

Inside in the City:  
Domestic Space in the Literature and Film of Weimar Berlin

by

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Professor Anton Kaes, Chair  
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## Abstract

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This dissertation explores the relationship between domestic interiors and urban exteriors in Weimar literature and film. Interiors have been neglected in scholarship about Weimar *Großstadtliteratur* (big-city literature); scholars have focused on the street scene and the psychological effects of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and commodification. While many architecture and design theorists of the time engaged with interiors as part of a plan to modernize and thus create a new city—and society—the interiors they imagined for the *Neues Wohnen* (New Dwelling) are conspicuously absent from contemporary novels and films. One finds instead interiors like those of the previous century.

I argue that the persistence of nineteenth-century interiors in novels and films about Weimar Berlin uncovers the tensions inherent in modern city living. The expectation of what it was like to “live” in the fictional home differs from the New Dwelling of “real-world” homes. Despite their differences, both ways of dealing with modernity seek understanding and control of the urban environment. Whereas the architects of the New Dwelling strive to control modern city life through construction, the fictional imaginary explores the many ways in which the city controls and is controlled by its dwellers.

In order to explore these approaches to modern living, I will present close readings of a corpus of Berlin novels and films from the Weimar Republic, focusing on Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*; Erich Kästner’s *Fabian*; Irmgard Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*; Phil Jutzi’s *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*; and Slatan Dudow’s *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* My readings of these films and novels will be tested and informed by a study of manifestos and articles written by avant-garde architecture theorists including Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut, and Walter Gropius.

My dissertation will nuance the topography of space that has been allotted to the modern German big-city novel and film by expanding the understanding of what it means to

“dwell” in the city. More broadly, this dissertation will contribute to discourses on urban space during the first quarter of the twentieth century, leading the focus (momentarily) away from skyscrapers, department stores, traffic-jammed streets, and crowded sidewalks. This study will reflect on past German writers’ and filmmakers’ understanding of interior space and their critique of thoroughly modern urban dwelling habits with an eye to the present global obsession with minimalism, micro-housing, and smaller urban footprints.

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I am profoundly indebted to my dissertation committee, the members of which supported my often-frustrating progress and encouraged me to push onward despite the struggles I encountered along the way. Their knowledgeable, intellectually challenging, and open-minded approach to my topic both informed the structure of my work and allowed it to take on organic shape. I am grateful to my dissertation chair Anton Kaes for his confidence in my abilities and unflagging support for my work throughout my time at Berkeley, as well as for his expertise and the many resources to which he guided me. His expectations of rigor, creativity, and succinctness have been invaluable to my development. It is his spirit of inquiry that now drives my work and pushes me to create an “unbelievably critical” body of writing. Deniz Göktürk has taught me much about pushing the boundaries of a discourse and searching for new interdisciplinary inroads. Her feedback, the resources at her disposal, and the stimulating conversations we shared have allowed me to expand the scope of my topic and my own thinking as a scholar. It has been a pleasure to work with Mark Sandberg as an outside reader. His own interest in the architectures of film and literature have served as an inspiration for my doctoral studies. My very first course at UC Berkeley, a Film and Media Studies seminar on “Architecture and Film” that Professor Sandberg co-taught with Professor Anne Nesbet, provided the earliest sparks of this dissertation project.

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and along with it, critical theory. My faculty mentor, Elaine Tennant, has provided a towering professional role model.

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## Introduction

Lying on his couch, a man is mesmerized by flickering shadows that race across his ceiling. Projected inside, the figures and movements bring the busy outdoors world indoors—into the man’s living room (see figures 1 and 2).



*Figures 1-2: The protagonist watching shadows on the living-room ceiling (top); shadowy figures play across the wall above the protagonist (bottom). From Die Straße, dir. Karl Grune, 2:53, 2:17.*

This opening scene to Karl Grune’s 1923 silent film *Die Straße* emphasizes the outside world’s difference from the calm, traditional interior in which the viewer first encounters the protagonist. Activity from the street enters the home unannounced and uninvited; it is invasive, and yet it is also intriguing. Carnavalesque street scenes lure the man outside to voyeurism, adventure, and

ruin. And all the while his wife remains at home, where she prepares food, sets the table, cleans up, and waits for her husband to return. The space she inhabits is populated by a sofa, carpets, vases, armchairs, doilies, and a fully equipped kitchen (see figures 3 and 4).



*Figures 3-4: The protagonist's wife preparing soup in the kitchen (top); wife and husband in the traditionally furnished living room (bottom). From Die Straße, 0:48, 1:01.*

The street scene that poached her husband from his cushy spot on the sofa is a ubiquitous representation of early twentieth-century urban life. Hordes of pedestrians mingle on the sidewalks, and cross streets are made dangerous by all manner of speeding vehicles. Lights flash, store windows beckon, and everything is in motion (see figures 5 and 6).



Figures 5-6: Street traffic inset on a grid of speeding train traffic and moving shadows (top); cars, horses, and pedestrians on the street and sidewalk (bottom). From *Die Straße*, 4:14, 5:28.

Scenes like this are common in European and American films and literature of the first third of the twentieth century—yet they are acutely representative of German modernism, especially of Expressionism and New Objectivity. These scenes are also particularly representative of descriptions of Weimar Berlin. In no work is this more evident than in Alfred Döblin’s 1929 epic novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The novel is characterized by film-like techniques such as montage and cutaway. It employs an omniscient narrator to guide the *Lumpenproletariat*<sup>1</sup> protagonist through the busy streets of working-class Berlin. Themes of building, machinery, traffic, and alienation carry the plot along with the protagonist Franz Biberkopf’s trials and tribulations—from the moments when he leaves the Tegel prison and

<sup>1</sup> In brief, the term *Lumpenproletariat* refers to the unpolitical lower-class members of society who lack the community engagement and camaraderie of skilled workers and other working-class people.

enters the heart of Berlin, until the novel's end when he takes his post on a street-corner as a factory watchman. The constant construction and mechanization, the flow of pedestrian, bicycle, car, and train traffic, and the alienation from and in society are those same "modern" tropes seen in Grune's *Die Straße*, as well as throughout the entire cross-section of big-city literature, or *Großstadtliteratur*, from the Weimar period. These novels and films present an imaginary depiction of what Weimar Berlin looked like from the outside—on the streets, in parks, in and out of public spaces; this imaginary focuses on the street scene and the psychological effects of both urbanization and the expansion of industrial capitalism. Although this exterior view is the dominant point of departure in studies of literature from the Weimar period, it should not be assumed the sole spatial apparatus through which these city tales are told.

Interior spaces—in particular domestic interiors—are frequently used in fiction literature as descriptive tools to aid in character development. Yet the imagery chosen to construct those spaces reflects contemporary attitudes about interior design and interior space. The constructed spaces of fictional novels and films also provide a mirror for contemporary conceptions of social class and the conditions of living as they are constructed along class lines. During the same period of the early twentieth century, a plethora of theoretical and educational writings about *das neue Wohnen* (the New Dwelling) and *das neue Bauen* (the New Building) were published and circulated. The international circulation of these texts suggests that the ideas presented in them might also penetrate the sphere of contemporary fiction, because of the theoretical writings' appeal to a new and modern future within the grasp of the present. There is instead a preponderance of bourgeois nineteenth-century domestic interiors in Weimar literature—remnants of an earlier conception of space that is directly at odds with the New Building's sleek modernism. Much attention has been paid in scholarship to these theoretical writings, which share a similar excitement about urban modernity with the city and street scenes explored in Weimar novels and films. The "traditional" middle- or upper-class interior is associated with stuffy notions of domesticity, stability, and social hierarchy that were perceived to be in flux or in the process of being eroded by industrialization, urbanization, and commodification. These frilly, cluttered, decorative interiors in Weimar *Großstadtliteratur* cry out for attention amid the widely referenced descriptions of modern urban life that they accompany. The absence of New Dwelling interiors in 1920s and 1930s novels and films comments subconsciously on the literary reception of the period's breathless architecture and design theories, which sought to erase all traces of past dwelling styles.

I argue that the persistence of the nineteenth-century interior in *Großstadtliteratur* and *Großstadtfilme* about Weimar Berlin uncovers the tensions inherent in modern city living. The authorial and directorial decisions to include these "outdated" living rooms, apartments, and back courtyards in representations of burgeoning 1920s Berlin is at odds with the cries for minimalism and rationalized, modernist living that were being proclaimed in manifestos, journals, and theoretical tracts. Yet both ways of dealing with modernity seek understanding and control of the urban environment. Whereas the modernist architects and designers strive to control the city through its built environment, the spatial imaginaries of novels and films explore the many ways in which the city controls and is controlled by its dwellers. That the conflicted main characters in Weimar Berlin novels and films are quite at home in lace-bedecked rooms with curtained windows testifies to a literary imagination that runs in parallel with—not in opposition to—the architects' and designers' new theories for creating a more modern world. Those theories can be used to help draw out the roots of the tensions that run beneath the urban spaces of fiction. As far

as the period's novels and films are concerned, the modern city is a product of the piling up of layers of spaces that, when teased apart, present a complex network of interdependence. This is as opposed to the single entity of exterior, urban space that has been singled out by recent scholarship. A conception of city space that privileges domestic interiors alongside urban exteriors space exposes the tension between expectations for the "city" and the "home." Where the mode of dwelling, or "living," is seen to be influenced by the urban location, "living" is influenced by the space closest to that term's origin—the living space.

In his monograph on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Peter Jelavich notes that the Berlin shown in Phil Jutzi's 1931 film adaptation of the novel, as well as throughout all of what Jelavich refers to as "leftist Weimar cinema" is, "depicted with the type of 'realistic' scenes of streets, courtyards, tenements, and pubs that characterized *Mother Krause*, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and other 'Berlin films' and 'Zille films.'"<sup>2</sup> Despite tenements and pubs being interior spaces, Jelavich lumps them in with all spaces that are inherently urban. No domestic space is explored in his treatment of the novel or the film, except for a brief look at the cutaway description of the apartment house on Linienstraße (the so-called dollhouse scene), which I will discuss in Chapter 3. In further scholarship, David B. Dollenmayer writes that, "The title *Berlin Alexanderplatz* indeed implies that place, the exclusively urban space of this novel, is just as important as character, the traditionally central concern of the bourgeois novel."<sup>3</sup> Dollenmayer's discussion of place throughout his article is nearly void of any mention of an interior, aside from Franz's barroom conversation with Krause and the dollhouse scene. While Dollenmayer's description recognizes that "urban" space encapsulates both public and private space, no importance or discussion is spent on any spaces that could be classified as either "private" or interior. There are certainly many interior spaces, particularly domestic interiors, that figure in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and its contemporaries, and which merit discussion. The domestic interior, as it is almost entirely neglected in scholarship of *Großstadtliteratur* from the first quarter of the twentieth century, should be given room in discussions of novels and film that deal with the modern metropolis. Outside of literary scholarship, the modern interior is very much a topic of the early twentieth century. The differences between literary and theoretical forms of constructing spatial imaginaries can tell us much about the situation of the modernist architecture and design project.

From the beginning of the Bauhaus in 1919 until the scaffolding of Nazi Neoclassicism was erected in the early 1930s, architects and designers obsessed over the finer details of the modern interior. This was part of the larger project of the New Objectivist dreamscape of the New Building, but the drive to simplify domestic interiors was also compartmentalized within the bigger picture of the modern city's development from an urban planning perspective. The New Living would dictate not only the way in which *der neue Mensch*, the New Man, would move about the urban environment; it also explicated the possibilities for dwelling properly in one's home. Given the vast corpus of literature about the New Building and the New Living, it is surprising that scholarship of *Großstadtliteratur* and *-filme* from the same period has avoided bringing the two discourses into constellation with one another. Although it can be said that

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 245.

<sup>3</sup> David B. Dollenmayer, "An Urban Montage and its Significance in Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*," *The German Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (May 1980): 317.

theory and fiction occupy two very separate realms, it may be productive to think of the New Objectivist manifestos and treatises on the New Building as imaginative insofar as they neither reflect their contemporary reality nor (historically) result in a completed project. Similarly, Weimar big-city novels and films, as fictive texts, represent Berlin not as it was, but as it was imagined or could imaginably be.

In order to further explore novels' and films' response to modernity as it unfolds within the modern big-city text, I will present close readings of a corpus of Berlin literature from the Weimar Republic, focusing on Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929); Jutzi's film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1931); Jutzi's film *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929); F. W. Murnau's film *Der letzte Mann* (1925); Erich Kästner's novel *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (1931); Irmgard Keun's novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932); Slatan Dudow's film *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (1933); Dudow's film *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt* (1930); and Karlheinz Martin's film *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1920). Despite the inherent differences in media between film and novels, I will hold these two types of fictional texts up together as representations of the conditions of domestic life at the time. These investigations will be informed, tested, and complemented by an exploration of contemporary architecture, design, and urban planning theories by Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Bruno Taut, Erich Mendelsohn, and Walter Gropius. Although Le Corbusier was not German, his influence in the international modernist movement contributed to the German field of architecture and design.

Perhaps the two most relevant prior studies to this dissertation are Jelavich's monograph on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which has briefly been discussed above, and Sabine Hake's book *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin*.<sup>4</sup> Jelavich uses the three iterations of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (the novel, the film, and the radio play) to discuss the political and cultural changes that shaped the end of the Weimar Republic and led to National Socialism; Hake uses the urban makeup of Weimar Berlin (its planning, buildings, and human population) to discuss the tension between working-class Berlin and white-collar Berlin. Both of these studies lend support to this dissertation's foundation, because the political and socio-economic tensions on the streets and in the media of Weimar Berlin are both at odds with and feed into the tensions I intend to uncover within Berlin's fictional domestic interiors. Two other studies are particularly useful for the formation of my argument: Anthony Vidler's collection of essays *The Architectural Uncanny* and Sharon Marcus' book *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*.<sup>5</sup> Vidler's essays mine the psychology of the modern city as it was built and as written about in texts; Marcus' book creates an entry point into my own body of work because her research was situated in the century before—that “age of great cities” which is the bane of the theorists whose manifestos will be discussed later—and in two metropolitan areas which both predate and are contemporaneous with the modern urbanity of Berlin.

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<sup>4</sup> Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992); Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

Going forward, I will lay the groundwork for focused discussions in chapters 1 through 4 of the texts named above. In Chapter 1, “The Street Enters the Room: Urban Space and its Interiors,” I will discuss the significance of the bourgeois nineteenth-century interior as a modern space that comes to be seen as the antithesis of modern in the early twentieth century. This change brings with it a discussion of the difference—or lack thereof—between “private” and “public” space in theoretical as well as in fictional treatments. Drawing upon Marcus and Vidler’s writings to help elicit further differences between the living situations of the two centuries, I will discuss Le Corbusier’s theories and the representation of modernist building and design theory in avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter’s 1930 film *Die neue Wohnung*. After placing the nineteenth-century interior within the context with which it was dealt in early twentieth-century literature and design theory, I will show how the bourgeois interior of the previous century was represented as an unstable space already in pre-war Expressionist German literature. This will involve a close-reading of the spaces in Georg Kaiser’s play *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1912). Although the play was written before the establishment of the Republic, it takes on new life in the earlier Weimar years in Martin’s 1920 film adaptation, which is also an Expressionist work. As the texts that will be discussed in chapters 2 through 4 fall more within the realm of socialist realism (aside from *Der letzte Mann*), these Expressionist texts will create a bridge between the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century spatial imaginations of modernity.

In Chapter 2, “Domesticity in the Interior: Kitchens in Theory and Literary Practice,” I will show how the New Living’s proposals for interior space, particularly kitchen space, reinforce traditional domestic roles despite the illusion of their possibility to increase women’s liberation. Taking household rationalization as a starting point, I will show how far these imagined kitchens fall from making a significant impact on those whom they were designed to affect. Few examples of the New Living exist in German novels and films, and literary depictions of the New Woman that do exist either ignore domestic space altogether or retain earlier notions of the domestic interior that contrast with the assumed urban modernity (and morality) in which the New Woman spends much of her day. In order to explore this, I will contrast Richter’s *Die neue Wohnung* with Jutzi’s *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. The juxtaposition of these two very different films raises questions of class in the dichotomy between the utopian space Richter (and Le Corbusier) envisions for the New Man and the proletarian space of the working-class apartment. Further fictional film examples of proletarian dwelling spaces will be provided by Dudow’s *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* and his short documentary, *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*.

In Chapter 3, “Rooms for Rent: The Interior Landscapes of Berlin’s Proletarian Domestic Spaces,” the discussions of Chapter 1 will crystallize with a literary analysis of the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior ideas and furnishings that have found their way into the modern city novel’s protagonists’ dwellings. This analysis will continue the work of Chapter 2 by making visible the discrepancy between the goals of the modernist theorists and the “reality” of those in the working classes whose lives were to be changed or improved by the New Living. Highlighting Hilberseimer’s urban planning theory, I will show that the modernist design community concentrated its efforts on the private house in the same breath that it called for multi-unit developments to serve the masses. With a specific focus on Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Jutzi’s, this chapter will articulate how the old-fashioned notions of domestic space that persist in Weimar big-city texts are a result of the loss of power the protagonists experience in a city of renters who do not own their homes.

Finally, in Chapter 4, “*Quadraturin* for the City: Cafés, Courtyards, and Corner Bars as Urban Living Rooms,” I will complicate the notion that domestic interiors are separate from the urban exterior by discussing how the big-city texts I have chosen also show that the urban exterior fulfills needs that the conditions of living in the modern apartment cannot. The modern city is one in which the domestic spills out into “public space,” as the *Eckkneipe*, *Hinterhof*, and Café act as substitute living rooms or dining rooms. This spilling out is a function of the downsizing of “private” space in modernity, a side-effect of the city’s becoming more modern amid urbanization. This chapter will take as its main foci a continuation of the discussions of *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and will add a brief discussion of Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann*. To conclude this chapter—and the dissertation—I shall continue the trajectory of my argument’s steps from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth, on to the twenty-first. I will do this by presenting an overview of tensions present in Weimar Berlin that continue to the present. By linking Ikea, affordable housing platforms, homelessness, and global real estate markets with the New Objectivity and Le Corbusier’s mass-produced homes for the masses, I will show the lineage from the streamlined modern homes of modernist architecture and design theories to the tiny houses and microapartments of the present moment in the mid-2010s. Not only has the dreaded massification of the early twentieth century led to the mass media of the early 2000s, but it has also led to a kind of societal collectivization that could never have been imagined by the mid-century Soviets. From the dollhouse scene in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to Facebook, the notion of dwelling has changed quite a bit in the past 150 years—in Berlin and across the globe.

With a heavier focus on theory as it relates to novels and films in the first two chapters, I will develop the tensions that this dissertation has begun to discuss. In the final two chapters, I use a stronger focus on readings of literature and films to show how those tensions play out in the Weimar spatial imaginary. Together, these analyses of fiction literature and theory attempt to nuance the topography of space that has been allotted to the modern German big-city novel by expanding the understanding of “what is *großstädtisch*” to include interior space and an understanding of what it means to dwell in the modern city. More broadly, this dissertation will contribute to discourses on urban space during the first quarter of the twentieth century, leading the focus (momentarily) away from skyscrapers, department stores, traffic-jammed streets, and pedestrian-flooded sidewalks. This study will reflect on past writers’ understanding of interior space as it relates to the modern city in rapidly changing Berlin with an eye to the present global obsession with micro-housing, minimalism, and ever smaller urban footprints.

## Chapter 1

### The Street Enters the Room: Urban Space and its Interiors

Writing in 1932, English diplomat Harold Nicolson meditated on “The Charm of Berlin” relative to two of Europe’s great capitols, Paris and London. His metaphor for the three cities captures the relative newness of Berlin’s urbanization and modernization:

London is an old lady in black lace and diamonds who guards her secrets with dignity and to whom one would not tell those secrets of which one was ashamed. Paris is a woman in the prime of life to whom one would only tell those secrets that one desires to be repeated. But Berlin is a girl in a pullover, not much powder on her face, Hölderlin in her pocket, thighs like those of Atalanta, an undigested education, a heart that is almost too ready to sympathize, and a breadth of view that charms one’s repressions from their poison, and shames one’s correctitude. One walks with her among the lights and in the shadows. After an hour or so one is hand-in-hand.<sup>6</sup>

Berlin’s youth and roughness relative to the French and English capitols is the strongest element of this sympathetic description. Nicolson’s metaphor for the cities as women at different life stages separates the German metropolis from its western European peers. In the same breath, the suggestion of the cities being at different relative ages, and the word choice of “undigested” to describe Berlin’s level of knowledge about the world, allows for the extrapolation that Berlin—a relatively young city that did not develop at the same pace as Paris, London, or Rome, for that matter<sup>7</sup>—will indeed grow up and become polished like the other two cities. Paris and London may be considered the trendsetters in fashion, design, and art from a nineteenth-century and even an eighteenth-century perspective. In terms of industrialization and urbanization, those cities were “modernized” before Berlin. Thus the conditions for living in Paris and London during the nineteenth century can be used as a point of entry into a discussion about modern dwelling practices in Berlin.

Beginning an English-language dissertation with two non-German cities necessitates a look at cultural and linguistic differences. Those differences might appear to be elided by the comparison of cities that will allow me to build up to my argument, and it is my desire that the differences be looked at altogether within a discourse of “living practices.” The reader should also keep in mind that those practices are separated by their relative linguistic and cultural

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<sup>6</sup> See Harold Nicolson, “The Charm of Berlin,” *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994): 426.

<sup>7</sup> As Werner Hegemann points out in the first quarter of his book, *Das steinerne Berlin*, Berlin did not develop into a “big city” until the latter half of the nineteenth century. See Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin* (Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, 1979).

geographies. As Sharon Marcus points out in the introduction to *Apartment Stories*, “The very word ‘home’ evokes English prototypes.”<sup>8</sup> That may indeed be the case within an English-speaking context, such as it is with this dissertation. Yet I am concerned primarily with German literature, films, and manifestos. Thus the word “home” must be seen in relationship with the words *wohnen* and *Wohnung*, which bring to mind both the dwelling space and the idea of dwelling<sup>9</sup> as the act of inhabiting a private, domestic space as one’s “home.” The English word “home” is related more closely to the German word *Heim*, which carries undertones of both ownership and an apparatus of institutional governance for the home (e.g., retirement homes, hostels, asylums). Alongside these nuances in the ways of describing the place one calls home, there are also gradations to the ways in which certain kinds of dwelling spaces are codified. Namely, when we speak of a “bourgeois” domestic interior, the word may conjure particular meanings for different audiences and in different cultural settings. The bourgeois interiors with which the international modernist design community was concerned are those middle- and upper-middle class homes that tended toward the overly decorative in an attempt to make visible the inhabitant’s social class and upward aspirations. Some in the working and lower classes may also have adopted, as much as they could afford to, a style reminiscent of bourgeois décor. By hoping to make one’s home look like an aristocratic apartment, one hoped to become in some ways aristocratic—at least in the parlor, among one’s guests.

### **Public Space and Private Abode Share the City**

As readers and viewers invited into the domestic interiors of novels and films, we become privy to the characters’ supposed personal space. Here, in the assumption of entering another’s realm, the tension between “private” and “public” is already present. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that I, like Marcus, see this separation as a construct that adds to the myth of all domestic interiors as “private” space—a myth because so-called “private” domestic interiors are part of the city and cannot be separated from it, even when they are seen as refuges from the “public” space beyond one’s walls. As Marcus points out in her book, city dwellers’ four walls rarely protected them from their neighbors’ and landlords’ spying ears and eyes. Similarly, when a person rents her apartment from a building owner, for example, she gains a degree of privacy from the outside world, but is not guaranteed that privacy for her landlord. To complicate matters further, as Marcus explains:

...the ideal home associated with the middle ground of domesticity [...] is hard to situate in the larger spaces of street, city, village, or region, because it is by definition abstracted from external influences; it is enclosed, built to hold only one family and to stand freely on its plot of land.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> That is, “dwelling” as a theoretical concept and as an element of everyday practice.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus, 1-2.

Whereas this “ideal home” is an explicitly single-family structure in Marcus’s context, the dwelling space—whether it is a villa or a tenement apartment—has become classified as something that is separated from everything “outside” in the imagination of both the reader and the person who goes home to that space in the literary and the “real” worlds. Marcus argues that this separation is a nineteenth-century construct that feminist scholarship has exposed largely as a tool to restrict women’s movement and produce a false, gendered understanding of “private” and “public” space. Regardless of gender, the construct has shaped readings and further representations of domestic interiors as “other” from the city.

For discussions of a city’s “private” spaces, the house or single-family residence becomes less of a focus in the late 1800s than in previous centuries. The apartment, tenement, and multi-family complex then become the ubiquitous spaces for urban dwelling. According to Marcus, apartment buildings were already significant in literature during the nineteenth century because they were:

...vantage points for visual observation and exhibition, nodes of commercial and sexual exchange, and settings for the sensory overload and chance encounters associated with crowds. Attempts to separate the city and the home had to contend with powerful celebrations of the apartment house’s capacity to make urban and domestic spaces continuous and often foundered on the impossibility of fully separating the city and the home.<sup>11</sup>

In this discussion, “home” refers to the domestic interior space where people live—that is, sleep, hang their clothing, and raise their families—regardless of that space’s type and associated economic status (e.g., house, apartment, tenement; upper-, middle-, working-class). If we are to include essential tasks of dwelling, such as eating, unwinding, entertaining, and conversing, then domestic space also encapsulates Weimar Berlin’s *Eckkneipen*, cafés, and enclosed courtyards. These places functioned as living or dining rooms for those whose rented dwellings did not include a room for either purpose. Privately owned establishments that were open to the public, cafés and pubs served a need that was unique to the city’s population of renters, and at the same brought together public and private realms spatially and in their patrons’ daily lives.

One of the most significant changes from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in terms of “public” and “private” space is the shift in dominant discourses about “living” and “everyday life” from the privately owned, single-family dwelling to the multi-family apartment or tenement building. Architects and city planners already in the nineteenth century had designed urban space under the auspices of, “associating the apartment houses with the urban progress and modernity that twentieth-century historians have attributed only to public spaces such as boulevards and cafes.”<sup>12</sup> According to Marcus, the apartment gained prominence in Paris in the first half of the 1800s and had become a topic of feverish discussion in London by the 1850s. The role of the apartment in the nineteenth century is significant not just because this dissertation digs down to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26.

that century as it searches for the roots of the tension in early twentieth-century interiors in novels, film, and theory. Rather, the nineteenth-century discourse on apartments is striking because the apartment is not the predominant interior space in German literature of that century, and because of the nineteenth century's place in history as the "age of great cities."<sup>13</sup> The apartment is tied to the urbanization and modernization of cities unlike any other structure used for domestic purposes. Despite this, the modernist design community continued to look to nineteenth-century homes—and houses—in their musings about those parts of the city that most needed change and progress.

### **Theory Against the Bourgeois Nineteenth-Century Interior**

In architecture and design theory, the separation of the "private" or domestic interior and "public" or urban exterior relates to what Henry James has named the "sense of the past."<sup>14</sup> As Vidler explains it, James' concept names the specter that haunted the modernist architects and designers, who, "attempted to erase its traces from their architecture. This urge to escape history was joined to a therapeutic program, dedicated to the erasure of nineteenth-century squalor in all its forms."<sup>15</sup> This escape from or erasure of the past is tied to the idea of reprogramming modern city dwellers and making them compatible with the urban landscape that has been, or is to be, built for them. Vidler sums up this agenda as the balancing of two items of order:

The one, stemming from the demand for cultural revolution and a sense of the exhaustion of traditional academic forms, stressed the need to remake the language of the art, to explode the conventions and out of the debris to construct a way of speaking adequate to the modern moment. The other, more tied to the tradition of utopian and materialist attempts to refashion the social world, called for a political and economic transformation that would precipitate society into a life of harmony in the new industrial epoch."<sup>16</sup>

Every generation seeks in some way to do away with the previous generation's baggage. This is a function of either wanting to distinguish itself as different or to do away with that which was previously necessary, but has outlived its use value.

The avant-garde theorists who called for these plans did not hide their intentions. In order to create a cohesive city that would seem to operate in perfect harmony, they saw no option but to wipe away the memories of the past, physically and psychologically. Foremost among the international group of avant-garde architects plotting the end of nineteenth-century sensibilities was Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret). His writing style, which mostly tends toward

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>14</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 189.

manifesto, is reminiscent of a hawker announcing wares on a street corner, so bold are the ideas he offers the reader.<sup>17</sup> He is not shy about insisting on the difference between his present and the previous century, writing in countless variations: “But men live in old houses and they have not yet thought of building houses adapted to themselves”;<sup>18</sup> “The styles of Louis XIV, XV, XVI or Gothic, are to architecture what a feather is on a woman’s head; it is sometimes pretty, though not always, and never anything more”;<sup>19</sup> “Architecture is stifled by custom”;<sup>20</sup> “We do not appreciate sufficiently the deep chasm between our own epoch and earlier periods”;<sup>21</sup> “There reigns a great disagreement between the modern state of mind, which is an admonition to us, and the stifling accumulation of age-long detritus”;<sup>22</sup> or, most significantly for this dissertation:

Then why do we have the enormous and useless roofs on pretty suburban villas? Why the scanty windows with their little panes; why large houses with so many rooms locked up? Why the mirrored wardrobes, the washstands, the commodes? And then, why the elaborate bookcases? the consoles, the china cabinets, the dressers, the sideboards? Why the enormous glass chandeliers? The mantelpieces? Why the draped curtains? Why the damasked wall-papers thick with colour, with their motley design?<sup>23</sup>

Although much of Le Corbusier’s writing centers on the role of the architect in ensuring the modern home is appropriate for the New Man, the scope of this project extends beyond the role of the typical architect and into the interior designer’s realm, ideally bringing the two together to create a harmony between the structure and the physical uses (“tools”) of a building that make it a “machine for living in.”<sup>24</sup> The manifesto form calls for an exaggerated tone, hence the urgency one finds in Le Corbusier’s lists of lists, questions, grievances, and demands for the New Living. Le Corbusier’s project is not so different from the many similar bodies of theoretical writing by his contemporaries, from Ludwig Hilberseimer to Bruno Taut and Erich Mendelsohn.

For example, Hilberseimer writes that the apartment building was negatively viewed by builders because it had not—in the past—been properly conceived in its internal structure and in its placement within urban space.<sup>25</sup> He advocated for a mixture of single-family homes and apartment complexes to be built in the same sections of the city, but with enough space between the buildings that inhabitants could “enjoy the benefits of sunlight and fresh air” as well as, in the

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<sup>17</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City; Principles of Planning* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944), 75.

very least, “a view over gardens.”<sup>26</sup> Like Le Corbusier, Hilberseimer felt that buildings should be designed “as a whole” with foremost regard for their functionality in the fulfillment of inhabitants’ needs.<sup>27</sup> Also like Le Corbusier, he saw in historical or older building styles “beauty at the expense of truth;” focusing on the previous century in particular, Hilberseimer writes that: “the imitative tendency of the nineteenth century found its roots in this classic revival [of pseudo-antiquity vis-à-vis the Renaissance] and the tendency has not been overcome to this day.”<sup>28</sup> Taut, also lamenting the persistence of the past in current structures, writes that:

The direct carrier of the spiritual forces, moulder of the sensibilities of the general public, which today are slumbering and tomorrow will awake, is architecture. Only a complete revolution in the spiritual realm will create this architecture. But this revolution, this architecture will not come of themselves. Both must be willed – today’s architects must prepare the way for tomorrow’s building.<sup>29</sup>

Those who were invested in the modernist project were sure on paper that the future could not unfold properly without architectural “revolution,” a term that arises not only in Taut’s writing, but in Le Corbusier’s and in Mendelsohn’s. Yet while Mendelsohn also speaks of revolutionary times and a future that will be free of the current problems, his language appears tempered by a realistic sensibility that is not present in the writings of his peers.

Like Le Corbusier, Mendelsohn uses the word “forms” when he talks about the basic elements of buildings. And like both Le Corbusier and Taut, everything that is to come is “new,” however the complete erasure that is present in both Taut and Le Corbusier’s writings is not present in Mendelsohn’s manifesto: “When forms break up, they are merely thrust aside by new forms that are already present but only now come to light,” and “before such a future the great achievements of *historical* times step back of their own accord; the immediacy of the *present* loses its importance.”<sup>30</sup> This language of “stepping back” and “merely” being “thrust aside,” while still appearing passionate in its manifesto format, alludes to the problem inherent in the modern architecture and design movement—namely, its utopianism. The printed words and sketches being produced to advance the agenda were publications that did not have to deal with the effects of displacing people and businesses, cleaning up the spaces that were proposed for demolition, and allaying the costs of creating the new buildings for the city of the future. Mendelsohn recognizes that existing structures will always be older than the new ones about to be built. Rather than starting with a clean slate or ridding the future of all traces of the past, he acknowledges that the design elements of earlier times will remain, just as the elements of modern or future style have been present all along in the foundations of that which came before

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>29</sup> Bruno Taut, “A Programme for Architecture,” in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 41.

<sup>30</sup> Erich Mendelsohn, “The Problem of a New Architecture,” in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 54.

it. At the same time, Mendelsohn's choice of tempering his statement of recognition with the phrase "before such a future" returns his argument to the hopeful front of the avant-garde building program.

Le Corbusier's corpus clearly shows a similar conception of creating buildings for the society of the future, as he looks back to Classical architecture for hints at how contemporary builders can create modern architecture from "basic elements" and "clarity of form."<sup>31</sup> Classical tenets have been continuously present in architecture, even as the ornate styles that came after Greek, Roman, and Renaissance classicisms piled more and more curves, curlicues, and embellishments onto the basic forms. In other words, if builders are using the basic forms to create a new architecture, then they are really going back to the building blocks of western style—and antiquity—to start over again. There can be no complete erasure of the past, just as there can be no completely "new" modern person who will not be able to live in the dwelling spaces built in the nineteenth, eighteenth, or seventeenth centuries. A person may choose to live in a home furnished in the Baroque style or in twentieth-century modern; but a person likely will not be born who finds it impossible to adapt to living in the same types of structures his or her parents and grandparents did. As I will discuss in the next chapter, what is impossible is convincing all people to give up their appreciation for older floorplans and décor.

The furnishings which these architects and their peers refer to as detritus from earlier periods are assumed in the manifestos to exist throughout the classed tiers of society, from the "suburban villa" to the working-class apartment. This blurring of class concerns is evident in Hans Richter's film, *Die neue Wohnung*, which features modernist buildings and theories—among them, Le Corbusier's. *Die neue Wohnung* is an exhibition film Richter created for the Schweizer Werkbund, for presentation at design expositions such as the first WoBa (Schweizerischen Wohnungsaustellung). The film is bookended with still shots of modernist interiors that are so utilitarian that the collapsible walls, window blinds, and retractable lamp are shown to operate by themselves; these modern buildings are the answers to all of the problems of urban life at any income level—or, at least, airy, verdant villas are for the upper class and mass-manufactured, utilitarian apartments are for the working class. This dichotomy becomes clear during the film's body narrative, which I will discuss further in Chapter 3. The middle part of the film shows the polar opposite of its beginning and ending, and is thus meant to contrast the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior with its ideal modern counterparts. The interior of the past is coded negatively with footage of dirty children playing in alleyway puddles, streets so narrow the sun does not shine in them, and furniture so heavy a moving crew can barely hoist it up a flight of stairs. These images are meant to portray poverty, unsanitary living conditions, and oppressive historical styles that place undue burdens on the modern urban inhabitant.

Early in the film, a family is shown living in a "typical" apartment, living primarily in the kitchen. Although they live in a three-room apartment, the family members eat, cook, wash

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<sup>31</sup> In this instance, "Classical" refers to Greek and Roman designs, as well as to some Renaissance works. According to Le Corbusier and his peers, these Classical structures were designed using mathematics and basic shapes. The buildings may be embellished with decorations, but they do not obscure the form's clean lines. Of course, most builders work with plans that have been created using mathematical equations and formulations. The point here is stylistic, focusing on the relative minimalism of design.

laundry, bathe, read, and complete schoolwork in their kitchen while their living room is reserved for visitors (see figure 1.1).



*Figure 1.1: The family "living" in its kitchen. From Die neue Wohnung, dir. Richter, 7:08.*

As I will discuss in the next chapter, a living situation that has the family completing so many tasks together all in one room is anathema to the New Building. The family's living room, in comparison, is a proper parlor. That room is visible to the viewer only when a guest is about to arrive for lunch (see figures 1.2 and 1.3).





Figures 1.2-1.3: The woman removing dust cloths from the parlor furniture before the guest arrives (top); the guest, husband, and children seated in the parlor (bottom). From *Die neue Wohnung*, 7:53, 9:13.

The parlor is off-limits to the children until the guest's arrival. It is also locked up before and after the visitor's stay, with cloths covering the furnishings to protect them from dust. This parlor is exactly what Le Corbusier means when he writes of the styles of the past offering much to look at, but little to put to use. The room is chock-full of figurines, paintings, heavy curtains, and decorative furniture. Richter edits the family's lunchtime scene to present the images of these "useless items" at a fever-pitch pace, such that their montage results in a catastrophe. Several figurines, including a bust of Goethe, plummet to the floor and shatter, leaving the children in tears, the mother in shock, and the guest running for the door. Through the montage, this room's interior creates a feeling of claustrophobia that emphasizes the lack of free space in the room. The argument follows that the family must live in the kitchen so as to preserve the bourgeois environment the parlor represents—at the cost of their emotional well-being and freedom of movement within their own domestic space.

*Die neue Wohnung* presents an understanding of interior living space as contemporary viewers would recognize it as something that is incompatible with modern life. The bourgeois domestic interior is linked to the organic urban structures from past centuries that are associated with airless courtyards and dark streets. A film contemporary—and competing—with *Die neue Wohnung*, Pierre Chenal's 1930 *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, also quotes Le Corbusier's theory. An independent film that Chenal, like Richter, created for the Schweizer Werkbund, the film differs from Richter's in its presentation of theory. Chenal's film provides more theoretical "facts" in long intertitles and skips the animated furnishings that bring Richter's interiors to life. Significantly, Le Corbusier himself is shown in Chenal's film, drawing a line through the middle of Paris as he describes how he will tear the city down and build anew (see figures 1.4 and 1.5)—even after Haussmann had finished doing the same less than a century earlier!

Le Corbusier propose de  
percer Paris d'Ouest en Est  
et de démolir les anciens  
quartiers qui occupent  
le centre de la ville.



*Figures 1.4-1.5: An intertitle that declares, “Le Corbusier proposes to cut through Paris from east to west and demolish the old quarters in the center of the city” (translation mine; top); Le Corbusier drawing his line through Paris (bottom). From L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, dir. Pierre Chenal, 8:43, 8:46*

This provides a visual example of how literally Le Corbusier intends his manifesto to be taken; it is no metaphor to tear the city down and start from scratch.

While it is generally impossible to raze entire cities and start over again in normal circumstances, ambitious architects and designers often saw such a movement as the only explanation for how to undo the “damages” of previous eras so that they might accomplish something “right.” The project in which Le Corbusier, Taut, Mendelsohn, and their cohort were engaged is not unique to the twentieth century. As Marcus points out in her discussion of nineteenth-century architects’ goals, that generation of architects sought to create buildings that were inherently “urban,” or visibly belonging to the city in terms of their relationships with one another and with the city plan as a whole. Georges-Eugène Haussmann is perhaps the most famous of those earlier modern builders. Haussmann rebuilt the center of Paris from 1853 to 1870 with a similar project in mind of wiping out what was previously present and starting fresh.

Similar to Haussmann, the modernist architects of the 1910s and 1920s see the problems of existing urban structures as something that must be fixed on the inside and the outside, regardless of the private inhabitants' own desires and intentions. The program extends so far as to erase all spaces in the city that would allow its inhabitants to have any memories of what it was like to live in the "miserable" metropolis of the nineteenth century.

Literature is a site in which generations of readers can access the spaces and expectations of the past through words and imagination. Each era has its own concerns and unique characters and settings. In fiction from the first third of the twentieth century, the separation of the "private" interior and "public" urban exterior differs from the inward-looking landscapes from the latter half of the nineteenth century. This compartmentalization of spatial roles may have something to do with what Anthony Vidler calls the lack of physical spaces for memory in modern cities:

Preoccupied with traces and residue—the material of the dreamwork—rather than with the new, writers and architects have increasingly found ways to chart the underground reverberations of the city. In their ascriptions, territoriality becomes unfixed, camouflaged and dug-in, in so many ironic emulations of military and geopolitical strategy; subjectivity is rendered heterogeneous, nomadic, and self-critical in vagabond environments that refuse the commonplaces of hearth and home in favor of the uncertainties of no-man's-land."<sup>32</sup>

Although the architects with whom this study is concerned were obsessed with "the new," and although the writers and directors whose novels and films will be discussed in this dissertation lead their characters and plots through the spaces of the new, the "underground reverberations of the city" are nonetheless present in their texts. Understanding those reverberations—what they are, from where they come, and with how they are dealt—will tease out the reasons for the tension between modern city life and the domestic interior in the literary, filmic, and theoretical imaginaries of Weimar Berlin.

### **The Unhomely Home of the Past**

In order to understand the currents that led to the churning desire in modernist architecture and design manifestos for a supposed erasure of the past, it is necessary to go to earlier hints that all was not right in the home. Georg Kaiser's play *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1912) presents a pre-World War I look into the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior. This representation is not only significant because it is located before the Great War and predates the heights of functionalist design, but also because it resurfaced in 1920 as a film adaptation directed by Karlheinz Martin. Insofar as the story's "message" remains virtually intact from the original text to the adaptation, one could argue that the picture the story paints of the traditional home is just as volatile before Weimar as it is during the republic. Kaiser's play is a seven-scene

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<sup>32</sup> Vidler, xiii.

Expressionist piece that carries the unnamed protagonist to his decline over the course of a single day—from morn to midnight. A bank cashier, he steals money at the prospect of running away with an Italian woman, only to find that she has no intention of leaving with him. He decides to leave for the big city anyway, but not without first returning home to his family. Both the film and the play are characterized by Expressionist stylistic tropes: nameless characters, exaggerated gestures, surreal “realities.” These alienating traits force readers and viewers to examine their own expectations for drama or film. The stylistic elements of the stage directions and dialogue in the play, and in the plot and setting in the film, point to an uneasy present. The language of both texts in their separate media relays certain attitudes toward the particular mode of dwelling the protagonist abandons.

The cashier’s family is introduced in scene 4 of the play. The text includes notes describing how the interior should look and feel: “Stube bei Kassierer. Fenster mit abgeblühten Geranien. Zwei Türen hinten, Tür rechts. Tisch und Stühle. Klavier. Mutter sitzt am Fenster. Erste Tochter stickt am Tisch. Zweite Tochter übt die Tannhäuserouvertüre.”<sup>33</sup> This immediately sets the scene as one of bourgeois domesticity: the women at home, taking part in middle-class female pursuits; geraniums; a piano. Further stage directions throughout the scene make clear that the house has multiple rooms, including a separate kitchen. The furniture and layout of the home, as well as the pursuits of its inhabitants, ensure that the reader knows the cashier and his family are middle class. This is significant because it carries forward earlier literary traditions from the modern period, which focused on the *Bildungsbürger* and the middle-German milieu with which readers could identify through those earlier tropes.

Later in the scene, once the cashier has returned home, he reflects on his home’s interior and its atmosphere of domesticity:

“(herumblickend). Alte Mutter am Fenster. Töchter am Tisch stickend – Wagner spielend. Frau die Küche besorgend. Von vier Wänden umbaut – Familienleben. Hübsche Gemütlichkeit des Zusammenseins. Mutter – Sohn – Kind versammelt sind. Vertraulicher Zauber. Er spinnt ein. Stube mit Tisch und Hängelampe. Klavier rechts. Kachelofen. Küche, tägliche Nahrung. Morgens Kaffee, mittags Koteletts. Schlafkammer – Betten, hinein – hinaus. Vertraulicher Zauber.”<sup>34</sup>

This moment repeats almost exactly the wording of the set directions. The repetition of words in the written text underscores the importance of Kaiser’s choice to call for a room like this one. After all, the decision to frame the room as one with a piano and a hanging lamp is a decision as opposed to one in which those items are not included. Although the Expressionist staging of the

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<sup>33</sup> “Cashier’s living room. Window with faded geraniums. Two doors in the back, one to the right. Tables and chairs. Piano. Mother sits at the window. First daughter knits at the table. Second daughter practices the overture to Tannhäuser” (translation mine). Georg Kaiser, *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967), 29.

<sup>34</sup> “(looking around) Old mother by the window. Daughters knitting at the table – playing Wagner. Wife tending the kitchen. Surrounded by four walls – family life. Pretty comforts of being together. Mother – son – child are all together. Intimate enchantment. He goes crazy. Parlor with table and hanging lamp. Piano to the right. Tile stove. Kitchen, daily sustenance. Coffee in the morning, cutlets in the afternoons. Bedroom – beds, into them, out of them. Intimate enchantment” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 33.

play would imply a grotesque distortion of the fictional world being presented, the status that the elements of the set represent is important for situating the cashier's domestic life and spelling out what he is about to lose by leaving. The cashier refers to the atmosphere as one of *vertraulicher Zauber* – “intimate” or “private” enchantment. Not only does his reflection draw the reader's (or viewer's) deeper attention to the home's interior space and its specific contents, but the reflection also underscores the traditional understanding of domesticity tied up in the space's furnishings and the activities that are made possible by those furnishings (playing the piano, embroidering, cooking, enjoying meals). The cashier is, as he describes his surroundings, also wearing his slippers, housecoat and a cap, and smoking a pipe.<sup>35</sup> This image is not unlike the living room scenes from Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) or other modern texts taking place within a non-aristocratic domestic interior.<sup>36</sup> Despite the illusion of *gemütlichkeit*, the style of representation and small details of the room lead to an understanding of the space as ridiculous. After all, the geraniums are *abgeblüht* (have ceased to bloom), and the cashier makes a cryptic remark about death directly following his soliloquy about the parlor's *vertraulicher Zauber*. A space associated with the past, the room takes on a sentimental sheen even in the alienating world of an expressionist text.

Not long after settling into his chair, the cashier changes back into his normal clothing and appears ready to depart, just as his wife announces that lunch is ready. In the exchange that follows, the cashier's desire to leave his family and home results in death.

**Kassierer.** Landstreicher. Ich sagte es ja. Scheltet nicht! Besser ein verwahrloster Wanderer auf der Straße—als Straßen leer von Wanderern!

**Frau.** Wir essen jetzt zu Mittag.

**Kassierer.** Koteletts, ich rieche sie.

**Mutter.** Vor dem Mittagessen willst du—?

**Kassierer.** Ein voller Magen macht schläfrig.

**Mutter.** (*fuchelt plötzlich mit den Armen durch die Luft, fällt zurück*). [...]

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>36</sup> For example: “Werther ging in der Stube auf und ab, [Lotte] trat ans Klavier und fing eine Menuett an, sie wollte nicht fließen. Sie nahm sich zusammen und setzte sich gelassen zu Werthern, der seinen gewöhnlichen Platz auf dem Kanapee eingenommen hatte” (Werther paced throughout the parlor. [Lotte] went to the piano and began a minuet, but it wouldn't flow. She pulled herself together and sat serenely beside Werther, who had assumed his usual spot on the sofa” (translation mine). See Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 132-33. The lovers' circumstances aside, the *Stube* is complete with its piano, sofa, and (mentioned in other scenes) writing desk and books. The inhabitants and their visitors can safely socialize, play or hear music, and read or translate literature without fear of missing any necessary accoutrement.

**Kassierer** (*tritt zum Sessel*). Daran stirbt sie, weil einer einmal vor dem Mittagessen weggeht.<sup>37</sup>

According to the cashier, his own desire to go out before the family has eaten dinner goes so much against tradition that his mother cannot survive the possibility of such an event. This suggests a household protocol that underlines the bourgeois nature of the cashier's household and the understanding of propriety which it embodies. By deciding to part with the rigid structuring of home life and the quiet comforts that structure entails, he throws the domestic sphere into chaos. This is in sharp contrast to the assumed chaos of the exterior world, especially because of the wife's helplessness and lack of action after the cashier departs. He goes on to leave his home forever, spending the play's remainder in public spaces and with crowds of people. Because the cashier's downfall takes place outside the home, the plot trajectory could well be interpreted as resulting from his desire at the beginning of the play to leave the home. Yet the relationship between the domestic interior and the temptations of the exterior world is more complicated. The cashier spends a short time in his home between when he decides to steal money and run off with a strange woman and when he dies at a Salvation Army service. During that time, he makes remarks about comfort and familiarity. In the preceding and following scenes, he is agitated, on the run, and increasingly uncomfortable. Wherever he looks, he does not find the peace of mind that he seeks. The exit from the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior is equated with the death of the previous generation; it is also partly to the protagonist's inability to feel "at home" anywhere in the modern city.

In Martin's film adaptation of the play, the cashier's "Trautes Heim" (cozy home) is depicted in distorted and linear Expressionist style, with attention to the set details Kaiser had called for in his notes to the play. The contrasting tones and angular shapes in the film are sharply different from "reality." The stylization of Expressionist film highlights the scenes' tension and makes the mood darker. As a result, the *trautes Heim* appears just as negative as the spaces outside of it. The set has a strong quality of constructedness, with visible paint strokes and forms that are not drawn to scale. The furniture in the cashier's home is accented with the curvatures characteristic of baroque furnishings (see figure 1.6).

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<sup>37</sup> "**Cashier.** Drifter. I said it. Don't nag! Better to be a scruffy wanderer on the streets than for the streets to be empty of wanderers! / **Wife.** We're eating lunch now. / **Cashier.** Cutlets, I smell them. / **Mother.** Before lunch you want to—? / **Cashier.** A full stomach makes one sleepy. / **Mother** (suddenly waves her arms in the air, falls backward). [...] / **Kassierer** (goes to the chair). That's what she dies from, because somebody wants to leave before lunch for once" (translation mine). Kaiser, 34.



Figure 1.6: Mother, wife, and daughter await the cashier in their parlor. From *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, dir. Martin, 27:56.

The most modern embellishment in the room is the hanging lamp to which the cashier refers in his monologue in the play. In the scene during which the cashier is seated in his housecoat and slippers, smoking his pipe while his daughter and wife attend to him, he peers around the room smiling, nodding, and chuckling to himself (see figure 1.7).



Figure 1.7: The cashier in slippers, robe, and cap amid his family in the parlor. From *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, 29:37.

His apparent contentment gives way to his family's shock and his mother's death as he prepares to leave the room, and then to his own horror as he peers at his daughter and a skull fades in and

out, superimposed on her face—one of several such shots consistent with the *momento mori* motif that runs throughout the film (see figure 1.8).



Figure 1.8: The cashier sees a skull in his daughter's face before he leaves the home. From *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, 31:48

Beyond the overt conflicts of morality and social mores with capitalism and greed, the death within the domestic space and the end of homely family life flag the changes taking place within early twentieth-century German society. It is not only the wild world outside, lust, greed, or even money alone that remove the cashier from his private space. The home plays a role in booting him out, as well. This suggests that no space is safe from the alienation of modernity. Just as the cashier's daughter's face is as easily a death mask, the cozy house is replaced by a rented room. In the format of Expressionism, a twentieth-century mode of storytelling and image creation, home is not "homey."

Kaiser's protagonist, the bank cashier, lives in a home that is not classified specifically as either a house or an apartment. Yet the playwright picks the word *Stube*, or "parlor," to classify the main room in which scene 4 takes place. The parlor carries particular meaning with it—it is a living room, but it is also somewhat grander than a living room. It is that space in Richter's *Die neue Wohnung* that is bursting with knick-knacks, is cordoned off unless guests arrive, and is the space for entertaining. In the 1920s, where it does still exist in middle-class and upper-middle class apartments, that parlor is coded by the avant-garde as stiff and musty, a waste of space that is undoubtedly also unhygienic. Yet in *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, the parlor is where the family gathers to wait for its patriarch. Except for the mother, whose tasks take her to the kitchen, everyone in the family sits in the parlor to fulfill some leisure activity—embroidering, piano playing, resting. Neither the children nor the grandmother are engaged in labor. Their pursuits serve no purpose beyond passing the time until the cashier returns, just as the parlor serves no purpose other than to embrace him when he arrives. Having gotten a taste for the possibilities of a life outside his home, the banker has no need for this center of *Gemütlichkeit*; he leaves without so much as fulfilling his purpose of eating there, going away forever to take

part in the debaucheries of moneyed urban life. External and internal forces alike are most likely to blame for the cashier's fated decline. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the play's middle scene unfolds in an interior that would be described by Le Corbusier as belonging to the decorative, functionless past.

## Conclusion

It is fruitful to question the tension that arises in such an interior. If this interior was modern in the relative modernity of the 1880s, why is there such friction in the evolution of each new modernity out of its predecessor? It is not simply urbanization, or the growth of cities in a largely agrarian land. As Raymond Williams has shown, the relationship between urban centers and their provincial neighbors has never undergone the dramatic shift that nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians presume.<sup>38</sup> There has always been a form of cooperation or link between urban environs and their surroundings. Rather, something changed during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century in terms of Europeans' understandings of both "dwelling" and "nature":

And then what one has to consider is the extension of this observation [of one's childhood home being developed into something else]—one kind of loss against one kind of gain—into a loss of 'Nature'. It is not only the loss of what can be called—sometimes justly, sometimes affectedly—a piece of 'unspoiled' country. It is also, for any particular man, the loss of a specifically human and historical landscape, in which the source of feeling is not really that it is 'natural' but that it is 'native' [...] And then what is most urgently being mourned [...] is a loss of childhood through a loss of its immediate landscape...<sup>39</sup>

The "loss of childhood" is particularly interesting in the context of a change within the dwelling space. The domestic interior is, after all, associated with childbearing, childrearing, and childhood. If that space has changed or become lost in some way, then the inhabitant's sense of his or her own past—and also his or her place both in the home and in society—is compromised. This shift is evident in literary interiors, yet it is vastly overshadowed by the twentieth century's focus on changes in the exterior, urban landscape, on the street and across the span of each of the great cities. No matter how much the city and its needs of its dwellers change, there is always—except in the case of homelessness—a domestic interior to which the city dweller returns once his workday or night out has come to an end. And no matter how much women's freedoms are seen to evolve, there are still demands placed on them to return to domestic duties in the home. The pressures of the exterior world thus galvanize in the domestic interior. In the assumed safety of the "private" interior, the dweller believes him or herself to be beyond the realm of the city, in a separate space where he or she is "at home." Perhaps it is the assumption of separateness and

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<sup>38</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

privacy in the domestic interior that allows the tension to take place, as the judgmental eyes of “society” are understood to be safely on the other side of the dweller’s four walls. Yet as I will show in Chapter 3, those walls are typically not the dweller’s own. The housing market is one of renters in the urbanized city; private ownership is largely the space of landlords, or else it is reserved for living situations outside the urban center.

The nineteenth-century “age of great cities” was modern before the early twentieth century changed what it meant to be modern. As has been mentioned many times, and by many others before, the nineteenth century can be broadly characterized across Western Europe by terms such as industrialization, capitalism, population boom, and urban migration. These terms are not so far removed from those that are often used to describe the beginning of the twentieth century: deindividuation, alienation, Fordism, mechanization. Perhaps best stated by the philosopher Georg Simmel, “An inquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body, so to speak, must seek to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super-individual content of life.”<sup>40</sup> That is, the city is what is different for the conditions of living. The various terms used to describe modernity, as well as the landscape with which it is most closely associated, are as inextricably linked to the great cities as they are to the many people who came to dwell in those cities. The psychology of those urban inhabitants is also assumed to have been different from that of the people who predated them. Much like Kaiser’s cashier, who becomes alienated from his home and family to the point of abandoning them, the modern urbanite is assumed by those seeking to build his or her future city to be unable to exist in the same framework of life—as an individual and as a member of society—as the people who came to the cities from the country, or who remain in provincial locales.

In Berlin, where the cohort of modernist architects who fell in line with Le Corbusier and filmmakers like Hans Richter sought to realize some of their most ambitious utopian plans, the concerns about living spaces from the previous century continued to rumble beneath the surface of the tenement kitchen floor and the rented room. Those rumblings, perhaps of a dwelling space that is struggling to exist, are most evident in the kitchen. A hotly contested space that signified equality for the New Woman in theory, Weimar Berlin kitchens as they were depicted in literature and film paint a different picture of “reality” than the kitchens that were proposed to take their place.

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<sup>40</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated by Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 409.

## Chapter 2

### Domesticity in the Interior: Kitchens in Theory and in Literary Practice

Writing in 1924, Bruno Taut referred to the kitchen as the “nerve center of the dwelling.”<sup>41</sup> Taut went on to explain how the work of a small- or medium-sized household is performed by the woman, and that the home must be reconceived of so that women are better able to perform that work. Because women are the subjects for whom the improvements to the kitchen were intended, the kitchen thus emerges as a gendered space that is most closely associated with domestic labor. Indeed, much was written in the 1920s about how to improve the kitchen, and thus the lot of women in general. In the new social democracy, women might work outside the home as did men, but they were also expected to perform the majority of the chores and childcare within the home. The kitchen became the nexus for discussions about the New Dwelling and about the New Woman, precisely because the modern woman could not be divorced from the traditional gender norms that associated her with domestic labor. In both films and in written treatises on the New Living, urban wives and mothers are depicted as harried slaves to their dank dwelling spaces. The parlor and the kitchen are treated together in illustrating these shackles, however the reinvention of the kitchen is given ample experimentation in modernist theory’s manifestos and model homes.

While there were exhibitions on the New Living in and around Berlin—notably featuring the work of Bruno Taut and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, among others—the most famous experimental colony in Germany was located far from Berlin. The Weißenhofsiedlung (Weißenhof Estate) outside of Stuttgart was one of the exhibitions of model homes in Germany and throughout Europe built during the 1920s and early 1930s to illustrate the New Dwelling’s possibilities. One can still visit the settlement, where normal people live in homes designed by the likes of Le Corbusier, Taut, and Walter Gropius. Visiting the Weißenhofsiedlung in 1927, politician and women’s rights advocate Marie-Elisabeth Lüders reported on the many realistic shortcomings of Mies van der Rohe’s contribution to the exhibition.<sup>42</sup> While Lüders discusses the entire building, her concerns return several times to the kitchen and its impractical layout. After complaining about the kitchen’s large windows and their southern exposure, she adds that:

This kitchen, however, suffers from a further serious error: the gas stove—quite small for the number of people intended for the apartment—is located opposite the window against a narrow wall between two doors arranged at right angles to each other. First of all, one turns one’s back to the light while cooking; second, every time one of the doors is opened the gas flame is disrupted; and, third, it is a

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<sup>41</sup> Bruno Taut, “The New Dwelling: The Woman as Creator,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 462.

<sup>42</sup> Here I refer to his built contribution, a block of four apartments. Van der Rohe’s contributions go beyond the scope of designing a building, as he and Lilly Reich together planned and designed the exhibition. See “The Houses of the Weissenhofsiedlung,” Weissenhofsiedlung, last modified 2002, accessed May 12, 2016, Weissenhofsiedlung, <http://www.weissenhof2002.de/english/weissenhof.html>. See also “The Participants of the Werkbund Exhibition ‘Die Wohnung’” on the same website.

miracle if everyone who goes through the door does not knock a pot off the stove or come too close to the flame.<sup>43</sup>

Here, the attempt to view space and save the housewife from walking too far between tasks is seen as creating a cramped environment that creates more problems than it effectively solves.

Lüders also sees the kitchen not just as a woman's solitary domain, but as a space into which all members of the home might pass for various reasons. She imagines a safety hazard in the tiny, cornered stove, as well as in other elements of the house such as the high windows and unprotected staircases. After going on to continue complaining about the kitchen's exposure, its location on the first floor, and some of the house's other failings, Lüders returns yet again to the kitchen for final words on the building and on the exhibition as a whole. She writes that:

The kitchen in the same apartment has been executed with remarkably little care and left quite insufficient. In other kitchens, which are otherwise well dimensioned, practically arranged, etc., one nevertheless finds windows which are set so high above such a broad kitchen table that any normal-sized woman would have to stand on a stool to open them.<sup>44</sup>

She does not make explicit which other kitchens she has found that are better arranged. Speaking broadly, she appears to find the kitchen to be most wanting in all of these new homes designed by the eager male architects who had, in building those kitchens, expressed a desire to make women's lives easier. In Lüders' opinion, women would encounter extra hurdles to accomplishing mundane tasks in these model homes, rather than finding ease, comfort, and a lighter workload in "streamlined," amply lit kitchens as the designers had hoped.

Beyond the list of grievances against the house's layout and its appliances, the root of Lüders' complaints is really the proposed application of a theory to real-world practice. Writing about the sparse furnishings in the homes at the Weißenhofsiedlung, Lüders explains that where the models should be teaching visitors about the "practical possibilities for furnishing their homes"—a stance that is in-line with the modernist design community's desire to exhibit homes for public viewing—they are instead "imagined in a vacuum by the aesthetic sense of Mr. So-and-So."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, one could argue that theory remains in a vacuum when it is applied in practice by the theorizer.<sup>46</sup> Yet the goal of the exhibition was to do just that, in order to control the message being presented so that it remained true to the modernist cause. Lüders, a politically significant female visitor, disagreed that the builders had succeeded. One person's opinion does

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<sup>43</sup> Marie-Elisabeth Lüders, "A Construction, Not a Dwelling," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 469.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> I will discuss this later in the chapter; see page 39.

not constitute a general rule; but the evidence of such a response to the New Living can provide a clue to understanding the absence of similar interiors in contemporary fiction novels and films.

The absence of modern design in films and novels can be seen as a deviation from expectations for fictional texts of that time because of the constructedness of the environments in each medium. In written literature such as novels or plays, authors choose their words to convey spaces that are based on certain assumptions. In film, where most settings for 1920s and 1930s films were constructed in studios, instructions for how the set should be built would also be based on a set of expectations for the intended space and the mood or milieu with which it was to be associated. Thus the decision to set a novel or film in a dark and cluttered tenement apartment provides a different set of living conditions than a novel or film set in a bright and airy apartment house with minimalist furnishings. Looking at Weimar films and novels from the current constellation of past and present, the viewer or reader expects to find modernist locations that express his or her assumptions about the spirit of that period. When poor living conditions are associated with building styles of the past in a visual or written image, one might expect to find a “better” alternative presented alongside it. The alternatives one finds are not necessarily “newer” styles or “future” styles; where they exist, the alternatives tend to feature styles from the same period, but from a different class status.

Kitchens are all but absent in literary treatments of modern Berlin, and the kitchens that are made visible are usually not “true” kitchens. One reason for this may be that the New Living’s proscriptions for interior space, particularly kitchen space, reinforced traditional domestic roles despite the illusion of women’s increased liberation. After all, the modern kitchen is still intended for the woman of the house, it is women who are presented doing domestic labor in the new kitchen, and it is women who review those kitchens. The situation in reality may have been more fluid as women moved in and out of the public and private spaces that were open to them, constantly negotiating and renegotiating modern space just like the men who dwelled in it with them. The supposed liberation of the New Woman is not reconciled with ongoing domestic expectations in theory. It does not seem to be reconciled in the realms of literature and film, either. Few examples of the New Living exist in either medium, and fictional depictions of the New Woman are generally set in spaces retaining earlier conceptions of the domestic interior.<sup>47</sup> Because of the supposedly liberated position of the woman in the new republic, those interiors contrast with the urban twentieth-century modernity (and morality) in which she spends much of her day. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the gulf between 1920s design theory and contemporary novels’ and films’ treatments of modern living vis-à-vis the kitchen.

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<sup>47</sup> Those works that do not incorporate earlier notions of domesticity also do not represent modernist intentions for the home; their sets and settings are much more sparsely assigned, leaving more room for imagination.

## Living the New Living in Theory

In 1921, the journal *Die Kommunistin* published a “Manifesto for International Women’s Day.”<sup>48</sup> Among the various points in the manifesto is the condition for living to which many women were subjected following the end of the first world war and the birth of the Weimar Republic. According to the manifesto, “Uncounted numbers of you are massed in stifling black rooms, in dark and airless courtyard apartments, in damp, moldy cellars and drafty garrets.”<sup>49</sup> Descriptions like this characterize many of the contemporary writings about tenement housing and city living, both in manifestos and in some socialist realist films. Seen as a trope of impoverished living, it is one on which Le Corbusier relies heavily in his writing, and one to which Hans Richter gravitates in his cinematic treatment in *Die neue Wohnung*. In the previous chapter, I discussed the bourgeois parlor as the tipping point in the film; yet in scenes leading up to those of the family at home in their apartment, Richter inserts a montage of desolate images of “urban” life that resonate quite well with *Die Kommunistin*’s assertion of “airless courtyard apartments.”

Following a celebratory montage of modernist villas at the beginning of *Die neue Wohnung*, an intertitle announces that, “Einstweilen aber sind unsere Städte noch Steingefängnisse.”<sup>50</sup> The title then cuts to an aerial view of Berlin, shot from above (see figure 2.1).

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<sup>48</sup> *Die Kommunistin*, “Manifesto for International Women’s Day” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>50</sup> “Meanwhile, our cities are still stone prisons” (translation mine). *Die neue Wohnung*, dir. Hans Richter (Zürich: Praesens Film AG, 1930), YouTube video, 28:16, posted by “CourtneyCJohnson,” June 30, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAUhQHRANj4>, 3:56.



*Figure 2.1. Still from an aerial shot that pans across a section of Berlin. From Die Neue Wohnung, 4:04.*

Although it is no terrible mass of American-style skyscrapers,<sup>51</sup> the image of Berlin presented in this moment gives a literal overview of the great number of people inhabiting the city's space together. Despite Richter's choice of words, the imagination of the city as a *Steingefängnis* is subjective. The viewer sees both light and shadow, as well as open space, rivers, and roads in the aerial view. Directly after this shot, an intertitle guides the viewer's perception with the word *Elend* (misery or squalor). This title cuts to a succession of shots of narrow, dark, cobblestoned passages, decrepit courtyards with no light, a child playing in the dirt, and a drooping flower in a lone pot (see figures 2.2 through 2.7).

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<sup>51</sup> As Dietrich Neumann points out, New York's topography of skyscrapers was integral to Weimar depictions of urban space. Neumann cited both Fritz Lang and F. W. Murnau among those directors whose fascinations with New York and Los Angeles fed back into their filmmaking. Regarding the most famous urban space in Weimar cinema, Neumann writes that "for anyone familiar with architectural debates in the Weimar Republic, the central view onto the skyscrapers in *Metropolis* combined an exaggerated version of the dark streets of American cities with the notion of a central tower that had played such an important part in recent discussions that represented the most conservative contemporary approach to skyscraper design and town planning in Germany." See Dietrich Neumann, ed., "Before and after *Metropolis*: Film and Architecture in Search of the Modern City," in *Film Architecture: From Metropolis to Blade Runner* (New York: Prestel, 1999), 36.





*Figures 2.2-2.7. Shots from a sequence intended to convey the mood of misery in urban residential spaces. From Die neue Wohnung, 5:06-5:27.*

The shadowy lighting in these shots creates a somber mood, while the crumbling structures and lone subjects present a setting that is almost totally void of life. The supposition of poverty is underlined by the next intertitle, which reads: “16% der arbeitenden Bevölkerung haben keine eigne Wohnung.”<sup>52</sup> The word *eigne* here suggests a state of communal living in which the inhabitants do not have their “own” private space. This was a reality in the immediate post-war years and throughout the 1920s as the housing shortages in cities like Berlin endured. Yet despite the insinuation that so many of Berlin’s people share living space, the film does not provide any visual examples of shared apartments.

Rather than showing the actual living conditions in contemporary Berlin, Richter’s narrative relies on telling the “facts.” He illustrates the city’s urban space with examples of dwellings that are largely empty of humans. The film does not present images of working-class or impoverished Berliners at home together, sitting on their steps in the evening, or leaving for work in the morning. Instead, Richter uses firm statements in the intertitles and quiet street scenes to put forth the film’s case. This is similar to the montage of Bauhaus homes in the film’s opening and closing sequences; yet it fails to make the direness of reality a visual stimulus for the urgent need of change. For example, the following intertitle explains that “Hunderttausende leben in gesundheitsschädlichen Räumen.”<sup>53</sup> It was certainly true that many city dwellers lived in unsanitary conditions.<sup>54</sup> But the only image presented to bring the situation across visually is a shot of a worker walking down a set of dark stairs. This is knitted to a shot of a kitchen in which two adults and some children are seated at a small table crammed between cupboards and a window. Although it is dark and clearly an underground-level dwelling, little more attention is paid to this space. Yet this is the point in the film when the grand question of modernist architecture appears—the question of how one lives in the modern urban home.<sup>55</sup> The following

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<sup>52</sup> “16 percent of the working population does not have their own apartments” (translation mine). *Die neue Wohnung*, 5:29.

<sup>53</sup> “Hundreds of thousands live in spaces that are health hazards” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 6:04.

<sup>54</sup> As Dan Silverman points out in his article about the Weimar housing crisis, laws intended to ease the shortage led to a doubling-up on existing spaces that those in need of housing could actually afford: “While soaring construction costs and mortgage rates forced rents on new housing to unbelievable levels, rents on prewar housing remained relatively low. Predictably, there was practically no demand for new housing, and thus very little new construction. To stretch existing housing as far as it would reach, the government extended the wartime regulations. Owners of large apartments received subsidies to help defray the costs of subdividing them. Municipalities removed restrictions against attic and basement dwellings, and relaxed zoning and construction standards. A new housing shortage law of May 11, 1920, prohibited the razing of buildings, consolidation of apartments, or the conversion of residential property to commercial use. The 1923 housing shortage law (*Reichswohnungsmangelgesetz*) required landlords to advertise all vacancies, empowered municipal authorities to seize large apartments and fill them to ‘capacity,’ and introduced a system of compulsory renting under which the local housing office could requisition space for homeless families.” From Dan P. Silverman, “A Pledge Unredeemed: The Housing Crisis in Weimar Germany,” *Central European History* 3, no. 1/2 (1970): 118.

<sup>55</sup> To provide an example, Le Corbusier writes at length about the question of dwelling throughout *Towards a New Architecture*. He addresses the question at length in his essay on “Airplanes”: “Architecture as practised provides no solution to the present-day problem of the dwelling-house and has no comprehension of the structure of things” (Le Corbusier, 110-11). In order to prepare and answer his own question, Le Corbusier treats this “problem of the

intertitle makes that question obvious for the viewer: “Wer heute noch Arbeit hat, kann sich vielleicht eine eigene Wohnung leisten[.] Wie wird sie benutzt?”<sup>56</sup>

The film answers its own question with an intertitle announcing that, “Man wohnt in der Küche!”<sup>57</sup> In other words, the problem is that the rooms in urban dwellings do not have separately designated functions. This is underscored by a scene in which the protagonist children eat at the table as their father reads the paper and smokes his pipe across from them, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. Meanwhile the mother irons next to the window, beneath a line of laundry strung from the ceiling above them all (see figure 2.8).



**Figure 2.8.** The protagonist family “living” in its kitchen by completing a variety of tasks in the same room, although not only the tasks for which that room was built. From *Die neue Wohnung*, 7:08.

A wash basin sits beside the father, and utensils for serving food stand on a cabinet next to the children. The father looks around in apparent dissatisfaction, and the mother pauses her ironing to set a pot on the stove. Although the kitchen appears to get plenty of light and have lots of storage space, and the family is not in apparent poverty as was suggested of the city dwellers earlier in the film—particularly as the viewer soon discovers that not only is this the family’s

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house” from both the point of view of the architect-designer and that of the dweller: “LET US STATE THE PROBLEM. [...] *A house*: a shelter against heat, cold, rain, thieves and the inquisitive. A receptacle for light and sun. A certain number of cells appropriated to cooking, work, and personal life. *A room*: a surface over which one can walk at ease, a bed on which to stretch yourself, a chair in which to rest or work, a work-table, receptacles in which each thing can be put at once in its right place. *The number of rooms*: one for cooking and one for eating. One for work, one to wash yourself in and one for sleep. Such are the standards of the dwelling” (Ibid., 114-15). Thus Le Corbusier argues for the utilitarian separation of space in an appropriately designed home as the solution to contemporary problems of dwelling.

<sup>56</sup> “He who still has work today may be able to afford his own apartment[.] How is it used?” (translation mine). *Die neue Wohnung*, dir. Hans Richter, 6:39.

<sup>57</sup> “One lives in the kitchen!” (translation mine). Ibid., 6:56.

own apartment, but that the home also has a bourgeois parlor. The clear intent is to show how “unsanitary” this particular living situation is in comparison with the ideas the film hopes to perpetuate. Never mind that this family is one of the percentage that can afford a single apartment; those who must live in dire or communal situations disappear from focus for the duration of the film. The big picture is the housing shortage in the entire country, specifically in large urban areas, yet middle-class urban life becomes the strategic focus in the battle for satisfactory modern living spaces.

In what follows of the film, the kitchen is contrasted with the living room, which is saved only for special visitors.<sup>58</sup> As we know from the writings of Le Corbusier and his peers, sanitary living involved separating tasks by the individual rooms in the house to which they are assigned: only cooking in the kitchen, only eating in the dining room, only bathing and undressing in the bathroom, and only sleeping in the bedroom. The family that is shown cooking, doing housework, enjoying leisure time, eating, and bathing all in one room represents outdated, unsanitary dwelling practices that the modernist designers wished to associate with the nineteenth century and before. Following the film’s climax in the parlor scene, the film returns to the kitchen as a site in which modernist living ideals are most visibly illustrated. In other scenes comparing modernist living situations with outdated ones, people are shown struggling with the trappings of their parlors in shots that are contrasted with shots in which modern dwellings operate by themselves—curtains, doors, lamps, and wall partitions that move on their own, suggesting their comparative ease of use. Yet in both kitchen scenes, women are shown preparing a tea service. At about 20 minutes into the film, an intertitle presents the correlation of: “Große Küche - Mehr Arbeit - Längere Wege.”<sup>59</sup> A woman is then shown crisscrossing her kitchen to get individual parts of the tea and bread service she is preparing, one item at a time. This is placed into opposition with a scene preceded by the intertitle, “Kleine Küche - Weniger Arbeit - Kürzere Wege.”<sup>60</sup> The woman shown in her small, modern kitchen still has to cross the room, but the pieces are stored closer together. Serving windows, foldable counter space, and sliding cabinet doors are all implicated in the disburdening of the modern woman’s domestic life.

Shortly before the film’s ending with a montage of modernist homes, an intertitle announces that “Die Architekten haben begonnen, zweckmäßige Häuser zu bauen!”<sup>61</sup> A call-to-arms of sorts, the film’s finale looks hopefully toward a boom in modernist building projects. Many of the avant-garde architects believed that mass-produced housing and furniture would solve the housing crisis. Despite the focus on a middle-class family throughout much of the film, the ultimate goal of *Die neue Wohnung*—and indeed of the exhibitions for which it and the *Weißenhofsiedlung* were created—was to spur the mass production of simple, utilitarian homes in order to alleviate the housing shortage and bring people out of forced communal living. Writing in 1926, Walter Gropius alluded to this in a soliloquy about the need for technical advancement to work together with the spirit of modernity. I include a significant section of that text to illustrate the thought process of the theory:

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<sup>58</sup> I have discussed the living room in depth in the previous chapter. See Chapter 1 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>59</sup> “Large kitchen – more work – longer paths” (translation mine). *Die neue Wohnung*, dir. Hans Richter, 20:56.

<sup>60</sup> “Small kitchen – less work – shorter paths” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 22:13.

<sup>61</sup> “The architects have begun to build utilitarian homes!” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 25:57.

Ein Ding ist bestimmt durch sein Wesen. Um es so zu gestalten, daß es richtig funktioniert – ein Gefäß, ein Stuhl, ein Haus –, muß sein Wesen zuerst erforscht werden; denn es soll seinem Zweck vollendet dienen, das heißt, seine Funktionen praktisch erfüllen, haltbar, billig und ‘schön’ sein. Diese Wesensforschung führt zu dem Ergebnis, daß durch die entschlossene Berücksichtigung aller modernen Herstellungsmethoden, Konstruktionen und Materialien Formen entstehen, die, von der Überlieferung abweichend, oft ungewohnt und überraschend wirken (vergleiche beispielsweise den Gestaltwandel von Heizung und Beleuchtung). Nur durch dauernde Berührung mit der fortschreitenden Technik, mit der Erfindung neuer Materialien und neuer Konstruktionen gewinnt das gestaltende Individuum die Fähigkeit, die Gegenstände in lebendige Beziehung zur Überlieferung zu bringen und daraus die neue Werkgesinnung zu entwickeln: Entschlossene Bejahung der lebendigen Umwelt der Maschinen und Fahrzeuge. Organische Gestaltung der Dinge aus ihrem eigenen gegenwartsgebunden Gesetz heraus, ohne romantische Beschönigungen und Verspieltheiten. Beschränkung auf typische, jedem verständliche Grundformen und -farben. Einfachheit im Vielfachen, knappe Ausnutzung von Raum, Stoff, Zeit und Geld...<sup>62</sup>

Everywhere in modernist writings, from Gropius to Le Corbusier, from *Das neue Berlin* (The New Berlin) to *Frankfurter Küche* (Frankfurt Kitchen), did similar sentiments echo. So why, then, do these sentiments appear within the realms of avant-garde theories, tracts, manifestos, and pamphlets, in exhibitions, exemplary communes, and advertisements, and in a few surviving examples of villas, neighborhoods, and communities built here and there—and not in more contemporary examples of novels and film? It would be too easy to surmise that the rise of national socialism and Hitler’s regime was the sole douter that extinguished the flame of modernist building. In part, Lüders’ response to van der Rohe’s building at the Weißenhofsiedlung explains why modern design did not catch on so furiously during the 1920s: because it simply wasn’t practical enough to illicit broad support. At the same time, Richter’s film and other contemporary advertisements in film form present another explanation.

Andres Janser suggests that film and the way it was used to present modernist ideas prevented the ideologies from becoming anything other than the “*Mise en Scene* of

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<sup>62</sup> “A thing is determined by its being. In order to design it so that it works properly – a vessel, a chair, a house – its form must first be researched; because it should perfectly serve its purpose, that is, to practically fulfill its function, to be sustainable, cheap, and ‘pretty.’ This study of being leads to the conclusion that only through the determined consideration of all modern production techniques, constructions and materials should forms be developed which, by way of divergent transmission, appear frequently unfamiliar and surprising (compare for example the change in form of heating and lighting elements). Only through continued contact with developing technology, with the development of new materials and new constructions, will creative individuals achieve the ability to bring objects into an active relationship with production and develop from there a new sense of workmanship: Determined affirmation of the living environment of machines and vehicles. Organic formation of the things from outside of their own laws that are bound to the present, without romantic embellishments and playfulness. Restriction to typical forms and colors that are intelligible to all. Simplicity in the manifold, restrained, utilization of space, material, time, and money...” (translation mine). Walter Gropius, “Grundsätze der Bauhausproduktion,” in *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre: 15. Europäische Kunstausstellung Berlin 1977* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1977), 1/182.

Architecture.”<sup>63</sup> According to Janser, “...avant-gardists such as Hans Schmidt showed a strong interest in scientific films which presented photogenic and ‘ever more precise’ reproductions of the world.”<sup>64</sup> By suggesting that the films were photogenic and “more precise” reproductions of the world is to imply that the images presented to viewers, regardless of the buildings’ actuality, were fictive images that could not exist in the “real” world as the designers and directors had hoped. Certainly, the word “reproduction” cannot be uttered in an academic context without bringing to mind Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.”<sup>65</sup> Mass production meets the filmic reproduction of “reality” where Benjamin refers to the “here and now of the original.” He writes that:

*The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction. But whereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproduction. The reason is twofold. First, technological reproduction is more independent of the original than is manual reproduction. [...] Second, technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain.*<sup>66</sup>

In the context of modernist architecture and design, the reproduction of reality takes place in the presentation of an educational space—either an exemplary colony or a design film—that is inherently not an authentic reality insofar as it is striving to become reality. It is particularly significant that Benjamin writes that the reproduction, “can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain”; in other words, the desired reality of the modernist movement is nothing more than a desire seeking a reality through artificial means. Those means simultaneously render that desired reality nothing more than a mere reproduction of theory and a fantasy. When an avant-garde theory for a building is reproduced as a built structure, the building is an artificial reproduction of a theory; the two buildings cannot be seen as one and the same.

Janser’s citation of Schmidt pertains to a series of advertising films produced for proponents of the exhibition *Das neue Wohnen* in Frankfurt. Grete Lihotzky, the architect behind *Die frankfurter Küche*, and a theorist of scientific rationalization for the household, brings us back to the kitchen table. Lihotzky at first appears to be the most realistic of the modernist

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<sup>63</sup> Andres Janser, “*Die neue Wohnung* and the Early Documentary Film on Modern Architecture,” in *Cinema & Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*, ed. François Penz and Maureen Thomas (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 38.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Schmidt was a Swiss-born architect, city planner, and graphic designer who was among the members of the New Building. *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

designers as she approaches the question of how to educate everyday people about the New Living:

When we enter dwellings we still find the old knick-knacks and the usual inappropriate “decor.” That all the efforts to the contrary had so little practical success is primarily the fault of women, who are remarkably uninterested in the new ideas. The furniture dealers say that the customers keep on wanting the old stuff. And women would prefer to take on the extra work in order to have a “snug and cozy” home. *The majority still takes simple and efficient to mean the same thing as dull.*<sup>67</sup>

Yet Lihotzky does not seem to know how to convince women to take up the “labor-saving kitchen” and household rationalization beyond bringing them to exhibitions and fighting to rid the market of “the old stuff” she deems inappropriate for modern life. Ending her essay, she writes that:

Here, as in all things, it must be a general principle, in particular for women, not to accept thoughtlessly whatever comes on to the market, not to choose things that seem pretty at the moment, but to check for appropriateness and faultless technical quality. This exhibition should sharpen the eye for the task.<sup>68</sup>

She does not envision a future in which the market will be free of the old, useless things. The only convincing tactic she puts forth is to bring people to the exhibitions so that they may be taught how to choose items for their homes. Because the modernist design and architecture theorists had so few convincing tools at their disposal beyond educational films, articles, and exhibitions, it is no surprise that modernist interiors were not widely reproduced in the literary imaginaries of novels or film.

### **Cinematic “Reality” is Less Optimistic**

Of the many city films produced during the 1920s and early 1930s, one can argue those films that may be filed under the genre of socialist realism present the most “realistic” image of contemporary society insofar as they avoid the “safe” qualities attributed to the films of more conservative filmmakers and those filmmakers who wished not to upset the censors or bring on

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<sup>67</sup> Grete Lihotzky, “Rationalization in the Household,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 463.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

National Socialist protests.<sup>69</sup> Of course, the fictional narratives of socialist realist movies cannot be equated with any actual reality in Berlin. These films assuredly support a specific ideological worldview. Yet they address some of the same issues that the modernist designers and architects sought to fix. In the 1930 short film *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*, director Slatan Dudow addresses a question similar to that of Richter's *Die neue Wohnung*, which was produced the same year. Dudow's 10-minute documentary uses a similar style of montage to that of modernist design's exhibition films. In fact, Dudow even uses some of the exact same filmed material that Richter uses in the exterior scenes of *Die neue Wohnung*. But Dudow presents the "proletarian" side of urban life, focuses on the workers and working class, and goes inside of communal dwellings and low-income apartments. At about seven minutes into the film, the viewer sees a *Schlafstelle* (literally, "sleeping space") featuring a stove, wash basin, dresser, chair, and bed all crammed into a single small room (see figure 2.9).



*Figure 2.9.* Still from a sequence panning across the furnishings of a "Schlafstelle" (a rented room or place to sleep) in Berlin. From *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*, dir. Slatan Dudow, 7:38.

This is the epitome of the unsanitary living against which the modernist design community was fighting. It is presented by Dudow as unsanitary and unsatisfactory. In a series of shots that follow this, two children sleep in a bed while their mother does the washing at the foot of the bed; a mother pushes a pram down a flight of stairs with one arm while holding a baby with the other; a woman stirs a pot on the stove; and another woman adjusts the pillow of an elderly man whose bed faces a tiny cook stove (see figures 2.10-2.13).

<sup>69</sup> See Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 156.





*Figures 2.10-2.13. Scenes of people at home in a sequence about working-class domestic life. From Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt, 8:16-8:54.*

This short sequence appears to illustrate the difficulties and claustrophobic conditions of working-class dwellings, all of which are situated such that a variety of tasks are carried out in a single room. After the woman has adjusted the old man's head in figure 2.13, an intertitle reads, "Durch die nasse Kellerwohnung taubstumm geworden."<sup>70</sup> This makes clear the health hazards of low-income dwelling spaces and the poor quality of life associated with those affected by joblessness and poverty. It can also be read as a metaphor for the silencing of the working public by their plight, and their blindness to the idea that something is wrong.

In all of the interior scenes, families are shown living in a single room, a kitchen-bedroom-parlor-washroom. There is no modernist alternative presented—only the message that this awful situation is widespread. Dudow's agenda is similar in some ways to that of the architects and designers whose manifestos are explored in this dissertation. He is concerned with the housing shortage, the living conditions of workers, and the legality of social inequalities. Starting with the word *Zeitprobleme* (contemporary problems) followed by the explanatory *wie* (how), Dudow's title presents documentary as reality, rather than as an ideology or an outmoded situation. The film poses questions, but provides no clear answers. It is meant to provide an "objective" look at the living conditions of the lower classes. Dudow uses a similar image of Berlin in his 1932 feature-length drama, *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* Based on a script written by Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwalt, with music by Hans Eisler, and including a scene directed by Brecht himself, the film was banned because of its negative presentation of the republic. The documentary and the fictional narrative deal with the same themes and subjects, however the focus on proletarian living conditions extends into the absurd in the latter film. While this can partially be attributed to Brecht's script and minor directing role, and to Eisler's

<sup>70</sup> "Gone deaf and blind because of the damp cellar apartment" (translation mine). *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*, directed by Slatan Dudow (Berlin: Filmkartell Weltfilm, 1930), DVD, 1:09:17, 8:58.

music, the absurdity can be traced to the idea of people living in tents in the same way that they would live in apartment homes.

Kuhle Wampe is, and was, a campground alongside Berlin's Müggelsee. Over the course of the film, the campground is turned into a site of temporary homes for those who have been evicted from "permanent" structures. Eviction of those who are too poor to afford rent is the theme that ends *Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*; in *Kuhle Wampe*, eviction provides the leading action for the plot. Where one film uses eviction to hit home the desolation of "real" life, the other uses it as justification for a political cause. It is worth noting that *Kuhle Wampe* presents no inherent solution to the problems of joblessness and eviction. The closest the film comes is in the heavy-handed suggestion that an organized working class can strive to make things better. The only alternative to urban apartment life is the tent dwelling, and it is not an answer to the problem.

In *Kuhle Wampe*, the kitchen does not play a large role in the plot. Yet it is presented in three scenes within the film that are worth describing here. The main protagonist, a young woman named Anni, lives with her family at the beginning of the film in an apartment in Berlin. Despite the bourgeois decorations, the apartment has a separate dining room and kitchen—a kitchen which appears to be solely for the purpose of cooking, which would please Le Corbusier and his cohort, even if the many individual items in the rooms would not (see figures 2.14 and 2.15).





*Figures 2.14-2.15. The family eating in a room that appears to be designated both as a living room and a dining room (top) and the mother cleaning up after dinner in the single-purpose kitchen (bottom). From Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt? dir. Dudow, 9:04, 11:32.*

While this would seem to place the family within a class of urban residents more closely related with those to whom *Die neue Wohnung* and its ilk appear to speak, the state of the family's affairs is not as happily aligned as the separation of rooms in the film's apartment. All is not well, as the family is found to be six months behind on their rent. This is a direct result of the son being jobless for seven months. Following his suicide, the family is evicted. After finding no legal recourse, Anni calls her boyfriend, Fritz, for advice. He invites her to bring her family to Kuhle Wampe, where he lives. During the conversation, Fritz states that they are to bring all of their possessions with them. The family is then shown with their furniture piled atop a car, traveling through forested areas toward the encampment along the Müggelsee.

Anni and her parents carry lamps, tables, dressers, and other furnishings down a hill to the campground. While the family arranges their furniture in a vacant square of land, other campground inhabitants take part in outdoor activities such as bicycling, hiking, boating, and bathing, or in leisure activities like reading, card-playing, and listening to the radio. A memorial that looks like a gravesite refers to the unemployment that has led all of these people to reside along the lakeside. This juxtaposition is then followed by a series of shots of camp residents preparing meals—in their tents—on small stoves and over tiny fires (see figures 2.16-2.18).





*Figures 2.16-2.18. Meals being prepared on stoves by women and men throughout the Kuhle Wampe campground. From Kuhle Wampe oder wem gehört die Welt, 22:55-23:03.*

The nature and leisure activities one would expect to find in the campground coexist with the “bourgeois” existence being transported there from the built environs of the city. The two mingle uneasily without being forced to reconcile with one another or with the social issues that are at stake in the film. With no money and no job, one can at least still live comfortably in the woods; no matter how one lives or passes one’s time, there is a small stove upon which dinner can be prepared. It is also worth mentioning here that women and men alike are shown fixing supper on the stoves in this montage, overturning expectations for gendered domestic labor that might accompany the transport of traditional living arrangements to an unconventional dwelling space.

In the next scene featuring Anni’s parents, they are seated in what remains of their bourgeois living room: with the gramophone playing, surrounded by their old furniture. The only apparent difference is that they sit beneath the canvas roof of a tent. The grotesque nature of this arrangement is made clear a short bit later in the film, after Anni has become pregnant and Fritz has been forced to agree to marry her. They host friends, family, and acquaintances for an engagement party in the tent’s living room (see figures 2.19-2.22).





*Figures 2.19-2.22. Anni's mother passes refreshments through the kitchen door into the living room (top); party guests sit around the table (upper middle); Fritz tends to the beer supply outside the tent (bottom middle); guests devour the feast (bottom). From *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*, 36:13-38:17.*

All of the guests are arranged around a long table that spans the length of the room. Anni and her mother stand in the doorway to the kitchen, framed by canvas walls and tree branches. Anni's mother feeds refreshments out of the kitchen and through its doorway to Anni, who then shuttles them to the table as march music plays on the radio. Close-up shots show food disappearing from the platters so quickly as they touch the table. Those shots are inter-cut with ones of the guests shoving food into their mouths, and these are then woven in with shots from outside showing plainly that the party is seated beneath a striped tent as all of the finery is consumed. The interior shots would make it seem as if the celebration is taking place in a "normal" home, except for the pine branches that appear along the perimeter. The persistent shots of the outside of the tent remind the viewer that there is no kitchen, no dining room, and there are no fixed walls. The overall picture is circus-like, thanks to that big, striped tent.

In the apartment and in the tent alike, Anni's mother is the only person who is ever shown inside the kitchen. Anni can be found just outside the doorway, but she never enters. Indeed, Anni is visibly young and modern—with a short bob, wearing menswear-inspired fashion, working in a factory, confidently defending her brother before his suicide, and then quickly taking his place as family provider after his death. Despite her self-assuredness, she wavers between aborting her child, keeping it, and leaving everything behind altogether. As Elsa Herrmann writes in her 1929 book, *So ist die neue Frau*, "...the woman of today is oriented exclusively toward the present. That which is decisive for her, not that which should be or should have been according to tradition."<sup>71</sup> Looking at Anni through the lens of this definition of the New Woman, Anni would be acting in line with tradition ("the woman of yesterday") by sticking around to marry her fiancé, have his child, and keep his house. Although the film leaves off whether or not Anni and Fritz get together, or whether she goes through with having the child

<sup>71</sup> Elsa Herrmann, "This is the New Woman," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 207.

or aborts it, Anni's willingness to leave the engagement party and her relationship with Fritz signals that her concerns are separate from those of her mother's generation.

Thus it is in part Anni's character type as a modern woman, as well as her political consciousness, that seem to be attributable for her actions taking place outside of the kitchen space. According to Herrmann, "the people of yesterday are strongly inclined to characterize the modern woman as unfeminine because she is no longer wrapped up in kitchen work and the chores that have to be done around the house."<sup>72</sup> In other words, the New Woman has both dissociated herself from the cares and appearances of previous generations as well as from the association with domestic labor that accompanied her mother and other "un-modern" women. Anni's mother, a member of the older generation who is quite at home in her bourgeois living room regardless of the type of walls that surround it, is the only person who moves over the threshold between the living room and the kitchen. If we look back at *Die Straße* and the scenes described at the beginning of Chapter 1, we also see the protagonist's wife—again, an older woman—remaining at home while her husband goes out. She prepares meals in the kitchen and then waits up for her husband so that she can reheat the soup as soon as he returns home (see figures 2.23-2.25).



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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



*Figures 2.23-2.25. The wife preparing soup in her kitchen (top); setting the table in the living- and dining-room (middle); sleeping at the table until her husband returns home for dinner (bottom). From Die Straße, 4:02, 4:16, 1:28:08.*

The young woman who is pursued by that film’s protagonist remains outside the home (and kitchen). Although she is coded as “bad” whereas Anni is coded as “good,” neither woman shows any sign that she might stick to the same roles that have been handed down the generations until her mother.

In these films featuring bourgeois family life, the kitchen is a “female” space—but it is at the same time a space that is separate from the living room and the bedroom, which are also part of the “domestic realm.” These kitchens serve their purpose, put to use by those who have been trained to carry out their life’s work inside the home. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, those kitchens bear a striking resemblance to those of the late and mid-1800s. In the same token, these kitchens are “dated” spaces, as they are accessed by older generations of women adhering to supposedly antiquated gender norms. The parlors do, too, as do the gendered roles of those who

inhabit those spaces. There is urban modernity on overdrive outside the home—rampant unemployment among its troubles—and yet the families depicted against that background can afford (at least for a time) their own private living spaces. They have chosen to furnish those spaces with so-called nineteenth-century decor, and the films' modern, urban plots play out in those spaces. In *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*, when the family members can no longer reside in their urban apartment, they find a new place to continue “playing house.”

Phil Jutzi's 1929 tragedy, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, paints a more problematic picture of the relationship of Weimar modernity with the kitchen and traditional domestic space. As the film's plot shows, it is a relationship in which the word *Glück* (happiness or luck) is implicated with the kitchen's ability to both nourish and kill. The dividing line between kitchen space and everything else is blurred in this film, in part because of the kitchen itself and the family's economic situation. Classified as a “Zille film,” and dedicated to Berlin illustrator Heinrich Zille and his stories of lower-class Berlin life, *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* tells the story of Mother Krause, her children Paul and Erna, and the *Schlafbursche*, or lodger, who rents a room from them with his prostitute girlfriend and her daughter. The first intertitle in the film reads, “Hier lebt Mutter Krause”<sup>73</sup> as the shots surrounding the title zoom in on one window of many in a tenement building. The viewer is introduced to Mother Krause and her family—discovering that their situation is not well-off, as Paul collects a few Groschen by sorting through junk at the *Lumpenstampe* (junk collection yard) and Mutter Krause earns her money selling newspapers. Their situation is similar to that of the people in Dudow's *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*, but it is wrapped up in “entertaining” socialist realist fiction, perhaps as a way to pass censors who would scorn overly critical social commentary.<sup>74</sup>

In these introductory moments of the film, the scope of the family's dwelling space is also made visible. Mother Krause cooks, cleans, and works in the kitchen. In the same room, Erna bathes and dresses while the lodger sits at the table and eats (see figure 2.26).

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<sup>73</sup> “Here lives Mother Krause” (translation mine). *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, dir. Phil Jutzi (Berlin: Prometheus, 1929), DVD, 1:01:33, 5:31.

<sup>74</sup> The film is “entertaining” because it is peppered with music, dancing, carnivals, and parties. In the very beginning of the film, the viewer is introduced to Erna and the lodger dancing inside the apartment. The music is a street organ, and shots of the apartment's interior are crosscut with shots of crowds of people standing in the courtyard watching an organist with monkeys. As with the circus of bourgeois life in *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*, there are continual reminders of lay entertainments interspersed among the more somber moments in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*.



*Figure 2.26. The lodger eats while Erna washes her legs at the wash basin in the kitchen. From Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, dir. Phil Jutzi, 23:40.*

This is one of those kitchens in which the family “lives.” As the plot unfolds, the apartment is implicated in the family’s poor luck. Erna, however flirtatious she may seem, constantly sees the lodger making romantic advances at her—even when his girlfriend is around. At about 37 minutes into the film, the lodger convinces Mother Krause to search for Paul, who has not come home since she discovered he spent all of her money in the pub. The lodger takes this opportunity to kiss Erna while she sleeps in the kitchen. She struggles and wakes the child who is sleeping in the room with her—which sends the lodger to back away and open the curtains (see figure 2.27).



*Figure 2.27. The lodger stands between the wash basin and the beds on which Erna and the child sleep. From Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, 40:32.*

He is able to pretend he simply meant to use the wash basin, which is located across from the beds. Here, the negative nature of the living situation has been made clear.

Not only is Erna's body constantly in danger because the family must rent out part of its apartment, but so is the family's ability to keep that home. During the lodger's wedding celebration, he announces to Erna's boyfriend Max that he has already had an affair with Erna—made possible and plausible by their proximity—and then he announces that he will move out. Following this event, Mother Krause calculates her budget and sees no way to come up with enough money to pay her debts without the lodger in residence. Seeing no other way, and constantly being reminded that her son drank away her money, she uses one of her remaining coins to turn on the gas in the kitchen. She then leaves the gas on, killing herself and the lodger's young step-daughter as they sleep on the beds in the kitchen corner. There is a carefully constructed relationship between the kitchen and the deaths, and between the apartment and the family's poor economic situation.

This happens in two movements. First, cross-cutting and montage present Mother Krause thinking about her financial situation in the kitchen and show her focusing on the gas as she grasps for a solution. Second, in an earlier scene, Max's friend dismisses Erna's complicity in the alleged affair with the lodger by saying, "Schuld hat doch nicht das Mädchen, sondern das Milljöh."<sup>75</sup> The word "milieu" here conjures the Zille-milieu, that lower-class environment of largely unemployed men and women living in shared apartment spaces amid a labor and housing shortage. These are the people for whom the modernist designers proposed their designs by way of mass-produced housing, but who did not pick up the "modern" way of living in any contemporary fictional depictions of that class. As if to further clarify this correlation for the viewer, Max's friend goes on to provide a quote from Zille: "Man kann einen Menschen mit einer Wohnung genau so töten wie mit der Axt."<sup>76</sup> In other words, the fault of any danger to Erna's purity lies in her residence in the apartment and the social class it accompanies. It is the apartment that kills Mother Krause and the child, literally and figuratively. Yet it is specifically the kitchen that is the site of death, in large part because they are forced to live in the kitchen. Also, the gas stove in the kitchen is the easiest means Mother Krause can see for ending her bad luck. In a brief scene near the film's end, when Mother Krause enters the room the lodger and his new wife rent, the viewer sees a large room with a bed and table, a tile stove, a window, and plenty of space (see figures 2.28-2.29).

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<sup>75</sup> "The girl isn't at fault, but rather the environment" (translation mine). *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, 1:05:39.

<sup>76</sup> "You can kill a person with an apartment just as well as with an axe" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 1:06:29.



*Figures 2.28-2.29. The lodger and his new wife in their rented room (top); Mother Krause entering the room she rents out of her apartment in order to ask her lodgers for a loan (bottom). From Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, 1:02:25-1:02:27.*

This is a large space that the Krause family could use as a living room or bedroom. Yet they must rent out the room, rendering the space off-limits to them, so that they can afford the entire apartment. Mother Krause lays down to sleep on Erna's bed in the kitchen before her death—perhaps not just to be sure that the gas leak kills her, but perhaps also because there is no other space for beds in the apartment while the bedroom is still rented out.

Whereas the apartment space may be seen as both murderer and murder scene, it is the condition of living in that apartment which is most significant for this chapter. Just as the modernist designers and architects proposed “new” living spaces to improve the lot of families everywhere—both in answer to the housing shortage and out of a need for sanitary living conditions—Jutzi's film calls for better social conditions to improve the lives of Berlin's

working-class families. This is made most visible when Erna searches for Max at the demonstration right after she runs away from working as a prostitute for the lodger. The lodger's admonition, "Ein feines Kind, das seine Mutter ins Gefängnis gehen läßt, wenn es helfen kann,"<sup>77</sup> clashes with the messages written on the banners Erna sees while she searches the ranks of demonstrators for Max (see figure 2.30).



*Figure 2.30. Demonstrators in favor of better housing march with a banner as Erna searches for Max. From Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, 1:14:13.*

The banners read: "'We demand more humane living quarters,' 'Working woman—think of your child,' and (most appropriate to Erna) 'Working women, join the ranks.'"<sup>78</sup> The suggestion from these banners is that help and better living quarters come not just from getting more money somehow or another, but from demanding better of those in power. Despite the constant condemnation of the Krause family's living conditions—a family living in the kitchen—Jutzi gives no alternative beyond partisan change. As in *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*, there is no "better" living space presented to the viewer. Even when Erna calls on the older gentleman to whom she is to prostitute herself, what is shown of his living space is a traditional, bourgeois living room with heavy, ornate furniture (see figure 2.31).

<sup>77</sup> "A fine child that allows her mother to go to jail when she can prevent it" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 1:07:57.

<sup>78</sup> As translated by Jelavich, 206.



*Figure 2.31. Erna tries to escape from the man's advances after deciding she will not help her family through prostitution. From Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück, 1:11:24.*

In *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*, and *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt*, Berliners are either living in cramped kitchens or among nineteenth-century trappings. These films present the “real” living situation of Berliners as a problem, but do not show the alternative. During the same time, modernist designers and architects presented the New Living in written texts, exhibition spaces, and advertising films. They were not able to have their alternative translated into a medium that would have been more widely seen by the people who most needed that alternative. As we will see in the next section, the New Living did not find its way into contemporary novels, either.

### **Literary Domesticity Implies Tradition through Absence**

It is difficult to find literary texts from the Weimar Republic in which Berlin's interior spaces are lent the excitement with which its exterior spaces are treated. Therefore, those texts in which the interior is described are noteworthy for those descriptions and what they reveal about contemporary attitudes toward domestic space. While the bulk of my discussion about those descriptions will take place in the next chapter, focusing on the rented room and tenement building, there are two Weimar novels in which the kitchen—or rather, its absence—lends itself to the greater concerns of this chapter. Irmgard Keun's 1932 novel *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* follows a young woman through the streets and bedrooms of Berlin as she tries to find fame and satisfaction in the city. Rather than coming into her own as a liberated woman, she finds comfort in the domestic interior and discovers that she enjoys cooking and cleaning for a man, so long as she does not have to go to work like everyone else. And in Erich Kästner's 1931 novel *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*, the protagonist meets and has affairs with several women, always in those women's apartments. Despite those women's supposedly emancipated attitudes

toward sexuality, the affairs lead to them cooking dinner for Fabian in those nineteenth-century interiors that simply will not be left behind.

About halfway through *Fabian*, the young flâneur meets a woman at the amusement park Onkel Pelles Nordpark. The woman, Mucki, makes advances on Fabian and takes him home with her. Mucki, who Fabian will later discover is married to a traveling businessman, cares for Fabian “mit hausfraulichem Eifer,”<sup>79</sup> and convinces him to stay with her until her husband returns. Fabian muses over the décor in her bedroom and the living room, which is decidedly not modern. He gives the most description to Mucki’s bedroom:

Er musterte die Zimmereinrichtung. Außer den Betten war noch ein leidenschaftlich geschwungenes Plüschsofa anwesend, ferner ein Waschtisch mit Marmorplatte, ein scheußlicher Farbendruck, wo selbst eine junge mollige Frau, im Nachthemd auf einem Eisbärenfell hockend, mit einem rosigen Baby spielte, und ein Schrank mit einem Türspiegel, der schlecht funktionierte.<sup>80</sup>

The contents of the room that Fabian describes—the over-stuffed plush sofa, the garish marble wash basin, and the poorly functioning mirrored armoire—suggest an interior decoration style that is at odds with the type of modern décor with which this dissertation has dealt so far. Similarly, Fabian notices a living room that is filled with old fashioned-sounding decorative pieces: “Die Möbel waren, wo sich dazu Gelegenheit bot, verschnörkelt. Auf dem Vertikow standen drei Leitzordner. Auf dem Tisch prangte ein bunter Glasteller, der schlug Wellen und enthielt Ansichtskarten.”<sup>81</sup> Kästner does not use many modifiers to qualify the items listed in these rooms as positive or negative, leaving the reader’s impression of the rooms to be swayed by his or her feelings about the characters and the action. The ornate furniture and decorative embellishments are reminiscent of furnishings from the previous century’s bourgeois home—the types of furnishings against which the designers of modernist interiors were battling; Mucki’s sitting room could just as easily be the parlor in *Die neue Wohnung*.

Most significant to this section is the absence of any other description in Mucki’s home. Although she and Fabian eat in the kitchen at first, there is no description of that room. This absence is conspicuous because Fabian describes the other rooms of the apartment. And yet the kitchen is present because it enables Mucki to perform the domestic work that allows Fabian to become, willingly or not, the man of the house in her own husband’s absence. Despite her forwardness outside the home, she falls neatly into a traditional domestic role inside the home. She is, in a sense, playing the role of housewife while also acting the emancipated woman outside of the apartment’s four walls. Since she has no job and no one to attend to, Mucki

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<sup>79</sup> “with a housewife’s zeal” (translation mine). Erich Kästner, *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten* (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 141.

<sup>80</sup> “He surveyed the room’s furnishings. Other than the bed there was also a passionately curved plush sofa, beyond that a wash basin with a hideously colored marble slab on which a plump young woman in a nightdress crouched down to play with a rosy baby, and an armoire with a mirrored door that worked poorly” (translation mine). *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> “The furniture was, wherever possible, ornate. Three file folders stood on a two-door chest with a drawer. A colorful, wavy glass plate sat resplendent on the table and held postcards” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 144.

appears to find solace in insisting that Fabian allow her temporarily to take on this outmoded position in relation to him.

When Fabian returns for dinner, Mucki talks about her apartment in just enough detail to make visible a living condition that is markedly different from that given in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* and in *Zeitproblem. Wie der Arbeiter wohnt*: “‘Komm, du wirst Hunger haben.’ Sie hatte im Wohnzimmer gedeckt. ‘Wir essen sonst in der Küche’, sagte sie. ‘Aber wozu hat man seine Dreizimmerwohnung?’”<sup>82</sup> A three-room apartment which is inhabited by the woman alone when her husband is gone—this is not exactly a proletarian existence. Bedroom, kitchen, and living room with bourgeois nineteenth-century decor allow the woman to inhabit traditional gender roles inside the home. Lonely and bored, she has nothing better to do than act out a different, possibly happier, existence when given the chance. At first glance, Mucki is the opposite of Keun’s protagonist in *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris, who has no home and no space of her own in which to “play house”—at least not until the end of the film, when she comes into her own as the housewife in someone else’s home, almost the inverse of Fabian.

In *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, Doris runs away from her parents and her small-town existence, searching for fame in Berlin. “Ich werde ein Glanz,” and “denn bin ich ein Glanz” are variations of a phrase that Doris repeats in her journal over and over again.<sup>83</sup> Hopping from affair to affair, finding herself in different apartments, nightclubs, cafes, and pubs throughout the city, Doris keeps the idea of being a “star” in mind at all times. She eats out, whether she pays the meal herself or finds a man to pay for her. Throughout the first two thirds of the book, Doris is as far from “domestic” as possible. This begins to change when Doris meets Ernst, whose wife has left him to be a dancer. Doris comes to replace his wife in the home, and stands in for her in his mind. Ernst’s wife has gotten the role that Doris came to Berlin to find, whereas Doris takes on the role that Ernst’s wife left behind. After several weeks of sleeping at his home and accepting his gifts, something happens inside of Doris that leads her to step into the role of housewife in a home where the actual wife has stepped out.

The transformation begins as a sort of transaction. Doris asks Ernst how she can pay him back for letting her sleep and eat and stay at his home. His response is not what she expects, as she assumes the payment will take the form of sex: “‘Wenn sie Lust haben, Fräulein Doris, dann können Sie morgen ja mal die Betten machen und bißchen Ordnung in der Wohnung.’ Ob ich so häßlich bin, daß er mich nicht will?”<sup>84</sup> In exchange for letting her live with him, Ernst wants Doris to clean up after herself and help with the housekeeping. This is a completely new exchange for Doris, who is used to sleeping with men in return for meals or a place to sleep. Yet after weeks of making the beds, then cleaning the floors and curtains, buying groceries, cooking, and finally becoming more or less “domestic,” Doris finds herself wanting to remain in this situation which seems to be completely at odds with being or becoming a star. Perhaps it is

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<sup>82</sup> “‘Come, you must be hungry.’ She had set the table in the living room. ‘We usually eat in the kitchen,’ she said. ‘But then why should one have a three-room apartment?’” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>83</sup> “I will be a star” and “because I am a star” (translations mine). Irmgard Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> “‘If it pleases you, Miss Doris, then tomorrow you can make the beds and put the apartment in order a little.’ Am I so ugly, that he doesn’t want me?” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 163.

because she can finally get actual rest and sees herself becoming physically healthier; perhaps it is also because she feels safe or stable with Ernst, who does not appear likely to throw her out like some of her previous boyfriends. After reading Doris' diary and learning her background, Ernst announces he wants to get her residence papers in order, return her stolen fur stole, and help her find a job. Without introspection, she insists on staying in the domestic sphere:

Lieber Herr Ernst, ich will nicht arbeiten, ich will nicht – bitte, ich will die Gardinen waschen und die Teppiche klopfen, ich will unsre Schuhe putzen und den Fußboden und kochen – ich koche so gern, es ist mir ein Erleben, weil es mir doch selber schmeckt und sehe ich Ihre Lederhaut rosa werden und habe überhaupt eine Überlegensheitsart von meinem Tun. Ich will alles tun, aber arbeiten will ich nicht.<sup>85</sup>

Of course, Doris desperately wants to keep her fur. She has been obsessed with the fur since she acquired it, and it represents the starlet lifestyle for which she came to Berlin. She also wants to avoid having to find a career and leave the home to work like a normal modern woman. But she definitely wants to continue earning her keep. Although she refers to the housework not as work, but as tasks she enjoys carrying out, she signals a desire to want to stay within a traditional domestic space rather than by passing her time on the streets and in the public spaces of cosmopolitan Berlin as she did so often before meeting Ernst.

Just as that of Mucki in *Fabian*, Doris' relationship with the kitchen is one in which an absence of description creates presence. While Doris describes furnishings in the living room and in Ernst's bedroom, she never describes the kitchen. For a woman who is constantly describing things, places, and people in her journal, this omission is striking. Doris tells her reader what labor she has completed in the kitchen and with which ingredients she has prepared meals there, but she does not tell anything about the room itself or its furnishings. Thus kitchen labor leads to the kitchen becoming a described space, insofar as a "typical" kitchen can be imagined. The domestic work Doris desires to complete in the home and kitchen is not the career of an emancipated, modern woman, but the traditional women's work in the nineteenth-century bourgeois apartment. In her and in Mucki, there is a latent resistance to the New Living insofar as it has the New Woman straddling a career outside the home and housework inside the home. These women are described as appearing one way on the city streets, but leading a different existence inside bourgeois apartments. The kitchen is their domain, as much through their desire to spend time working there as through their domestic labor constituting the presence of a traditional kitchen space. Doris and Mucki are more similar to Anni's mother in *Kuhle Wampe* and the housewife in *Die Straße* than they are to Anni and Erna. These characters, in films and novels alike, allow for an association of the kitchen with domestic labor and the gender roles of the previous generations.

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<sup>85</sup> "Dear Mr. Ernst, I don't want to work, I won't—please, I want to wash the curtains and dust the rugs, I want to clean our shoes and the floor and cook—I enjoy cooking so much, it's an experience for me, because it even tastes good to me and I see your leathery skin turn pink and I have an absolute air of superiority in my being. I want to do everything, but I don't want to work" (translation mine). Ibid., 183-84.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have pulled a thread that runs through three different kinds of kitchen spaces. The first is the idealized kitchen of the modernist exhibitions, seen through the eyes of the designers who envisioned their greater production and some of the women who imagined the difficulty of finding them successful in a “real-world” application. The second is the kitchens of socialist realist films of the late 1920s. Bourgeois kitchens—and their associated gender roles—that can dwell within an apartment’s concrete walls as easily as within the bizarre space of a tent city are shown to be as difficult to part from as the poverty-stricken confines of the kitchen-turned-living room/bedroom of impoverished working-class families. The third is the invisible kitchen that is made visible through traditional gender norms in the apartments of Weimar novels. The common theme is that there must be a kitchen, whether one dwells in a tent in the woods, in a small working-class kitchen, or in a three-room apartment. The only thing that separates the kitchen of the past from the kitchen of the present in these texts is social class. Upper class kitchens remain more or less static, whereas lower class kitchens become the site of all home life.

The fictional kitchens of novels and film hold onto their nineteenth-century visages, and modern kitchens are nowhere to be found. Why do the supposedly emancipated women and the flâneurs they accompany not entertain the notion of living in modernist dwellings that are supposedly better-suited to their urban environs? It cannot simply be that authors and directors were totally ignorant to the existence of contemporary writings about the New Living and buildings that sought to make it tangible, or that they outright rejected the New Living. When there is a problem posed with the state of living in these novels and films, it is not countered by a better dwelling space. Instead, these texts propose a different relationship to solve the problem: a better city shaped by social and political engagement, rather than through large-scale building projects. “The nerve center of the dwelling” is incorrectly wired, yet the only solution presented in these texts is to change the approach of those people who are activating that center; there is no suggestion for how to rewire it. As I will continue to explore in the following chapters, the relationship is not simply a failure of theory to expand its reach into the realm of novels and films. Rather, those fictional texts present a reaction to modernity that defies the necessity for overwhelming changes to dwelling spaces. The kitchen and the apartment still “work;” it is the condition of living in them that does not. This is not a function of the built environment, but of expectations for that environment.

## Chapter 3

### Rooms for Rent: The Interior Landscapes of Berlin's Proletarian Domestic Spaces

The fascination with Berlin's exterior urban spaces was a dominant discourse already in the 1920s. In the wake of the war and the creation of the new republic, palpable excitement circulated in the newspapers, journals, media, and discussions about the metropolis. Much of the talk was due to development; those wishing to solve the city's problems eagerly described how they might change Berlin's skyline and contribute to its cosmopolitan feel given the opportunity and the right funding. One of the most significant foci of these discussions was the housing shortage and the myriad potential ways of bringing it to an end. A widespread solution early on was the creation of *Mietskaserne* (rental barracks) that were erected throughout the city. These tenements were concentrated particularly in the eastern neighborhoods around Alexanderplatz and the outskirts. They developed out of a building boom in the 1870s and 1880s when industrialization created the metropolis' first round of housing shortages. As I noted in the previous chapter, those who owned residential property in the city during the earlier years of the Weimar Republic were encouraged to subdivide their apartments and flats to create more livable space for a greater density of people.<sup>86</sup> This led not only to smaller available housing spots for families, but also to a greater number of *Schlafburschen* and *Schlafmägde* (lodgers).<sup>87</sup> This chapter deals with the rented rooms, or *Schlafstellen*, and *Mietskaserne* in which many low- and working-class Berliners lived by 1933.

The most significant big-city novel to deal with these spaces is Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a 1929 modernist epic that is often lauded for making Berlin into a character without giving the city anthropomorphic qualities. Much of the novel's descriptions dwell on the exterior spaces of Berlin, but a significant number of moments lend importance to specific, domestic details within the rented rooms in which Franz Biberkopf and his compatriots dwell. Those details point not to the newness of Weimar modernity, but rather to the "comforts" of nineteenth-century domestic interiors that urban dwellers carried with them into the *Mietskaserne* and *Schlafstellen*. Those comforts are relayed to the reader or viewer by way of the functional and decorative details about an interior space's makeup and the characters' attitudes toward those details. That the old-fashioned notions of interior domestic space persist in the fictional imaginaries of Weimar Berlin novels and films runs in opposition to the interiors proposed for Berlin in the avant-garde journals, meetings, trade papers, and advertisements that sought to create a brand-new city of the future. The discrepancy that is visible through this opposition can be attributed to the idea of who controls the space in each field of representation. In one sense, modernist architects and designers seeking to facilitate a "more modern" urban landscape were engaged with the same project as the writers and directors who created fictional

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2 (p. 35); see also Silverman, "A Pledge Unredeemed: The Housing Crisis in Weimar Germany," 118.

<sup>87</sup> *Schlafburschen* and *Schlafmägde* literally mean "sleeping boys" and "sleeping girls," although the vast majority were working or job-seeking adult men and women.

narratives about the existing modern environment. Both saw the conditions of “city” life as a driving force in the state of social, commercial, environmental, and political interactions.

Although the explicit subject of modernist architecture and design theories is the person who is to dwell in the structures being theorized, the implicit subject is the person who had money, and thus power, to create those new spaces. The building owners and landlords who owned the spaces that would be rented by city dwellers could shape and control the evolution of urban space. Those renting the livable parts of the city could only access it through the mediation of a contract allowing them temporary privacy in a room that was owned by somebody else. The novels and films with which this dissertation deals are concerned with those renting the rooms and apartments. Although the novels and films discussed here enter the urban structure at the lower rungs of power, they share with modernist theories an interest in the conditions for living in the city. Together with an understanding of the role of *Mietskaserne* in the modernization project for Weimar Berlin, close readings of Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Phil Jutzi’s 1931 film based on that novel elucidate the conditions for living in a modern city of renters.

I explore those conditions in novels and films because they are as close as the viewer and reader can come to understanding the “reality” of life in Berlin during the 1920s and 1930s. Certainly, one can read diary entries, reports, articles, and statistical data about the “facts” of life during that era. One can look at photographs, drawings, and reconstructions. These texts provide a generally objective understanding of history. But it is no longer possible to access Weimar city dwellers’ understanding of “what it was like” to live in Berlin during the 1920s and 1930s. Novels and films can provide an approximation of “what it was like,” so long as we accept that the pictures those media present us with belong to a fictional imaginary. While true “reality” cannot be accessed from the current moment in time, we can hold up representations of that moment in the past with our assumptions about it. By bringing those things into constellation with the historical factors that shape contemporary assumptions about the past, we can gain a mediated understanding of that version of the past and what it tells us about our present.

### **Hilberseimer’s Theory in Praise of Proletarian Living Space**

As I have mentioned several times in this dissertation, the Weimar housing crisis led to the subdivision of existing apartments and the building of new ones. Ludwig Hilberseimer was perhaps the most vocal member of the modernist design community to focus on the need for new mass housing developments. Many of his peers were loud proponents, to be sure. Hilberseimer is known for his writings about city planning and “big city architecture.”<sup>88</sup> Written in a style that is similar to the manifestos of Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut, Hilberseimer lays out the problem of dwelling in the modern metropolis. In writings that span the 1920s through the 1940s, Hilberseimer sees a need to change the way that designers and city dwellers alike view and

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, *Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays*, ed. Richard Anderson (New York: GSAPP Sourcebooks, 2012); *The New Regional Pattern: Industries and Gardens, Workshops and Farms* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1949); *The New City; Principles of Planning* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944); “Raumdurchsonnung und Siedlungsdichtigkeit,” *Moderne Bauformen* 35 (February 1936): 69-76; *Internationale neue Baukunst* (Stuttgart: J. Hoffmann, 1927); *Großstadtbauten* (Hannover: Merz-Verlag, 1926).

approach urban space. Like many of his peers, he expresses the opinion that more green space is necessary in cities, that interior space must be filled with light and air, and that all buildings must be designed rationally. While much of his theory deals with urban planning, especially the planning of industrial space in relation to commercial and residential space, Hilberseimer also places importance on the situation of working-class living quarters. Referring to the location, layout, and size of a housing settlement, Hilberseimer explains that:

Economic considerations are always of great weight, for the settlement planned will be dependent upon the means of existence available to its people. They may make their living by industry alone, or by industry combined with agriculture or horticulture, and their mode of livelihood must be reflected in their community's plan. The size and layout of a settlement is also influenced by the particular kind of industry established there.<sup>89</sup>

This statement privileges the needs of working-class people and those who could not afford larger or relatively luxurious living spaces like the villas depicted in avant-garde exhibition films such as Hans Richter's *Die neue Wohnung* and Pierre Chenal's *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*.

Hilberseimer addresses the needs of apartment dwellers in particular and makes reference to the Weimar zoning laws discussed earlier. He lays the blame for inadequate housing on those subdivision laws:

It would seem irresponsible to have made the inadequate small apartments of the lower classes more inadequate, thus tolerating ever-increasing densities. Our laws have done this, however, partly because they have been concerned chiefly with individual lots instead of large integrated urban areas...<sup>90</sup>

Here he makes the distinction between "individual lots" and "integrated urban areas," going beyond the differences between houses and apartment complexes. The city as Hilberseimer acknowledges it places single-family residences on the same geography as mixed-use buildings, multi-family homes, and large rental complexes. This implies that the relative diversity of each city block brings a varying set of challenges to the task of ensuring there is enough space for all city dwellers. In contrast to the fervent writings of many of his peers, Hilberseimer's approach to the problem of modern building is pragmatic. He addresses the problem not just as a result of a general shortage of housing or jobs, but as the effect of a period of speculative building that focused primarily on profit and secondarily on the external appearances of buildings.

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<sup>89</sup> See Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City*, 56. Although these remarks were written down in 1944, during Hilberseimer's tenure as a faculty member at Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology, he acknowledges in the text that they are the result of 20 years of theoretical labor on the same issues. In other words, those ideas were as relevant in the US at the end of World War Two as they were in Weimar Germany during the decade that preceded the war.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Hilberseimer writes that the problem occupying architects has not been acknowledged, “yet the residential building is the building problem of the present. It is the actual problem of the architecture of the metropolis.”<sup>91</sup> This is quite different from the theories of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Theo von Doesburg, and so forth, who wrote that the problem—a problem which always in avant-garde theory has not yet been acknowledged—was the problem of the house, the house’s functionality, or the house’s interior design, designations, or decorations. Hilberseimer flips this focus on its head; rather than focusing on eliminating petit-bourgeois details to facilitate the opening up of interior space, the designers and architects should be making sure that residential buildings are constructed so that one might be able to live in them in the first place.

The significance to this chapter of Hilberseimer’s focus is in the difference between the house or villa and the apartment or tenement. Looking back to the first two chapters, Le Corbusier’s writings and Hans Richter’s images take the villa as a starting point, zoom in on the working-class dwelling, and then turn to the middle-class house as ideal.<sup>92</sup> Hilberseimer writes that it is impossible to compare the two types of living space. To quote him at length:

To date, the tenement has been built according to entirely false premises. Many have mistakenly sought to derive the building type from the individual house, which was above all conditioned by the narrow plots of land characteristic of private land ownership. Despite having exploited the land most cleverly, architects have attempted to maintain the external character of the individual house. This enterprise has led to the most grotesque deformations. It was never clear that the tenement building represents a new architectural problem, whose solution goes hand in hand with the solution of social problems. One had neither the courage nor the will to go to the source of the housing problem and tried instead to conceal the calculated uniformity of the plan and structure by uniquely designing the facade. Preoccupied by the external art of the facade, one forgot the actual problem, which is not one of form, but one of organization.<sup>93</sup>

In line with his contemporaries, Hilberseimer seeks to address social problems through building new homes. He sees the greatest solution in the organization of the home, which is not far off from household rationalization and the concerns of the *Frankfurter Küche*, as discussed in the previous chapter. Like Le Corbusier and the formalists, he lambasts the facade and its use in the pursuit of “beauty.” Yet where he departs from his cohort is in recognizing the apartment building, the tenement house, and the multi-family unit as inherently different from the house and other residences that are supported by a system of primarily private ownership. The working class that arrived in the city with industrialization is a population that lives in homes owned by

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<sup>91</sup> Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Metropolisarchitecture*, 136-7.

<sup>92</sup> Richter’s film in particular implicates the greater avant-garde architecture movement in this focus on the house, because the villas highlighted in his opening and closing montage are Bauhaus buildings. The Bauhaus was at the forefront of the modernist building project in Germany, and most of the surviving residential structures that illustrate Bauhaus and modernist building theories are single-family homes.

<sup>93</sup>Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Metropolisarchitecture*, 137.

others. Even as the number of factory workers yielded to the growing white-collar class of office workers, or *Angestellten*, the housing situation remained a renter's market. The condition of living, then, is not just dictated by the functionality of a living space, but by the ability to find an adequate home that one can afford, that is in proximity to one's workplace. Moreover, it should be one in which the owner upholds the sanctity of the rental contract and respects the dweller's privacy. The nature of renting a room or apartment leads to many variables that are not addressed when the focus of theory remains on privately owned dwellings.

By looking at these variables and the contemporary range of problems through the history of tenement buildings in particular, as well as through the projects of his peers in Germany, Austria, France, England, and North America,<sup>94</sup> Hilberseimer's theory of modern residential building shifts to elucidate the problems of city living in a way that his peers' writings do not manage. Although he does not explicitly write it, *The New Living* is plagued by the transience of modern urban dwelling. Rooms and apartments may be a poor fit, may become unaffordable, or may not accommodate a resident's growing family. The needs of the living space are not just strict functional organization and the erasure of nineteenth-century floor plans and decorations. Instead, the needs of the living space are dependent on the person or persons living in them: workers and families, individuals whose income prevents them from purchasing a private home or villa. The problem of the house as it is obsessed over in avant-garde architectural theory is then a continuation of a strain of building theory that carries over from the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. As Goerd Peschken writes in his chapter about *Mietshäuser*, "architecturally, the Berlin apartment houses of the last century were certainly not cheap housing for the poor, they were a stage of development of the 'Bürgerhaus' (bourgeois house) from which they represented a smooth transition."<sup>95</sup> Thus there can be no complete break with the past if the *New Living* continues to focus on the house as the ideal housing structure. If the *New Man* and *New Woman* are city dwellers, ostensibly working in offices, department stores, and urban industry, then the *New Dwelling* should be conceived of as a multi-unit building.

This is not to state that mass housing was not a concern of the avant-garde building community. Instead, I seek to position much of the *New Building* theory within a focus on shaping the multi-family dwelling structure around the archetype of the single-family house. As Fritz Neumeyer writes in his essay on the *New Building*, Bruno Taut, Martin Wagner, Erich Mendelsohn, Walter Gropius, and their contemporaries succeeded in building many new mass housing settlements on the outskirts of Berlin that were in line with *New Building* and *New Living* tenets.<sup>96</sup> Economics dictated that the settlements had to be built outside of the city center, however there were exceptions:

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-90.

<sup>95</sup> Goerd Peschken, "The Berlin 'Miethaus' and Renovation," in *Berlin: An Architectural History*, ed. Doug Clelland (London: Architectural Design Publications, 1983), 49.

<sup>96</sup> See Fritz Neumeyer, "Nexus of the Modern: The New Architecture in Berlin," in *Berlin 1900-1933: Architecture and Design / Architektur und Design*, ed. Tilmann Buddensieg (New York and Berlin: The Smithsonian Institution and Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1987), 71-4.

Bruno Taut's Wohnstadt Carl Legien in Berlin-Weissensee, the apartment complex on Kurfürstendamm designed by Erich Mendelsohn in conjunction with the Universum Cinema, and Mies van der Rohe's blocks of flats on Afrikanische Strasse, all departed from the pattern of dispersed developments. Instead, they returned to the much-maligned tradition of high-density housing, and managed to beat it at its own game. Precisely by not adhering to the concept of urban dispersal, and by seeking a metropolitan alternative to the tenement-block style, they proved how effective the principles of the Neues Bauen could be, by showing that modern planning approaches could contribute to amenable living in downtown areas.<sup>97</sup>

Just as Neumeyer acknowledges the successes of New Building housing projects in the heart of Berlin, he tempers that success by stressing that "living was not the central concern of metropolitan architecture."<sup>98</sup> In other words, the majority of the modernization projects intended for the city involved structures that would serve industry, administration, and commercial interests. The New Building's domestic structures were largely left to the outskirts, suburbs, and countryside where there was space to build new garden cities and villas. Thus it is no surprise that the "reality" of modern urban life remained in the realm of tenement blocks and rented rooms, both in the actuality of what was built during the Weimar Republic, and in what we see of "real" life in novels and films from that period.

### **Fiction and One's "Own" Rented Room**

In her book *Topographies of Class*, Sabine Hake advances the difference between the public housing estate—or garden city, as the settlements were often called—and the tenement building. Separating the two based on their links to the two phases of Berlin's modernity, she writes that:

If the tenement and the factory were the structures most closely linked to Germany's belated industrialization during the 1870s and 1880s, and the department store the building type most spectacularly identified with the rise of consumer culture around the turn of the century, it was the public housing estate on the periphery and the office building in the center that most clearly symbolized Weimar modernity and its divided allegiances: to the egalitarian principles of social democracy as well as to the maximizing of resources under capitalism, and to the interests of the people as well as to the power of organization.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See Hake, 107.

In recognizing the different building types that characterized the city and the rise of the white-collar class in Berlin's urban culture, Hake fails to note that the more modern housing types never appear in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. She does recognize Biberkopf's position outside of the white-collar and even the working-class milieus, classifying him as a *lumpenproletariat*.<sup>100</sup> Hake finds this designation significant, stating that it allows Döblin to "imagine alternative models of modern urbanity and collectivity."<sup>101</sup> In other words, Döblin privileges a viewpoint that looks at the city from the bottom up, rather than from the top down as we see in avant-garde building theories.

*Berlin Alexanderplatz* is a novel of its time, painting a vibrant portrait of Berlin culture during the later Weimar years. For all of its modern street traffic and construction projects, the novel avoids the shopping centers, office buildings, and garden cities that Franz might have encountered had he ventured into different parts of the Berlin. Instead, the novel's spatial imaginary remains in the tenements and working class bars; its characters are workers, street peddlers, prostitutes, and thieves. This image of Berlin complicates a broader notion of modernity by showing that even in fiction, the city is not free of the "shackles" of the past. Characters dwell in structures that—based on Hake's assertion of which structures "most clearly symbolized Weimar modernity"—might be assumed to have outlived their purpose. A variety of fictional interior descriptions appears in Döblin's novel. Based on the descriptions and attitudes of the characters who dwell in them, those interiors are nostalgic toward nineteenth-century domesticity. Unapologetically un-modern, those rented rooms are integral to the life of then-modern Berlin.

Despite the action and the movement of the streets, traffic, and outdoor life that characterize much of the text in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Franz's relationship with the city is one of being inside. Berlin itself is characterized as a closed space to be entered. After leaving prison, Franz is transported by tram into the city, with the narrator placing emphasis on the pronoun "ein": "er war mit der Elektrischen so weit hierher gefahren, er war aus dem Gefängnis entlassen und mußte hier hinein, noch tiefer hinein. Das weiß ich, seufzte er in sich, daß ich hier rin muß..."<sup>102</sup> The presence and repetition of "hinein," and "rin" focuses the action on the movement toward an inside. Even if urban space may be classified as "public" space, it is a realm that has its own interior, as exemplified in German by the pronoun "in" used when one enters a city ("in die Stadt," or "into the city"). Even as Franz makes his way into the city, before entering a single building, there is a dissonance between "inside" and "outside" that positions Franz as an outsider to contemporary society as a result of his segregation in prison, but also because of the Tegel prison's location outside of the urban center. Later, the difference between inside and outside continues on both a social level and a spatial level, between the relative safety of Franz's dwelling space(s) and the pubs where he passes his time, and the streets where he walks, works, and loses his arm.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "He came this far with the tram, he was released from prison and had to come in here, still deeper inside. I know it, he sighed to himself, that I must come in here" (translation mine). See Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 9.

The number of described interior spaces is less in the beginning of the novel, but increases as the plot goes on. The home of the rabbi where Franz first ends up with Nachum, the Jewish man who brings the traumatized Franz in from the streets, is relatively undeveloped aside from the apartment's possession of several rooms, including a living room outfitted with a rug, a sofa, and a hanging lamp. Following that episode, Franz goes home with a number of young women. The first woman Franz meets in the novel takes him to her room, where he can hear through the wall the sound of her landlady cooking.<sup>103</sup> Aside from the presence of a bed with pillows, a dresser, and a shade, the reader knows little more about this room except that it is rented out. Yet for the second woman Franz goes home with, there is a tender description of her room: "Und nachher in der Stube, Blumen hinter der Gardine, sauberes Stübchen, niedliches Stübchen, hat das Mädchen sogar ein Grammophon, singt ihm vor..."<sup>104</sup> The diminutive suffix *-chen* attached to the word *Stube* stresses the room's smallness, but it also denotes a fondness for the space. The nostalgic description and the naming of the sofa as a *Kanapee* rather than a *Sofa*, seem to be in stark contrast to the woman, who doesn't care whether Franz stays or goes, so long as he pays her and she can sneak away his cigarettes unnoticed. Here the room stands in for the feeling of domestic comfort Franz seeks in going home with a woman.

Franz first feels his need for that comfort met when he goes to Minna, who is the sister of Ida, the girlfriend he mortally wounded—for which he has just spent four years in prison. Franz forces himself on Minna. On one hand, he therefore finds the sexual comfort, or satisfaction, in Minna that he did not find in the women with whom he went home before, women with whom he could not have intercourse. On the other hand, he finds a "homely" comfort in the idea of Minna and from the time they spend together in her apartment. This is made visible when Franz insists on replacing the apron he tore when he raped Minna. An article of clothing that is generally a female item, the apron is also a symbol of domestic labor and the traditional gender role of the woman within the house. Franz appears proud to supply Minna with new aprons:

Da hat sie aufgemacht, er hat das Paket in die Stube geworfen, und wie sie nicht in die Stube kommen wollte, mit dem Besenstiel in der Hand, ist er allein in der Stube herumgesprungen. "Freu mir, Minna. Ich freu mir den ganzen Tag. Hab in der Nacht von dir geträumt." Da hat er auf dem Tisch das Paket aufgemacht, sie ist näher gekommen, hat den Stoff befühlt, hat drei Schürzen gewählt.<sup>105</sup>

Not only does Minna actively defend herself with a broom, another household object, but she ends up picking out three of the aprons Franz brought her. Franz seeks and finds traditional domestic comforts in Minna and her home, and she, upon failing to defend herself and her space against him, allows him the illusion of temporarily being "at home" there. The exchange is

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>104</sup> "And afterwards in the room, flowers behind the curtains, clean little room, sweet little room, the girl even had a gramophone, sang to him..." (translation mine). Ibid., 27.

<sup>105</sup> "She opened the door, he threw the packet into the room, and since she didn't want to enter the room, with the broomstick in her hand, he jumped around the room alone. 'I'm glad, Minna. I'm glad all day. I had a dream about you last night.' Then he opened the packet on the table, she came closer, felt the fabric, chose three aprons" (translation mine). Ibid., 32.

problematic because Minna's acceptance of the gifts partly justifies Franz's behavior to him and underscores his expectation for traditional gender norms. The exchange is also problematic because it underlines the troublesome relation between Minna and Franz, which is not yet fully elucidated in the novel.

Indeed, Franz attacked Minna's sister Ida after she informed him that she was leaving him for someone else. According to the narrator, Franz would have killed Ida on the spot if Minna had not entered from another room and interrupted the fight. The reader does not know at this point the full back story of Ida and Franz's relationship, but it can be extrapolated that whatever domestic role Ida played in Franz's life before her death, he imagines her sister easily taking on that same role. Minna recognizes this during Franz's rape of her: "Jetzt weiß sie, sie ist die Schwester von Ida, so hat er manchmal Ida angeschaut. Er hat Ida in den Armen, sie ist es..."<sup>106</sup> In other words, Franz substitutes Minna for Ida, and Minna's apartment for his and Ida's own. Franz appears blind to the nature of their encounter—although the reader will later learn that he is often haunted by visions of Ida. While he is triumphant at finally having had an intimate relationship with a woman, the comfort he receives from Minna goes beyond pure physicality. The third time Franz visits Minna, she assumes he wants to have sex with her, only to have him counter with an unexpected request: "'Warum denn, ich will bloß bei dir in der Stube sitzen.' Sie haben friedlich eine Weile nebeneinander auf dem Sofa gesessen und haben gesprochen. Dann ist er allein gegangen."<sup>107</sup> Although Franz's interaction with Minna is framed by the narrator as part of his return to strength and good form, this desire to spend time with a woman in a domestic interior is significant beyond the man's sexual health or the momentary substitution for Ida of Ida's sister. In a modern, fast-moving Berlin that leaves him bewildered and alone, Franz seeks first and foremost a modicum of "home" insofar as that means a furnished, three-room apartment and a woman who performs domestic labor in her new aprons. Whether or not that version of home is one to which Franz had access before prison, or which he has a desire to attain, it is a notion that he chases in his interactions with his lovers.

The reader learns little more of Franz's living situation after his reunion with Minna, beyond that he sells his old furniture and his landlady gives him a little bit of money when he returns. Franz cohabitates with his girlfriend Lina, but the apartment where they stay is an underdeveloped space. It has a *Kommode* (a large dresser)<sup>108</sup> and a *Sofa*<sup>109</sup>; more detail the reader does not know. The reader can assume it is in Lina's name, as the narrator states that "es war in ihrer Stube" when Franz sets his hat on the *Kommode*.<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, the space is referred to as a *Stube*. Döblin chooses to use the word *Stube* as opposed to *Zimmer* throughout the book. *Stube* means "parlor" or "living room" in German; it does not refer to a generic room in the same way that *Zimmer* does, and as such imparts a specific image of a living space. The overstuffed parlor from Richter's *Die neue Wohnung*, the room with the gramophone and the sofas that moves from

<sup>106</sup> "Now she knew, she was Ida's sister. He used to look at Ida like that sometimes. He had Ida in his arms, she was her..." (translation mine). Ibid., 31.

<sup>107</sup> "'But why, I just want to sit with you in the living room.' They sat peacefully next to each other on the sofa for a while and chatted. Then he left on his own" (translation mine). Ibid., 33.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>110</sup> "It was in her room," (translation mine). Ibid., 64.

a built apartment to a tent in *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*: each of these rooms is a *Stube*. So when the unnamed woman at the novel's beginning, Minna, and Lina each receive Franz in a *Stube*, a certain kind of three-room apartment comes to mind. Yet everyone in the novel inhabits a *Stube*: Franz, Franz's friend and enemy Reinhold, Herbert and Eva. It is not until over halfway through the novel, when the reader becomes acquainted with Eva's secondary living situation with her *Cavalier*, that the word *Wohnung* is used to describe the space where a character actively lives.

The contrast between the *Stuben* in which the novel's characters live and the living situation of higher classes is drawn when Eva invites Franz's young, new girlfriend Mieke to visit her in the apartment she shares with her rich boyfriend.<sup>111</sup> The apartment has more than just three standard rooms, as it includes a children's room, a dining room, and a private toilet.<sup>112</sup> As the narrator points out, the goal of the visit is educational for Mieke, so that she sees, "...wie es bei ganz feinen Leuten ist."<sup>113</sup> This is not something that Franz can show Mieke; the women in the novel attain living situations through their boyfriends that the men in the novel do have access to. While Franz remains more or less a thief during his relationship with Mieke, she is able to supplement their income through her entry into a higher-class domestic space. It is not long after her visit with Eva that Mieke has a new benefactor-boyfriend who is, "...beinah so reich wie Eva ihrer, aber schon verheiratet, was noch besser ist, der macht ihr eine feine Bude aus zwei unmöblierten Zimmern zurecht."<sup>114</sup> Here, as with Eva's boyfriend, the wealthy man creates a domestic interior for his lower-class girlfriend so that he can meet with her in the comforts to which he is accustomed. The apartments that Eva and Mieke have with their boyfriends, as well as the apartment that Reinhold rents for his girlfriend to live in separately, are associated with a higher class status. Eva and Mieke's boyfriends are both described as wealthy, and Reinhold acquires the apartment for his girlfriend as soon as he feels his status and wealth rise after purging Franz and his unwanted girlfriend Trude from his life.<sup>115</sup> Although he is still a member of the criminal underworld, Reinhold aspires to a higher class and uses his money to create the illusion of that status in the domestic sphere. For him and for Eva and Mieke's boyfriends, kept women can be placed in these living spaces away from the men who keep them, for their own personal access and convenience. As a result, the women temporarily take part in a lifestyle they would not otherwise be able to access. In all situations aside from these, the *Stube* is the primary living space in the novel. It can be surmised that the word *Stube* as it is used in

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<sup>111</sup> In *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, these boyfriends, referred to either as a "Cavalier" or "Gönner" (benefactor), are men who pay the women for sex and companionship. These wealthy men also support the women financially with food, necessities, clothing, and other objects in what is essentially a form of domestic prostitution.

<sup>112</sup> Döblin, 246-8.

<sup>113</sup> "...how very fancy people live," (translation mine). Ibid., 246.

<sup>114</sup> "...almost as rich as Eva's, but already married, which was even better. He set up fine digs for her out of two unfurnished rooms" (translation mine). Ibid., 257.

<sup>115</sup> See Döblin, 205: "Da hat er sich ein feines Weib aufgegebelt, die auch mal beßre Tage gesehn hat, und für die mietet er einen piekfeinen Bau an der Nürnberger Straße, und da kann er dann unterkriechen, wenn er den dicken Wilhelm spielen will oder vielleicht wo die Luft nicht sauber ist. So ist alles schön und glatt, er hat seinen Fürstenbau im Westen, nebenbei natürlich die alte Bude mit einem Weibstück drin..." ("He'd picked up a fine broad who'd also seen better days, and he rented her a posh building on Nürnberger Street, and he could sneak by whenever he wanted to show off, or when there was danger about. And so everything went nice and smooth, he had his princely abode in the west, on the side of course the old pad with a bitch in it." Translation mine).

*Berlin Alexanderplatz* describes a living space not altogether different from that in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, although perhaps not as dire. There is no separate bedroom, kitchen, and living room, as far as the reader can tell. One lives not in the kitchen, but in the parlor, as a matter of speaking. The description in literature of these working-class units is much friendlier than the avant-garde designers would have them appear in theory. The difference of course is the subject: the characters in the novel are the renters, and the people who own and rent out the buildings are the subjects at whom the theory is directed. What is most significant about Franz's living spaces, however, is not how or where his space is organized, but rather the psychic relationship he sees between the place where he lives and how the events of his life are unfolding.

In his quest to live an upstanding life, Franz is sensitive to his surroundings. After his first business endeavor has gone in the wrong direction, he removes himself without a trace from his living situation: "Und wie [Lina] abends wiederkommt, ist der Mann weg. Hat bezahlt, hat seine Sachen eingepackt, alles mitgenommen und ist weg. Die Wirtin weiß bloß, er hat bezahlt, und sie soll schreiben auf dem Meldezettel: auf Reisen."<sup>116</sup> Not only does Franz leave without telling anyone where he is headed next, but he moves on a second time as soon as Lüders, the man who betrayed him in the episode leading up to that first move, finds Franz's new home. Franz had not moved far, just a few three buildings away.<sup>117</sup> Franz's move is not for the purpose of removing himself from the area, per se; he still lives on the same street, even if he dissociates himself from Lina and from his usual pub. By finding a new room, he seeks a fresh start that could not have been achieved in the room he shared with Lina.

This is evident when Lüders enters Franz's new room. Franz reacts to the man's presence by trying to wash him away: "Biberkopf aber geht schräg nach hinten an den Waschständer, nimmt die Waschschüssel und – wat sagste – gießt das Wasser in einem Schwung durch die Stube vor Lüders' Füße."<sup>118</sup> Although it is described as a literal event, Franz pouring water into Lüders' path is a symbolic cleansing action. Lüders' presence is unwanted, as are any traces that he was present in Franz's room or his life. Franz continues to spread water around the room after Lüders leaves: "Muß alles sauber werden, muß alles weg; jetzt noch das Fenster auf und pusten."<sup>119</sup> The cleansing of the room with water and the airing out of the space are intended to rid the room—and Franz's life—of the negative forces that put him in the position of being betrayed by Lüders. Yet this is not enough to comfort Franz, and he moves again. His ability to pick up and leave on a whim follow him through every bad experience in the novel. Franz sees his living space as his *Grundstück* (foundation) and if something in his life has gone poorly outside the home, it is because his domestic life rests on a bad foundation. As such, Franz envisions his life and situation as a product of the domestic sphere. Home is not merely

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<sup>116</sup> "And when Lina came back that evening, the man was gone. He'd paid, packed up his things, taken everything with and was gone. The landlady knew only that he had paid, and she should write on the registration certificate: on vacation" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>118</sup> "Biberkopf stooped backwards toward the washstand, took the basin and—whaddaya say—poured the water in one swing through the room at Lüders' feet" (translation mine). *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> "Everything must be clean, everything must be gone. Now just open the window and blow it out" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 103.

somewhere for Franz to sleep; his home conditions are the basis for his dealings with money, friends and lovers, and the world outdoors.

One of the most famous interior scenes in the book—and indeed the one domestic space that is dealt with in scholarship about *Berlin Alexanderplatz*—is the scene which describes the house on Linienstraße to which Franz moves after he attempts to cleanse himself of Lüders. The narrator treats the house like a dollhouse, removing a wall to describe the contents to the reader. The description certainly fits with the style of narration that flows throughout the novel, bringing Franz's thoughts, his actions, and his conversations into a confluence with the conversations and life stories of strangers, advertisements, media proclamations, news and current events, traffic and business reports, and the general hubbub of the city that gives Berlin the sense of being a character in and of itself. Here, Franz's neighbors and their dealings are given as much weight as the protagonist and his own story. The narration serves to set the scene, re-introducing Franz to the reader by way of the building in which he lives. It is also an introduction to the social body of which he is now part. Franz is both a member of the building's living community, and at the same time one of many residents making their homes on that street, in that neighborhood, in the big city. I have chosen to reproduce much of this description to give a sense of the flow of narration and the milieu that is being painted as Franz's new backdrop:

Über den Läden und hinter den Läden aber sind Wohnungen, hinten kommen noch Höfe, Seitengebäude, Quergebäude, Hinterhäuser, Gartenhäuser. Linienstraße, da ist das Haus, wo sich Franz Biberkopf verkrochen hat nach dem Schlamassel mit Lüders.

Vorn ist ein schönes Schuhgeschäft, hat vier glänzende Schaufenster, und sechs Mädchen bedienen, das heißt, wenn was zu bedienen ist, haben um 80 Mark im Monat pro Kopf und Nase, und wenn es hochkommt und sie grau geworden sind, haben sie 100. Das schöne große Schuhgeschäft gehört einer alten Frau, die hat ihren Geschäftsführer geheiratet, und seitdem schläft sie hinten, und es geht ihr schlecht. [...] Im ersten Stock der Herr Rechtsanwalt. [...]

An seinem Schreibtisch sitzt um 7 Uhr abends Herr Rechtsanwalt Löwenhund und arbeitet vor zwei brennenden Tischlampen. [...]

Zweiter Stock: Der Verwalter und zwei dicke Ehepaare, der Bruder mit seiner Frau, die Schwester mit ihrem Mann, haben noch n krankes Mädchen.

Dritter Stock ein 64jähriger Mann, Möbelpolier mit Glatze. Seine Tochter ist eine geschiedene Frau, besorgt ihm den Haushalt. [...]

Nebenan ein Dreher, um die Dreißig, hat einen kleinen Jungen, Stube und Küche, die Frau ist auch tot, Schwindsucht, er hustet auch, der Junge ist bei Tag im Hort, abends holt ihn der Mann. [...]

Dann ein Kellner mit einer Frau, Stube und Küche proper eingerichtet, Gaskrone mit Glasbehang. Der Kellner ist vormittags bis zwei zu Haus, solange schläft er

und spielt Zither, zur selben Zeit, wo der Rechtsanwalt Löwenhund auf Landgericht 1, 2, 3 mit schwarzem Talar herumrast über die Korridore, aus dem Anwaltszimmer, in das Anwaltszimmer [...]

Ganz oben ein Darmhändler, was natürlich schlecht riecht und wo es viel Kindergeschrei und Alkohol gibt. Daneben zuletzt ein Bäcker Geselle mit seiner Frau, die Anlegerin ist in einer Druckerei und eine Eierstockentzündung hat. [...]"<sup>120</sup>

This greatly shortened version of the so-called dollhouse scene presents the house on Liniestraße as if it was being described to an outsider by a local gossip. Every resident's dealings are recounted in some detail, as if each story were to become linked with Franz's in some way. None of these neighbors come up in the story again, but because of the importance Franz finds in his living situation, the milieu is worth the narrator's recollection. As Hake has pointed out, the scene may have been inspired by similar descriptions published in the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*. Those reports featured photo essays on "everyday topics" such as "Berlin at work," "Big City Berlin," "Arrival in Berlin," and "A cross-section of Berlin tenements."<sup>121</sup> This example further underscores the ubiquitous nature of the tenements in Weimar Berlin's contemporary consciousness. It also illustrates the diversity of the building's inhabitants, given the variety of people and classes represented in the 'dollhouse' description. Döblin constructs the scene with no transition among neighbors beyond the designation of where in the building each one lives. This narrative structure creates a flow that brings the stories together as closely as the walls that separate them.

Franz's building community appears to be largely upstanding, about as far from a slum as a working-class building can seem. This is where Franz gets his start in the next chapter of the novel and the next chapter of his own life. Although the place where he lives seems to be "in order," as Franz would have it—aside from the episode recounting how the building manager and his wife help thieves steal from the neighboring factory—Franz doesn't get off to the

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<sup>120</sup> "Above the shops and behind the shops are apartments, behind those are courtyards, annexes, transepts, garden houses. Liniestraße, there's the house where Franz Biberkopf holed up after the mess with Lüders. In the front there's a nice shoe store, has four gleaming show windows and six girls working, which means that when there is something to sell, they have around 80 marks a month each, and when it picks up and they get old, they have 100. The nice, big shoe store belongs to an old woman who married her manager, and since then she sleeps in the back and hasn't been well. [...] on the first floor the gentleman solicitor. [...] Gentleman Solicitor Löwenhund sits at his desk at 7 o'clock in the evenings and works by two burning table lamps. [...] Second floor: the caretaker and two fat married couples, the brother with his wife, the sister and her husband, they also have a sick girl. Third floor, a 64-year-old man, furniture foreman with a bald head. His daughter is a divorcée, manages his household. [...] Next door a lathe operator, about 30, who has a little boy, parlor and kitchen, the wife is dead, consumption, he has a cough, too, the boy is in daycare during the days, the man picks him up each evening. [...] Then a waiter with a wife, parlor and kitchen, neatly arranged, gas chandelier with hanging glass. The waiter is at home until two each morning, spends the time sleeping and playing the zither, during the same time as which Solicitor Löwenhund dashes in his black gown from Land Court 1, 2, 3 across the corridor, out of the lawyer's chamber, into the lawyer's chamber [...] At the very top a gut dealer, where of course it smells bad, children are always crying, and there's alcohol. Finally, next to that, a journeyman baker and his wife, who's an investor for a print shop and has an inflammation of the ovaries. [...]" (translation mine). Ibid., 106-9.

<sup>121</sup> Hake, 179-80.

upstanding start he desires, and ends the chapter having been betrayed once again by a man he considers his friend. The only description of Franz's home in the chapter is given shortly before he disappears from that home:

Franz Biberkopf saß am Fenster seiner kleinen Bude, stütze seinen linken Arm auf das Fensterbrett, legte den Kopf in die Hand. Es war nachmittags, Sonntag, warm, mollig in der Stube. Cilly hatte schon geheizt zu Mittag, jetzt schlief sie hinten im Bett mit ihrer kleinen Katze.<sup>122</sup>

This scene presents more description than action, setting the tone of Franz's last moments in the room he shares with Cilly. Although it appears at first that he is content there, he leaves the space in order to discover why he hears bells ringing outside. The noisy city beckons him from the comforts of home, leading him to people and events that are beyond his control. While he could control whether he placed his left or his right arm on the windowsill in the scene above, he soon finds himself in a situation that robs him of his right arm and the ability to control it. The loss of control outside of the home leads him to ultimately seek control of his life in the home—as much as one can control a home that one does not own. Thus as Franz's luck changes, so, too, do his whereabouts. Once he has lost his arm, Franz makes no effort to return home to Cilly for the same reasons he never returned to Lina or the place he lived after her—because he desires to achieve a clean break with that past.

After his accident, Franz's friends Herbert and Eva take him in and help him through his convalescence. Consistent with his past, Franz refuses to stay them for long because he feels the need for a fresh start: "Franz möchte eine eigene Bude, sonst kommt er nicht in Gang."<sup>123</sup> The emphasis here is on having his "own" place. Franz was sleeping in a shared space at Herbert and Eva's, so he did not have any real privacy there. This nuances the idea of private space as a function of ownership: just as the renter is beholden to his or her landlord's ability to pry on the space he or she rents from the landlord, the people staying in an apartment may only see it as "private" if there is a sense of ownership over the space. Just as he needed to find a new room for himself each time he started over in his past, Franz must secure a room alone before he begins his life as a one-armed man.

Franz's new *Stube* doesn't become a "home" until he meets Mieke, who is both another stand-in for Ida and the second love of his life. One of the traits that makes Mieke so dear to Franz is how well she keeps house:

...und in ihrer Stube ist alles so sauber und manierlich mit Blumen und Läppchen und Bändern wie bei einem kleinen Mädchen. Und immer ist schön gelüftet und

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<sup>122</sup> "Franz Biberkopf sat by the window of his little pad, propped his left arm up on the windowsill, and leaned his head in his hand. It was afternoon, Sunday, warm, cozy in the room. Cilly'd had the heat on until noon, and now she slept in the bed in back with her little cat" (translation mine). Döblin, 176.

<sup>123</sup> "Franz wanted his own digs, or else he wouldn't get off the ground again" (translation mine). Ibid., 214.

mit Lavendelwasser gespritzt, daß er eine ordentliche Freude hat, wenn sie abends zusammen nach Hause kommen.<sup>124</sup>

Not only is Mieke's housekeeping ability part of her appeal, but that she has it nicely decorated and pleasant smelling. It is the presentation of homeliness and the feeling of bourgeois comforts that make the house a "home," along with the inclusion of a woman to do domestic labor and ensure that the home remains clean and cozy. This was foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel in Franz's interactions with Minna, and it comes to fruition near the novel's end in his life with Mieke. The effect Mieke has on Franz and his living space together make him want to be at home with her. The only further descriptions of their home in the remainder of the novel describe where they sit in relation to one another, or where others position themselves after entering the home. The description above is the most complete and nostalgic description of one of Franz's living spaces, as it represents his ideal conditions for living.

When Reinhold enters Franz and Mieke's home, things begin to change. First Reinhold comes on his own, to see what Mieke is like. Then Franz brings Reinhold into the home to see Mieke, and while Reinhold hides in their bed, Franz beats Mieke senseless. Reinhold prevents Franz from beating Mieke to death, a moment that is later juxtaposed against Reinhold murdering her in a field outside the city. It is also a moment that looks back at Franz killing Ida. The very last time that Franz and Mieke's *Stube* comes into play in the novel is in a dream Mieke has:

Sie hat in der Nacht geträumt: ihr Bett und Franzens stehen in dem Wohnzimmer ihrer Wirtsleute unter der Lampe, und dann bewegt sich der Vorhang vor der Tür, und etwas Graues, eine Art Gespenst, wickelt sich langsam daraus, kommt in das Zimmer.<sup>125</sup>

The same bed that Reinhold hid in while Franz beats Mieke, and in which Franz and Mieke sleep each night, is the subject of this bad dream. The nightmare provides narrative foreshadowing, as the episode takes place shortly before she leaves the city with Reinhold and ultimately meets her death. The nightmare references Franz and Mieke's situation as renters through the setting in their landlords' living room, as well as the public magnifying glass under which their romantic relationship will come after her death. Following from Franz's earlier dwelling habits, the nightmare is possible because the home hasn't been purged of Reinhold's negative influence and they continue to inhabit the soiled space. Unlike when Franz tries to wash away Lüders, he

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<sup>124</sup> "...and everything in her room was so clean and genteel with flowers and small cloths and ribbons, like in a little girl's room. And it was always well-ventilated and scented with lavender water, so that he felt a proper joy when they came home together in the evenings" (translation mine). Ibid., 230.

<sup>125</sup> "She had had a dream that night: her and Franz's bed stood in their landlord's living room beneath a lamp, and then the curtain over the door moved and something gray, a kind of ghost, slowly swirled out of it and entered the room" (translation mine). Ibid., 306.

invites Reinhold into the home he shares with Mieke. This action sullies the “hominess” they had achieved in their dwelling space and undermines Franz’s *Grundstück*.

After Mieke goes missing, Franz stays in the apartment. He is hard-pressed to leave the space, and is tied to it physically as much as he is emotionally to Mieke. In order to deal with the feeling he has of her missing, Franz tears everything apart: “Franz sitzt auf seiner Stube. Stundenlang. Wo ist Mieke. Die ist weg, läßt nichts von sich hören. Wat sagt man. Alles durcheinandergewühlt in der Stube, Bett auseinandergenommen, wieder zusammengelegt.”<sup>126</sup> Here again the bed is the subject of unrest, this time not in a nightmare. The inability for Franz to be comfortable in a home space is further underscored by this event, as he cannot feel properly “at home” if everything is not orderly and situated in its proper place—Mieke included. He does not move away and find a new home after this episode, because he continues to wait for Mieke until he discovers that she is dead. Thereafter he is forced to leave once he discovers his implication in her death. As I have shown above, he is doubly implicated because he allowed their domestic space to be tarnished. Since he does not clean up the space or find a new one, he must live with the consequences of losing his love and the domesticity he achieved with her.

The film version of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* does not place the same merit on interior spaces that the reader finds in the novel. Peter Jelavich has discussed at length the factors that led to Phil Jutzi’s adaptation *Berlin Alexanderplatz* diverging significantly from the core values of Döblin’s novel.<sup>127</sup> Where there are more than 400 pages of written fiction crammed into an hour and a half of film, plot changes at a minimum are inevitable. Döblin worked with Hans Wilhelm to adapt his epic to film, which resulted in a drastic reduction of the story and its many threads—hence the film’s full title, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte Franz Biberkopfs*. The number of characters has been cut down, so that the only two female characters Franz encounters are Cilly, who takes on the roles of Lina, Cilly, and Eva from the novel, and Mieke. The medium of film also treats the setting differently. But the visual world of the film is still an imaginary that has been specially constructed; Jutzi’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was nearly all filmed in a studio set. The film largely takes place in a pub, and there are few domestic spaces in the film: the house into which Franz goes to escape the city at the very beginning, Franz’s rented room, and Cilly’s apartment.

Franz’s apartment is clearly a rented room, as the viewer sees that his sofa, table, bed, desk, and washbasin inhabit the same space (see figures 3.1 and 3.2).

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<sup>126</sup> “Franz sat in his room. For hours. Where was Mieke. She’s gone, not to be heard from. What is there to say. He dug through everything in the room, took the bed apart, put it back together” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>127</sup> See Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 191-239.



*Figures 3.2 and 3.2: Cilly and Franz in Franz's rented room (top); Franz crossing his small room (bottom). From Berlin Alexanderplatz, dir. Phil Jutzi, 16:39, 17:33.*

The room is shown in one scene, as the camera pans across the window, bed, table and chairs, to Franz on the sofa next to the desk, and back across the room past the window to Franz's wash basin. It is a small space, not particularly well-lit, with few personal items and a single plant. In Cilly's apartment is not shown in its entirety as Franz's room is, but her dwelling space appears to be finer—likely a unit that is rented for her by a wealthy boyfriend (see figures 3.3 through 3.5).





Figures 3.3-3.5. Mieke sits in Cilly's apartment (top); Cilly on the phone in her apartment (middle); Cilly and Mieke confiding in one another in Cilly's apartment (bottom). From *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, dir. Jutzi, 47:09; 52:30; 57:42.

Jelavich confirms the status of Cilly's living space, writing that: "...prostitution is a trade reserved for Cilly, who becomes the 'kept woman' of a rich man in the western parts of town."<sup>128</sup> Whereas Franz's room is plainly furnished with a few moderately embellished pieces of furniture, Cilly's apartment contains art, china, decorative furniture, and knick-knacks. While Döblin's narrator tells his readers not what style of furniture the apartments have, but rather what kinds of furniture and the feeling they provide, Jutzi's film presents decidedly un-modern decorations for its characters' dwelling spaces. In both cases, the furnishings convey the spaces' relative socio-economic classes. Nobody owns their living spaces in either the film or the novel, but the implication of ownership or privacy for living spaces is stronger in the novel than it is in the film.

## Conclusion

The conditions for living in Weimar Berlin's fictional homes are at first glance a function of their immediate milieu and the characters' decisions to live there. But as the apartments of Eva, Mieke, and Reinhold show in the novel, and Cilly's shows in the film, the spaces that the dwellers in fiction have access to depends on economics, whether that means the character's own money or the money of someone else who takes care of him or her. Most of the male characters do not share in higher-class dwelling spaces. In Jutzi's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Franz's single rented room is a simple abode of little note. And in Döblin's novel, where there is always a room for Franz to rent, the location or type of unit is of little import. The system of power and ownership of the city's livable structures that allows the characters to live in the spaces that they

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 220.

do is not overt in either fictional text; Franz's problems with being successful and getting ahead never seem to be thwarted by access to money.

Despite the wealth of options Franz finds for renting his rooms, the housing crisis is not absent from the novel. The narrator refers to laws protecting renters: "Das Mieterschutzgesetz ist ein Fetzen Papier. Die Mieten steigen ständig. Der gewerbliche Mittelstand wird auf das Pflaster gesetzt,"<sup>129</sup> and, "Attentat auf das Mieterschutzgesetz, aufgewacht, Mieter, man nimmt dir das Dach über dem Kopf weg."<sup>130</sup> Both statements are written in a short clip, like announcements at a rally or a political demonstration. Almost in the same breath as it acknowledges the *Mieterschutzgesetz*, the novel refers to furniture styles in advertisements:

Ihr Herz lacht! Ihr Herz lacht vor Freude, wenn Sie ein mit den berühmten Höffner-Möbeln ausgestattetes Heim besitzen. Alles, was Sie sich an angenehmer Wohnlichkeit erträumten, wird von einer ungeahnten Wirklichkeit übertroffen. Wie auch die Jahre entschwinden, wohlgefällig bleibt dieser Anblick, und ihre Haltbarkeit und praktische Verwendbarkeit erfreuen immer von neuem.<sup>131</sup>

In much longer, descriptive sentences, this text overtakes the brief sentences about the Rent Act, ignoring the housing crisis and focusing on the life one can attain by having this furniture in his or her home. Home for Franz is not a fancy place; rather, "home" relies on notions of comfort and domesticity that stem from a nineteenth-century conception of "homeliness" such as the one with which *Die frankfurter Küche's* Grete Lihotzky found fault, as discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>132</sup> In his quest to be a new man and get things right, Franz returns to a particular domestic interior as the basis point for his success. The advertisement above, which eclipses the call for action on the housing crisis, mirrors in some ways Franz's ability to fall back to a new home whenever there is a problem in his life, rather than dealing with the root of the problem.

The modern dwelling spaces in Döblin's novel are not airy rooms built under rational premises. They are rooms that the character rent in order to satisfy their most basic needs for living. This is both in accordance with and at odds with the New Living, which calls for a living space designed rationally so as to provide the utmost efficiency and ease of living. While Franz desires "order," he does not choose rationalized household efficiency—nor could he likely afford it. In the literary city, the conditions for living are the result of one's access to work, by traffic patterns, and by one's immediate milieu and the other people inhabiting the shared urban space. Everything is largely beyond the protagonist's control, aside from that which belongs to him or

<sup>129</sup> "The Rent Act is a shred of paper. The rents rise steadily. The working middle class will be thrown out on the street" (translation mine). Döblin, 105.

<sup>130</sup> "Assassination of the Rent Act, wake up, renter, the roof over your head is being taken away" (translation mine). Ibid., 149.

<sup>131</sup> "Your heart will laugh! Your heart will laugh with joy when your home is fitted with the famous Höffner Furniture. Everything you could ever dream of coziness will exceed an unimagined reality. How the years will fall away, this sight will remain satisfying, and its durability and practical usability will always be as delightful as new" (translation mine). Ibid., 106.

<sup>132</sup> See Chapter 2 (pp. 39-40). See also Lihotzky, "Rationalization in the Household," 463.

her within the home. Even the domestic interior is not the character's own; as such, one's living conditions are affected by the location and availability of rooms for rent. In the example of Franz Biberkopf, the individual is a product of his environment. This is also the case in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, as I discussed in Chapter 2. When I ended that chapter by saying it is the "condition of living" that is broken, that is due in large part to a loss of control for the urban inhabitant who cannot afford a "private" home. Yet as I will show in the next chapter, it is too easy to write off home space as the only living space in the city, and in doing so to privilege domesticity in terms of "living" and "dwelling." Although I have built my argument in the previous chapters around a domestic interior as the space of the home, I will show in the next chapter that the house, apartment, or room is not the only space for dwelling. The city being uncontrollable as it may for a large segment of the population, it becomes in the age of rented rooms one big living room.

## Chapter 4

### *Quadraturin* for the City: Cafés, Courtyards, and Corner Bars as Urban Living Rooms

The *Quadraturin* was still working. During the eight or nine hours Sutulin had been out, it had pushed the walls at least another seven feet apart; the floorboards, stretched by invisible rods, rang out at his first step – like organ pipes.  
– Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, “*Quadraturin*”

Living spaces were among the concerns of some of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky’s writings during the early days of the Soviet Republic. At the same time that Berliners were learning to navigate the city space in their own new republic, Soviets were learning to live in smaller apartments and share more common space amid the early stages of collectivization. No work captures this quite like Krzhizhanovsky’s 1926 short story, “*Quadraturin*.” The story recounts what happens when the protagonist, Sutulin, tries out a free bottle of a serum called *Quadraturin* that is designed for the purpose of “biggerizing rooms.”<sup>133</sup> Sutulin uses the serum but runs out before he can finish painting his ceiling. He finds his 86-square-foot, single-room apartment ever expanding in all directions except for the ceiling, the dimensions of which remain static. The enlargement of Sutulin’s private space is at first a relief from his cramped living quarters, and then a curse as the continuing growth of that space leads to frightening proportions. That Sutulin even chooses to apply the serum to his apartment is a rebellion against the social order that allows him the original 86-square-feet and stops by to measure that the space remains as assigned. The frequent checks are intended out of fairness as well as a need to control that the number of inhabitants in the building remains at a legal limit. The terrifying moments when these checks are completed appear to represent the exterior world barging in on Sutulin’s private interior. And yet they also underscore the notion that his living space has expanded in a way that the builders never intended—a decision that Sutulin does not have the authority to make for a space that he does not own. The *Quadraturin* defies both architectural laws and the intended modern social order to provide Sutulin with a greatly expanded space.

This is not so different from the way that domestic space appears to spread out into the exterior in some Weimar novels and films. Phil Jutzi’s film adaptation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* moves the diegesis of Döblin’s city beyond the realm of the strictly urban. The film features a few prominent outdoor scenes—most famously the opening sequence when Biberkopf enters the city on the tram and the repeated scene of him hawking wares on the Alexanderplatz—and a select few scenes in domestic interiors, as have been discussed in the previous chapter. Yet much of the film is concentrated in a corner pub. Franz meets Cilly at Henschke’s pub; he becomes involved with the Pums gang there; after the gang tries to kill him, he returns there to beg them to take him back on; and he is captured in the pub following Mieke’s death. *Weltbühne* film critic Rudolph Arnheim takes a jab at the pub’s dominance in his October 1931 review of the film,

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<sup>133</sup> Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, “*Quadraturin*,” *7 Stories*, translated by Joanne Turnbull (Jackson, Tenn.: Glas New Russian Writing, 1991), 15.

referring to, “pub scenes such as we’ve seen ad nauseum.”<sup>134</sup> As if to underscore the ubiquity Arnheim suggests, corner bars, or *Eckkneipen*, like the one in Jutzi’s film also feature prominently in another fiction film that has been discussed in this dissertation: *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. The corner bar, like the cafés in the novels *Fabian* and *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, and the courtyards of the novel and the film *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, F.W. Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann*, and *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, serve in those films and novels to fill a role that is missing in those texts’ domestic interiors.

The bars, cafés, and courtyards effectively stand in for the living rooms that the city dwellers do not possess. As I will show in this chapter, these spaces fill in for what is missing in the shared apartments and rented rooms of working class Berlin. In a movement that allows the insides of the city to spill outdoors—as a type of urban Quadraturin—the protagonists leave their homes to find and create the spaces that they lack. In an unconscious gesture toward the household rationalization that the avant-garde sought to employ in new developments, the fictional characters living in the tenements recognize the need for some separation among the activities of domestic life. Where a city has not yet been built that fulfills all of the dweller’s needs, the dweller is shown—in novels and films—to shape his or her relationship with the city to fit those needs.

Before the fever of modernity had become universally accepted as characterized by fast-paced life along busy city streets, Georg Simmel had pointed to the character of the urban metropolis as a demoralizing force on the individual, leading to agoraphobia, depression, and nervousness.<sup>135</sup> Simmel’s viewpoint sought to provide an understanding of urban modernity as the effects of the city itself on the individual. He was concerned with exterior space as an alienating force that shaped the subjectivity of those living in the cities. Scholarship has worked with this explanation for over a century, refining our understanding of urban subjectivity as “modernity” has shifted to mean and include different things. As Sabine Hake has more recently gone on to complicate Simmel’s theory:

Most studies on the culture of modernity agree that modern subjectivities and urban identities are profoundly affected by the acceleration of time, the fragmentation of space, the mechanization of work, the medialization of experience, the mobilization of perception, and the rationalization of living. However, the materialization of these changes in urban life is complicated not only by the historically developed layout of cities but also by the spatial organization of class and gender and the construction of self and other in the name of nationalism, racism, and colonialism.<sup>136</sup>

As the variety of factors given here shows, urban space is composed of many more layers than simply physical space, and as such the metropolis is more than a network of exterior and interior

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<sup>134</sup> As cited in Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 220.

<sup>135</sup> See Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 409-24.

<sup>136</sup> Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class*, 63.

spaces. Yet what is significant in Hake's summation is the possibility for the "rationalization of living" to have an effect on that which is inherently modern.

As I discussed largely in Chapter 2, household rationalization was the crux of modernist designs for domestic space. As the wordplay of the avant-garde manifestos makes clear, the New Living and the New Dwelling are influenced by the compartmentalization of how one "lives" in modernity. Döblin's Biberkopf explicates this best whenever he moves to a new apartment, because his foundation for making a living in the city is influenced foremost by his dwelling, or "living" space—his home. This chapter seeks the harmony between interior and exterior space, between the domestic and the urban, and the private and the public. Without diminishing the importance of the domestic interior that one has, the missing living room can be created at one's table at the corner pub, in the open space formed by abutting buildings, or in a neighborhood eatery. Through this substitution of an existing space for a missing space, the rented room is made whole by its extension out of the home. This assertion underscores the argument I made in Chapter 1 that domestic interiors are not inherently separate from urban exteriors. Although I have in chapters 2 and 3 used the difference between "private" and "public" to explore the relationships characters are shown to have with their conditions for living, I have also shown in Chapter 3 that the conditions of living are dictated by forces beyond the renter's control—from his or her ability to find a job and the availability of a room to rent to his or her socioeconomic status and the ways of aspiring to a higher class. Creating a living room out of a public space is one way that the dweller can make a portion of the city his or her "own."

### **The Café and The City Dweller without a Kitchen**

As the discussion in Chapter 2 of *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* has shown, the lodger who rented a room in someone's house or apartment did not have his or her own personal kitchen space. This was because the kitchen became a common area for all residents of the house, and frequently also it was where some members of the household slept. Not all lodgers shared their meals with their landlords as did the lodger in Dudow's film. Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* presents Doris not just as a flâneur who wanders day and night about the city and from affair to affair. Doris is also what we might call the predecessor of the 2010s foodie blogger: in her diary, she recounts not just with whom, what, and where she has been, but in which cafés and restaurants, and what she has eaten and drunk. Doris eats out for nearly every meal in the first two-thirds of the book. She spends her time dining and writing in various *Lokale* (neighborhood restaurants) and *Kaffeen* (cafés). She explicitly refers to cafés 17 times and to restaurants 23 times in the novel—and those are just the times when she describes her location by type. Other times she just gives the business name, or she simply explains what she ate while she was out.

Doris' documentation of the *Kaffeen* and *Lokale* where she passes her time is significant for several reasons. First, she often uses these places not just to dine, but also to sit and write. As such, they stand in for the living room or study where someone with her own home might instead choose to write privately. For example, Doris blends her location into a stream of thoughts that occupy her in one of her diary entries:

Ich – mein Feh – der ist bei mir – meine Haut zieht sich zusammen vor Wollen, daß mich in dem Feh einer schön findet, den ich auch schön finde. Ich bin in einem Kaffee – das ist Geigenmusik, die weht weinerliche Wolken in mein Gehirn – etwas weint in mir – ich habe eine Lust, mein Gesicht in meine Hände zu tauchen, damit es nicht so traurig ist. Es muß sich soviel Mühe geben, weil ich ein Glanz werden will. Es strengt sich ungeheuer an – und überall sitzen Frauen, von denen die Gesichter sich anstrengen.

Aber es ist gut, daß ich unglücklich bin, denn wenn man glücklich ist, kommt man nicht weiter. Das habe ich gesehen an Lorchen Grünlich, die heiratete den Buchhalter von Gebrüder Grobwind und ist glücklich mit ihm und schäbigem Pfeffer- und Salzmantel und Zweizimmerwohnung und Blumentöpfen mit Ablegern und Sonntags Napfkuchen und gestempeltem Papier, das ihr den Buchhaltrigen gestattet, um nachts mit ihm zu schlafen, und einen Ring.<sup>137</sup>

Here we see Doris' obsession with her fur—which stands for her desire to become a star—melting in with her impressions of the immediate environment. The café, with its violin music and the other women in the room, is the setting for Doris to manifest her desires through the metaphors that she creates on paper. Outside of the home and not having a “typical” bourgeois lifestyle like Lorchen Grünlich, Doris can talk about that type of domestic arrangement as something that is not good enough. Sitting alone in a café and writing, Doris separates herself from the woman who has the home life she has described. Since she is unhappy, Doris can still aspire for something better—and being in this café, with that music, allows her to justify for herself how she has escaped and can continue to escape a similar fate to Lorchen's.

Second, Doris often enters these spaces alone and then makes acquaintances in them. She frequently meets her boyfriends while she is out eating. Doris' affair with the businessman Alexander begins in this way: “Ich lernte ihn kennen in einem Kaffee Unter den Linden, wo eine hochklassige Musik herrscht. Ich sah ihn an, er sah mich an. Ich sah einem Mädchen ähnlich, das er auf der Schule geliebt hat - es muß dreihundert Jahre her sein - so alt ist er, aber das wirkt gerade beruhigend.”<sup>138</sup> The syntax with which she describes this interaction creates a series of cause-and-effect. Because she was in that café and looked like the girl Alexander used to know,

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<sup>137</sup> “I – my fur – I have it with me – my skin tightens with the desire that someone who I find attractive will find me beautiful in my fur. I am in a café – there is violin music that blows tearful clouds in my brain – something cries inside me – I have the urge to bury my face in my hands so that it isn't so sad. I have to make so much of an effort if I want to become a star. It is tremendously stressful – and everywhere here women are sitting with strained faces. But it is good that I'm unhappy, because you don't get anywhere if you are happy. I saw that with Lorchen Grünlich, who married the Grobwind brothers' accountant and is happy with him and a shabby salt-and-pepper coat and a two-room apartment and flower pots with cuttings and Sunday Gugelhupf cakes and postmarked papers that the accountant granted her so that she would spend her nights with him, and a ring” (translation mine). Keun, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, 81.

<sup>138</sup> “I met him in a café on Unter den Linden where loud, high-class music played. I looked at him, he looked at me. I resembled a girl who he had loved in school – he's so old, it must have been 300 years ago, but for now that has a reassuring affect” (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 122.

it becomes something more than a fleeting interaction between two people. Meeting Alexander leads to Doris living temporarily with him; in the book, this scene in the café is woven into her descriptions of Alexander's apartment and the finery ensconcing her there. She would not have access to such a lifestyle if she did not hang out in cafés and restaurants—much like the women in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* whose wealthy boyfriends put them up in fancy apartments. Although Doris' interactions with men are not coded in the same terms as they are in Döblin's novel, there is a strong similarity. Sometimes Doris does not have money to eat unless a man invites her out to eat and drink. For example, just when Doris is concerned about having to become a prostitute like the women who work for her friend and roommate Tilly's upstairs neighbor Rannowsky, a man asks her out to dinner: "Heute gehen wir ins 'Resi' – ich bin eingeladen von Franz, der arbeitet in einer Garage [...] Der Garagenfranz bestellte mir einen italienischen Salat und Wein."<sup>139</sup> This Franz is not a wealthy suitor, but he does buy her meal. Yet he could just as easily be anyone else; he is introduced after the restaurant, showing that the *Lokal* is more important to Doris than the man taking her there. While this does not allow for an interpretation of the cafes and restaurants as living rooms in an explicit sense, the time Doris spends in these spaces gives her a chance to make up for the living space that she lacks.

Doris spends little time describing the places where she sleeps throughout the novel. She devotes more time to describing the company she keeps and second the *Lokale, Kaffeen, and Bars* where she writes, drinks, and eats. In part, that is a result of her lifestyle as a flâneur and an urban nomad. But it is also a direct result of her living situation. After moving out of Tilly's two-room apartment where she first lives upon coming to Berlin, Doris is homeless unless she stays at a man's home. She casually describes the contents of those apartments, focusing more on the luxurious ones that match the lifestyle she came to Berlin to find. She spends the most attention on Alexander and Ernst's apartments—Alexander's being the luxurious one,<sup>140</sup> and Ernst's the bourgeois one that brings her to a desire for domesticity.<sup>141</sup> As I described in Chapter 2, it is not until the third chapter of the novel that Doris moves in with Ernst and realizes she prefers a life in the home and kitchen to a life spent working or wandering the city streets. The transformation from serial café- and restaurant-dweller to domestic is marked; Doris does not go out again after she declares her desire to cook and clean for Ernst. And when she finally does leave Ernst, it is to

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<sup>139</sup> "Today we are going to 'Resi.' IBI was invited by Franz, who works in a garage. [...] Garage-Franz ordered me an Italian salad and wine" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>140</sup> "Die Wohnung ist so fein, der Chauffeur ist so fein, alles ist so fabelhaft, ich wandle durch die Räume. Und es sind Tapeten von dunkelroter Farbe – so toll vornehm – und Eichenmöbel und Nußbaum. Es sind Tiere mit Augen, die leuchten, und die knipst man elektrisch an, dann fressen sie Rauch. Und Klubsessel, die haben kleine Aschbecher umgeschnallt wie Armbänder – so eine Wohnung ist das" (*Ibid.*, 124-5). "The apartment is so fine, the driver is so fine, everything is so marvelous. I parade through the rooms. There are carpets in a dark red color – so fantastically posh – and oak furniture and walnut. There are animals that have eyes that light up when you turn on the electricity as they guzzle the fumes. And lounge chairs that have small ash trays built in like bracelets – such an apartment is this!" (translation mine).

<sup>141</sup> "Hat da 'ne Wohnung mit Korkteppich, drei Zimmer mit Bad, einen Gummibaum und ein Diwan so breit mit seidiger Decke und so feine stahlene Zahnarztlampen – hat er alles, und heult in seinem Bauch über 'ne ausgerückte Frau. Gibt doch so viele. Hat da 'n lackiertes Bett, so ganz flach, und kleine Nachttische wie japanische Kochkisten und Ringe um die Augen wegen ner Frau" (*Ibid.*, 157). "He has an apartment with cork rugs, three rooms with a bathroom, a rubber tree and a wide divan with silk upholstery, and such fine, steel dentist's lamps – has everything, and blubbers like a baby about a runaway wife. But there's really so much. He has a lacquered bed, so totally flat, and little nightstands like Japanese cooking boxes, and bags under his eyes over a woman" (translation mine).

go with Karl so that she may keep house for him instead. Until that point, Doris spends much of her time writing and describing the food, drinks, music, people, and events surrounding her in Berlin's *Bars*, *Lokale*, and *Kaffeen*. In essence, she is homeless but she lives in cafés and restaurants.

Although he is not homeless and instead rents out a room in Berlin, Erich Kästner's Fabian is also a restaurant- and café-dweller. The word *Lokal* appears 19 times in the novel, and *Café* appears 11 times. Fabian spends the vast majority of the novel sitting on benches, strolling the streets, and frequenting others' homes. He shares Doris' inability to dine at home, thus necessitating frequent visits to eateries in order to gain sustenance. His landlady does bring him breakfast each morning,<sup>142</sup> but Fabian never eats lunch or dinner at home except for when his mother comes to visit and brings a lunch. Fabian's room is described always in brief: "möblierte Zimmer"<sup>143</sup> and "sein Zimmer – achtzig Mark monatlich, Morgenkaffee inbegriffen, Licht extra."<sup>144</sup> We can safely assume it is a single room with no kitchen. He spends little time there, except to sleep and bathe. The cafés and restaurants thus serve as substitutes for the missing kitchen and dining room.

Both Keun and Kästner are considered New Objectivist authors. This places them in the company of the modernist design community and the many texts that community produced regarding the New Man, the New Woman, and the New Living. There is no mention of modernist design in either *Fabian* or *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*, both of which may be classified as *Zeitromane*, or topical novels of their time.<sup>145</sup> But the missing elements of the protagonists' domestic interiors—or altogether lack thereof—point to the same factors that drove the avant-garde's denunciation of the current state of the dwelling. The focus on cafés and restaurants in these Weimar fictions of urban existence point to a kind of "home life" that takes place inside and outside the home, making up for the imperfections caused by living conditions that the characters cannot fully control.

### **Eckkneipe as Twentieth-Century Parlor**

The notion of a home life beyond the domestic sphere is even stronger in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, particularly in Jutzi's film adaptation. As I mentioned above, the film is set primarily in a single pub. In the novel, Franz sees great importance in each new *Stube* or *Bude* he inhabits; but as these single-room living arrangements are "incomplete," he frequents *Eckkneipen* and *Lokale*. These spaces and the interactions in them might be considered stereotypical "pub scenes," as Arnheim called them. But they are also the living rooms of the working class.

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<sup>142</sup> "While I'm bathing, the landlady brings breakfast to the room" (translation mine). Kästner, *Fabian. Die Geschichte eines Moralisten*, 97.

<sup>143</sup> "Furnished room" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>144</sup> "His room – 80 marks a month, morning coffee included, heat extra" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>145</sup> Hake, 95.

The word *Kneipe* appears 52 times in Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. At first, Franz just goes to the pubs to "frißt sich wieder satt und säuft."<sup>146</sup> But as the *Kneipen* gain space in the novel, they become more than just a setting for eating and drinking. The first time the reader sees Henschke's pub described, it is as a "Kleine Kneipe am Rosenthaler Platz. Vorn spielen sie Billard, hinten in einer Ecke qualmen zwei Männer und trinken Tee."<sup>147</sup> Although there is distance in the construction, "Vorn spielen sie Billard," for which the subject "they" is never named or described, this sentence is immediately followed by a conversation between the tea-drinking men. The reader enters this ongoing conversation between two pub patrons who are familiar with one another. The dialogue drags on for several paragraphs. Although this is the only time the reader will encounter these characters in the novel, the scene establishes a relationship between the men and the pub, and the reader and the men, as if the reader is sitting at the table with them. As the pub scenes throughout the novel show, the *Eckkneipen* are familiar spaces in which characters interact with one another by sharing in eating and drinking, playing games, engaging in conversation, or singing and dancing.

The act of going to the pub is a ritual that Franz takes part in at least once or twice a day,<sup>148</sup> and increasingly with the intention of meeting others there.<sup>149</sup> He gets to know the other regular patrons, builds friendships and enemies, and also has a place to dine and spend his free time. For example:

Und wie es acht Uhr war, saß Franz mit Meck und noch einem, der Stumm war und bloß Zeichen machte, am Tisch in der Ecke in einer Kneipe. Und es ging hoch her. [...] Zunächst kam ein grüner Junge in die Kneipe, hängte seinen Hut und Mantel an die Wand und schlug auf das Klavier.

Das Lokal füllte sich. Am Ausschank standen welche und diskutieren. Neben Franz setzten sich welche an den Nachbartisch, ältere Männer in Mützen, ein jüngerer mit einem steifen Hut, Meck kannte die, das Gespräch ging hin und her. Der Jüngere mit seinen schwarzen blitzenden Augen, ein gerissener Junge aus Hoppegarten, erzählte...<sup>150</sup>

<sup>146</sup> "Eats himself full again and gets drunk" (translation mine). Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> "Small bar on Rosenthaler Platz. Pool is played in the front, and in a back corner two men puff away and drink tea" (translation mine). Ibid., 43.

<sup>148</sup> "Inzwischen wird er weiter in den Kneipen frühstücken..." (Ibid., 88). "In the meantime, he would continue to have breakfast in the pubs" (translation mine).

<sup>149</sup> "Vormittags darauf erwartet er Lina in der Kneipe, wie immer..." (Ibid., 61). "The next morning he waited for Lina in the bar as usual" (translation mine).

<sup>150</sup> "And as it was 8 o'clock, Franz sat at a table in the corner of a bar with Meck and another guy who was deaf and just made signs. It was a great time. [...] Next a young man came inside the bar, hung his hat and coat on the wall, and pounded on the piano. The restaurant started to fill up. A few people stood at the bar and debated. A few others sat at the table neighboring Franz's, old men in caps, a younger man with a stiff hat who Meck knew, and the conversation jumped from this to that. The younger man with black, flashing eyes, a sharp youth from Hoppegarten, told stories..." (translation mine). Ibid., 152.

The act of Franz and his friend sitting at the table with a stranger leads to interactions with other strangers, about a variety of topics. The ability for characters to blend in and out of each other's conversations suggests a level of comfort and familiarity that is not easy to find in all areas of public space. This comfort is foregrounded by the supposition of regularity associated with time in the bar. The phrase, "und wie es acht Uhr war" suggests that the pub looks much like this every evening at the same time. Although the pub is not a domestic interior, it can be seen as a "home away from home." This is possible if a home is assumed to consist of a living room, a kitchen and dining room, and a bedroom. Franz's homes typically only consist of a bedroom with a built-in washroom. Because these rooms do not fulfill all of his needs, he goes out into the city's spaces that can meet those needs.

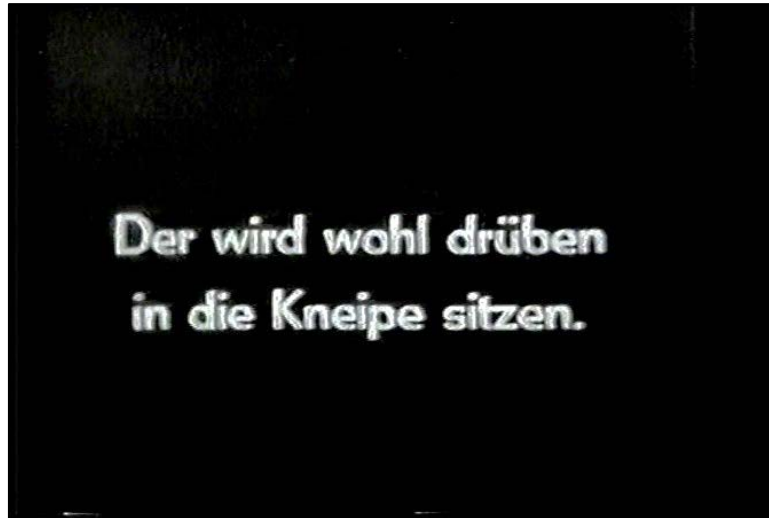
In fact, when Franz does not come home, Lina and Cilly, respectively, go to the pub to wait for him. It is more likely that he will return there before going home, or that he will always go to the pub even if he doesn't come home: "Da saß Cilly bis zum späten Abend da. Die Kneipe füllte sich. Sie sah immer nach der Tür. Einmal lief sie auch nach Hause und kam wieder zurück. [...] Sie zog langsam wieder in die Kneipe, Prenzlauer Ecke, immer wieder in die Kneipe."<sup>151</sup> Similar to a person sitting up late in his or her living room while waiting for a spouse or child to return, Cilly stays in the pub and waits for Franz. In part, the crowded space of the bar helps the women waiting on Franz to ease their loneliness in his absence. Yet the ritual of spending time in *Eckkneipen* is just as much a part of these women's lives as it is Franz's, as the words "wie gewöhnlich" (as usual), "wie immer" (like always), "morgens" (in the mornings), and "abends" (in the evenings) show in the various instances when Franz and his girlfriends meet one another or sit together in a pub.

The *Eckkneipe* is an integral space not just in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, but in many other contemporary texts. In Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, the son Paul goes to the pub before returning home every day (see figures 4.1 through 4.3).

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<sup>151</sup> "Cilly sat there until late evening. The bar filled up. She kept looking toward the door. Once she ran home and came back again. [...] She returned slowly to the bar, corner of Prenzlauer Street, always back to the bar" (translation mine). *Ibid.*, 177-8.





Figures 4.1-4.3: Paul and his friends at the bar (top); Paul drinking beer he pays for with his mother's newspaper money (middle); an intertitle spoken by the lodger to Mother Krause that reads, "He will surely be sitting over in the pub" (translation mine; bottom). From *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*, dir. Jutzi, 28:01, 30:07, 30:16.

The intertitle in figure 4.3 shows the same regularity that is seen in the novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, as the lodger says Paul "wird wohl" (will surely be) in the pub. One of the implications in that film in particular is that if the family had an apartment in which they could fully live, then Paul would not be forced to turn to the pub each day to spend his free time. Since there is no living room in the apartment, and the family lives in the kitchen, Paul's primary space for relaxation and fun is in the corner bar. Despite the association of the pub with free time, it is not framed as a positive space in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. Although Paul laughs and appears to have a lot of friends there, close-up shots of his face, especially when he is about to pay for another beer, show a serious facial expression. The isolation of his face from those of the other people sitting around the table suggests alienation from the raucous good time that the other patrons are sharing; the gravity of his own situation is clear to Paul, even as he continues to take part in it. As I have already discussed in Chapter 2, the symbolic dangers of the Krause family's living space are many, and the results of such an "unhealthy" environment are Mother Krause's suicide, the death of the child, the lodger's supposed rape of Erna, and Paul's degeneracy in the pub.

In *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* also, the father escapes to an *Eckkneipe* when his family quarrels and he cannot bear to be in close quarters with his son (see figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Anni's father and a friend drink in the corner bar. From *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?*, Dudow, 15:01.

Although this family does have a living room in their apartment, the apartment is still lacking in some necessity that drives the father outside: namely, the monetary assurance that the family will be able to continue living there. The conversation that the father and his friend share in the pub scene focuses on the situation of joblessness in Berlin, a topic about which the father and his son have just quarreled. Joblessness is directly related to the family's inability to pay rent, to the negative relationship between father and son, and to the father's need for the stability that he finds in the pub. Stability is presented here as the familiarity with other patrons and their shared understanding of how the conditions for living should or do work. As I have discussed it in Chapter 1, the living room in Weimar films is a static space that holds onto the decorative styles of the previous century. This is a visual representation of a type of stability that can be associated with the private living as well as with the corner bar. For anyone who did not have a living room in his or her home, the living room was just outside.

### ***Hinterhof* as Community Den**

Where the *Eckkneipe*, the *Café*, and the *Lokal* stand in for a domestic space outside the home, the *Hinterhof* is a zone in which domestic and urban space intermingle. The proximity to the home, as well as the spatial arrangement of domestic buildings that create the back courtyard, create a space where one can be both at home and out "in public." F. W. Murnau's 1924 film *Der letzte Mann* provides an example of this relationship and the tensions it entails. The protagonist, an elderly hotel porter, parades through his building's *Hinterhof* each morning and evening as he goes to and from work. The first scene of him returning home presents a sharp contrast to the

pomp and wealth of the hotel where he works: the people in the courtyard wear simple clothing, children play in the mud, and the milieu is one of apparent poverty (see figures 4.5 and 4.6).



*Figures 4.5-4.6: Residents in the courtyard outside the porter's tenement building; children play with a water pump in the courtyard. From Der letzte Mann, dir. F. W. Murnau, 8:05, 15:39.*

In almost all instances, the courtyard contains groups of chit-chatting neighbors, with several people hanging out of windows to join in the conversation. It is a lively atmosphere that could easily be equated with the liveliness of modern urban streets. Yet the courtyard is made possible by the domestic buildings that border it, which leads to a unique social environment.

The people neighbors who meet in this open space appear to spend much of their time outside of their apartments. Judging by the porter's apartment, which appears to have only a

bedroom and a kitchen, it is likely that none of the domestic spaces in these buildings contain dedicated living rooms. To make up for this lack of a space in which they can visit with guests and spend their leisure time, they extend the space of their living environment into the space beyond its walls. As a result of this time spent in the courtyard together, the neighbors know everything about each other. Whenever the porter walks through the courtyard, his neighbors know he is about to arrive and they turn to greet him (see figure 4.7).



*Figure 4.7: The porter salutes his neighbors as they pause their conversation to acknowledge him. From Der letzte Mann, 9:11.*

The way that the people stop their conversations, turn their whole bodies to face him, and nod to acknowledge his salute suggests respect and deference to this man in his hotel uniform. His coat and that represent a world that is beyond the scope of the tenement courtyard, one which appears to accord him a higher status.

Although the porter is only an employee at the hotel, his association with that space sets him apart from his neighbors. When the news arrives that he has been demoted and is now a bathroom attendant, the neighbors use all of the spaces surrounding their homes to spread the news (see figures 4.9 through 4.12).





*Figures 4.9-4.12: A neighbor listening through the door as the porter's in-law tells his daughter what she saw at the hotel (top); the neighbors telling one another the news in the hallway (upper middle); a neighbor shouting the news across the courtyard (bottom middle); a woman listening at her window as another neighbor shouts the news across the courtyard to her (bottom). From Der letzte Mann, 1:00:46-1:02:12.*

The hallways of the tenement buildings and the courtyard among them link the inhabitants together in a network of information, just as they connect the neighbors on a grid of domestic space. The *Hinterhof* in *Der letzte Mann* is an informational intersection point in the grid of the tenement community's space. As the scenes discussed above show, it is also a space other than the kitchen or bedroom in which the people living in that community can pass their time before bed or before the start of the workday, much like the space of the *Eckkneipen* in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and in *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*. The neighbors know one another as a result of living around the edges of these densely populated buildings. Because of the open space

those buildings create, they are able together to find a living room or den in proximity to their domestic interiors, where there each family does not have its own.

### Concluding Remarks

As I have argued in this chapter, the private, or domestic, domain in Weimar novels and films is insufficient. This causes the characters to find other spaces in the city that can make up for that lack. The hype about Weimar modernity might suggest that the street is always coming indoors, as in Karl Grune's *Die Straße*; yet it can also be formulated the other way around. The private matters of interior life drive exterior interactions and possibilities, from finding a job to pay one's rent, to frequenting a pub or café because one's rented room does not possess a kitchen. These lacking domestic interiors in fiction must have also existed in the "real" world, as the modernist design community strove to create new buildings that would fill all of city dwellers' needs with household rationalization. We know that this is true in part as a result of the housing crisis. In both fiction and in theory, the condition of living is a product of what already exists in the city and what could or should exist in urban space. The way that people "dwell" in the modern metropolis is informed by the type of domestic interior to which they have access, as well as to the monetary opportunities they have to enrich or secure that space.

Most emblematic of the tension in Weimar modernity with which this dissertation grapples is the construction of Berlin and the city's changing landscape. "Construction" is a Weimar trope that spans various genres and discourses. It is noteworthy that of all of the building plans proposed for the city during the years of the Weimar Republic, the only major project that was begun and completed during that period was the modernization of Alexanderplatz.<sup>152</sup> According to Hake, this venture's scope allowed the term "construction" to derive new meaning through its representation in novels and films during the 1920s and early 30s. As she writes:

Construction functioned as a central trope in most contributions, standing in for the dream of a modern society defined by mobility, adaptability, and uniformity and a modern metropolis ruled by efficiency, functionality, and rationality...<sup>153</sup>

The dream of an efficient, functional, and rational city appears at first glance to belong to the modernist architects and designers more than any other group. But it can also be said that the fictional protagonists whose stories have been explored in this dissertation also sought functionality and rationality through the environments with which they were already familiar. Thinking in these terms, it is easy to get caught up in the city as an external world. The domestic interior is often painted in quiet tones, a mere place to sleep and eat and bathe.

As I have shown in this project, the domestic interior illustrates a more complex convergence of assumptions, ideologies, and stylistic choices. In attempting to dictate how the

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<sup>152</sup> Hake, 196.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

New Dwelling should look, Le Corbusier whittled down the rules for living to minutiae such as whether or not one should hang paintings on the wall or have a separate bathroom and changing room. So much of “living” is subjective, and yet it appears that avant-garde architects and designers wanted to control all of domestic space. This desire for control can also be treated as a metaphor. In a world that is changing so rapidly during one generation’s lifetime, there may be a feeling of loss of control—or of alienation. This is similar to Simmel’s conception of urban subjectivity, but it does not just have to be about the numbers of people living in the city, or about the city’s mechanisms turning it into a space that is conducive to alienation. In the search for a New Living that is adequately prepared for the New Man and the New Woman, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut, and Ludwig Hilberseimer effectively recognize that the world as it is is changing at a pace that people cannot keep up with. Rather than admitting the difference, this group of city dwellers sought to control and shape that change to better fit the needs of people as they assumed those needs ought to be met—based on their own assumptions for living in the modern city.

In the novels and films of the same period, control is exacted on a much smaller level. Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* underscores this with the example of Franz Biberkopf, who is always seeking a solid domestic foundation to aid him in a successful life outside the home. As someone who spent several years of modern urban development locked in prison, Franz is able to see everything in the city as new and modern. Yet rather than allowing that which has changed to wash over him, his fresh, new start always begins by seeking the comforts of home as they meet his assumptions—which are based on the time before things changed, before he went to jail. If the homes of the characters in the films and novels described in this dissertation appear outdated within the gaze of modernist building and design theory, it is not because the authors and directors sought to defy the “rules” of modernist design. If we apply the trope of “construction” to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the way that Döblin employs the term, “connects the formal principles of montage to the self-reflexivity of urban discourses and creates a provocatively and disconcertingly heterogeneous cityscape that resists appropriation to the dominant discourses of the urban in Weimar Berlin.”<sup>154</sup> In other words, if construction, building, and design are significant for the public portions of urban space as much as for urban space’s private and public interiors, it is unsurprising that the resulting spatial imaginary might resemble that which came before just as much as it resembles that to which the city dweller looks forward.

This all goes to show that modern and “unmodern” cannot be separated, because the old order is the foundation on which everything that is new must be built. This interdependence creates a tension that affects the conditions for living across the segments of urban society. If the city is under construction, the inside cannot be made “new” and “rational” while the outside is a jumble of construction projects. Likewise, the outside cannot erase the inside if people are still living there. This is not just a result of the inability to take care of the inside until the outside has been completed, but because the outside is informed by the state of the inside. Like Sutulin’s apartment, where the uneven application of *Quadraturin* to the surfaces leads to the untouched surface remaining the same, there is no means of changing the exterior that forces the interior to change in spite of it. The ceiling, without *Quadraturin*, pushes back against the other five changing surfaces, refusing to move with them. As a result, the entire space is still different, but

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 240.

its shape and appearance are explicitly affected by the unchanged part. Although builders wanted the domestic interior to change, they could not force it; their Quadraturin of theory did not broadly influence the minds of urban dwellers who were receptive to it, and their building projects could only change the exterior walls of new buildings. Thus the shape of the outside is always beholden to the shape of the inside.

For all of the hopes and dreams that characterized early twentieth-century modernity, and especially Weimar modernity, it appears that in a way, little has changed. Designs based on those created by the modernist designers are now readily available in low-quality, mass produced products from IKEA and other cheap furniture purveyors. The intention of these furnishings is not the same today as it was in 1920 or 1930. Structures that were designed for their functionality are now purchased for their “beauty”; functionality is a factor that comes secondary to their cheapness. The industrial capitalism that figured in the alienation of earlier urban modernity has taken hold of much of what the avant-garde proposed. Household rationalization has given way to a type of domestic “minimalism” reduced to Pinterest-pretty organization techniques. The current foundation for building and décor is updated, and yet it is based on the theoretical writings of previous generations—including and stretching past the modernists of the early twentieth century.

Political and historical changes aside, city dwellers continue to live predominantly in rented rooms and apartment complexes. While many people purchase flats, brownstones, and condos, a significant number of global urban dwellers is made up of renters. The size of the housing available to renters is still an issue, as the current cohort of architects and designers look ahead to a world in which space is once again at a premium. In Berlin, Paris, London, Moscow, Tokyo, Beijing, Hong Kong, Sao Paulo, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle, “microhousing” is all the rage.<sup>155</sup> “Luxury” apartments of 150 to 400 square feet seek to present flexible, economic living spaces for hosts of urban dwellers. The price tags are often astronomical, and the amenities are decidedly spare. Access to affordable housing amid these conditions continues

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<sup>155</sup> See, for example: Julia Räscher, “Wohnen auf kleinem Fuß in Berlin,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 1, 2015, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/tiny-houses-gegen-mietsteigerungen-wohnen-auf-kleinem-fuss-in-berlin/11205018.html>; “Mega-Trend Zwergen-Haus: 5000 Euro fürs Eigenheim,” *Focus Online*, January 16, 2015, [http://www.focus.de/immobilien/bauen/bau-mini-haeuser-auf-raedern-tiny-houses-trend-in-deutschland\\_id\\_4397647.html](http://www.focus.de/immobilien/bauen/bau-mini-haeuser-auf-raedern-tiny-houses-trend-in-deutschland_id_4397647.html); Gernot Kramper, “Wohnklo mit zehn Quadratmetern soll über 100.000 Euro kosten,” *Stern*, January 16, 2016, <http://www.stern.de/wirtschaft/immobilien/berliner-immobilien-wahnsinn---wohnklo-mit-zehn-quadratmeter-soll-ueber-100-000-euro-kosten-6651528.html>; David Sillito, “Germany tests 9ft ‘micro-house,’” *BBC News*, November 1, 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/4394566.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4394566.stm); Layla Maghribi, Yoko Wakatsuki, and John Deferios, “Tokyo’s big idea: Can micro-homes offer housing solution?” *CNN*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/asia/tokyo-japan-micro-home/>; “Seattle has highest number of tiny apartments in U.S.,” *CCTV America*, January 6, 2015, <http://www.cctv-america.com/2015/01/06/seattle-has-highest-number-of-tiny-apartments-in-u-s/>; Daphne Auza, “Tiny Homes Show that Bigger Isn’t Always Better,” *The Cultureist*, January 21, 2014, [http://www.thecultureist.com/2014/01/21/tiny-homes-show-bigger-isnt-always-better/?utm\\_source=Updated+Weekly+Email&utm\\_campaign=9ac23a7410-Weekly+Culture1+31+2014&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_45a1b18ebf-9ac23a7410-92976565](http://www.thecultureist.com/2014/01/21/tiny-homes-show-bigger-isnt-always-better/?utm_source=Updated+Weekly+Email&utm_campaign=9ac23a7410-Weekly+Culture1+31+2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_45a1b18ebf-9ac23a7410-92976565); Robbie Couch, “This Genius Project Would Create Tiny Homes for People Making Less Than \$15,000 A Year,” *Huffington Post*, August 22, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/portland-oregon-tiny-homes\\_n\\_5698214.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/portland-oregon-tiny-homes_n_5698214.html?); Michael Salguero, “The Tiny House Movement,” *Huffington Post*, September 12, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-salguero/the-tiny-house-movement\\_b\\_5811058.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-salguero/the-tiny-house-movement_b_5811058.html?); Tiny Houses Consulting UG, *Tiny Houses: Wohnen auf kleinem Raum*, accessed May 3, 2016, <http://tiny-houses.de/>.

to be a problem, as the recent election of Sadiq Khan shows. Khan, who was elected mayor of London in May 2016, ran on a platform that included a push for more affordable housing in that city. London and Seattle are both among the top global real estate investment markets—cities where the world’s super wealthy purchase properties—which sometimes are kept empty—so that the property owners can have equity in the strongest real estate markets.<sup>156</sup> At the same time as these big cities’ housing markets are booming for some, they are a disaster for others. Seattle, for example, is home to a tent city of more than 40,000 people that lies beneath the freeway system.<sup>157</sup> Called “The Jungle,” that series of encampments is home to families and single people from many walks of life—eerily recalling the jobless families living in the campground in Dudow’s *Kuhle Wampe*. The many concerns that affected Weimar Berlin can be found in everywhere in the globalized world. That is to argue that the tensions present in contemporary living conditions are nothing new. They are reminiscent of the impulses driving the theoretical and actual building projects of the 1870s and 1880s, and likewise of the 1920s and early 1930s. Also characterized by an economic crisis, the housing problems then as now affected a population converging on cities to fill the needs for a “modern” labor force—in earlier times, first factory and then white collar workers; now, tech and media engineers.

To facilitate a similar comparison, the 2010s “tiny house” has replaced the idealist garden colony of the 1920s; the “microapartment” is somehow still the “dwelling space of the future.” Rather than the corner bar, café, and courtyard, the contemporary city dweller now has common spaces built into his or her apartment or condominium complex: community kitchens to take the place of the tiny, utilitarian kitchens built into the walls of 200-square foot units; business centers to make up for the lack of a study or office in modular studios; lounges, “home” movie theaters, libraries, and community patios to make up for the lack of a living room. The premise for these substitutions is that the modern city dweller does not desire to be at home, but would rather commune with his or her fellows in a common space. The difference here from Weimar Berlin is that the force of domestic space appears to finally be pulling inward, rather than spilling outside with the whole of urban development. The city is still succumbing to the forces of modernization, nearly 100 years later. Or perhaps it is yet a further articulation of processes that have been going on for much longer, and the present moment will appear in another 100 years to be not so different from the moment in 1924 or 1929 or 1931 that sought to differentiate itself from the decades that came before.

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<sup>156</sup> See Puget Sound Real Estate, “CBRE: Seattle Emerges as a Top Ten Global Market for Real Estate Investors,” *Puget Sound Real Estate*, published May 5, 2015, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://news.theregistryps.com/cbre-seattle-emerges-as-a-top-ten-global-market-for-real-estate-investors/>.

<sup>157</sup> Kirk Johnson, “Seattle Underbelly Exposed as Homeless Camp Violence Flares,” *The New York Times*, published March 1, 2016, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/seattle-underbelly-exposed-as-homeless-camp-violence-flares/ar-BBqdtJV?li=BBnb7Kz>.

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