besseren Friseur-Salons ausgeführt.

Fordern Sie kostenlos von uns Abbildungen neuer Bubikopfschnitte für Sommer 1927.
LINGNER-WERKE / DRESDEN

Figure 7: Advertisement for Pixavon shampoo featuring 'Daisy,' in *Illustrierte Zeitung: Leipzig, Berlin, Wien, Budapest, New York* vol. 169, no. 4301 (18 August 1927). Collection of Stephanie Bender. Public domain.

inside of which two smaller cartoons are framed. On the left, Daisy is shown seated at a vanity table working a product into her hair. On the right, she is swaddled in a fur wrap as she is escorted by a man in a tuxedo. The words ‘*Die Lockende Linie*’, or ‘the Alluring Line’, follow the line that contours Daisy’s tightly pressed waves. This ‘alluring line’, which forms a bell curve around the bust of the cartoon, emphasizes the shape of the *Bubikopf*: inverted, cupped, and curved. It is a feminine shape that contains the cartoon figure. ringl + pit present a far less structured *Bubikopf*, and one far less specific than those worn by Daisy or her Pixavon counterparts. The hair in *Komol Haircoloring* reaches out, its seam aligned with the upper-right to lower-left diagonal emphasis of the product and its label, while the hair’s breadth forms a counter-diagonal. Further, the looser, more linear swatch of waves of the Komol advertisement are more realistic than the meticulously coifed models and starlets of the mass media.

Certainly, the radiating line and text that correspond to Daisy’s hair, and the three iterations of Daisy are, as ideas of duplication, echoed in *Komol Haircoloring*. The major difference here is that Daisy seeks the transformational powers of her product in the hopes of impressing and attracting a man. The narrative is made clear in the side cartoons which are both set up as a fantasy, suggested by the dreamy far-off gaze of Daisy and as a before-and-after effect of the hair cream’s help in securing for her a romantic partner. Pixavon’s work exemplifies the fantasy-for-sale relationship that informed Marx’s commodity fetish. This fantasy, though, is not for the woman alone. Daisy’s identity, her future ideal self, is one dependent upon coupling herself with a man. In contrast, *Komol Haircoloring*’s cut-out profiles, which are as constructed as Daisy the cartoon, are nevertheless blank silhouettes separated from the fetishized curls by the grid of wire mesh. The future is not determined, nor is the hair color. The efficiency of the product is suggested by the stark contrast of the two sides of hair, but this doubling suggests more than a good dye job. Anna Corrigan and Susana S. Martins (2019: 130) describe ringl + pit’s *Komol* photograph as ‘pok[ing] fun at this conflation of woman and commodity, calling into question the phenomenon of the female consumer who buys while being sold as a product herself’, and while this is so, I see more in this advertisement by ringl + pit. This image, like so many others by the partnership of Auerbach and Stern, denies any concrete identity and is thus open-ended. In its indeterminate and layered profiles, *Komol Haircoloring* becomes a mirror, a blank slate, and perhaps a wish, but that wish is left to be determined by the viewer/consumer. The suggested figure here is not actually made of the product, but rather the product allows for the figure to be in a state of flux: neither blonde nor brunette, but both. Furthermore, there is not just one figure suggested here but two at the very least. The two paper cut-outs and the bi-hued hair, split at its seam, suggest that a woman may be contradictory, multifaceted, and can change her mind about her appearance and therefore about her

identity. The duality of the image suggests that women, meaning those individuals who identify as such, have agency in their identity and in the identity-formation of the New Woman, and that such identities are not necessarily stable.

The idea of the duality of feminine identity was perhaps a part of the *zeitgeist* of the era and is the premise of 1932's *Blonde Venus*, starring the famously androgynous Marlene Dietrich as the protagonist Helen. Duality is played out through the roles Helen adopts: she is a mother and wife, tethered to the domestic sphere, then, in order to pay for her husband's life-saving surgery, she becomes a seductive cabaret performer and kept woman of a millionaire. Finally, she becomes a fugitive after kidnapping her son once her duplicities are revealed. Her two primary identities in the film (mother and performer) hinge upon the duality between the New Woman and the domestic mother. Her stage personas vary greatly as well: from androgynous, suit-wearing *Garçonnes* to a blonde-afroed voodoo queen.²⁹ Helen/Dietrich's ease of switching from persona to persona emphasizes the performative quality of her many selves. It is not simply the costumes and fashion that allow for such diverse performances but also the seemingly inexhaustible feminine types that orbited around the idea of the New Woman in contrast to the singular and sacred role of wife and mother.³⁰

ringl + pit's *Komol Haircoloring* shares this possibility of transformative identities. Rather than showing a preference to the blonde hair, their composition is organized around doubling: the profiles are doubled, the hair is divided into two halves of a whole, and even the borders of the image are doubled with the wire mesh representing a second picture plane. Komol hair dye might be good at coloring hair, but it is the promise of transformation and of creating another self that is highlighted by ringl + pit's advertisement. Mila Ganeva (2008: 2) points out that 'self-fashioning', or 'creating and interpreting their own fashionable images', was central to Weimar women's appreciation of fashion and cosmetics. Elizabeth Otto (2020: 52-55) argues that ringl + pit's figural photographs engage with ideas of performance, and I see their non-figural advertisements as extensions of such performative theatricality in their suggestion of costuming and construction. Fashion can be transformational. The substitution of objects for figures in ringl + pit's advertisements defies the identity (or fantasy) of the New Woman as a

²⁹ *Garçonne*, according to Manfred Georg, 'personified the masculinized, rational and independent female, embodying women's supposed intrusion into formerly male-dominated spheres such as sport, technology, intellectual debate and sexual agency, challenging men on their own territory' (Hung, 2015: 55) and, as a type, had originated from Victor Margueritte's (2015) novel of the same name, published in Germany in 1923. Additionally, from 1930 to 1932 it was also the name of a German magazine geared towards lesbians.

³⁰ Carol Schmid's (2014) 'The "New Woman" Gender Roles and Urban Modernism in Interwar Berlin and Shanghai' investigates these 'opposing ideals of womanhood' that vacillated between traditional and maternal femininity and the sexually threatening New Woman.

particular type and instead presents the various fashionable trappings associated with the modern woman. In their advertisements, ringl + pit offer neither the sporty athlete [*Sportstyp*], *Garçonne*, or *femme fatale*, but the possibilities are there for any or all of these.³¹

The dominant constructions of Weimar women in advertisements as passive spectacles who shop to adorn themselves for the male gaze have implicit ramifications for the New Woman and anyone identifying as a modern feminine individual during the late Weimar Republic. These formulas are exposed when compared to Auerbach and Stern's images. ringl + pit's work highlights that the contours of the New Woman were not firmly set in any one mold and this may suggest how Stern and Auerbach saw their own fluid identities. The names they gave themselves, ringl + pit, deny any affirmative gender and the two women would engage in what Otto (2020: 52) calls 'gender play', using different pronouns and depicting themselves in collages and photographs as overtly masculine or feminine, or entirely androgynous. Through substitution, among other techniques, ringl + pit make evident the masquerade of identity construction to transform such constructions into a positive outlet for expression and identity formation. In doing so, they challenge the fetishistic and narcissistic implications of the broader sphere of Weimar advertising. Their works fit with the larger and increasingly visible homosexual and queer counterculture of Berlin. ringl + pit allow room in their advertisements for every kind of New Woman, rejecting the sexualized and seductive type that dominated the advertising of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. These are intelligent female photographers making challenging and coy images for modern women and femme-presenting individuals, rejecting the patronizing formula of an idealized and sexualized New Woman, a formula that is only now starting to collapse under the empowered feminist's gaze.

³¹ These are some of the feminine 'types' of the New Woman displayed in Weimar visual culture (von Ankum, 1997: 12).

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