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Mediating Worlds: The Occult as Projection of the New Woman in Weimar Culture[1]

Weimar women were experiencing unprecedented advances in political and social life, yet this was also met with a backlash of traditionalism resulting in their ambiguous status. The "New Woman" was still expected to perform her duties as wife and mother despite her new responsibilities in the world of the work force. Unable to completely fulfill either of these roles in this transitional period, the New Woman assumes what anthropologist Mary Douglas identifies as an ambiguous position. Incapable of fully integrating into the social system, individuals in an ambiguous status are often treated by their community as possessing both desirable qualities, as well as dangerous powers that are to be feared. In what follows, I read the various ways in which the occult woman is treated as both prophet and demon as a marker of the New Woman's similar predicament. I provide a study of mediumism during this period and of various Weimar cultural works (Mary Wigman's expressive dance and Richard Oswald's 1919 film, *Unheimliche Geschichten*) as a way of demonstrating the transitional status of the New Woman.

The Ambiguity of the New Woman

The fluidity of social roles in modern society allows women to assume new identities, and yet there remains a dominant discourse that maintains a rigid demarcation of gender. In this regard, one must be sensitive to both the differences and similarities between tight-knit communities and modern society. Insofar as societies construct social roles, they may be compared to the cultural norms exhibited in communities. We may consider how Douglas's theory of marginalization, which was developed primarily through her research of small scale indigenous communities, operates in a similar fashion in modern European societies. Douglas, who covers such varied themes as Central African cosmology, Joan of Arc, and the Cold War, notes that when a social system assigns an ambiguous role to an individual or group, the community often attributes spiritual powers to the disenfranchised (99). According to Douglas, "To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger,

The German Quarterly 83.3 (Summer 2010) 317

to have been at a source of power" (97). The feminine is often positioned at the margins, with woman possessing the power of the other, which is dangerous and must be held in check.

The term "New Woman" (*die neue Frau*), found in the popular media, referred to the independent woman who was participating in the work force. By 1925, nearly 36 percent of the German work force consisted of women, with a significant percentage of these (12.6) employed in white collar positions (Grossmann, "Girlkultur" 65; Frevert 177).[2] Other significant signs of women's emancipation during this period include the rise of the average marital age, decrease in birth rate and, perhaps most notably, women's suffrage.[3] While women were enjoying significant advances, there remained a strong social expectation that their participation in the working world was only something they did prior to marriage (Frevert 179, 183). Unlike the training of young men as future workers and professionals, girls were socialized to be housewives (179). Most women, in fact, quit their jobs when they got married so as to devote themselves to their husbands and families (183). While they made great strides in the economic and political spheres, gender inequality inside the family remained relatively unchanged.

Both the popular media and academic discourse noted the transitional state between tradition and emancipation.[4] It was feared that the New Woman, with her perceived self-interested orientation toward career advancement, had the potential to undermine the social fabric. According to Weimar critic Heinrich Eduard Jacob, women who tried to attain the economic rights of men were responsible for taking part in the "downfall of culture" (114–15).[5] The press in general asserted that woman must not play "ape" to the male intellectual world, but must be content to be loved as a true woman and mother (Thiess 138).[6]

The Weimar woman navigated between the masculine world of career and her traditional role as mother and homemaker. Other discourses relating to this in-between state included the threatening *Mannsweib* figure, who was pitted against the traditional feminine woman in the Weimar press. The alleged trend of masculinized women, synonymous with the New Woman's androgyny, was decried by many critics who saw them as a threat to the stability of family and state. An article in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* comments on the garçon style: "The look of a sickeningly sweet boy is detested by every real boy or man" ("Enough is Enough!" 659). The Weimar representation of the masculine woman, complete with coat dress, bobbed hair, and career ambitions, was compared to a more "feminine" counterpart who would leave the world of business to men and assume the role of proud mother and wife. Fashion designer Paul Poiret pits the much-maligned garçon style against the maternal image: "Enough with women made of cardboard, the emaciated forms, the pointed shoulders, bosoms without breasts.... I see women who are 'women,' ... happy and proud mothers, cheerful wives" (33).

Weimar critics commented on the interstitial state of woman as trapped between supposed masculine and feminine desires. Many felt that the masculine woman could only represent an "intersexual" type. According to Sigmund Freud, the girl who refuses to accept her castration exaggerates her masculinity in defiance (197–99). The intersexual woman is typified by a more aggressive personality and the tendency for homosexual relations (198–99).[7] German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld termed the intersexual woman the "third sex."[8] These multiple in-between states ascribed to the Weimar woman created a situation in which spiritual powers deemed dangerous by society were attributed to women. The ambiguous status of the New Woman is reflected, I contend, in the contemporary public discourse about women's role in the occult.

The Medium

Ulrich Linse argues that with the discovery in the early twentieth century of such things as radioactivity, the separation between spiritual and physical realms was breached (16). He describes this contaminated sphere in the following manner: "Die Geister konnten sich 'materialisieren,' und beim neuen Bild des Todes war der Unterschied zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits ... 'nur subjektiv getrennte Welten'" (16). This supernatural sphere emerges as fertile ground in which the ambiguous New Woman can traffic. It is not merely women's participation in the occult that bears attention, but more importantly we will examine how these activities were perceived by the scientific community and the popular press as a means for understanding women's ambiguous status.

One finds numerous instances from the Weimar period in which women are portrayed in both popular and scientific discourse in terms of their connection to the supernatural. Women were seen to possess mystical power that promised the ability to solve problems for which traditional modes of rationality were without answer. The police utilized mediums, one notable one being Else Günther-Geffers, to solve criminal cases. A belief in the value of women's occult powers was further supported by scientists such as Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, who attempted to prove the scientific validity of the supernatural with particular focus on women's claims to possess mysterious powers.[9]

Practitioners of mediumism believed that they could awaken the dead and commune with them by means of the séance. Weimar physician W. von Gulat-Wellenburg defines the medium as "experimental subject," endowing her with the characteristics of "psycho-physical energy" and "exterior power" (1). Corinna Treitel further maintains that women outnumbered men as mediums in Weimar (61, 64–65).[10]

Mediumism, of course, has a long history that predates Weimar and we might consider some of the practices immediately preceding the interwar period.[11] Munich parapsychologist Albert Freiherr von Schrenck-Notzing's pre-war work, *Materialisations-Phenomene*, first published in 1913 and then updated in 1920 gives us a sense of how the medium functioned.[12] One of his most famous investigations involved Eva C. or Eva Carrière, formerly known as Marthe B., who delivered séances assisted by her friend Juliette Bisson. Eva C. produced emanations known as ectoplasm from parts of her body, creating what bystanders reported as visible apparitions. Eva additionally was able to bring body parts, including feet and faces, to life. Schrenck-Notzing comments on these apparitions: "the expression of the face is more clearly brought out. It seems pleasanter, and the lines of the profile are strikingly soft.... The composition and arrangement of this head appear to be a remarkably artistic performance, quite apart from the question as to how it was done" (*Phenomena* 143). These apparitions were also documented and captured in the popular press. Photos of women leading séances often included women in rigid or trance-like positions. The most disturbing of these photos depicted women with white masses of teleplasma streaming from their mouths and noses.[13] This teleplasma could carry the face of a loved one visible in the slime, or could simply represent the spirit of a dead individual.

Eva was initially credited as the first medium to produce ectoplasm, though this was later debunked (the medium's phantom "Dorsmica" resembled images in the paper *Le Miroir*) (Brandon 156).[14] Schrenck-Notzing comments: "Immediately after the disappearance of the substance I examined her face... without finding anything by means of which this phenomenon [spirit] might have been produced. The face was indeed quite moist as if with mucus.... During the phenomena she groaned and trembled, and when she was awakened, she was very exhausted. The conditions of the experiment during the phenomena described constitute a great step in advance" (*Phenomena* 52).[15] Here, Eva C. literally "gives birth" to the spirit. Her physical effort, including the groaning and trembling, also suggests a sexual dimension existing in Schrenck-Notzing's scientific description.

Eva C.'s manifestation of spirits through plasma, and apparitions of body parts led Schrenck-Notzing to alert the scientific world to these unexplained phenomena. He was in fact prepared to collect empirical scientific evidence in order to provide positivistic proof of spirits (*Phenomena* 12). Psychologist Alfred Lehmann, whose book *Aberglaube und Zauberei* was in its third edition by 1925, also commented on the workings of the medium: "the wish, to serve as a spirit's mouthpiece, will soon cause autohypnosis and trance, while the self-suggesting personality expresses itself in speech and writing. If the person present does not make do with these manifestations, the medium can develop into a materialization medium; it is certainly the case, that a medium has gradually developed in various directions" (656).[16] By the 1920s, mediumism

was a popular area of debate in Germany. While some experts such as Schrenck-Notzing supported the validity of this occult science, scholars such as Lehmann were skeptical of the legitimacy of mediumism.

Likewise, Weimar popular journals both legitimated and debunked the scientific value of occult practices such as mediumism, tarot, palm reading, and astrology. Doctor of medicine Friedrich Schwab argues in an article sympathetic to the medium, "Teleplasma, eine mysteriöse Substanz," that we are not privy to all of the mysteries of nature, thus we should embrace varied occult phenomena with scientific rigor (859). It is not so much the fact that we support the world of ghosts through the discovery of teleplasma, but that we "build a bridge," so that we could possibly penetrate the puzzle of the source of life itself (861). Schwab vigorously argues that those who are skeptical of these phenomena should search their own prejudices in order to accept scientific evidence.

Mediumism received equally strong attempts to debunk its claims. Carl Graf von Klinckowstroem published several essays on the deceptive nature of mediums. In works like "Der Unfug des Mediumismus" and "Taschenspieler und Medien," he disputes parapsychology as a valid area of scientific activity, stating that mediumism is a playground for credulous fantasies and so-called experts are duped by stipulations placed on the conditions of séances. In order for researchers to take part in the séance, they must conform to the medium's wishes, making an unmasking of the deception almost impossible ("Der Unfug" 473). Klinckowstroem notes that the medium determines the tricks of her trade, including "Dunkelheit, Lärm durch Musik, Gesang oder gesteigerte Unterhaltung, die Händekette, Verbot unvermuteten Lichtmachens und Zugriffs" ("Taschenspieler" 862). Scientists who experimented in the field of the occult encouraged the medium's swindle by shutting out true accountability. Confirming this point, parapsychologists such as Schrenck-Notzing did prohibit magicians from attending séances, blocking one method of control. Trick experts like Harry Houdini, who worked in the U.S. to uncover medium swindle, were unwelcome in Europe (Klinckowstroem, "Taschenspieler" 863–64). Further, it was usually the medium's friend, for example Juliette Bisson in Schrenck-Notzing's work with Eva C., who assisted with tricks and enabled the medium to ring bells, tilt tables, and produce teleplasma.

Writing with regard to psychic swindles, Weimar criminologist Erich Wulffen in his famous work *Das Weib als Sexualverbrecherin* (1923) also commented negatively on the woman who practiced the occult arts. The female spiritualist is for Wulffen an "artful defrauder" who exploits her victims by playing on their superstitions (115). In his chapter entitled "Female Swindlers and Cheats," Wulffen notes that the deception practiced by the woman spiritualist is not a far cry from the profession of procurement—in both cases, there is always an erotic and sexual motive at hand: "The leading attributes are petty and sordid greed and a witch-like, malicious joy in her domination

over persons and their fates" (116). He further states that the art of prophecy has always been practiced by woman. Possessing a natural gift of acting, woman can make this fraud more believable (116).

As suggested earlier, the obsession in the Weimar press with women's involvement in the occult may be read as a sign of woman's perceived ambiguous position in society. New Women were at once described as careerists, mothers, sexual predators, and/or homosexual. This confusion led to an attempt to define the perceived manifestations of woman to make sense out of her ambiguous status. In Wulffen's description, the spiritualist woman's profession is akin to procurement, with her sexual greed coming to the forefront. Klinckowstroem also sees swindle and deceit in the actions of the medium, who uses darkness, music, and the aid of her assistant to trick participants in the séance. Concerning the issue of fraud, the legal status of occult activities was under discussion during the Weimar era. Bavarian law forbade anyone from accepting payment or gaining advantage from magic or necromancy, through fortune telling, tarot, treasure hunting, or symbol and dream interpretation (Hellwig, "Hellsehen als strafbare Gaukelei" 124–25). Laws forbidding the occult were also on the books in Hessen and Baden.

Mary Douglas notes that a community will often attempt to restrain the spiritual powers possessed by persons with an interstitial status as is confirmed in the confrontations of Klinckowstroem, Wulffen, and in contemporary legal rulings regarding spiritualism (102). Weimar critic Bernhard Bauer underlines the suspect nature of the supernatural woman by documenting her supposed power: "Wie und was bist du, du großes Rätsel des Lebens, du seltsam … dämonisches Geschöpf? … Die du Kriege entfachen, Könige von Throne stürzen kannst…. Kannst du ergründet, kannst du enthüllt werden, du überirdisch-mächtig Wesen?" (339). Similar to Jacob's dire assessment of the New Woman, Bauer reinforces the idea that the supernatural woman could somehow undermine the social order.

Mary Wigman's Dance

The powers attributed to the medium are also exhibited in modern dance of the period. The expressive dance of Mary Wigman drew extensively on the Wilhelmine and Weimar discourses of the occult. Selma Jeanne Cohen discusses German expressive dance as coming from the inside out, enabling the dancer to bring her ideas to the audience (162). Although expressive dance may appear as wholly improvised to the audience, in reality, it is highly structured and orchestrated. Trained in the school of rhythmic dance, Wigman's choreography is highly calculated. This underlying structure is made explicit, as Wigman thematizes the mathematical basis of her work: "Aus der Vermählung von Körper und Raum entsteht: die gerade Linie, der Kreis, die

Acht, das Drei-, Vier- und Fünfeck übereinandergelagert, sich kreuzend, einander durchdringend, als Kugel, Pyramide, Kubus dreidimensional erlebt" (qtd. in Witzmann 617).

The mathematical precision found in Wigman's dance mimics the language of scientific rationality and technological advancement, inherent in the Weimar era of "New Objectivity." [17] The New Woman's participation in this "objective" discourse would signal her initiation into the masculine realm. Writing for *Uhu* magazine in 1931, critic Stephanie Kaul notes that history has given rise to the masculine woman. Between 1914 and 1921, living conditions supposedly caused women to strive after the pleasures of life (671). The obliteration of social distinctions also forced the boundaries between men and women to collapse, as women styled themselves in the guise of male objectivity: "Above all, objective women... wanted to conquer and demolish the whole world in objective speech" (671).

Wigman, a protégé of Rudolf von Laban and also "objective" in her dealings as an artist and business woman, opened her influential dance school in Dresden in 1920. Wigman's dances were ecstatic spectacles whose movements were capable of tapping into a fount of otherworldly energy and transmitting this from the stage through the gaze of the viewer. In her own words from 1925, Wigman describes the motivating force behind elemental dance:

> [Elemental dances] are the medium and symbol of those forces born of the soil. Their purest form is the demoniacal grotesque in all its variations. Everything apparitional, spectral, whether confined to earthly or released to transcendental experiences is fashioned out of the grotesque. All sensations of anxiety, all chaotic conditions of despair arising from torment, hatred, or fury, grow in this medium of expression up to and beyond the boundaries of the purely human and blend themselves with inhuman, demoniacal violence. (qtd. in Sorell 93)

Wigman's expressive form is perhaps best represented in the demonic movements of her solo work, *Hexentanz* (1914), which was either performed with full orchestration or even more hauntingly performed with the accompaniment of percussive beats. Weimar author Rudolf Lämmel noted that Wigman's ecstatic dance had the power to bring the audience under her spell: "Without music, full of a wild passion for movement, Wigman in a fluttering gray cloak, hair flying. Wildly pounding jumps" (qtd. in Manning, "Feminism" 107). Wigman's other solo dances including *Ekstatische Tänze* (1917) and *Der Spuk* (1920) similarly convey feelings of unleashed and unbounded reverie. [18]

Wigman's dance generally involved the solo dancer (Wigman) positioned as an intermediary to the other world. For example, her *Tanzmärchen* (1925) is set in the underworld and includes guardians, magicians, and a demon in its cast of characters that she will take on in order to prove her supremacy. Wigman's 1926 *Totentanz* depicts the boundary between life and death. In *Totentanz*, the community of female dancers represents the dead who have come back to life and Wigman must resist death's call by battling the beast. In

the end, all of the female dancers succumb to death's command. Wigman states: "[*Totentanz*] never lost touch with the threatening unknown powers hovering over it all the time" (qtd. in Sorell 101).

Mary Wigman's obsession with death in her dances might be considered alongside attempts to commune with the dead in various occult practices. Wigman's masterwork *Totenmal* (1930) has her actually performing the role of the medium in an attempt to commune with the dead of WWI, represented by the male choir and by actual soldiers' letters that are read from offstage during breaks in the dance performance.

The central theme of the performance is played out in the confrontation between the male and female choruses.[19] The female chorus is made up of grieving women that have come to make contact with the spirits of the dead, represented by the male chorus. When all the women are assembled, Wigman's character instructs the women to form a "hill of suffering," in order to conjure up the male spirits, who then appear on a platform (Wigman 95). The spirits of the fallen soldiers stand still, clothed in solemn robes, each with an arm raised in protest of the violation that has been committed against their spiritual realm. The women are incapable of withstanding the presence of the dead and flee the stage, leaving Wigman with the task of once again evoking and single-handedly confronting the dead spirits. With this, Wigman's character is now forced to confront the demon, who angrily appears on stage in response to her attempt to intervene in the world of the dead. Wigman's character cannot ultimately withstand the demon, and she must consequently lose her life in her effort to intervene on behalf of the women's chorus.

Let us consider the elements of mediumism present in *Totenmal*. Although not formally identified as a medium, Wigman's character calls forth the dead by her strenuous physical gestures. In the composition entitled "The Hall of Conjuration," Wigman overcomes the bounds of space and light in order to move into another dimension. She achieves this state of transcendence by tracing geometric figures such as the triangle, the arch, and the circle in the air. Wigman manages to evoke movement among the dead spirits until she is thwarted by the imposition of the demon. Conserving her vital forces, she unleashes her strength in a final act to conjure the dead spirits.

In addition to investing all of her physical energy into the act of conjuring, Wigman's character draws on all of her emotional resources. The Speech Choir describes her character's emotional display: "Selbst ein Bildnis ihres Traums / kommt sie andächtig / geschlossnen Augs den Weg herauf / das Schweigen über ihrem Angesicht / ist wie ein heilend Licht / verdammt sei wer dies Schreiten stört / Hinweg-!" (Talhoff, *Totenmal* 43). In a renewed act of movement, Wigman finally allows the Spirit Chorus to move forward. In her last call, Wigman travels like a night-hunting animal, moving in circles and then backwards and forwards. In turns, Wigman moves up and down, back and forth, until in the final phase of the call, she goes beyond her body into a

superhuman existence marked by a rotating dance, allowing the dead to make contact with the living. (Talhoff, *Totenmal* 46).

The death of Wigman's character underscores Douglas's idea that the spiritual power of the interstitial other must be reined in, so as not to threaten the wider community. Douglas notes that "unconscious powers … provoke others to demand that ambiguity be reduced" (102). The need for the character's death mimics legal restrictions placed on women, who practiced the occult in Weimar. District Court judge Albert Hellwig discusses the prosecution of three women, who practiced spiritualism—Frau Günther-Geffers, Frau Hessel, and Frau Diederich—and insinuates that occult practices should not be tolerated by the legal community (Hellwig, "Gibt es nachweisbar echte Fälle" 121–23).

Furthermore, Wigman's use of the triangle, the arch, and the circle in her performance, as well as her mathematically precise dance choreography, situates her in the arena of scientific discourse, traditionally off-limits to women. The New Woman, with her education and new public presence, participated in the traditionally male realms of art, literature, and politics. Russian feminist Alexandra Kollontai notes the independence of the New Woman figure with respect to her heightened profile: "das sind die Mädchen mit frischen Seelen und Köpfen voll kühner Phantasien und Pläne, die sich in die Tempel der Wissenschaft und der Kunst drängen, die mit geschäftigen, männlichen Schritten die Trottoire bevölkern" (7).

In Wigman's performance, the lights go out on the female medium, assuring that her spiritist power and physical being are both extinguished. Wigman comments on the scene: "Only then when the back of the head touched the floor, the almost superhuman tension was able to loosen. The back gave in, the arms fell limp. With a deep breath I could release myself from the self-imposed spell. The lights went out. *Totenmal* had come to an end" (Wigman 98). The physical strain of calling the dead has led to her demise; her power has literally been drawn from her by the community, whose insistence on her actions (through the words of the chorus) has pushed her forward. While the male spirits come to life and dominate the last scene, Wigman's character dies on the periphery of the action. The community has both made use of woman's spiritist powers and eliminated her in the process.

The fate of Wigman's medium is not unlike the predicted fate of the New Woman. According to dramatist Arnolt Bronnen, independent women who pursued their own objective reality without consideration for traditional gender norms, were endangering society (71). It was feared that this modern woman, with her interest in male pursuits would bring down the very social foundations of the republic. The New Woman thus had become an interloper and had to be pressed out of the male realm.

Anita Berber and *Unheimliche Geschichten* (1919)

In addition to Wigman's expressive dance, Richard Oswald's film, *Unheimliche Geschichten* features Anita Berber as a medium, who directs the spirit world both through her expressive dance and through the act of the séance. Berber's character awakens the dead using eroticized gestures. In this regard, her character must be considered in the context of the sexually liberated New Woman. Sexual ecstasy was attributed to the modern woman of Weimar, who not only experienced emancipation through her participation in the workplace, but also enjoyed a personal sense of freedom through sexual liberation. Rather than investing her libido solely in the confines of marital relations, the New Woman acted on her sexual impulses. According to Weimar sources, living the life of the New Woman included trading away female virginity and objectifying the art of love (Flake 138–39; Hollander 41–43).

Weimar critic Otto Flake notes that the supposed emancipation of woman has made her "unromantic" (135), destroying the notion of the ideal woman ("tugendhaft" and "keusch"), leaving instead a woman with bodily instinct (136).[20] For critic Hans Ostwald, women who assumed male positions during the war would not be pressed back into the family. These women chose to live life to the fullest, enjoying a new sensual fashion that exposed the woman's leg, as well as an entertainment culture of revue theaters that celebrated a culture of nudity (7).

Unheimliche Geschichten is a film that foregrounds this overt female sexuality. It begins with a framing device, featuring three ghostly characters—the prostitute (Anita Berber), death (Conrad Veidt), and the devil (Reinhold Schünzel)—who haunt an antiquarian bookstore. As the customers leave the bookstore for the evening, the characters leap from their portraits, terrorizing the bookseller and then investigating the books in the shop. This initial frame leads the viewer into five separate horror stories, authored by such notables as Edgar Allan Poe ("The Black Cat") and Robert Louis Stevenson ("The Suicide Club").

We find the female medium in the second installment, based on a short story entitled "The Hand" by Robert Liebmann. Here two men enter a dice game to win the favor of the female lover played by Anita Berber. As the two men shoot dice to decide the winner, the game of chance leaves the assassin character (Veidt) ahead, only to be strangled by the murderer (Schünzel). This eerie scene offers a premonition of the supernatural. The assassin's dying hand cramps into a claw-like grasp, which clings tightly to the murderer and remains visible when the girlfriend (Berber) finds his dying body. The jagged shadow cuttings framed on the wall add a spook-like demeanor to the scene as does the chiaroscuro lighting.

The claw-like hand of the murdered man is brought back to life when the murderer joins the girlfriend at her dance debut many years later. In a montage

sequence featuring the murderer looking and Berber dancing, the dead man's hand and then body appear on stage. The reappearance and disappearance of the murdered man are invoked by Berber's expressive dance. In a black cape and tights, reminiscent of Mary Wigman's "Witch Dance" costume, Berber twirls around the stage. The dance ends with Berber as toreador, arms extended as if casting a spell.

The expressive dance of Anita Berber was well known in the early Weimar years. Berber studied under Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, master of rhythmic gymnastics, and then became a professional dancer in 1917. Berber went on to perform such ecstatic dances as "Selbstmord," "Morphium," and "Haus der Irren," creating a stir when she published a book of poetry and images entitled *Die Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase* (1923). While Berber was a pioneer of expressive dance and the first performer to dance nude on stage, she became known primarily for her notorious lifestyle. Berber's hypnotic public persona served as a context for Oswald's film, providing it with an additional layer of meaning.[21]

In *Unheimliche Geschichten*, the Berber character summons the dead through dance. She begins in a crouched position and then shifts to a series of turns. She raises and lowers her arms, finally kicking out to emphasize the end of her performance. Berber's fast turns interspersed with her slow caressing arm movements are followed by a series of gestures, beckoning Veidt's spirit to appear off-stage. While Berber twirls like a dervish, reminiscent of Mary Wigman's final movements in *Totenmal*, the Veidt figure appears, first as a claw-like hand gripping the curtain, then as a ghostly figure off-stage. To emphasize the dancer's connection to the spirit, Berber ends her dance with claw-like hand gestures. She then crumbles to the ground in a fashion similar to the physical exhaustion experienced by mediums like Eva C.

After Berber's performance at the club, she invites the murderer and two other men back to her home for a séance. As the séance commences, the murdered man's ghostly apparition is superimposed onto a window, appearing later as a huge ghostly head. Berber leaves her hands on the table, calling forth the footprints of the deceased. She again clenches her hands in a claw-like position and scratches the table, anticipating the return of the ghost. The final moments involve a sequence in which Berber inhabits the foreground of the frame, while Veidt's ghostly character strangles Schünzel in the background. This positioning leads the viewer to infer that Berber is a primary accomplice in the murder that is taking place. Furthermore, Berber uses dance movements to inspect the body, pacing cat-like while extending her clenched hands as if to recognize her prey. At this point she smiles, expressing her apparent satisfaction upon viewing the death scene.

Berber, whose real-life exploits exemplified this sense of sexual liberation, captures in her character the social stigma placed on the sexually promiscuous woman. Frequenting seedy nightclubs, Berber is the seductress, who preys on

innocent men that fall victim to her spell. She is equivalent to "beetles and spiders who live in the cracks of the walls," waiting to prey on those unsuspecting individuals, who are caught by her unbridled sexuality (Douglas 102). Berber courts danger and sexually manipulates the men who are involved in the séance. She is able to control the Schünzel character through the seductive draw of the dance.[22]

In a Weimar context, critics such as Bronnen regarded Anita Berber's dance and general sensuality as a marker for the further division of the sexes. Women such as Berber abandoned their traditional feminine status: "sie verzichteten auf ihre göttlichen Rechte, sie warfen ihr Leben hin… Nichts ist trostloser als das Leben dieser Frauen und nichts ist gieriger" (71). The portrayal of the selfish woman, who looks to her own desires at the expense of man is a constant critique leveled at the New Woman. The trivialization of love and the supposed destruction of the family by the sensual woman are finally highlighted by Ostwald. The unreasonable sexual demands of woman are a threat to the nuclear family and society at large. According to Ostwald, "Ein erotischer Taumel wirbelt die Welt durcheinander" (7).

Conclusion

The portrayal of women in the Weimar press as caught between traditional femininity and a perceived masculine desire presents the larger challenge posed by emancipation. According to Mary Douglas, this interstitial position is met with fear and dislike resulting in the marginalization of this individual (102–03). The problem posed by the New Woman is played out in the figure of the occult woman, whose powers must be both respected and feared.

Berber and Wigman may represent different aspects of the New Woman, though both pose serious threats to the masculine order. Berber's femme fatale character, with her unbridled sexuality, represents the threat that the New Woman posed to traditional roles as wife and mother. Her seduction dance casts a spell, which results in the death of some and the resuscitation of others. According to Wulffen, such a woman must be held accountable for the sinister nature of her sexual exploits. Choreographer and businesswoman Mary Wigman embodies an "objective" aspect of the New Woman both in her professional work as a teacher and in her mathematically precise dance movements used in *Totenmal*, and yet it is Wigman who censures herself in that very work by having her character perish for having trafficked in a forbidden spirit world.

The association between the New Woman and the occult illuminates both the true achievements and the limits to women's emancipation. The threat posed by the occult woman highlights the inevitable backlash that tempered women's advances in the social, political, and economic spheres. The scien-

tific and popular perceptions of occult practices parallel the needs of the master narrative to cognize and constrain the irrational other. As Douglas suggests, the ambiguous other must be defined by a strict demarcation in order to preserve the social hierarchy (4). Just as the medium is both prophet and demon, the New Woman participates in the masculine order, nonetheless remaining an outsider in the dominant discourse.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Valerie Weinstein and Brian Crawford for their reading and comments on this paper, as well as the reviewers for their valuable insights.

[2] While the percentage of German working women did not rise significantly from 1907 (34.9%) to 1925 (35.6%), there were three times as many female white collar workers in 1925 as there were in 1907. Female white collar workers such as secretaries, typists and shop assistants caught the attention of the Weimar Republic (Frevert 177).

[3] The number of children per family decreased as the Weimar Republic progressed: the early 1920s saw 2.27 children per family; in 1929 the statistic was 1.98 children per family (Frevert 186). In 1920–24, women married at the average age of 25.4 years (201).

[4] For more information on the perception of woman in this historical context, see Grossmann, "The New Woman" (153–71).

[5] Jacob states: "Das Leben der Frau, wie sie heute lebt, ist wirtschaftliche Tatsache; unstürzbar, unabänderbar. Männliche Bedürfnisse spürend, erwarb die Frau die Rechte des Mannes . . . . Es nimmt ... die heutige Frau an [dem] Untergang der Kultur unablässigen gründlichen Anteil" (114–15).

[6] Thiess notes: "Denn so wie absolute Freiheit sinnlos ist, kann auch absolute Gleichheit nicht gefordert werden, weil die Welt nun einmal von Bestimmung her ungleich ist und aus dieser Ungleichheit allein die schöpferische Kraft des Menschen erwuchs" (145).

[7] Freud's notions were found in the popular press, specifically in the woman's magazine *Die Dame*, where Löbel noted that masculine and feminine sides of woman battled for dominancy (34, 36).

[8] See McCormick for an in-depth description of the New Woman and the various ideas of masculinity and femininity associated with this debate (146–62).

[9] Schrenck-Notzing's works, *Die Traumtänzerin Magdeleine G.*, *Phenomena of Materialisation*, and *Die Physikalischen Phänomene der Grossen Medien* provided popular sources for a Weimar interest in the occult woman.

[10] Sharp notes that the qualities associated with the "feminine" were also those attributed to the best mediums, namely the ability to be "volatile, emotional, [and] sensitive" (162).

[11] Both Treitel and Wolffram cover the continuity of interest in the occult from the period of Imperial Germany through Weimar.

[12] Schrenck-Notzing's 1920 edition of this work was significantly revised, adding a more "scientific" rhetoric to the description of the potential spirit world.

[13] See *Der Querschnitt* 12.12 (December 1932) for several images of woman and teleplasma. The theme of woman and the occult was also evident in popular journals such as *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Berliner Leben*, and *Die Dame*.

[14] For a thorough discussion of Martha B./Eva C., see Brandon (127–63).

[15] Ectoplasm and teleplasma are the same substance, namely a sticky material that was supposed to represent the physical manifestation of a deceased individual.

[16] See also Moll's *Der Spiritismus* and *Psychologie und Charakterologie der Okkultisten* for further negative renderings of the occult medium.

[17] See McCormick for a discussion of woman and "New Objectivity."

[18] Wigman also performed in the *Sun Festival* in Monte Verita (1917) with Laban's dancers. This festival was sponsored by the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), a freemason group, which was notorious for its occult practices. There is also evidence that Wigman was interested in occult questions. For more information on Wigman's life and dance, see Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*.

[19] I am reconstructing the performance using Talhoff's published script, *Totenmal* and M. A. Moralt's 1930 English translation *Call of the Dead.* I also rely on Mary Wigman's memoir, *The Language of Dance.* For photographs of the performance, see Manning's *Ecstasy and the Demon* (150–52, 156) and Müller and Stockemann (91–92). Also note Manning's "Ideology" for additional details and interpretation of *Totenmal*.

[20] Flake comments on the New Woman: "ein Körper, den Hunger, Liebe und das Bedürfnis nach Entspannung regieren" (136).

[21] For more on Anita Berber as a Weimar artist, see Funkenstein. See also Rowe for coverage of sexuality, woman, and the city in Weimar Berlin (130-82).

[22] At the beginning of the story based on "The Hand," the Veidt and Schünzel characters vie for the affection of Berber. As they celebrate with champagne in a night club, it is Berber's wild twirling dance with a third man that convinces Veidt and Schünzel they must go head to head for her affection. In this jealous state, one kills the other, resulting in a second murder committed by the returning spirit.

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