The Ambivalence of Ornament: Silhouette Advertisements in Print and Film in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

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Introduction

In his influential account of the genealogy of new media, Lev Manovich has taught us to understand the age of digital cinema, at least in part, as a rehabilitation of traditions of animation that once stood at the forefront of moving image spectacles before the consolidation of narrative cinema. Although long marginalized as film's 'bastard relative', a children's art of the 'graphic' and the 'trick' considered inferior to the indexical promise of photographic realism, animation can today once again occupy centre stage as a 'serious' artistic activity – indeed as the cinema's very ontological ground. But the new prominence of animation has also created a broader opening for investigations into its multifaceted history in the twentieth century. This is true particularly in light of the increased interest today in other marginalized (or 'orphaned') filmic traditions such as industrial and educational film.

A good example of such under-researched areas of animation history can be seen in early product advertising. At the very historical moment when feature films were downplaying animation and special effects in the interest of narrative hegemony, advertising film followed precisely the opposite path. While the earliest advertisements consisted of live action scenarios, advertising film producers quickly turned towards tricks and animation. Thus the most prominent German advertising producer, Julius Pinschewer, having begun by making live-action advertisements such as Carmol tut wohl (Carmol Does You Good, 1911) and Die Suppe (The Soup, 1911), soon transitioned towards an aesthetics of trick photography in the tradition of Georges Méliès; in films such as Sektzauber (Champagne Magic, 1912) and Der Nähkasten (The Sewing Box, 1913), Pinschewer’s imps and conjurers literally appear to summon commodities to life on the screen. By the 1920s, advertising film overwhelmingly featured flat and drawn animation, and a panoply of graphic artists – such as Robert Lortac in France, Hans Fischerkoesen in Germany and Peter Eng in Austria – found regular work in the service of advertising film companies. In contrast to industrial film, which used live cinematography to demonstrate industrial processes and technological apparatuses, advertising film came to be considered precisely as a graphic art. Indeed, the concept of the ‘living poster’ emphasized just this point: for advertising film was, as one advertising brochure for the company Werbedienst GmbH suggested, understood as an adaption of well-known poster genres to the medium of moving images (plate 1). So engrained was this identification of advertising film with graphic arts by the mid-1920s that the advertising theorist Käthe Kurtzig, in a 1926 article for the journal Industrielle Psychotechnik entitled ‘Types of advertising film’ (Die Arten des Werbefilms), could provide a...
taxonomy of forms for product advertising that included no photographic films. Instead, Kurtzig classified advertising films according to three prevalent types of animation: the humorous cartoon caricature (which she rightly designates as the ‘most widely used’ type of advertising film), the ‘absolute’ advertising film of the type practised by Walter Ruttman, and the graceful silhouette.8

Of all the advertising forms outlined by Kurzig, the one that has remained the most enigmatic – and the one I want to explore in what follows – is surely the silhouette. If the form is remembered at all today, this is mostly on account of a handful of films made by Lotte Reiniger, who, in addition to her many animated fairy tales and vignettes, created at least two surviving silhouette advertisements for Pinschewer’s Werbefilm GmbH in the early 1920s: Das Geheimnis der Marquisin (The Marquise’s Secret, 1922) for Nivea skin products and Die Barcarole (1924) for Mauxion praline desserts (plate 2). Reiniger would also go on to make other advertisements in the 1930s, such as her ads for John Grierson’s GPO film unit in England, as well as several cultural films such as Das rollende Rad (The Rolling Wheel, 1933) on the history of the wheel in human civilization. But Reiniger’s work was only one part of a thriving culture of silhouette animation, particularly in Germany; other silhouette animators included Rudi Klemm and Toni Raboldt, Reiniger’s colleague at Hans Cürlis’s Institut für Kulturforschung (Institute for Cultural Research) in the early 1920s, both of whom made silhouette advertisements for Julius Pinschewer. There were even live action silhouette advertisements, in which human actors, filmed in stark backlighting, appeared as flattened shadows on the screen – effectively transforming photographic film into a two-dimensional, graphic art of shadow, contour and ornament (plate 3).9

These silhouette advertisements occupied a curious position within the landscape of advertising forms outlined by Kurzig. On the one hand, the silhouette was, on account of its association with an illustrious classical print silhouette tradition stretching back to the Enlightenment, seen as more ‘serious’ than the caricature advertisements of artists such as Peter Eng and Harry Jäger. Thus one writer for the film trade journal Der Kinematograph praised Reiniger for reviving what had been the ‘privileged form of entertainment in the eighteenth-century’ with practitioners including Goethe and Adele Schopenhauer.10 On the other hand, silhouette advertisements never quite enjoyed the authority of abstract animated advertisements such as those of Walter Ruttman and Guido Seeber, which generated much more attention in advertising trade journals.11 Couched between caricature and avant-garde, the silhouette film thus stood on precarious ground, hovering between high and low art, between abstraction and figuration, and – as Noga Wizansky has argued

1 ‘Das lebende Plakat’, examples of advertising films for Manoli cigarettes by Werbedienst G.m.b.H, from Die Reklame, 14, 1921, 128.
2 Still from Lotte Reiniger, Die Barcarole, 1924, advertisement for Mauxion chocolates.
in an insightful reading of Reiniger’s magisterial *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (The Adventures of Prince Achmed, 1926) – between magic and rationality.\(^{12}\)

The precariousness of the silhouette film was also clearly related to its ambivalent gendered positioning.\(^{13}\) Of all the forms of animation adapted to advertising in the 1920s, only the silhouette film provided a space in which a woman artist such as Reiniger could gain recognition. As recent art-historical research has shown, women in fact constituted a major force in nearly every sphere of art and visual culture in the Weimar Republic. Looking beyond the work of canonical artists such as Käthe Kollwitz and Hannah Höch, scholars have highlighted the widespread participation of women in photography, fashion and painting, where artists such as Gerta Overbeck, Alice Lex-Nerlinger and Jeanne Mammen actively intervened in the artistic representations of femininity.\(^{14}\)

But even as they reconstruct the history of women artists, historians have also sought to account for the very real ways in which these artists – who as Marsha Meskimmon points out often came through Kunstgewerbeschulen (arts and crafts schools) rather than prestigious art academies – continued to be marginalized in the 1920s.\(^{15}\) One form such marginalization could take was to deem women’s art insufficiently ‘modern’: too close to arts and crafts or (as in the case of Overbeck) too beholden to the conventions of pictorial realism to contribute to the currents of experimental abstraction commonly deemed to define high modernism.\(^{16}\)

Where women did participate in the avant-garde, they were often relegated to a secondary status or simply written out of the picture. A good example can be seen in the case of the Bauhaus, where women were formally accepted as equals but in practice segregated into the more ‘delicate’ arts of textiles, bookbinding and pottery.\(^{17}\)

Women artists in Weimar thus had to negotiate an artistic sphere characterized by a fundamental contradiction between the formal and legal declarations of equality and de facto forms of exclusion that persisted even in more ‘radical’ avant-garde circles.

A similar structure of marginalization characterized the sphere of experimental film. As Ingrid Westbrock long ago showed, women were widely involved in the work of filmmakers such as Richter, Ruttmann, Seeber and Viking Eggeling, but this involvement generally took the form of anonymous assistance behind the scenes.\(^{18}\) The silhouette film, on the other hand, allowed an artist like Reiniger to create films independently and sign off as the principal author. In this, the silhouette film followed upon a tradition of print silhouette already well established before the First World War, in which artists such as Käte Wolff and Adelheid Schimz gained prominence as designers and illustrators within the emerging field of graphic design (plate 4).\(^{19}\) It is surely not by chance that all of these artists tended to thematize the tool of the scissors in their works and promotional materials; for the scissors functioned precisely as insignia of the artistic talents to which these women were laying claim (plate 5 and plate 6). But like Hannah Höch’s kitchen knife, such accoutrements
also associated those talents with distinctly ‘feminine’ activities like embroidery or sewing. In the case of advertising, moreover, such a ‘feminine’ coding also translated into a certain gendered notion of consumption itself, as the silhouette film was deemed an appropriate medium for advertising delicate or refined wares. Thus Käthe Kurtzig, in the article on types of advertising film cited above, prescribed the silhouette film above all as the proper form for advertising ‘graceful things such as perfume, flowers, delicate fabrics and sweets’.20

Reading such assessments today, it would surely be a mistake to champion the silhouette film under the guise of an essentialist ‘feminine aesthetic’. But we would
also be amiss to ignore the way in which silhouettes did provide an important forum in which women artists could gain public recognition. In what follows, I want to think more broadly about the genealogy and the stakes of this gendered positioning as it intersected with the emergence of advertising as a graphic art in early twentieth-century Germany. How, this article asks, did the silhouette come to be associated with both delicacy and design? How, secondly, did this association enable the emergence of an important framework within which women artists could practise and under what constraints? Finally, what kind of modernity was the silhouette advertisement selling?

An Ornamental Aesthetic

The silhouette's association with delicacy is borne out repeatedly in the aesthetics of the advertising films themselves. Nearly all of the surviving silhouette advertisements from the 1920s privilege one of two visual settings and motifs: orientalism or rococo. The orientalist strain, largely spurred on by the publication of studies such as Bernd Melchers' Chinesische Schattenschnitte (Chinese Silhouettes, 1921), is present in many silhouette films from the 1920s, and scholars have rightly underscored the ways in which Reiniger's Prince Achmed in part recasts the cinema itself as an art of shadows derived from ancient and oriental traditions. In advertising, this orientalist strain characterized films such as the 1923 perfume advertisement, Khasana das Tempelmädchen (Khasana the Temple Girl), in which a maiden transformed by Buddha into a delicate flower cries refined 'tears of love' into a Khasana perfume bottle. Another orientalist silhouette advertisement entitled Die chinesische Nachtigall (The Chinese Nightingale, 1928) adapts Hans Christian Andersen's eponymous tale to tout the superiority of Tri-Ergon sound-film technology by having a fictional 'Mr Tri-Ergon' capture the nightingale's delicate song for the Chinese emperor. Examples of the rococo advertisement, on the other hand, include Reiniger's Das Geheimnis der Marquisin and Die Barcarole, both of which unfold in courtly settings, as well as Pinschewer's live-action champagne advertisements Colombinchen (1921) and Faun und Mädchen (Faun and Girl, 1921). Both the orientalist and the rococo settings served to associate the silhouette advertisement with cultures marked, in the imagination of the time, by extreme refinement, delicacy and lightness. And indeed, the aesthetics of the films themselves underscore this association, not only through the lightness of the paper figures, but also through the intricate use of ornamentation – the plush curtains in the princess's bedroom in Das Geheimnis der Marquisin; the delicate curvature of the bridge design and the vegetation in Die Barcarole; the palm trees, curtains and arabesque temple interiors in Khasana das Tempelmädchen, etc. Such ornamentation was a prominent characteristic of the silhouette film as a whole and one that Reiniger explicitly espoused already in the very title of her first independent film, Das Ornament des verliebten Herzens (The Ornament of the Love-Struck Heart, 1919), which was finished just a year before Das Geheimnis der Marquisin and could in many ways be seen as a model for the latter film.

But beyond the visual layout of the film, this ornamental quality also characterized the way in which silhouette figures were made to move on the screen. In an article on silhouette films for the 1924 Kulturfilmbuch (The Cultural Film Book) by Edgar Beyfuß (then director of the section for Cultural and Educational films at the Ufa), Reiniger explained that her articulated silhouettes, while building on

6 Still from Lotte Reiniger, Aschenputtel [Cinderella], 1922, prologue.
the tradition of marionettes, differed from the latter precisely because of their weightlessness and their position lying flat on an animation table. As a result of the figures’ flatness in two-dimensional space, the laws of mechanics and gravity are cancelled out: ‘The Puppets lay flat on the surface. They are missing that centre of gravity which gives the marionette such a charming unreality. … But in exchange, they are masters of this surface, and there is no limit to their delicate mobility.’ Reiniger’s characterization of traditional marionettes in terms of a ‘centre of gravity’ (Schwerpunkt) is a clear reference to Heinrich von Kleist’s famous essay ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ (‘On the Marionette Theatre’, 1810) in which the mechanical play of the marionettes’ limbs around a ‘Schwerpunkt’ is seen as a form of mathematical grace unattainable by self-conscious humans. Kleist’s essay was still well known in the 1920s and cited often in dance criticism. In some respects, Reiniger’s silhouettes share the marionette’s ‘charming unreality’, but their ‘delicate mobility’ also differs from the mechanical marionette in its capacity as an unbounded movement. Lying flat on a surface rather than inhabiting three-dimensional space, Reiniger’s puppets were not limited, in their range of movement, by any centring instance or earthly principle (Schwerpunkt). While their jerky trick movement could not embody the kinds of vital rhythms and flows characteristic of modern dance – or the cinema of Reiniger’s French counterpart Germaine Dulac – they did nonetheless aspire, as Reiniger states elsewhere in the same essay, to become ‘endlessly mobile’ (unendlich beweglich) (204). Indeed, this aspiration was built into their very mechanics, as Reiniger’s puppets were articulated in numerous parts of the body. In the same article, Reiniger offers a kind of ‘instruction manual’ to readers on how to build a silhouette for animation, in which she tells readers to cut no fewer than sixteen separate pieces (head, hands, upper thigh, etc.) and join them at fifteen points of articulation. In her effort to impart her puppets with an ‘endless mobility’, Reiniger sought, one might say, to create a form of ‘ornament’ in the temporal sphere: an ornamental movement, unfettered by any centring principle and – like the many morphing figures in Reiniger’s Achmed film – unlimited in its free unfolding by any reality principle.

It was partly this association with ornament that made the silhouette appear as an ‘appropriate’ medium for women artists in the early twentieth century. Just as the Bauhaus channelled women students away from the constructivist domain of architecture and metal working into ‘areas of ornamentation and decoration’ such as textiles, so the world of experimental film tended to divide along gender lines, where ‘constructivist’ forms appeared as the reserve of male artists such as Richter and Ruttmann while women artists were relegated – at least publically – to the ornamental form of the silhouette. As we have seen, it was precisely this gender...
division that made silhouette advertisements appear as an apt medium for advertising ‘feminine’ products.

But this association with ornamentation also made the silhouette the object of a distinct ambivalence in advertising discourses. In her article on the varieties of advertising film cited above, Kurtzig contends that the danger of the silhouette film – and the silhouette is the only genre of animated advertisement to present a ‘danger’ – is precisely that it might succumb to the temptation of ornamentation, drowning out the object advertised with the free-play of decorative forms. Whereas caricature favours a direct, ‘objective’ (sachlich) mode of representation, silhouette functions by creating a less definable ‘Stimmung’ (mood) and exerting an extraordinary ‘aesthetic charm’ over viewers. But in so doing, Kurtzig argues, these films also risk losing the focus on the commodity being advertised: ‘In this type of film, to be sure, there is always the danger that the film will lose itself within the details of the action and the propaganda content will never find as clear an expression as would perhaps be desirable.’

Kurtzig’s reservations can perhaps help us to understand a particular feature of Reiniger’s silhouette advertisements. For the presence of ornamentation in those films is not, in fact, ‘boundless’. On the contrary, it is countered by a pervasive use of symmetrical and centred compositions, as well as the consistent presence of binding frames within the image. The symmetrical bridges and enclosed carriages of Das Geheimnis der Marquisin, and above all the many frames within the frame, although often displaying rococo-curves, nonetheless function to enclose and contain the action, thus directing our attention to the centre of the screen and eventually to the product and its trademark (plate 7). The pervasiveness of such framing devices in Reiniger’s advertising films stands, moreover, in marked contrast to her first independent film Das Ornament des verliebten Herzens from 1919 in which the two lovers literally appear to emerge from the ornamental figures like phasmatodea from the twigs of a tree, only to dissolve into the abstract ornaments once again at the end of the film (plate 8). If Reiniger attempted to contain such a proliferation of ornamentation in her advertising films a year later, this transformation can be seen precisely as a reaction to advertising discourse; by focusing spectatorial attention on the action and the product, Reiniger’s frames function precisely to ward off the ‘danger’ of ornamentation described by Kurtzig.

**Historical Transformations**

There is more to say about these associations between the silhouette, ornament and femininity, and I will return to the topic below. Before doing so, however, it is worth pointing out that such associations, as well as the predilection for baroque and rococo in silhouette advertisements, might seem surprising when one considers the history of the medium. According to most art-historical accounts, eighteenth-century silhouette portraiture emerged largely as a reaction to the ornamental style of rococo aesthetics. As is well known, the word ‘silhouette’ was derived from the name of Etienne de Silhouette, the stringent finance minister under Louis XV, whose name helped to spawn the expression ‘à la silhouette’ designating work executed on the cheap. This is clearly the sense that eventually became attached to the silhouette portraits, which – even at the height of their popularity in the courts of Europe – were understood as a cheaper alternative to expensive miniatures. By simplifying representation, reducing detail and emphasizing the contour, the silhouette thus seemed to offer a ‘poorer’ version of the painted portrait. But as Penley Knipe
has argued, it also offered a more stringent and monumental alternative to baroque painting, one that was largely understood as a means of reviving the forms of antique portraiture. This, indeed, was the very narrative that silhouette historians of Reiniger’s day espoused. In her 1911 History of Silhouettes, for example, Emily Jackson depicted the rise of silhouettes in the eighteenth century as part of an effort to revive ‘the Greek purity of line … after the over-gorgeous detail in all domestic decoration under Le Roi Soleil’.31

But the value of the silhouette for the eighteenth century lay not only in its formal austerity; it also resided in the silhouette’s perceived accuracy as a trace of the real. Although hand-cut silhouettes already existed in the eighteenth century, the dominant form was that of a traced outline of the shadow cast onto a surface by light meeting a human body. If this act of tracing was first performed by the human hand, it would increasingly aspire to mechanical precision with the introduction of tracing apparatuses such as the ‘physiognotrace’ device, which became popular attractions in places such as the Peale Museums in Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore (where visitors lined up to have their own portraits traced) (plate 9).32 According to Jackson, such tracing devices were used in early nineteenth-century Europe by showmen such as J. P. Tussaud (son of Marie Tussaud), and there were even silhouette automatons in the tradition of the famous card readers and chess players, which ‘by machinery scratched [the visitor’s] outline of a profile on card’.33

It is no doubt this status as a quasi-indexical trace that endowed the silhouette with the pathos of a keepsake.4 But the perceived accuracy of the mechanical trace also made the silhouette an appealing form for the eighteenth-century science of physiognomy. For Johann Kaspar Lavater, the silhouette, although the ‘feeblest’ (schwächste) of portrait types, provided the ‘most truthful’ (wahreste) and ‘accurate’ (getreueste) representation of the human countenance. In the original German edition of the Physiognomische Fragmente (1775–78), Lavater directly attributed this accuracy to the status of the trace, which offered an ‘immediate imprint [Abdruck] of nature … which no artist, however talented he may be, can achieve with his unaided hand’.35 To this end, Lavater recommended a tracing apparatus consisting of a chair designed to hold the body still as the light threw the head’s shadow onto an adjustable pane of glass to which oiled paper was attached for tracing (plate 10).36 In later English and French editions of the Physiognomy, Lavater
would increasingly call on readers to analyse silhouettes by means of measurements and the addition of ‘horizontal, vertical and oblique lines’, the relations of which the physiognomist could then study.\textsuperscript{37} Lavater’s use of lines and measurements to analyse the image clearly connects the silhouette to a tradition of scientific illustration – what Gottfried Böhm has described as the use of images as ‘instruments of knowledge’ – in which the reduction of surface verisimilitude favours a more abstract engagement with the image, its ‘reading’ for informational content. With its inherent flatness and lack of surface verisimilitude, the silhouette could conform ideally to this tradition of scientific imagery such as anatomical crosscuts and maps.\textsuperscript{38}

In its status as a trace, the shadow silhouette would, of course, soon be surpassed by that other form of mechanical light and shadow inscription: photography.\textsuperscript{39} Photography would go on, moreover, to become the principal medium of both portraiture and scientific physiognomy (in the criminological studies of Cesare Lombroso, Francis Galton and others) in the nineteenth century. Early historians of the silhouette tended to see this period as marked by silhouette’s decline from its ideal manifestation in classically inspired portraiture. Jackson, for example, argued that in the mid-nineteenth century, ‘the craft of the silhouettist fell into disrepute when it had become part of the curriculum of young ladies’ schools; unskillful artists itinerated, pursuing their craft in booths and at fairs.’\textsuperscript{40} But it is important to note that the rise of photography didn’t so much abolish the silhouette as it occasioned a transformation of the medium. Already, the emergence of mechanical tracing devices coincided with the newfound prominence of an alternative tradition of silhouette fabrication that would still influence modernist artists such as Reiniger: namely that of the virtuoso scissor artist. While scissor-cutting was not a new practice in the early nineteenth century, its status as a rival to machines was. Thus Auguste Edouart – the most celebrated scissor artist of the early nineteenth century, who worked in France, England and the United States cutting portraits of figures ranging from Paganini to US Senators – boasted of his ability to cut likenesses of a sitter as accurate as those produced by tracing apparatus using only his bare scissors (plate 11).\textsuperscript{41} Whatever the reality of Edouard’s talents, his self-fashioning and his subsequent legend clearly point to a new need to position the artist in competition with mechanical devices. The English artist William James Hubbard similarly claimed in 1825 to be able to cut silhouettes ‘without the least aid from drawing, machine or any kind of outline’.\textsuperscript{42}

With the rise of photography, this transformation would take yet another turn as silhouette images gradually veered away from their long-held ‘documentary’ function. Indeed, in a manner prefiguring the later history of animation in the cinema traced by Manovich, the era of photography

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{9} Charles Wilson Peale, ‘Physiognotrace’, 1803. Watercolour, 8\textfrac{1}{2} × 7\textfrac{3}{4} inches. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Chair for tracing physiognomies, from Johann Caspar Lavater, \textit{Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniß und Menschenliebe}, Leipzig, 1776, insert facing p. 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Auguste Edouart, portrait of Paganini (early nineteenth century), from Emily Jackson, \textit{History of Silhouettes}, 1911, p. L (plates section).
\end{itemize}
did not so much suppress the silhouette as it marginalized it, forcing it to migrate into less ‘serious’ domains, particularly that of children’s illustration. Hans Christian Andersen’s work in this regard is well known. In Germany, the tendency was represented by illustrators such as Paul Konewka and Karl Fröhlich. Fröhlich, who specialized in illustrated fables, verses and tales for children, was seen by his contemporaries as the quintessential children’s artist (plate 12). As one writer described it in 1862:

[Readers] already know him, the many-talented scissor artist, … who can create an entire world of wonders from a tiny piece of paper: flowers and fruits, houses and trees, people and animals, old Fritz on his horse. … He does all of this with the most graceful brio and an amazing sense of poetry, which is all the more irresistible the more it appears as effortless and the more it seems to deny, as it were, its own artistry. … The many house fathers and mothers who have given their children Fröhlich’s ‘Silhouettes in Rhymes’ as a loving Christmas gift know well that he also shapes language and verses with rare talent, and that his rhymes conquer the hearts of children as rapidly as his pictures.43

Several points here are worth emphasizing. First, the new scissor artist (the ‘Tausendkünstler mit der Schere’) is no longer seen as competing with a machine – be it a tracing apparatus or photographic camera – for accuracy. Rather, he is understood as a magician, whose spectacle resides precisely in his ability to invent worlds from paper; crucially, those worlds are now defined as worlds of wondrous apparitions — ‘eine ganze Welt der Wunder’ — and meant to solicit reactions of astonishment rather than being understood as traces or evidence of the real. Secondly, the silhouette, far from promoting scientifi c study, is now understood as a ‘naïve’ art, and this is precisely what makes it appropriate for children according to the Biedermeier codes of the nineteenth century. Whereas Edouart’s virtuosity lay in his ability to make likenesses, Fröhlich’s resides in his ability to create fantastical worlds and his appearance of artlessness.

All of this points to a new defi nition of the silhouette: no longer a trace, a memento or a scientifi c aid, the form was now associated with a kind of visual ‘innocence’ and with a new regime of children’s pedagogy largely opposed to the ‘adult’ world of photography. As such, the consumption of silhouettes could readily be associated with ideas about parenting, and thus easily reconciled with notions of ‘motherliness’. It is precisely this space of children’s silhouette art, moreover, that would come to be occupied by numerous women artists of the turn of the century. After the republication of Fröhlich’s Maiblumen in 1913 and a second volume Schattenrisse in 1914 by Ferdinand Avenarius – editor of the journal Der Kunstwart (The Guardian of Art) and a key proponent of ‘aesthetic education’ in Germany – one fi nds an increasing number of editions of literature for young readers illustrated and signed by women. The Leipzig artist Adelheid Schimz, for example, produced silhouette illustrations for editions of Hans Christian Andersen’s tales, as well as the Bekanntnisse einer schönen Seele (Confessions of a Beautiful Soul) from Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship, 1796) and
Similarly, the well-known Berlin silhouette artist Käte Wolff fashioned silhouette illustrations for Marie Beeg’s 1920 book *Sonnenscheinchen: ein Buch für liebe kleine Kinder* (*Sunshine: A Book for Lovely Little Children*)45 and Margarete Schreiber fashioned the illustrations for Himmelsvolk, *Ein Buch von Blumen, Tieren und Gott* (*People of the Sky: A Book of Flowers, Animals and God*, 1920) by Waldemar Bonsels (better known today for his children’s story *Die Biene Maja*) (plate 14). It was this tradition of illustration, moreover, that defined the conventions that Lotte Reiniger would take up in her many children’s films such as *Der fliegende Koffer* (The Flying Suitcase, 1921), *Dornröschen* (Sleeping Beauty, 1922), *Aschenputtel* (Cinderella, 1922), *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (1926), *Der chinesische Nachtigal* (1927), *Dr Doolittle* (1928) and numerous others. This is not to reduce Reiniger’s films as such to the status of mere literary ‘illustrations’. Many scholars have rightly pointed
to the differences between her films and their literary forerunners, and already in the 1920s, critics such as Béla Balázs – perhaps the greatest champion of the cinema’s specificity as a visual medium – defended Reiniger’s films as autonomous works of visual art, unbefehden to any literary ‘fable’.46 But the very fact that Balázs felt the need to defend Reiniger against the charge of illustration points to the historical horizon of expectations in which her filmic fairy tales were made and distributed.

If the silhouette appeared as such an appropriate genre for these illustrated children’s stories, this was precisely on account of its newfound status as a medium opposed to the documentary medium of photography: that of a ‘naïve’ art whose flatness holds the illusionism of three-dimensional representation at bay. Thus one reviewer of Reiniger’s films, asking how they managed to deal with ‘adult’ themes of violence without offending the child’s sensibility, concludes that the difference lies precisely in the opposition between silhouette and photography.

The technique of the silhouette resides precisely in stylization. This form is predicated on a conscious renunciation of the principle of naturalism, for the silhouette – and this also goes for the silhouette film – is and remains absolutely two-dimensional, whereas photography gives us the impression of three-dimensionality. This natural stylization, which has nothing arbitrary about it and thus leaves no impression of artistry, makes things appear in a light that naturalism cannot attain. For naturalism appears raw and abrasive, whereas the silhouette remains light and graceful.47

We are clearly a long way from Lavater’s ‘accurate’ portraits: no longer understood as a forerunner or competitor to photography, silhouette – in its two-dimensionality and its naïve ‘grace’ – now appears as a medium inherently opposed to photography’s brute naturalism. As I hope my preceding analysis has made clear, this opposition resulted not from any inherent qualities of the medium, but rather from a thoroughly historical process, in which the silhouette was repositioned from a medium of mechanical inscription to a medium of childlike fantasy, from a proto-photographic technology to an anti-photographic world of ‘wonders’.

From Design to Advertising
But what, then, of advertising? What made this ‘naïve’ art appear as such an appropriate medium for selling products? Part of the answer to this question

lies in an increasing identification of the ‘feeble’ silhouette with the emerging concept of design around the turn of the century. Here, too, the silhouette appeared interesting precisely on account of its perceived opposition to the three-dimensional illusionism of photography. In an insightful essay, the art historian Nancy Forgione has shown how modernist painters also rediscovered the silhouette around 1900 as a device for overcoming photographic illusionism (albeit with different motivations from the proponents of children’s literature). For symbolist artists and theorists such as Édouard Dujardin and Paul Gauguin, the silhouette held out the promise of surpassing naturalist and impressionist painting to attain a dimension beyond surface detail. By eliminating external markings and reducing the image to contour, the silhouette – which these artists also associated with mythical interpretations of the shadow – gestured towards the more ‘intimate reality’ or ‘essence’ of a person or object.48 In stylistic terms, this cultivation of autonomous silhouettes conformed to a wider modernist tendency to overcome three-dimensional illusionism and a ‘new respect for the surface plane’,49 and Forgione rightly sees this role of the silhouette as an early indication of tendencies towards ‘design’50 and even ‘abstraction’51 that would come to the forefront in the early twentieth century.

Given this association between the silhouette and the anti-mimetic thrust of modernist art, it is perhaps no coincidence if a critic such as Rudolf Arnheim, writing some three decades later, would see in Reiniger’s animated silhouettes an ideal form with which to reclaim the cinema as ‘art’ in opposition to the increasingly dominant associations of cinema with photographic realism.52 But the flat aesthetics of the silhouette also corresponded more closely to a developing discourse on design, applied arts and advertising. In Germany, early twentieth-century design theorists regularly discussed the silhouette, and they valued the form precisely on account of its resistance to three-dimensional illusionism.

It is here that the silhouette began to be seen as an appropriate medium for advertising, which was emerging in the early twentieth century not only as a practice, but as a new theoretical discipline with close ties to both design and the new field of psychotechnics.53 In a 1919 article for the journal Das Plakat entitled ‘Die Silhouette in der Reklamekunst’ (The silhouette in advertising art), the critic Rudolf Uebe argued that silhouettes conformed ideally to the new dictates of pictorial advertising (plate 15).54 Once again, Uebe emphasized the unmistakable flatness of the silhouette, its reduction of depth to two dimensions as well as its reduction of colour to two contrasting fields and its emphasis on line and contour – all of which align the art of the silhouette with that of the poster (what Uebe refers to repeatedly as the ‘Flächenplakat’ or the ‘surface poster’).55 More specifically, Uebe argues that such reductive black and white designs fulfil all the requirements of an effective advertisement. They are, first of all, more appropriate for mass reproduction on account of

![Image](Image)
Silhouette Advertisements in Print and Film in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

their relatively low production costs (compared to colour images), and they are particularly well suited to usage in mass-produced newspapers, where the low quality paper and ink precluded the subtle mixtures or gradations that might be appropriate for glossy magazines. But above all, Uebe insists that the correct manipulation of black and white contrast can help silhouette advertisements to stand out in a crowded market of images vying for readerly attention: ‘The contrast of the black silhouette with the white paper background guarantees that the advertisement will get noticed, and even the cheapest and most rapid rotary presses will still leave enough ink on the paper for the advertisement to stand out clearly from the rest of the newspaper page.’ Here, Uebe is delineating a new understanding of the silhouette around 1920, one in which the criteria of efficacy now revolve entirely around the image’s ability to stand out from other images and attract the attention of would-be consumers.

This refunctioning of silhouette illustration into a mode of design only makes sense when read against the emerging discourse of advertising psychology. Spurred on by the new prominence of propaganda during the First World War, psychologists in the Weimar Republic set out to found a new discipline of advertising psychology grounded in empirical laboratory experiments. Of central concern, within this new science, was the status of images, and advertising psychologists unanimously agreed that the advertising image could no longer reckon with the kind of contemplative or immersive reception brought to bear on traditional art, but rather had to appeal to the fleeting glances of consumers on the go: of pedestrians and streetcar passengers, of newspaper readers, department store shoppers and fairground visitors. Using the rapid windows of tachistoscopes, these psychologists thus sought to test every imaginable aspect of the image layout.
size, placement, colour combinations, font, etc.) for its ability to attract the fleeting attention of mobile spectators in the blink of an eye. As a result, they called for precisely the kinds of qualities that Uebe attributed to the silhouette: flatness, sharp contours, and above all high contrast. In a programmatic article for the trade journal *Die Reklame* from 1920, for example, the director of the newly founded Institut für Wirtschaftspychologie (Institute for Economic Psychology) in Berlin, Walther Moede, exhorted advertising designers to heed what he called the ‘principle of the fleeting glance’ (*Prinzip des flüchtenden Blickes*) and the ‘law of contrast’ (*Gesetz des Kontrastes*); in an environment of rapid glances and short attention, Moede argued, the intensity of sensory impressions is entirely dependent upon their contrast with other, surrounding impressions. Recalling Uebe’s analyses of silhouettes in newspapers, Moede demonstrated how to use black and white contrast in order to create newspaper advertisements that stood out from neighbouring images (plate 16). Similarly, in the first full-length book on advertising psychology in Germany, the Würzburg psychologist Theodor König argued that the use of contrast – of black and white or complementary primary colours – was the most effective means of increasing an advertisement’s power over the attention, and König also included numerous images of newspaper advertisements to demonstrate the use of high-contrast and simplified forms to make advertisements stand out on the page. In his article on silhouettes in advertising, Uebe repeatedly invokes such psychological criteria in measuring the value of silhouettes. ‘This image arrests the reader and captures his attention’, we read at one point. ‘He will then stay with the advertisement and read the name of the company.’ Or again, discussing trademarks, Uebe writes:

These trademarks should stand out as much as possible, a trait achieved by means of the relatively large field of black, and they should also imprint themselves as much as possible on the viewer’s memory so that she does not confuse them with other trademarks. This is achieved, once again, by the clear and significant contour line that such flat drawings demand.

Uebe’s reinterpretation of the silhouette in terms of advertising – and his inclusion of trademarks in particular – suggests that we might rethink our understanding of early twentieth-century ‘silhouette’ illustration to include an entire domain of visual culture not normally associated with the term. Around the 1910s, and corresponding with the rise of advertising psychology itself, advertising designers began to transform poster art to privilege the kinds of simplified and highly contrasting layouts called for by the psychologists. The name most often associated with this new style was Lucien Bernhard, whose ‘Sachplakate’ (objective posters) – using radically reduced layouts to focus attention on the object advertised – were seen by most as the

best examples of good advertising layout. While not all of Bernhard’s advertisements employed silhouette, it should come as no surprise that he would take an interest in the form. One such Bernhard advertisement, made in 1921 for Heimlicht home movie projectors, earned the special praise of the editors of the trade journal *Seidels Reklame*, who praised its ‘effects of black and white’ (Schwarzweiß-Wirkung) as well as its reductive representation of people through elementary forms (plate 17). Such reductive planes of black and white, the writers argued, were vastly superior to earlier versions of the Heimlicht advertisement that had employed a ‘picture-like representation that gives the impression a traced photograph’. Reducing ‘photographic’ realism to simplified planes of contrasting black and white design, Bernhard’s advertisement – which also existed in poster form and was exhibited at the 1922 Deutscher Gewerbeschau (German Industrial Trade Fair) in Munich – conformed ideally to the new dictates of advertising psychology with its suspicion of traditional aesthetics and its call to capture the fleeting attention of consumers in movement. But this new anti-photographic style of simplified planes and high contrast was useful above all for trademark design, a form mastered by Wilhelm Deffke (plate 18). Deffke’s many trademarks, collected in his book *Handelsmarken und Fabrikzeichen* (*Trademarks and Logos*, 1918), were touted as models of a new era of ‘objective’ (sachlich) design. As Adolf Behne described in another article for *Seidels Reklame*, they embodied a brave new era in which ‘painting’ (Malerei) had given way to ‘image design’ (Bildgestaltung) and the ‘artificially organized surface’ (künstlich organisierte Fläche).

Such terms as Gestaltung, combined with the predilection for elementary shapes in these advertising images, clearly point to an affinity between the minimalist aesthetics of advertising design and the discourse of the constructivist avant-garde. This affinity also implicated – although not always under this name – the silhouette. Indeed, one could offer many examples of streamlined ‘silhouettes’ in the tradition of Bernhard’s posters in the early twentieth century. For instance, a constructivist counterpart to Lotte Reiniger’s silhouette puppets can be seen in the ‘mechanical dancing figure’ of De Stijl artist Vilmos Huszar, a mechanical puppet constructed of rectangular blocks and intended for shadow performance. One should also include in this category the work of Hans Richter, whose ground-breaking *Rhythmus 21* was in fact a silhouette film in the strict sense: paper cut-outs placed over a back-lit surface and filmed from above (plate 19). Indeed, Richter’s signature destabilization
of figure and ground in his rhythm films finds its precise counterpart in the pages of advertising theorists, who understood the relativity of figure and ground better than anyone; the famous reversal of figure and ground in Rhythmus 21, for example, echoed examples provided by König, who explained to his readers that they could increase the effectiveness of newspaper advertisements by reversing the black and white fields of advertisements in order to stand out from the surrounding images. Similarly, Uebe touted the reversibility of black and white by showing a pair of silhouette trademarks, both of which are still in use today: one, an advertisement for ‘Schwarzkopf’ shampoo, shows a black head on a white background, while the other, an advertisement for Oetker’s baking powder, displays a white head on a black background (plate 20). Such reversals, incidentally, were motivated not only by psychological theories of perception, but also by concerns of content. Thus the text in the Oetker’s ad reads: ‘Ein heller Kopf verwendet nur Dr. Oetkers Backpulver’ [Bright heads only use Dr Oetker’s Baking Powder].67 Reiniger herself followed this tradition in Das Geheimnis der Marquisin, where the use of white figures over a black background – a method Reiniger only employed in this film – underscores the lady’s ‘snow white complexion’ (Teint wie Schnee) obtained through Nivea facial cream.

But how, we might ask at this point, should we understand the relation between the ‘elementary’ silhouette of Deffke and Richter and the tradition of the ornamental silhouette practised by Reiniger and her predecessors? One model might be offered by Jacques Rancière, who has proposed an understanding of the modernist ‘surface of design’ as a space that could accommodate models of the ‘type’ stemming both from art nouveau and constructivist currents. For Rancière, both the balletic movement of Mallarmé’s graphic poetry and the minimalist forms of Peter Behrens’ trademark designs took part in a broader reorganization of visual culture around 1900, in which artists sought not simply to craft images, but to forge models for new modes of communal existence. In an era marked by the demise of shared (religious and courtly) symbols, Rancière argues, both the art nouveau and constructivism undertook an aesthetic ‘reconfiguration of a shared material world by working on its basic elements: the forms and objects of everyday life’.68

Certainly, Rancière’s characterization of the modernist surface as a space for the repartitioning of the sensible could provide a useful model for understanding the power and attraction of the flat silhouette: its capacity to appeal to book illustrators no less than trademark designers, to accommodate ornamental fantasies as well as streamlined industrial forms. But in its all-encompassing generality, Rancière’s model tends to gloss over the very palpable tensions inhabiting these different moments in the early twentieth century. The reductive ‘Sachlichkeit’ characterizing advertising layouts such as those of Deffke, Bernhard and Behrens were not simply one style among others, but rather a programmatic declaration of a rationalist principle – namely that of efficiency. ‘For advertising psychology’, explained Theodor König, ‘it is important to
follow the “energetic imperative”, i.e. to work towards attaining a maximum of success with minimal means.” Such an imperative informed the suspicion of ornament through and through, no less for Adolf Loos than for constructivist advertising designers. That suspicion is still at work in 1927, for example, when the psychotechnician Fritz Giese once again used Bernhard’s advertisement for Heimlicht projectors in his book *Methoden der Wirtschaftspsychologie* (Methods of Economic Psychology) to show readers how systematically to improve the ‘efficiency’ of an advertisement by transforming an ornamental silhouette into a minimalist one (plate 21). It is also palpable in Pinschewer and Rudi Klemm’s Tri-Ergon sound advertisement, where the superiority of European technology over the court of the Chinese Emperor is rendered visually in the juxtaposition between geometrical and ornamental silhouette compositions. Like Adolf Loos, advertising theorists considered ornament to be a problem, and a potential hindrance to the advertisement’s power.

**Ornament and the Negotiations of Aesthetic Modernity**

With this tension between the ornamental and the ‘elementary’ silhouette, we thus return, once again, to the ambivalence of ornament with which I began. In his article on the silhouette in advertising, Uebe did, in fact, include both ornamental and streamlined variants, as well as some examples that drew on both tendencies. He also included several examples of silhouette advertisements by women, such as Hertha von Gumppenberg’s intricate advertisements for Feist Cabinet champagne, which in their lightness and grace resemble the Kupferberg film advertisements of Pinschewer (plate 22). Indeed, one would be amiss not to remark here that advertising itself, along with book illustration, constituted one of the central fields in which women artists found work in the early twentieth century. Both practices, in fact, formed part of a
broader domain of ‘applied’ or ‘graphic’ arts opposed to the traditional aesthetics of ‘creative’ art. In another article from Das Plakat from 1919 entitled ‘Frauen im Dienste der Werbekunst’ (Women in the service of advertising art), Anna Adelheid Goetze previewed the work of some of the most prominent women artists in this new professional sphere, many of whom worked as both advertising artists and book illustrators. Goetze was well aware of the moment in which she is writing, which she described as ‘a powerful tremor’ (ein ungeheures Beben) in political and social life marked by war, revolution and the emergence of a new democracy. And she situates her analysis precisely within the context of women’s newfound legal and political equality — a formal equality which, she admits, has yet to translate into the cultural sphere: ‘Particularly in the domain of art, people have felt compelled again and again to deny that women possess the capacity for genuine productivity and truly creative artistic activity.’ But as her article was meant to show, the new arena of ‘graphic’ or ‘applied’ arts was allowing women artists to emerge at a systematic level (or as she put it, as more than simply ‘exceptions’ [Ausnahmen]): ‘But remarkably, in recent decades, we have seen women excelling with beautiful achievements precisely on these terrains [of applied arts]. And in the area of artistic advertising, as well, women have, as readers know well, had great success.’ Of the ten graphic artists profiled in Goetze’s article, two — Adelheid Schimz and Käte Wolff — worked almost exclusively in silhouette illustration, and Goetze reserves particular praise for Schimz’s ‘talent for excellent decorative advertising art’ (Begabung für vornheme dokorative Reklamekunst) and her ‘ornamental’ ex-libris bookplates.

Such ‘applied’ women artists, creating art in the service of products and book illustration, should, no doubt, be seen as forerunners to the film work of Lotte Reiniger. Here, moreover, the connotations of the term ‘ornament’ went beyond its status as a stylistic designation to suggest a functional definition of the very role assigned to the new applied artist: that of ‘ornamenting’ something else. Both Goetze and Uebe refer to book illustration in this sense as ‘Buchschmuck’ (book ornament) (Goetze 105). Indeed, Uebe argues that it is precisely this function of ‘ornament’ to the text that makes silhouette such an appropriate medium for book illustration. For a three-dimensional, illusionistic illustration, he argues, would distract from the main goal:

Book printing works with black colour on a white surface. … If one were to insert a pictorial, three-dimensional drawing into the sentence in order to liven up the page, the book page would appear deepened at this spot, its surface expanding three-dimensional space. The unity of the page as surface would be compromised. By contrast, the use of silhouette as ‘ornamentation’ (Schmuck) retains the uniform appearance of the page. The sentence and the silhouette occupy only the dimensions of height and width.

From the point of view of design aesthetics, Uebe’s call for visual coordination, where the flat black and white design of the silhouette complements the two-dimensionality of the black letters on the white page, is a familiar one, which can be linked to other modernist conceptions of Gesamtkunstwerk prevalent in design schools such as the Deutscher Werkbund.

But Uebe’s concern that the illustrations retain their subsidiary role as ‘ornament’, rather than distracting the readers from the text with naturalistic images, also reflects a broader preoccupation in advertising discourse, where the images of ‘applied’ art were expected to play a subsidiary role to the propagandistic goals of advertising. This was precisely the problem with traditional aesthetic beauty,
which – beyond its appeal to a contemplative gaze – distracted from the thing being advertised. As Theodor König described it: ‘Aesthetic beauty is not an adequate means of directing attention towards the advertisement’s practical propaganda. For it is the nature of beauty to be self-sufficient and perfect within itself, and not to point beyond itself.’75 Similarly, the editor of Seidel’s Reklame, Robert Hoesel, argued in 1920: ‘Genuine art refuses to serve any master, but only exists for itself: it cannot be ordered to make objects useful.’76 None of these theorists sought to forbid the use of beautiful images in advertising, but as they themselves repeated often, they did seek to contain them, subordinating beauty to the practical ends of advertising. This was the same imperative that drove the very creation of the ‘Sachplakat’, which, as its name suggested, sought precisely to subordinate design to the ‘thing’ being advertised.77 And it was this imperative that informed advertisers’ mistrust of naturalist or immersive images. Such a desire to keep inessential elements of the advertisement in check was by no means limited to print advertisements. In a 1921 article for Seidel’s Reklame, for example, Curt Heymann defended the use of inconspicuous abstract mannequins over lifelike ‘puppets’ in shop windows in order, once again, to focus attention on the thing itself: namely the clothing being advertised. Heymann reserved special praise for a new line of minimalist mannequins designed by the sculptor Rudolf Belling for the Erdmannsdorf Bust Factory (Büstenfabrik) and recently unveiled at a fashion event in the Marmorsaal of the Hotel Esplanade. Belling’s abstract design, he argued, ‘lends an effective expression to the flow of the clothes and fabrics. The advantage of Belling’s sculpture is that it does not impose itself upon the gaze of the beholder, but rather recedes before the objects on display.’78

Significantly, Heymann contended that women were particularly susceptible to the distractions caused by figurative detail in mannequins: ‘If one observes passers-by in the street, it is always women who pay more attention to displays with figurative mannequins than to the ones “without heads”. It is hard to imagine that such figures would make a greater impression on the masculine sex than simple stands and objectively decorated display windows.’79 Nor was Heymann alone in his association of women with a propensity to lose themselves in the ‘inessential’. Theodor König cited a series of psychological tests executed by the well-known American advertising psychologist Harlow Gale to argue that women were more likely to be distracted by images unrelated to the product being sold: ‘This observation that the female psyche is more easily influenced by inessential elements overlaps with an earlier study of attention by Gale, who showed that “the attention of women is more receptive to inessential elements than the attention of men, just as it is also

One is reminded here, of course, of Käthe Kurtzig’s warning, with which I began this essay, that the ornamental silhouette risked losing sight of the thing advertised amidst the plethora of inessential details. Discussions such as these suggest that there was a certain desire to keep both ornament and women artists in check, and this may have been part of what made the association of the two in the arena of applied art so convenient.

As we know from the work of Luce Irigaray and others, the identification of women with the ‘subsidiary’ or the ‘inessential’ was a longstanding topos of Western thought and culture. However, in terms of early twentieth-century advertising, it was one that stood in tension, as Anna Adelheid Goetze was well aware, with the new legal and formal equalities gained by women at the onset of the Weimar Republic. This tension defined precisely the parameters in which the new public figure of the female graphic artist emerged after the First World War. It should thus come as no surprise to find a writer like Goetze seeking to navigate them in her article on women in advertising through careful gestures of negotiated settlements. ‘We have fashioned our house and home with the help of men’, she wrote in closing. ‘In the future, men will continue to be the creators and developers of the state and of art, but with the help of women.’

Today, such a statement, in its reinscription of gender hierarchies, might leave us longing for more. But even as it maintains a certain segregation, Goetze’s statement does show some of the very real tensions and negotiations involved in claiming a space for women artists at the onset of the new republic. The silhouette, for all of its variable forms and manifestations, was one of the surfaces on which such negotiations played out: a surface marked not simply by the coexistence of different aesthetic programmes, but rather by struggle, tension and the contentious repartitioning of aesthetic territory.

Should we, then, conclude that the ‘ornamental’ art of silhouette, as practised by Adelheid Schimz, Käte Wolff and Lotte Reiniger, was in fact a prison house for women
artists and consumers? I do not believe so. For not only did work in silhouettes facilitate women’s claims to artistic creation, albeit under certain constraints, it also helped to promote a different kind of aesthetic modernity: one marked not by the imperative of efficiency or the architectonic forms of constructivist design, but rather by a certain lightness, refinement and even luxury. The products privileged in ornamental silhouette advertisements in print and film overwhelmingly seemed to embody such qualities: perfume, chocolate, cosmetics, fashion and — above all — champagne (Uebe remarks that ‘no fewer than five champagne companies’ were producing nearly all of their advertisements in silhouette form in 1919) (plate 23 and plate 24). For contemporaries, the ‘refinement’ of such products functioned above all to underscore their status as luxury goods, whose consumption held out the promise of social ascension in the years following the First World War. As the head of the Kupferberg champagne empire, Christian Kupferberg, himself explained in a 1922 article for Die Reklame, it was precisely the expanding market of ‘nouveaux riches’ (Neureichen), with their desire to ascend from the realm of ‘need’ into that of ‘luxury’, that companies such as Kupferberg catered to in their filmic and newspaper advertisements. Such a myth of ascension also informed the way people understood the genealogy of the silhouette at the time. In his article on Reiniger’s films, M. Hiller begins by arguing that the silhouette was invented in the eighteenth century ‘in order to show the aristocracy how one can decorate (schmücken) one’s room more cheaply’. Whatever the truth to Hiller’s genealogy, it does suggest one of the ways in which the silhouette, in its guise as a decorative and ornamental art (Schmuck), was understood in advertising discourses in
the Weimar Republic: while the gratuity of ornamentation could conflict with notions of efficiency, it could also connote the pleasures afforded by new arenas of consumption beyond need, arenas that had been opened to the middle class and were, of course, now available as never before to women.

In accommodating both the language of rationality and that of luxury, the silhouette thus offered a prime example of what Marsha Meskimmon has called the ‘polyvocality of the modern period’ and the ‘various languages of modernism’, which ‘challenges the historical constructions of modernism and a unified and singular field’. It was within this polyvocal arena that women artists were, as Goetzew put it in the passage cited above, claiming a new participation in the production of both politics and aesthetics (Staat and Kunst). If these artists tended to be associated with the pleasures of ornamentation, this was not the mark of any inherent dichotomy between ’masculine’ efficiency and ‘feminine’ sensuality, but rather the result of an all too historical process – one that helped to create the parameters in which Lotte Reiniger could bring the art of the silhouette from print to film.

Notes
Research for this article was supported by generous grants from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the Fonds Québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture.


3 On industrial film, see Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Wodarz, eds, Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media, Amsterdam, 2009.

4 On educational film, see Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron and Dan Streible, eds, Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States, Oxford, 2012.

5 Examples include the earliest known advertising film in Germany, Oskar Messter’s Bade zu Hause (1897), an advertisement for Moosdorf and Hochhäusern rocking bathtubs.


7 There were, of course, still some live-action films, although usually containing trick sequences. Other exceptions to drawn animation in the 1920s included puppet animation (as in Pirschewer’s Im Filmstelzer from 1927) and montage (as in Guido Seebeker’s Kino Film der Hans Richter’s Zweigniederlassung from 1928). But these films were all still situated within the tradition of tricks and loops that had been the mainstay of pre-cinematographic spectacle.


9 Though less frequent than animated silhouettes, such live silhouette films – which looked back to traditions of silhouette theatre – did exist. Reiniger herself made at least one silhouette film with live actors, the ballet Der Dancing Fleece (1950), which has been handed down only in fragments. The surviving footage can be seen on Lotte Reiniger, Doktor Delight & Arschvibrator, DVD (Absolut Medien, 2008), DVD 2, bonus materials 4.


14 On women photographers in Weimar, see Fotografieren hieß teilnehmen: Fotografinnen der Weimarer Republik, exhibition catalogue, ed. Ute Eskildsen, Düsseldorf, 1994; on women in Weimar fashion, see Mila Gameva, Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture 1918 to 1933, Rochester, 2008. On women artists, see above all Marsha Meskimmon, We Weren’t Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism, Berlin, CA, 1999.

15 Meskimmon, We Weren’t Modern Enough, 16.

16 Meskimmon, We Weren’t Modern Enough, 3.


18 Westbrock, Der Werbefilm, 48–9. 53. Reiniger herself was no exception here, as she had constructed silhouette titles for expressionist films such as Paul Wegener’s Der Rattenfänger (1918) and Rochus Gliese’s Der verlorene Schatten (1920). The worlds of visual art and film could also overlap, as in the case of Lore Leudesdorff, a student from the Bauhaus who worked as Rüttmann’s principal assistant for several experimental and advertising films between 1923 and 1927.

19 Both artists are discussed in Anna Adelheid Goetze, ‘Frauen im Dienste der Werbekunst’, Das Plakat, 19, 1919, 93–108.


22 ‘Die Puppen liegen flach auf der Fläche. Ihnen fehlt der originelle Beweglichkeit sind keine Schranken gesetzt.’ Lotte Reiniger, ‘Wie ich meine Silhouettenfilme mache’, in Edgar Beyfuß and A. Kossowsky, eds, Der verlorene Schatten (1918) and Rochus Gliese’s Der verlorene Schatten (1920). The worlds of visual art and film could also overlap, as in the case of Lore Leudesdorff, a student from the Bauhaus who worked as Rüttmann’s principal assistant for several experimental and advertising films between 1923 and 1927.

23 Both artists are discussed in Anna Adelheid Goetze, ‘Frauen im Dienste der Werbekunst’, Das Plakat, 19, 1919, 93–108.


25 Reiniger, ‘Wie ich meine Silhouettenfilme mache’, 205–6. Here we
learn that, unlike Reiniger’s print predecessors, her essential tools as a silhouette filmmaker include not only the scissors, but also the thread and the resulting ‘hinges’ (Schermen) of the moveable puppets.


27 Baumhoff, The Gendered World of the Bauhaus, 64.

28 ‘Bei dieser Art von Filmen liegt die Gefahr allerdings nahe, daß sich der Film zu sehr in die Einzelheiten der Handlung verliert und das Propagandaziel dabei von vornherein nicht so vollkommen zu Ausdruck gelangt, wie es vielleicht wünschenswert wäre.’ Kurzzig, ‘Die Arten des Werbefilms’, 114.


30 Knipe, ‘Paper profiles’, 206. This is a visual tradition that Reiniger would later draw upon in her filmic version of the Pygmalion myth: Galathia: Das lebende Marmorbild (1915), in which animated silhouettes are juxtaposed with sets featuring antique paintings, vases and sculptures.

31 Jackson, History of Silhouettes, 13.

32 See Knipe, ‘Paper profiles’, 215–17; Jackson describes a number of devices not only for mechanical tracing, but also for copying, enlarging and reducing silhouettes (Jackson, History of Silhouette, 35–46).

33 Jackson, History of Silhouettes, 45.

34 Jackson remarks that eighteenth-century silhouettes were often accompanied by mottoes such as ‘il ne reste que l’ombre’, and concludes in Victorian fashion: ‘The ethereal shadow picture seems to have specially appealed to the sentimental of the eighteenth century as a suitable reminder after death.’ Jackson, History of Silhouettes, 26.


36 Lavater, Physiognomische Fragmente, 92–3.


39 Nearly all of the silhouette historians understand the form as a precursor to photography. Jackson describes the silhouette as a ‘forerunner of Daguerre’ (? ) and as a means of quasi-photographic preservation of traces: ‘relies of bygone men and women, shadows caught and held, while the realities have fl itted across life’s stage and vanished’ (4). Elsewhere, channelling Talbot, Jackson writes: ‘Fine oil paintings and miniatures give us a man or woman interpreted through the senses of the artist and idealised or distorted through the alchemy of the artist’s mind. The shadow portrait is nature herself’ (58). For another reading of the silhouette as a forerunner to photography, see Hansen, ‘Einführung in die graphischen Verfahren’, 571.

40 Jackson, History of Silhouettes, 11. Elsewhere Jackson writes: ‘On the real treasures of black portraiture the curtain was rung down about 1850. At that date the pageant of shadow pictures since the days of black outline on Etruscan vases ceased to be hauntingly beautiful, mystic, alluring; its subtle appeal was over’ (19).


43 [‘Die Leser’] kennen ihn bereits, den Tausendkünstler mit der Schere, ... als einem winzigen Stück Papier eine ganze Welt der Wunder hervorgehen läßt, Blumen und Früchte, Häuser und Bäume, Menschen und Thiere, den Alten Fritz auf seinem Schimmel, ... alles von der amnuthigsten Lebendigkeit und einer Fülle von Poesie, die um so unwiderstehlicher wirkt, je anspruchsloser sie auftritt und je mehr sie sich gleichsam vor sich selbst verborgt. ... Die zahlreichen Häusväter und – mütter, die ihren Kindern seine “Silhouetten mit Reime” als liebste Gabe auf den Weihnachtstisch gelegt haben, wissen zur Genüge, daß er auch Vers und Sprache mit seltener Gewandtheit handhabt und dass mit der seltenen Schénlichkeit wie seine Bilder auch seine Reime sich in die Herze der Kinderwelt einschmeicheln.’ ‘Literatur und Kunst: Karl Fröhlich’, Deutsches Museum: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und öffentliches Leben, 12, 1862, 733–8, 733–4.

44 For more on Schimz, a student of Hugo Steiner, see Marcus Osterwalder, Dizainette des illustres S: 1905–1965, Neuchâtel, 2001, 1433.

45 Although there exists no published research on Käte (sometimes written ’Käthe’) Wolff, she was a well-known figure of the Berlin applied arts scene in the early twentieth century. Her work was featured in a 2004 exhibition on the history of silhouette artists in Berlin, Zwischen Schwarz und Weiß: Scherenschinkunktum in Berlin von der Aufklärung bis zur Moderne, organized by the Kulturstiftung Schloss Britz. See https://www.gutshof-britz.de/ausstellungen/scherenschinkuite/ woff.htm. Consulted 28 January 2013.


48 Forgione, ‘The shadow only’, 492.

49 Forgione, ‘The shadow only’, 492.

50 Forgione, ‘The shadow only’, 496.

51 Forgione, ‘The shadow only’, 499.


56 Uebe, ‘Die Silhouette in der Reklamekunst’.

57 Der Kontrast der schwarzen Silhouette zum weißen Papiergrund sichert der Anzeige ihre auffällende Wirkung, und selbst bei schnellsten und schlechtesten Rotationspressen wird noch immer soviel Farbe auf dem Papier haften bleiben, daß die Anzeige sich der übrigen Zeitungsseite klar und auffällend abhebt.’ Uebe, ‘Die


63 ‘Inserat vom Tage’, Stdtls Reklame, 6, 1921, 193.

64 ‘… eine bildmäßige Darstellung, die wie eine umgezeichnete Photographie wirkte.’ Stdtls Reklame, 6, 1921.

65 For the use of the Heimlicht poster at the Munich fair, see ‘Deutsche Gewerbeschau Münchens 1922’, Stdtls Reklame, 7, 1922, insert between pages 142 and 143.


67 In an article for Stdtls Reklame from 1919, one Dr Herder also discussed the Dr Oetker trademark, praising the ‘concordance’ (Zusammenklingen) between the text and the image. See Dr Herder, ‘Das Schlagwortinsserat’, Stdtls Reklame, 4, 1919, 159–60, 159.


69 ‘Es ist für die Reklame-Psychologie von Wichtigkeit, daß sie im Sinne des „energetischen Imperatifs“ sich betätigt, also durch das Minimum angewandter Mittel das Maximum des Erfolges sicherzustellen sucht.’ König, Reklame-Psychologie, 39.

70 Goetze, ‘Frauen im Dienste der Werbekunst’, 93.


73 Ibid., 105.


75 ‘Durch die Schönheit wird nur mangelhaft erreicht, die Aufmerksamkeit dem praktischen Propagandawert zuzuweisen. Es liegt ja im Wesen der Schönheit, daß sie in sich selbst ruht, in sich selbst vollendet ist, und nicht über sich selbst hinausweist.’ König, Reklame-Psychologie, 173.


77 Hoesel meant nothing else when he explained: ‘Gerade darin liegt ja die Größe des Reklamemalers, daß er sich von dem rein künstlerischen fernzuhalten verstehet, daß er … sein ganzes Können und Streben auf sachliche Schaffen in der Reklame eingestellt hat.'