The Beautiful Body of the Mannequin: Display Practices in Weimar Germany

MILA GANEVA

> "Schön, kühl und sachlich – aber gottseidank nur eine Puppe."
> (Franz Hessel)

The Berlin mannequin could not escape the inquisitive gaze of the *flâneur*. In a 1929 picture story entitled "Eine gefährliche Straße" and published in *Das Illustrierte Blatt* (Otto Umbehr provided the photographs), Franz Hessel voices the common mixture of fascination and anxiety triggered by the sight of dummies in the display windows. Walking down a street in Berlin, not far from the Spittelmarkt where numerous mannequin factories had their store fronts, the author describes the "stylized products of display window artists" as "the spooky beauties" that appear by the "hundreds of thousands all over Germany and around the world to demonstrate to us how to wear shirts, dresses and hats" (Hessel 1929a: 686). Indeed, by the end of the 1920s, the manufacture of mannequins, as well as fashion in general, was a flourishing business in Germany. There were over a dozen large mannequin factories in Berlin alone, where the thriving industry of ready-to-wear clothing ("Konfektion") counted close to 800 companies and was making huge profits in domestic and international sales (see Parrot 1981: 127; Guenther 2004: 80-82).

Observing the unprecedented proliferation of mannequins in Berlin shop windows, Hessel is frightened by their stylized expressions, their

uniform faces and their "gazes," in which the male observer reads human character traits such as "coldness, corruptness, impertinence and haughtiness." With his typical provocative irony, he concludes:

"Mit spitzen Mündern fordern sie dich, schmale Augen ziehen sie, aus denen der Blick wie Gift tropft […] Alle verachten uns Männer furchtbar. Sie bestaunen nicht, 'was ein Mann nicht alles denken kann'. Sie durchschauen uns" (Ibid.).

The image of the mannequin in Hessel's essay is paradigmatic of the hesitant ways in which the changes in the appearance of the "real" Weimar woman – her body, clothes and presence in the public spaces of the city – were greeted by the public. As another contemporary put it:

"Die Gliederpuppe ist mehr als nur ein Kleiderständer. Sie ist die Realisierung des Modetyps als Wunschkomplex. […] Es ist eine nachdenkliche Feststellung, daß diese arbeitende, rechnende, kalkulierende, spekulierende, diese mit technischem Wissen gesättigte, sportliche Physiognomie des Zeitgenossen allmählich alles verwischt, was platonischen Geist ausdrückt" (Starke 1930: 609).

It is the aggressive "Modetyp" – rather than the mannequin itself – that irritates Hessel. And this reaction is not surprising, since elsewhere in his writing, he has repeatedly given voice to his mixed feelings about the modern Berlin woman – admiring her athletic figure, elegant clothes and self-confident presence on the street, while at the same time chiding her excessive rationality, her conspicuous pragmatism and her emphatic embrace of independence. Yet here, in "Eine gefährliche Straße," the ambivalence is dramatically exaggerated: the threatening features take over any original fascination, and the overwhelmingly negative perception of femininity is mapped out directly onto the lifeless body of the mannequin, envisioned as a stand-in for the New Woman.

Most audible in Hessel's critique is the voice of the classical *flâneur*, whose ambivalence toward women on the street has been traditionally associated with the dangerous attraction of the prostitute and with the rise of commodity consumption in modern societies. Yet at the same time as they were blaming women for the modern condition, *flâneurs* considered their own wandering as something of an erotic adventure, marked by the vague yearning to meet the gaze of a strange woman.[1]

1 The most famous example for the flâneur's fascinating encounter with a strange woman on the street is provided in Baudelaire's poem "À une passante."

Therefore, as the new type of woman emerged in the 1920s – marked by her independence, her readiness to working and her rational attitude, functional attire and smart make-up – she had a disenchanting effect on the erotic imagination of the *flâneur* and provoked, as in the case of Hessel, an adverse reaction (Sykora 1999: 129).

In this essay, I would like to suggest a reading of the Weimar mannequin that in many ways departs from the persistent model established by the *flâneur*. I focus not only on mannequins in the display window, but also on those in the fashion show ("Modenschau"). Both locales are defined by the presence of a female audience standing face to face with a lifeless or living mannequin, and both present variations of what Katharina Sykora has called "urban threshold space," a space in which images of safe bourgeois interiority blend with fantasies of dangerous, morally ambivalent exteriority (Sykora 1999: 136). Since it was mostly women on both sides of the Weimar display window and in the fashion show (as mannequins, shop assistants, window shoppers, audience and consumers), it would make more sense to ask what diverse cultural practices – beyond *flânerie* – emerged in those spaces and what these practices meant to the female observers and participants in the spectacle. In such a reading, the display window and the fashion show appear as settings that allow for multiple positionalities. In other words, the women in these spaces are not tied to a single role – that of the consumer, the commodity, the object of observation or the opposite of the *flâneur* – but become the subjects of a complex, ambivalent and constantly shifting experiences of metropolitan modernity.

A closer look at the contemporary discourses on the mannequin in Weimar culture – in popular novels and in the press of the time – invites the reader to see the human features concealed under the mask of perfect beauty and elegance; to explore the hidden power games between designers, customers and mannequins; and to define the meaning of fashion as an everyday cultural practice. The exploration of the mannequin inevitably generates an eclectic mixture of historical, sociological and aesthetic questions: Who were these women who would become mannequins? What were their age, social background and professional status? What was considered particularly attractive about their bodies? What ideal of beauty did they represent? How were they commented upon or fantasized about in contemporary popular literature, magazine features and newspaper columns? I will return to these questions after a brief overview of the history of the mannequin.

I

The mannequin has always had an auxiliary function. Although born in the artist's studio, it was rarely considered art itself; rather, it was meant to aid the artist by stimulating his imagination. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word "mannequin" dates back to 1570, when Dutch painters, using the diminutive form for "man," named the little statue or model usually made of wax or wood a "manekin" ("a little man"). Thus the connotation of term, from its very inception, is endowed with ambivalence: the lay figure resembled a human being, but was not a real one; it resembled a work of art, a sculpture or a statue, but was not one either, since there was nothing permanent about it and its body parts could be turned and twisted at the whim of its creator. In the eighteenth century, the word "mannequin" entered both German and English via French in that very sense of the lay figure, the puppet.

The use of the mannequin to present the latest fashions and sell clothes dates back to the sixteenth century.[2] In the seventeenth century, wooden dolls dressed in miniature versions of couture clothes were sent to the royal courts and wealthy buyers in the capitals of Europe. The first made-to-order wickerwork silhouettes appeared in 1750, and a century later, the wirework model with wax or papier maché heads replaced the unstable basketwork dummy. With the birth of the elegant fashion salons, the large department stores and the ready-to-wear industry in the 19th century, the mannequin was brought into the limelight of the display window. It was now designed as a flattering reflection of the mass customer, who would not only buy the latest fashion but also try to emulate fashionable gestures, expressions and lifestyle. In other words, the mannequin transformed from a clothes-rack (headless dummy without limbs) into a human-like figure with authentic looking hair, facial features and adjustable arms and legs. By the late 1920s, the dominance of the realistic mannequin was challenged by the appearance of the "stylized mannequin," whose anatomy eradicated the signs of the natural female body, erased the individual facial features and had 'skin' with a metallic, often silver finish (Gronberg 1998: 89). These antimimetic mannequins sought to divert the attention from the female body to the merchandise it was wearing, while at the same time they reproduced, in abstract form, some essentially modern characteristics such as – in the words of one commentator – the "intensified rhythm" of life in the big city (see Ward 2001: 229).[3] It should be noted that display windows during the Weimar

2 For more on the history of production and use of mannequins, see Gross 1995: 31-42 and Parrot 1981.

3 For a discussion of the stylized mannequin, see Gronberg 1998: 80-113.

years featured all different styles of mannequins – from the androgynous-abstract to the wholly naturalistic – and they were all indispensable parts of the street scene.

At about the same time that the big department stores and elegant fashion salons were opening their doors in Paris, the dummies' animated doubles – the living mannequins – were born. In 1858, Charles Worth, who established his own fashion house in Paris, pioneered a practice to which contemporary fashion is still heir. For the first time, brand-new models, prepared in advance and changed frequently, were presented to clients in luxurious salons and then made to measure according to the client's choice. The models – the first seasonal collections – were worn and presented by young women, prototypes of today's mannequins and fashion models, known as *sosies* or "doubles" (see Moderegger 2000: 62; Lipovetsky 1994: 57).[4] In France, as well as in Berlin, dozens of fashion houses sprang up following Worth's example. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the use of flesh-and-blood mannequins for the demonstration of clothes at shows in stores, in hotels, at sporting events, on boats and in public parks was a popular practice throughout Europe and the United States.[5] As classified ads in the Berlin daily press from the 1920s testify, the city's famous fashion salons and central department stores also employed a large number of living mannequins known as "Probierdamen" or "Vorführdamen." Beginning in 1926, in an effort to generate even more publicity for their business, they organized annual contests among the mannequins and elected a "fashion queen" ("Modekönigin") (see Ward 2001: 25; Westphal 1992: 74).

II

The intensive discourses in mass media on the practices of fashion display during the 1920s foreground the pronounced ambiguity conveyed by the term "mannequin." The same word was commonly used to designate the artificial reproductions of women's bodies that appeared in the shop windows ("Schaufensterpuppen") as well as those women who offered up their bodies to the ritual of the fashion show in order to assist

4 Worth first used his wife Marie Vernet, a former salesgirl in a clothes shop, as a house model. Inspired by the success of Vernet in selling the clothes that she would put on, Worth hired even more women as mannequins and started the ritual of the fashion show (see Moderegger 2000: 62).

5 Paris designer Paul Poiret was the first to take mannequins on international tours: in 1911 to London; in 1912 to Berlin, Vienna, Brussels, Moscow and St. Petersburg; and in 1913 to New York (see Loschek 1995: 23-34).

customers selecting a dress ("Vorführdamen"). Both types of mannequins coexisted in a bizarre dynamic that ranged from an uncanny resemblance between the living and the lifeless to stark contrast and mutual exclusion. Frequently, a person made up to match inanimate mannequins as closely as possible would perform alongside them in a display window and mimic their expressions. This practice was started by the major department stores in Europe and the United Stated in the 1890s and reached new heights of ingenuity during the 1920s and early 1930s. A live female model would, for example, disappear and appear again at intervals as a statue on a pedestal, each time wearing a new hat, shawl or gloves (see Friedberg 1993: 66). Very often, women masquerading as artificial mannequins would be staged in intimate settings, as if caught trying on lingerie or stockings. Needless to say, such scenes almost caused traffic jams in front of the stores (see Leach 1989: 117; Ward 2001: 231).

Contemporary commentators considered many of these practices in line with the mentality of the urban dwellers: their desire for constant entertainment, distraction and stimulation. In a 1930 article in *Scherl's Magazin* entitled "Tausend Lockungen hinter Glas," Ottomar Starke claims that the window display, this modern-day "Gesamtkunstwerk," reflects his contemporaries' susceptibility to both voyeurism and narcissism: "Wir wollen sehen und gesehen werden" (Starke 1930: 606). Starke's article features two photographs as visual examples, implying that it is women who are put on display and, supposedly, "like to be seen." In the first photograph, a scantily dressed woman (her legs, arms and part of her back exposed) demonstrates an electric massage belt in the window of a Berlin drug store (fig. 1). In the second photograph, showing a window display advertising soap, two young women in rural costumes are washing linen in a spring (fig. 2). In both cases, a similar one-way visual dynamics takes place: the objectified bodies of the mannequins clearly become the target of unabashed male voyeurism.

But there is more to this spectacle in and in front of the display window. One cannot avoid the impression that these living tableaux strongly resemble a cinema screen, where the mannequins are framed as film stars and the window shoppers become spectators. The mannequins perform for an audience and, to a certain extent, even manipulate that audience – they are in control of the spectacle and choose to look back at the curious onlookers or to avert their gazes. While the audience in the first photograph consists mostly of men (who are obviously less interested in the products being demonstrated than in the live spectacle staged in the window), the second photograph features many women, which suggests further that window shopping for women may imply consumer contem-

Fig. 1: Mannequin demonstrating electric massage belt (from Starke, "Tausend Lockungen hinter Glas," Scherl's Magazin, 1930).

plation and self-reflective narcissism, in the same way that cinema spectatorship suggests distanced fascination and imaginary identification (see Friedberg 1993: 67-68). The woman in front of the glass can indulge in the mise-en-scène even if she cannot enter the store and make a purchase, just as the female spectator can dream of becoming the filmic icon even if she cannot enter the screen.

The actual women working in the display windows were typically lower-class, underpaid "shop girls" in the department stores with no realistic career prospects, which explains why the opportunity to be placed in the window may have seemed a glamorous and lucrative enterprise, almost like being picked for the movies. Contemporary accounts sketch out a collective portrait of these sales assistants. In a series of three reports for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, for example, Marie Swarzenski observes how tedious work makes the sales girls appear stiff, almost like automatons. The mandatory training in the department stores teaches

them to suppress their own personalities and emotions in their interactions with customers; it disciplines their bodily gestures, straightens their posture, streamlines their appearance, cleanses their language of regional accents and supplies them with an arsenal of stock phrases. Swarzenski writes: "Als ganzes sind sie ein getreues Abbild unserer Zeit: kühl, erwerbsbedacht, aber gleichgültig gegen die Zukunft, schnoddrig und stumpf zugleich. Die Worte, die ich am meisten hörte, waren 'Tarif' oder 'Kündigung'" (Swarzenski 1929: 1). To another commentator for the same newspaper, Siegfried Kracauer, the uniformed female employees of the department store appear as "its little machinery" ("seine Apparätchen") and, conversely, a mannequin in the "sales temple" seems to be easily confused with a bored shop girl who conscientiously fulfills her duty to be decorative (Kracauer 1990: 229, 350).

It is understandable, then, that a sales girl would want to break away from this strictly regimented working environment, which forced her to surrender her personality and to behave like a robot. Paradoxically, she found temporary escape nowhere else but in the display window, where her job was to act precisely as a lifeless body. However, there was an economic difference between pretending to be energetic and lively while in fact being reduced to an automaton (on the sales floor) and pretending

Fig. 2: Window display advertisement for soap (from Starke, "Tausend Lockungen hinter Glas," Scherl's Magazin, 1930).

to be a wax dummy while in reality remaining a person (in the display window): live mannequins received substantial extra pay for their services. Another document of the period, Vicki Baum's novel *Der große Ausverkauf*, sheds additional light on the practice of live-mannequin display, seen here from the point of view of the sales girl participating in this practice. At the center of the plot is a campaign to boost the sales of a new garter, and it is decided that "a real girl" should appear alongside sixteen wax figures in a display window of the department store in order to "show her knees and demonstrate that the stocking doesn't tear" (Baum 1937: 87). In order to pick a suitable model, all professional mannequins are asked to parade in front of a male jury, but none of them is approved since it is not the "mob of men" but rather the average "economical housewives" that the store wants to attract in front of the display window (Baum 1937: 89). Therefore Nina, a humble sales assistant from "China goods," is selected: a girl with "a pretty face, who looks respectable just the same" (Baum 1937: 95). Nina accepts the new assignment despite the disapproval of her husband Eric, a professional window-dresser, and despite her own unease about "showing herself in the shop-window" for a week. It not only presents a change from her everyday routine (she thought it "was her fate to get saddled with all the tiresome customers") but also and more importantly offers a great financial advantage: "Die Mädchen im Schaufenster sollten zehn Dollar Zulage täglich bekommen, eine außerordentliche Summe, verglichen mit dem kleinen Wochengehalt, das sie bezogen, solange ihre Beine nicht in Frage kommen" (Baum 1937: 88).

Most literary texts of the late Weimar period that touch upon the theme of the live mannequin in the display window describe the job as a "dreadfully tiring" and "irritating" occupation, which actually reinforces the young women's sense that they are indeed reduced to "wax figures with a stiff bend in the back and wooden smile" (Baum 1937: 96). However, along with providing some realistic descriptions, Weimar popular literature also tends to romanticize the position of the woman as a live mannequin. In Baum's novel, as well as in another short story from the time, Curt Krispien's "Das Mädchen vom Blatt IV," the woman in the display windows feels strangely empowered: she is keenly aware of how her presence generates a huge urban spectacle, forcing all of the nervous, rushing, blasé pedestrians to stop in their tracks and forget about their problems and urgent tasks. In Krispien's piece, a giant fashion journal is displayed in one of the department store's windows. Heads of dummies wearing hats, scarves and other fashionable accessories pop up from the pages of the journal, and surprisingly, one of these heads is that of a real woman: "Er drehte sich lächelnd nach links und nach rechts

und zog sich in kleinen Abständen hinter das Blatt zurück, um gleich wieder mit einem neuen Hutmodell auf den mattblonden Locken abermals lächelnd zu erscheinen" (Krispien 1932: 818). The living mannequin takes particular pleasure in the fact that she does not have to return the gazes of all these potential consumers. She can ignore them, "forget that she is being stared at" and fancy herself a performer, an actress (Baum 1940 102). Usually, indulgence in such fantasies of control and independence is short lived and quickly overshadowed by an ensuing love affair. In the plots of all these fictional accounts, the appearance of a real woman in the display window serves primarily as a prelude for some sort of romantic entanglement. A rich man may take interest in the woman behind the glass, fall in love with her and venture into the store in an attempt to "buy" her (as in Vicki Baum's novel), or a poor man will recognize in the mannequin a girl he had danced with at a party and will launch a desperate chase to regain her (as in Krispien's story). Predictably, the happy end in these stories usually also resolves the financial worries of the young couple as well, so that the shop girl will never again be tempted to appear as a live mannequin in a shop window.

III

The Weimar discourse on the mannequins in shop windows is inseparably intertwined with the profusion of texts (popular novels, critical commentaries, first-person accounts) and images (photographs in the mass media and films) concerning the women who worked as live models for department stores, ready-to-wear clothes dealers ("Konfektionshäuser") and exquisite fashion salons ("Modehäuser"). According to one succinct definition of the profession, a good mannequin is "like a fata morgana appearing in front of a female customer whose body is quite differently shaped than that of the mannequin and whose uncritical self-image would prompt her to make a purchase" (Rathhaus. 1930b: 2). Not unlike the display window, the fashion show – presenting clothes in front of a large audience or for an individual buyer – had the aura of an artistic performance based on the constantly shifting dynamics between deception and self-deception, identification and manipulation. The women walking in and out of this stage/frame were often referred to as "anonyme Modeschauspielerinnen" and "Darstellerinnen im Theater der Mode" (Leopold 1930: 189). In fact, the word "Mannequin" was often despised by the mannequins themselves, especially because its neuter gender in German was perceived as a further validation of their objectification and as an affront to professional dignity (Speyer 1930: 39). The

protagonists of one 1930 novel about Berlin mannequins by Wilhelm Speyer, Gaby and Christa, offer an alternative: they call themselves "cormorants" and provide the following job description, emphasizing not the appearance and passive behavior, but rather the skills and aggressive attitude involved in their daily work:

"Der Kormoran zeigt seine Geschicklichkeit darin, daß er mit seinem Schnabel Fische aus der See aufzupicken versteht. Aber man hat Maßregeln degegen gestroffen, daß er seine Beute etwa aufzehre: ein Metallring an seinem schmalen Hals macht es ihm unmöglich, die Fische herunterzuschlucken. Der Kormoran führt Seefische vor wie "das Mannequin" die Kleider. Dem Kormoran zieht man die Fische, dem Mannequin die Kleider aus" (Speyer 1930: 40).

This description alludes to the mixture of bitter social realities and hidden pleasures implicit in the practices of the profession. Every time the mannequin demonstrates a new outfit, it is a "game": while seducing the customer, she also indulges the illusion, at least for a few fleeting moments, that these unaffordable clothes are her own and that she is not really who she is, "a fashion salon girl with a middle-school education" and an empty closet, but someone with a much higher social status (Speyer 1930: 48). A similar sense of enjoyment while temporarily forgetting their life of poverty and monotony is evident in some of the interviews with mannequins in *Scherl's Magazin*. One of them, a woman employed as a "Vorführdame" at a Berlin fashion salon, confesses: "Es gibt doch nichts Schöneres als herrliche Toiletten vorzuführen. Mir wenigstens macht es sehr viel Spaß" (Leopold 1930: 192).

Despite the positive overtone of some accounts, however, most texts in the popular press reporting on the job of the mannequin focus primarily on the dark side of glamour: on the anonymity, the physical challenges and the subservient rituals that are intrinsic parts of the daily routine. Most revealing in that respect is Katharina von Rathhaus's series of reports for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the two weeks she spent in a designer's salon in Paris. In order to gain insight into the workings of the fashion business, Rathhaus, a well-known fashion journalist who published regularly in *Die Dame* und *Elegante Welt*, took on a job as a "Habilleuse," or an assistant to the mannequins. This role allowed her to observe the tedious routines, the various social interactions and the backstage spaces in the theater of fashion. Rathhaus's account is especially valuable not only because of its sober realism, but also because her observations and conclusions for the most part apply to the mannequins' working conditions in Germany as well as France. She describes how the young women – who are generally poor and uneducated and often

bear the additional burden of raising children on their own – report to work at nine in the morning. They spend most of their strictly regimented eight-to-twelve hour work day in a dressing room, where they put on make-up and change dozens of times during the day to present an entire collection of clothes made to fit them. The mannequins walk out into the official presentation salon for a few minutes per dress and then run back to the dressing room, change quickly and come out again to present the next piece of attire. During the presentation, they are forbidden to interact with the public, since only the "Vendeuse" or the sales assistant is authorized to deal with the customers and collect a commission on each item sold. Hence, it is in the small, hot, stuffy and incredibly busy back room that the sixteen women who are modeling for this Parisian designer salon actually work. Although she finds the close physical proximity of bodies uncomfortable, the constant handling of "warm dresses" unpleasant and the presence of the male personnel director humiliating, Rathhaus admits that there is no better place than the "Kabine" for her to get to know the work of these young women (Rathhaus. 1930b: 1). At the end of her visit, she declares this room an "island of joy amidst a bourgeois commercial enterprise" because, paradoxically, it is only here that mannequins are allowed to be human, have conversations, forge friendships and even read books (Rathhaus. 1930a: 2).

While Rathhaus observed the inner workings of the "Kabine," medical student Hanna Helm experienced first hand what it was to become a mannequin in a typical Berlin clothes company. She pursued this job as a quick way to earn money for her tuition fee. In 1930, the magazine *Uhu* published Helm's essay in a series of sobering reports about women working in service industries. As Helm decides to apply for training at the mannequin school ("Mannequin-Ausbildungs-Institut"), she quickly realizes that the very first step on this career path is to accept one's own reduction to a body with an exemplary size. In lieu of an interview or any verbal exchange, she is promptly being measured:

"Eine Frau, die mich erst gar nicht begrüßt. Sie mustert mich nur und schlingt das Zentimetermaß um mich: Brust, Taille, Hüfte. Jedesmal wirft das Auge einen Blick auf den Zentimeterstrich, den der Daumennagel eingeklemmt hält. Dann erst fängt sie an zu reden. 'Ja, Fräulein, sagt sie, Sie haben Chancen'" (Helm 1930: 55-56).

The eager candidate has "potential" because she fits size 44. In fact, all living mannequins in Berlin were strictly required to maintain a size 42 (44 at the most) in order to retain their jobs. When Helm starts working,

she finds her colleagues' slimness so unnatural, so unhealthy, that she suspects them of suffering various eating disorders in order to stay thin: "Sie haben eigentlich alle etwas, sonst könnten sie nicht so schlank sein. Es sind lebende Puppenständer" (Helm 1930: 59). The wax mannequins, unlike the live models, came in all possible sizes, since their manufacturers took into account the corporeal variety of the public (see Parrot 1981: 22, 44f; Stewart 2001: 88). Again, a paradox seems to be at work here: one is more likely to find greater variety and realism among the dead puppets than among the living mannequins regarded as mere "clothes racks."

The perfect sizes for mannequins at that time – 42 and 44 – stipulated that the chest measures should not exceed 92/96 cm, the waist 68/70 cm and the hips 96/102 cm (see Waidenschlager 1993: 24-25). In the 1920s, these measurements presented a considerable change in the ideal of female beauty, as the slimmer and youthful body was deemed the only one able to demonstrate the elegance of a dress. The new ideal personified by the mannequin targeted primarily the taste and imagination of middle-class and middle-aged female consumers, who were not only treated to fashion shows with exceptionally slender models but were also confronted with a profusion of advertisements for diets, exercise devices and slimming girdles. In reality, however, after looking at the clothes' perfect fit on the slim body of the mannequin, the customers would nevertheless order the dress in the larger size that would best fit them. Thus, if Weimar women in general were subjected to bodily discipline in the abstract, Foucauldian sense of the word, it was the young lower-class girls employed as mannequins, in particular, who were the concrete and immediate victims of the practices of bodily control, even while they actively participated in the mass-cultural practices disseminating this very same ideal.

As Helm's and other contemporary reports confirm, as soon as the Weimar mannequin was hired, her size (42/44), age (20 to 28) and a short, trendy first name (Mia, Hedy, Anny, Hertha, Elli, Nucki) became indispensable parts of her new, truncated and strictly controlled identity. It is not surprising, then, that for his feature in *Scherl's Magazin,* the journalist Dr. Leopold deemed it appropriate to introduce all five women he had interviewed only with their first name, age, size and hair color: "Minota v. Fr., 25 Jahre alt, Figur 42," "Nita M., 23 Jahre, Figur 42, dunkelblond," "Anita G., 25 Jahre, Figur 42. Merkwürdigerweise blond" (Leopold 1930: 189). Such an approach corresponds also to the widespread practice in which mannequins, unlike anyone else in the company and contrary to Germany's rigid social etiquette, were often referred to in public by their first names and addressed in an informal way (see

Tergit 1927: 100; Bud 1931: 49; Tieck 1925: 100; Helm 1930: 58). In addition, as a sign of further displacement of their personality, mannequins would often wear a tag dangling down their neck, which indicated the name (and sometimes the price) of the garment they were modeling (see Helm 1930: 57).

This strict enforcement of body measurements and the uniform guidelines for makeup and hairstyle often made the mannequins appear indistinguishable from each other, depriving them of their individuality: "Im Typus sind die fast alle gleich. Groß und schlank, ohne auffallende Haarfarbe," comments Dr. Leopold, who then proceeds to interview several Berlin mannequins (Leopold 1930: 189). "Sie sehen sich so ähnlich," observes the novice in the business, Hanna Helm. "Kastanienbraun oder blond, alle rosa angemalt, schwarze Striche und weiße Flächen im Gesicht – fünf Figuren in gleicher Größe" (Helm 1930: 56). A remarkably similar description is offered in Elsa Maria Bud's 1931 novel *Bravo, Musch!*: "Petra ist der modegerechte hundsmagere Halbknabe mit den hohen Beinen, zweiundvierziger Größe, an allen Enden gefärbt, gemalt, poliert und gestutzt. Sie wirkt vollkommen puppenhaft; […] leere Porzelanaugen starren langsam nach rechts und links" (Bud 1931: 45-56). Or as another commentator put it, the Berlin mannequins seem all to be wearing almost identical masks ("uniformierte Masken"; Tieck 1925: 100). But what many observers perceived as a lack of personality, individuality and emotions, mannequins themselves explained as the consequence of their compliance with the stringent requirements of the job. The blank facial expression also often hid the mannequin's sheer physical exhaustion: Helm reports that very often some of her colleagues would wear up to 150 dresses a day; changes have to be made at "racing speed," and no breaks are allowed in between (Helm 1930: 58-59). One of the interviewed mannequins provides even more detail of the daily routine: "Sie sehen selbst, wie hart wir arbeiten müssen. Jede von uns führt täglich mitunter 120 Keider vor, nämlich fünf- bis sechsmal unsere Kollektion" (Leopold 1930: 192). Adding to the physical strains of the mannequins' job is the constant realization that, for bosses and clients alike, they are nothing but lifeless bodies. "Ich selber existiere für ihn überhaupt nicht," says Helm about the customer who is inspecting the dress and checking on the quality of the fabric (Helm: 1930: 57). With time, the initial pleasure of putting on glamorous clothes and imagining oneself as someone else disappears. It is replaced by the "deadly boredom" of the salaried employees stuck in the drudgery of the everyday and by "disdain for the wealthy customers, who do not need to sell themselves" (Tieck 1925: 100). Medical student Helm was happy to collect her salary after a month, quit modeling and take up her studies right

away. For lack of any other choice, thousands of other professional mannequins had to continue participating in the incessant parade of fashions.

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As we turn our critical attention to the Weimar mannequins presenting fashion in display windows and couture salons, we are once again reminded how easy and compelling it has been (for both contemporary male observers and later critics) to reduce them to a surface onto which the characteristic markers of Weimar culture – mass production, uniformity and commercialization – are projected. Yet, as this investigation demonstrates, the disparate actual practices of fashion display elude a single, unequivocal classification. The mannequins were more than just a surface; their work life oscillated between performance and artificiality, between intense spectator attention and complete disregard, between stringent bodily discipline and narcissistic indulgence. It is this uncanny, multifaceted spectacle that continues to fascinate us.

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