

'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany¹

In October 1922, Greli Löchling received a postcard from her fiancé Franz. The text scribbled on the back was not more meaningful than most of our text messages: Franz sends his love, complains that he hadn't had a letter from his wifey ['Weiberl'] and promises to send one himself. But Franz had chosen a card with a rather explicit image: it showed a well-dressed couple holding hands and taking a stroll along a lake, where they encounter a stork. Slightly embarrassed but firm, they decline his offer: 'No, thank you, Mr Stork!' The couple on the card had no need for a child, and perhaps this was also true for Franz and Greli [figure 1].

During the 1920s, intentional childlessness – whether temporary or permanent – was common among Germany's young urban couples. But it is surprisingly difficult to establish how widespread this phenomenon was and how it came about.² Thoughts about family planning, negotiation processes and contraceptive practices were private matters that have only rarely left traces in the historical record. Unfortunately, not even early sociologists and sexologists were particularly keen to study this specific issue.³ Historians and demographers, therefore, struggle to understand why men and women of the younger generation not only tried to have smaller families but apparently sometimes chose not to have any children at all.

In this article, I approach the topic of voluntary childlessness in early 20th-century Germany from two different perspectives: first, I turn to contemporary statistics to delineate the rise in childlessness, and second, I present and analyse visual representations of childlessness



Figure 1. Postcard, circulated 1922. Private collection.

found in media as diverse as plays, films, caricatures and health and population propaganda. The very existence of such images points to contemporary concerns and debates. Apparently, voluntary childlessness was not only believed to exist, but also inspired emotional reactions ranging from scorn and irritation to envy and fascination. By comparing and contextualising the representations in question, we might come to understand why remaining childless was considered attractive but also why it was seen as problematic.

Debates on childlessness are, however, not only a phenomenon of the historical past; they have become quite prominent over the last ten years both in Britain and in Germany. Statistical data suggest that a significant minority of women and men – some 20% – enter middle age without having had a child, a trend especially marked among the better-educated segments of the population.⁴ Whether or not this should cause concern is a matter of controversy. While sociologists explore the reasons for growing childlessness, demographers speculate about its impact on future societies.⁵ Feminist voices are prominent within the debate, though they are by no means univocal. The unanimous wish to defend a woman's right to make her own reproductive decisions and the aim to counteract a possible revival of an outdated 'motherhood mandate' do not necessarily translate into a coherent discursive strategy. While some authors regard intentional childlessness as a purely personal matter that should not necessarily require explanation either in public or private conversations, others want to fight what they see as a final female taboo and regard childlessness as both 'a political, as well as deeply personal, issue'.⁶

Visual representations are not particularly prominent in current debates about childlessness, but they do exist. In the final part of my paper, I will examine the covers of contemporary books dealing with voluntary childlessness. By explicitly juxtaposing recent and past images, I will highlight the historic specificity of these images and the attitudes that underlie them. For the cultural historian interested in emotions, mentalities and gender relations, such an exercise in explicit diachronic comparison is heuristically useful. It allows us to distance ourselves from a point of view that would otherwise appear as completely 'natural' and without alternative.

I. Visual Representations of Childlessness – A Note on Methodology

Visual representations of childlessness are rare. While Western culture has produced countless images of mother and child, childlessness is hardly ever visualised. But there are exceptions. Robert Gober's 1987 sculpture 'X-Crib' [<https://www.flickr.com/photos/72759726@N00/9230703028/>] could be used to represent intended childlessness, while Mona Hatoum's 1996 sculpture 'Marrow' [<https://www.flickr.com/photos/saypigeon/268910836/>], which shows a

Christina Benninghaus, 'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany

collapsed crib made of brownish rubber, can be interpreted as representing thwarted expectations of becoming a parent.⁷ In early modern societies, biblical figures such as Sarah or Elisabeth could be referred to in order to express the emotional or social impact of infertility.⁸ The genealogical dimension – the end of a line – was visualised in family trees by branches that would not sprout further. Sometimes new and idiosyncratic ways of visualising childlessness emerged. During the 18th and 19th centuries, to give an example, masons on the North Frisian island Föhr chiselled images of flowers into gravestones to represent the deceased and other members of his or her family. Two different types of flowers would be used, one for male and one for female family members. Parents would be represented by larger flowers, children by smaller ones, those already dead by flowers with broken stems. In this visual language, the childless couple was represented by a pair of two flowers only – a rather beautiful and harmonious image.⁹

As these examples indicate, it is not impossible to visually represent dimensions of the experience of childlessness, but it is, and always has been, unusual. From a methodological point of view, this is unfortunate. Visual history is especially strong when it can rely on series of images that allow detailed comparisons. However, ‘childlessness’ is not a useful keyword for searching image databases, nor are there privileged visual sites or genres where images of voluntary childlessness – as opposed to sterility – are particularly likely to emerge. The best I was able to do was to identify certain clusters of representations. These clusters are partly composed of similar images – different caricatures all published in the same magazine, different book covers all published over the last decade – and partly bound together by common political aims, such as the socialist fight for abortion law reform or the right-wing condemnation of birth control. Some revolve around a single story narrated in a novel and two films and the publicity that surrounded them. Images of childlessness were certainly not restricted to these clusters, as the picture postcard shown at the beginning of this article indicates. A closer look at women’s magazines or at fascist satirical journals, for example, might well identify other clusters. However, the materials used here seemed sufficiently diverse to explore differences, similarities and shifts in the representation of childlessness.

While unusual with regard to their choice of topic, the images analysed in this article were all produced for instant consumption by mass audiences. They circulated widely within popular culture and reached audiences far more diverse than the readership of demographic articles and pamphlets. Whether they wanted to amuse, to inform, to alarm or to entertain their viewers, the images had to be striking and easy to decipher. They appeared within an environment of images (the bookshop, the cinema, the satirical magazine, the health exhibition) in which they

competed for the attention of consumers. Furthermore, they were usually not the product of a single artist representing an individual take on childlessness but emerged out of processes of negotiation involving caricaturists and editors, authors and publishers, scriptwriters, actors and directors. I therefore suggest that by comparing and contextualising these images, we might gain valuable insights into the historically changing but always contested meanings of childlessness.¹⁰ While not representing an unmitigated social reality of childlessness as a lived experience, the images reflect contemporary attitudes towards childlessness, pointing to culturally accepted visions of its value.

II. The Early 20th-Century Rise in Childlessness

In Germany, demographic concerns and public debates about falling birth rates emerged in the years shortly before the First World War.¹¹ In the first decades of the 20th century, a revolution in reproductive behaviour occurred that irritated contemporary observers and continues to puzzle demographers and historians. Within only a few decades, birth rates dropped significantly, and although some national, regional and social differences persisted, almost all social groups were affected by this trend.¹² How and why this development occurred, what future consequences it would have, and whether or not state and society should try to intervene were matters of heated debate. But while different theories about the factors behind new reproductive behaviours existed, experts on the whole agreed that a rising interest in birth control, rather than increased infertility, was behind the new trend.¹³ Whether by means of contraception, abortion or abstinence, German couples increasingly aspired to limiting their families.

The German woman, what's the matter?
thinks life without storks is much better,

joked the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* in July 1912, devoting an entire issue to the dwindling German birth rate and the reactions it inspired [figure 2]. Its front cover shows a drawing of a group of women in fashionable tennis attire attacking a stork whose intentions are indicated by the baby bonnet it is wearing. The title reads 'Out with the stork!'

A factor contributing to the declining birth rate that was less obvious to contemporaries than to later demographers, and one that became increasingly important during the 1920s, was a rise in childless marriages. In Britain, as Michael Anderson has demonstrated, 'the reduction in large families was accompanied not only by a rise in middle-sized families of three, four and five children, but also, right from the start, by increased numbers of childless couples and a very

marked rise in the proportion of families with just one child.¹⁴ Of those British marriages formed in 1925, as many as 16% remained childless, compared to 8% formed during the 1870s and 11% formed during the first decade of the 20th century.

Similar trends can be identified for Germany. Based on information provided by several fertility surveys, Dorbritz and Schwarz have estimated that 18% of those German couples who married between 1922 and 1925 remained permanently childless as compared to only 9% of couples marrying around 1900.¹⁵ A nationwide family census taken in 1933 suggested that many urban couples were in no hurry to have a child. Even eight years into their marriage, 33.5% of urban couples

who had married in 1925 were childless. For Berlin, this figure was as high as 45.2%, while the comparable figures for rural couples and those living in smaller towns were 12.4% and 20.3% respectively.¹⁶ On average, 22.2% of those women who had married in 1925 were childless in 1933, while 29.4% had one child and 25.8% had two children.¹⁷

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know with any accuracy how many couples were childless by choice and how many struggled with infertility. The magnitude of the regional differences in childlessness, however, suggests that volition, rather than biological factors, lay behind the phenomenon of increased childlessness. While urban couples ran higher risks of being infertile due to infections following abortions or caused by gonorrhoea and syphilis, these risk factors cannot explain the huge differences in reproduction between urban and rural couples.¹⁸ Furthermore, contemporary infertility experts did not believe in a sterility epidemic. According to medical handbooks, incidences of venereal disease declined throughout the 1920s.¹⁹

Historical events like the Great Depression of the early 1930s or the Second World War certainly contributed to high levels of permanent childlessness among marriage cohorts from the 1920s. Some of the couples who got married during the 'Golden Twenties' merely wanted to postpone having children but were later hit by unemployment, economic hardship, and



Figure 2. Cover of the satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*, July 1912. Heading in red print: 'The Decline of the birth rate in Germany'. Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar. © DACS 2014.



Figure 3. Vielleicht später, Herr Storch! (Perhaps later, Mr Stork!) Picture postcard intended for sending New Year greeting, undated, ca. 1930.

political persecution and, hence, ended up avoiding children altogether. However, this still leaves unanswered the question of why it was attractive to remain childless during the mid-1920s, when living standards were finally on the rise again.

Some recent demographic publications continue to interpret childlessness in the past as a direct consequence of external causes like poverty, economic depression and war. Current childlessness, by contrast, is seen as resulting from prosperity, cultural change and individualisation as well as rising economic insecurity.²⁰ However, historical demographers have taken issue with concepts that explain the reproductive behaviour of past societies by pointing only to external, mainly economic factors without paying attention to cultural values, social networks and processes of negotiation.²¹ Following

this line of argumentation, it appears plausible to ask whether, to what extent, in which social groups and when childlessness might not only have resulted from external constraints or medical problems but was also brought about intentionally or was at least accepted as an unavoidable risk people were willing to take when prioritizing other goals in life.²² Unfortunately, there is little research addressing the question how different social groups viewed or coped with childlessness and whether there were instances, times and places when to be childless was perceived as desirable.²³ While the shifting value adults attached to children and to parenthood has been studied, the value of childlessness has received comparatively little attention.²⁴

Given the lack of direct evidence, I propose to take a closer look at cultural representations of intended childlessness. If nothing else, their sheer existence suggests that during the 1920s and 1930s voluntarily childless woman and men had started to populate the cultural imagination [Figure 3].

III. Frivolous Childfree Women and Frustrated Men: Negotiating Childlessness

Images were central to Weimar culture. Illustrated papers and magazines, large scale adverts, picture postcards, and – most importantly – film proliferated during the 1920s. Within this visual universe, the new woman was a dominant and easily recognisable figure, an icon representing urban modernity and the allure of cosmopolitan consumer culture.²⁵ Her image could be used to advertise anything from cosmetics to brandy and from suitcases to photographic equipment [figures 4, 5].

Slim, fashionable, sexually attractive and unsentimental, the New Woman/Modern Girl as represented in Weimar culture was certainly not defined by maternal instincts. To the contrary: whether grooming herself with the latest cosmetics, dancing, flirting, smoking or swimming and skiing, she invariably suggested that there were more important and enjoyable things in life than motherhood. Rarely was the issue of intentional childlessness directly addressed, but by the mid-1920s, the topic was apparently ripe for satirical and cinematic exploration.

In 1924, the leading German satirical magazine, the *Simplicissimus*, published two caricatures addressing the issue of voluntary childlessness. The first caricature shows a man and a woman lounging on a day bed or sofa [figure 6]. The man wears knickerbockers and a jacket, which characterise him as Bavarian – a favoured object of scorn of the Munich-based *Simplicissimus* – but which also might point to outdoor activities like hunting, walking or skiing. He appears



Figures 4, 5. Mid-1920s adverts published in the *Simplicissimus*. Courtesy Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar.

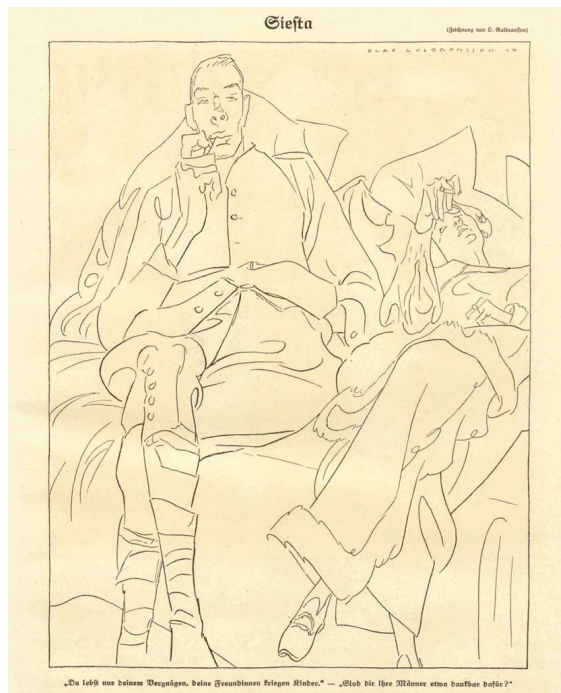


Figure 6. 'Siesta', *Simplicissimus*, 21 July 1924, p. 251. Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar. © DACS2014.

issue. Correspondingly, the text reads: 'You only live to amuse yourself; your friends are having babies.' 'And are their husbands grateful to you?' Her glib reply indicates that she knows about his sexual escapades, is not particularly impressed with his reproach, and certainly isn't thinking about having a child.

At first sight, the couple depicted in the second caricature could not be more different [figure 7]. As the heading suggests, they are 'delicate'. The male painter with his longish hair and crooked body looks rather effeminate. In a strong Saxon accent he addresses his partner: 'Amalie, if you don't have my baby soon, I will start to doubt the consonance of our souls.' Amalie, however, appears to be completely disinterested. She has turned her back towards the painter and looks rather troubled and very uncomfortable. Her haggard body, which reminds the viewer of a mermaid, suggests that she might be infertile.

Gender relations were a stock item of satire in the 1920s. While premarital sexual relations, the sexual exploitation of working-class women, homosexuality and the sex life

to be tall and muscular and smokes a pipe. The woman's body, by contrast, appears to be fashionably slim and flexible. Her posture and pretty but comfortable attire reveal a laid-back attitude. Like the title of the caricature, her short hair and cigarette seem to indicate a more cosmopolitan life-style.

The image conveys a sense of intimacy. Frame and eye-level suggests a viewer sitting close to the couple on a low chair. From this perspective, the lower parts of the bodies are particularly prominent. The man's pelvis takes up a significant part of the picture while the woman's crotch is hidden by her legs. Potency and sexuality are clearly an

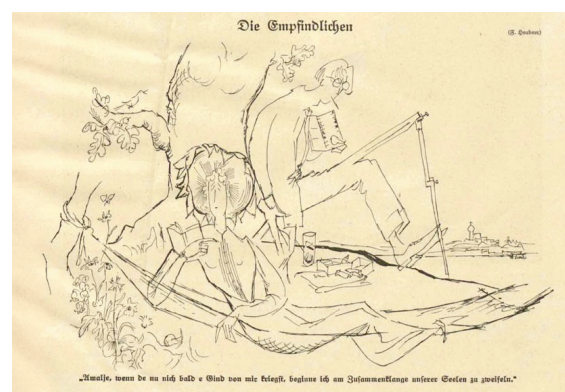


Figure 7. 'Die Empfindlichen (Delicate people)', *Simplicissimus*, 29 September 1924, p. 371. Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

of Catholic priests had been typical subjects for caricature before the First World War, the 1920s witnessed an obsession with the state of married life. The caricatures of the *Simplicissimus* frequently showed husbands and wives cheating on each other, explicitly calculating the economic and emotional value of their relationship, expressing disappointment, looking for alternatives, and contemplating divorce. Like pamphlets, articles, lectures and meetings, and like books such as Marie Stopes' *Das Liebesleben in der Ehe* (1920) – originally published in 1918 in the UK as *Married Love* – and Theodoor Van de Velde's *Die Vollkommene Ehe* (1926), the caricatures participated in the cultural process of re-negotiating the meaning of marriage.

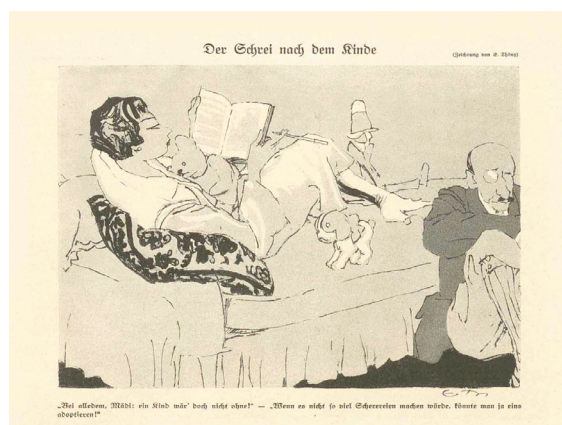


Figure 8, 9. *Simplicissimus*, 9 December 1907, p. 611 and 13 February 1928, p. 619. Images courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar; with kind permission of Dr. Dagmar von Kessel, Munich.

Both caricatures focus on the feelings of men who have to come to terms with women's growing independence. On a visual level, they participate in the development of an iconic figure: the lounging childfree woman. Both aspects become more apparent if we add two more caricatures created by the prolific illustrator Eduard Thöny (1866-1950) [figures 8, 9]. Published in 1907 and 1928, the two caricatures bear the same title, 'Cry for a child.'

The older caricature shows a wife arguing with her husband in a scene set late at night. 'If you didn't always gamble away such a terrible lot of money at your club, we could certainly afford the luxury of having a baby.' In essence, this is a fight about money. While the couple quarrels about whether or not to have a child – with the woman taking the initiative – both partners share the view that a child is a luxury item, the acquisition of which has to be balanced against other expenditures. When this caricature was published, the sexual mores and decadence of the upper classes had been exposed to wide criticism. On a visual level, the caricature does not hint at reproduction: the quarrel could be just about anything at all.²⁶

The 1928 caricature with the same title functions quite differently. Here the focus is on gender relations. The husband who looks old and depressed, says: ‘All in all, Mädi: a child wouldn’t be half bad!’ To which she replies: ‘If it wasn’t so much hassle, we could adopt one.’ Like the women in other 1920s caricatures, Mädi cannot even be bothered to look at the man who would like to father her child. Well dressed, made up, and coiffed, she continues to read and to smoke. She refuses not only to be a mother but to provide a possibly much-needed proof of her partner’s virility. Like his representation in the picture, he and his needs seem to be marginal to her life.

On a visual level, the caricature refers to childlessness by using the image of the lounging, self-absorbed woman. In this case, a teddy bear and other toys are added to underline her sensuality, which, however, is not directed towards her partner or a prospective child but squandered on a toy. Already before the First World War, teddy bears were believed to be popular not only with children but also with young American women. Critics interpreted this phenomenon as a sign that a young generation of women was breaking conventions and starting to transfer their affection onto toys rather than cultivating it for the sake of husbands and children. ‘Instead of Rachel’s fierce insistence: “Give me children, or I die!”’ you hear, in soft lisping tones, “Give me a Teddy-bear, or I’ll be out of fashion.”’²⁷ In the 1920s, a number of Germany’s film stars including Brigitte Helm, Carmen Cartellieri, Dorrit Weixler, Alice Hechy and Eva May were

photographed with teddy bears or other toys. Pet dogs were equally represented as favourite objects of affection. Apparently babies were facing strong competition.

Taken together, the caricatures represent childlessness as an almost natural state of being for self-indulgent middle- and upper-class women. While they are determined not to have children, their partners are deeply affected by their decision and find it difficult to come to terms with this female independence and the resulting lack of affirmation of their own virility. A caricature from 1930 invokes male impotence even more directly [figure 10]. It

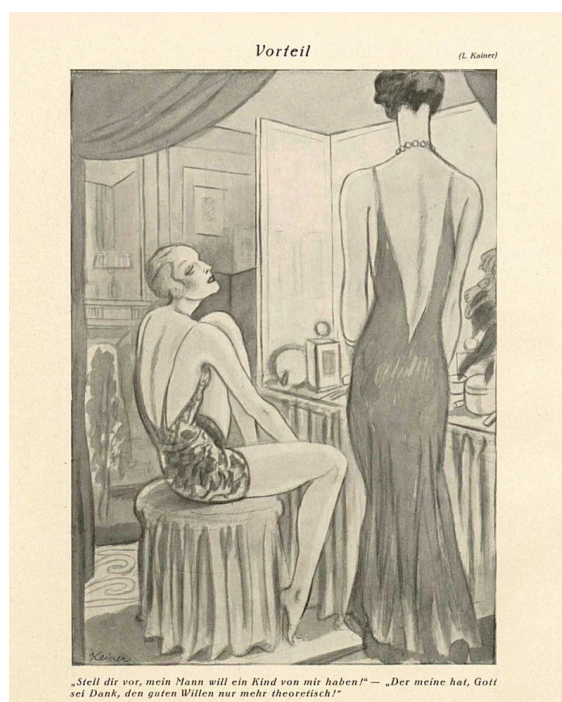


Figure 10. *Simplicissimus*, 5 May 1930, p. 70. Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar.

depicts two elegantly dressed, tall New Women in front of a dressing table. One complains 'Just imagine, my husband wants a child'. The other replies: 'Mine wants the same, but only theoretically, thank goodness.'

In these caricatures, childlessness was very much presented as an upper-class phenomenon. This was clearly not in tune with social reality, as many childless couples were working-class. However, while these couples could be seen as making difficult choices in reaction to economic hardship, the figure of the frivolous middle- or upper-class wife could be used to explore changes in gender relations. In preferring a childfree life, these women were represented as defying male expectations, expectations that themselves appeared as ill-founded and curiously outdated. Men clearly did not know what to do with the highly desirable 'New Woman' who was willing to get married but did not want to be a mother.

IV. Mocking Paternal Desires: *Madame Wünscht Keine Kinder*, 1926

While the caricatures of the Simplicissimus were addressed to liberal middle-class readers, Alexander Korda's 1926 silent film *Madame Wünscht Keine Kinder* [Madame doesn't want children] reached a more diverse audience²⁸ [figure 11]. It was inspired by a 1924 French novel by Clement Vautel translated into German in 1925. It tells the story of a young married couple played by Maria Corda and Harry Liedtke, both highly popular at the time. While Paul, a lawyer, has entered marriage hoping for a comfortable home, his glamorous wife, Elyana, is only interested in dancing and shopping. Children clearly do not feature in the life she has cut out for herself. It is only after a dramatic power struggle involving Elyana's frivolous mother and sister and Paul's former mistress that Elyana finally gives in: she accepts Paul's desire to become a father, renounces her extravagant lifestyle, and has a baby. Ironically, however, the final moments of the film do not show Elyana as a Madonna-like mother with child. Rather, we see a very pale, almost listless Elyana, covered in white sheets. Giving birth



Figure 11. Cover of a film-program to be sold in cinemas showing 'Madame doesn't want children', 1926. © Christian Unucka.



Figure 12. The photograph was taken on the film set and shows Maria Corda as Elyana at a point when she has just realized how much Paul enjoys playing with the neighbours' children. Note her fantastic outfit.

charm; one claimed, 'It is a very truthful study of the process by which a young and frivolous society beauty gradually settles down to happy married life.'³⁰ [figure 12].

The film and its topic were so popular that a sound film with the same title was produced by the German director Hans Steinhoff in 1933. In this later version, the female heroine is no longer addicted to dancing but to sports. The happiness of her honeymoon is threatened not by her insatiable demand for entertainment but by a tennis competition she wants to attend. On

certainly has not enhanced her well-being, her beauty or her sex appeal. And the baby? While it appears adorable to Elyana's mother and sister, all Paul can see when peering into the crib is a screaming bundle. The audience is left to wonder whether having a child was such a good idea after all.

When the film was released in December 1926, it was an instant success, both with critics and with the audience.²⁹ The film was perceived as a spirited comedy, funny and entertaining yet also realistic. Contemporary critics applauded the 'handsome and luxurious design' of the interiors and the 'elaborate' dresses. They dwelled on Maria Corda's enchanting and elegant looks and on Liedtke's



Figure 13. Page 2 of the Filmprogram accompanying the 1933 version of Madame doesn't want children, Illustrierter Film-Kurier, Nr. 536, undated. © Christian Unucka.

their return home, her husband comes to realize that their home has been turned into a gym. After some twists and turns, the couple is happily reunited, and Elyana – now called Madeleine and played by a platinum blonde Liane Haid – is ready to become a mother [figure 13].

The film *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* – here discussed in relation to the 1926 version – could be read as promoting maternity. However, compared to Vautel's novel, a clear 'message' can hardly be extracted. Instead, the film allows multiple readings, which might well have contributed to its popularity. In the novel, Vautel contrasted the egoistic, self-indulgent Elyana with morally respectable members of the working class: Paul's humble mistress and a happy 'famille nombreuse'. Furthermore, Elyana's conversion to motherhood only occurs after she has had an illegal abortion and has been very ill, depressed and desperate.³¹ While the novel presents Elyana's childlessness as a terrible moral offence, the German film version is much more playful.³² There is no positive depiction of a large family; Paul's mistress Louise, though a devoted homemaker who pampers Paul in every way conceivable, is also a childless single woman. The children who live upstairs are noisy and misbehaved and not particularly kind to each other. Their mother, who only appears briefly, looks bland and does not actively engage with the children. It would be hard to identify this scene as a celebration of motherhood.

In contrast to the book, the film does not punish Elyana for her rejection of motherhood. On the contrary, the film celebrates her beauty, charm and sex appeal. Her entertaining life and magnificent attire must have appeared rather enviable to many spectators. Her style and costumes are truly breathtaking, and as noted above, the pregnancy transforms her in ways that are not quite becoming.³³ Especially when compared to contemporary French films like *Maternité* (1929) in which the intentionally childless woman is terribly punished for her selfish rejection of motherhood, *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* certainly allowed identification with the childfree heroine.³⁴

Much of the film, however, focusses on the main male character, Paul, who appears as rather childish and self-centred. In a number of scenes, we see him being pampered by his butler, his mistress and her servants. In a dream, he even imagines himself as an oriental master being served pea soup – his favourite dish – by an utterly subservient Elyana. His ideas of marriage are clearly not in tune with modern gender relations, and the audience knows right from the start of the film that Elyana will not fulfil his expectations. A long sequence at the beginning of the film shows Paul getting drenched by rain while patiently waiting for Elyana, who – more than an hour late – finally arrives on the scene driving her own motorcar.

Paul's infatuation with Elyana, who is so obviously disinterested in becoming a housewife, shows that Paul lacks the ability to make rational choices. His desires seem to be inspired by

Christina Benninghaus, 'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany

normative expectations and popular images. While his oriental dream is triggered by a picture on a packet of cigarettes, he expresses his desire for a child by pointing to a huge soap advert, displaying a chubby child. Throughout the film, ironic intertitles invite the audience to laugh about Paul's behaviour and his feelings. Apparently, his paternal desires are not to be taken seriously.

V. Class Issues

By the late 1920s, the image of the frivolous childfree woman seems to have had developed into a familiar stereotype. This can be seen by turning to the debate about abortion law reform that electrified the German public in the late 1920s.³⁵ In novels, plays and films dealing with abortion, voluntarily childless women feature regularly as minor characters. They served as a counter-image to the exhausted and exploited working-class mothers whose body bore the brunt of repeated pregnancies and heavy work [figure 14].

Carl Credé's play *§218 – Gequälte Menschen* (§218 – Tortured People) is one example. Performed by the Piscator theatre, it toured through Germany in 1930 with much success.³⁶ Like other plays and films from the same genre, it tells the story of a poor working-class mother who already has five children. When her doctor refuses to help, a neighbour is asked to perform an abortion. Disaster strikes and the poor mother quickly and quietly bleeds to death. Her case is contrasted with that of Mrs Kleeberg, a married middle-class woman who had been pregnant but who obtained a legal abortion on medical grounds. Two doctors had certified that a pregnancy would endanger her life, as she allegedly suffered from incipient tuberculosis. The judge charged with investigating her case suspects that these health problems are a mere pretence, especially as Mrs Kleeberg is an ardent and competitive hockey and tennis player. But when questioned, Mrs Kleeberg mimics maternal feelings, claiming that she and her husband were keen on having a child and that her interest in sports and travel would never



Figure 14. Cover of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* [Workers' Illustrated Paper] addressed to female voters, February 1933. Image courtesy of Institut für Zeitungsforschung, Dortmund.

make her ‘forget about the serious and natural mission of motherhood’. Although the film depicts her abortion as problematic both on moral and on eugenic grounds, Mrs Kleeberg is not prosecuted. The abortion law, the audience is meant to understand, is manipulated successfully by those in command of sufficient social and economic capital.

Figures like Mrs Kleeberg also appear in §218 – *Unter der Peitsche des Abtreibungsparagraphen* [§218 – Under the Whip of Abortion Laws], published in 1923, and in Friedrich Wolf’s 1929 play *Cyankali*. Their motives for refraining from motherhood are presented as completely self-centred: an excessive interest in retaining a slim figure, in playing sports, and in enjoying urban entertainment. ‘But shall my entire winter be ruined by one accident, now, that I am in such good shape? My hockey team in Davos needs me urgently,’ insists an anonymous ‘lady’ in *Cyankali*.³⁷ Although the existing abortion law was heavily criticised by sex reformers, women activists, socialists and communists, the voluntarily childless were presented as unreasonably selfish. The plays and films do not suggest that these women might have a right to make their own reproductive and sexual choices.³⁸ They use the stereotypical childless woman merely in contrast to the decent, yet vulnerable working-class mother.

VI. Unintentionally Attractive? – Images of Childlessness in Population Propaganda

Around 1930, voluntary childlessness also made its appearance in population propaganda. Since the turn of the century, demography had developed into an object of adult education. Popular almanacs and health exhibitions, some of which were seen by millions of visitors, introduced ordinary people to demographic thinking.³⁹ During the 1920s, strategies of representation became ever more sophisticated. Panels with graphs and statistics were increasingly accompanied by models. The GeSoLei – a 1926 exhibition on health care, social welfare and sports – included not only three-dimensional models that represented the age structure of the current population but also an installation that worked like a giant music box: at regular intervals, figurines representing birth, marriage and death emerged from three different doors. The model was meant to help its audience visualise the biological fate of the German population, the constant movements of reproduction and decay.⁴⁰

Childlessness was not an issue within these popular visualisations of demographic data. The international picture language ISOTYPE, developed and propagated in the interwar period by Otto Neurath of Vienna, did not include a symbol for childlessness. This might reflect the lack of reliable statistics. Demographers had tried to study childlessness and had documented social differences in birth rates, but had not managed to include a retrospective question asking women about their reproductive biography in the census questionnaire.⁴¹

When, towards the end of the 1920s, the declining birth rate, the resulting aging of the population, and social differences in reproductive behaviour were seen as increasingly problematic, childlessness was interpreted as a threat to the nation. The image of the frivolous middle-class wife who craved comfort and dreamt of Persian rugs, fur coats and marble-tiled bathrooms was evoked in articles dealing with demography.⁴² In 1932, Friedrich Burgdörfer, one of Germany's most eminent statisticians, published his much debated book *Volk ohne Jugend* [Nation without Youth].⁴³ In his foreword, Burgdörfer claimed that the German nation would eventually extinguish itself by increasing (voluntary) 'infertility'. According to Burgdörfer, a rational approach to reproduction that had originally started among the upper classes had spread to all parts of the urban population. Burgdörfer wrote:

Rather than having a second or even a third or fourth child, people economize, so as to be able to buy a motorcycle or a car, a gramophone or a loudspeaker and a hundred other things. They cannot possibly afford another child. Despite the misery of our time, the "wish for a car" has become more successfully ingrained than the "wish for a child".⁴⁴

Over the following years, popular exhibitions and booklets on demography came to include visual representations of childlessness. In 1933, Burgdörfer's arguments were taken up by Otto Helmut (pseudonym of Otto Spatz) who produced a popular booklet entitled 'Endangered People' (*Volk in Gefahr*) that quickly went through several editions. Images from this publication are prominently used in many historical studies on Nazi Germany.⁴⁵ Like Burgdörfer, Helmut aspired to raise awareness regarding the perceived danger of depopulation and of social and ethnic differences in reproductive behaviour that, if interpreted in eugenic terms, were seen as causing degeneration. Helmut included two images by E. Schwendtnr that addressed the drop in the birth rate. The first was composed of twelve vignettes representing different reasons why people wanted to have fewer children or no children at all [figure 15]. On the left-hand side, three pictures represent economic constraints that might force couples to practice birth control: unemployment ('*Arbeitslosigkeit*'), poverty ('*Armut*'), and lack of adequate housing ('*Wohnungsnot*'). At the bottom, the reason 'women's work' ('*Frauenarbeit*') is given. We see women in a factory involved in manual labour. As Helmut explained in his text, women were often forced to take up employment because their husbands were unemployed. Apparently, he did not want to suggest that women were shying away from motherhood because they were pursuing interesting careers.

Seven vignettes identify the demand for a luxurious, child-free lifestyle as the prime reason for the decline in the birth rate. More specifically, the pictures are meant to show how an



Figure 15. E. Schwendtner, 'Reasons for the decline of the birth rate' in: Otto Helmut, *Volk in Gefahr* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1933)

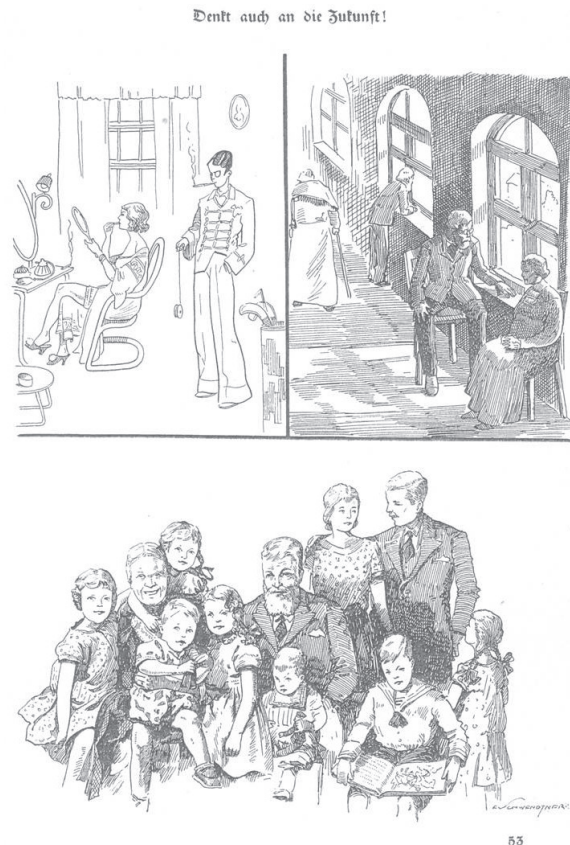
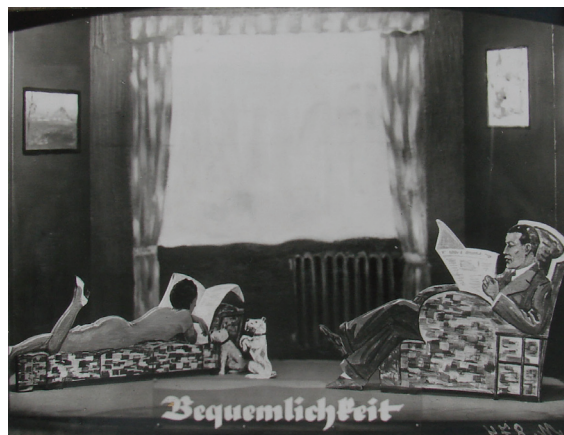


Figure 16. E. Schwendtner, 'Who has made the right decision? Also think about the future!' in: Otto Helmut, *Volk in Gefahr* (München: Lehmanns Verlag, 1933).

interest in one's own comfort ('Bequemlichkeit') and well-being ('persönliches Wohlergehen') as well as an 'addiction to pleasure' ('Vergnügungssucht'), sport, and an exorbitant cultivation of life ('Überkultur – Luxus') inhibited an interest in parenting. Two vignettes, entitled 'thrift and stinginess' ('Sparsamkeit und Geiz') and 'fear – dread' ('Furcht – Scheu') point to psychological reasons for a rejection of children. In both pictures, the adults display a physical reaction of distaste: they don't even want to come close to children.

Clearly, the image was designed to stress that family planning was often motivated by selfishness. Helmut and Schwendtner wanted to discredit voluntary childlessness and increase support for pro-natalist policy measures. However, the images also represented childlessness as quite desirable, and it seems likely that some readers will have identified with the modern, fashionable women in the pictures.

A second image presented a group portrait of a large family [figure 16]. The children in the picture cluster around the grandmother who seems to be the centre of affection. Just above the happy grandmother, a fashionable childfree woman is shown in the process of applying



Figures 17-20. Three dioramas and a wall panel from the 1937 exhibition *Ewiges Volk*.

lipstick while her partner passes the time playing with a yo-yo. A second picture shows an old couple sitting by a window. The image answers the question in its title by pointing to the pleasures of grandparenthood. However, the plea “Think about the future!” suggests that the attractiveness of a childless life is not to be dismissed.

Presumably unintended dissonances between the explicit message and possible readings seem even more striking with regard to an exhibition entitled ‘Ewiges Volk’ (Eternal Nation) that went on show in 14 major German cities between 1937 and 1939. The exhibition, organised by the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden, was meant to ‘introduce each German to the

principles of national socialist health and race policies'. To this purpose, statistics and scientific graphs were dismissed in favour of popular representations. The final panel of the exhibition stated that there were only two reasons why a nation could perish: because it did not produce enough children and because it allowed ethnic mixing.⁴⁶

In line with this general aim, reproduction was presented as a duty for those who were deemed suitable. Elaborate installations visualised the national disaster that allegedly would be caused by the so-called two-children-system (*Zweikindersystem*). To explain how the drop in the birth rate had come about, the exhibition included a group of at least six dioramas which illustrated what were believed to be major causes of the decline: 'Materialism', 'striving for comfort' (*Bequemlichkeit*), '1000 Wishes' (1000 Wünsche), an obsession with slimming ('*Die schlanke Linie*'), the diversions of city life ('*Ablenkung durch die Großstadt*') and an addiction to entertainment ('*Vergnügungssucht*'), visualised by a couple dancing in a club. Additionally, a wall panel showed a man in a flashy car who declared: 'In my sports car there's no room for children' [figures 17-20].

The audience was supposed to take home the message that it was the prime responsibility of every healthy German woman to become a mother. However, given that National Socialism supported consumer culture and boasted about its ability to provide ordinary people with holidays and consumer goods like radios and even cars, it seems that the propagandists were treading a rather fine line.⁴⁷ In the diorama 'Materialism', two shop windows are juxtaposed. While the left window displays baby wear and features a stork, the right presents exactly those consumer goods – suitcases, radios, a car – seen as especially desirable to many contemporary consumers. A well-dressed couple is placed in front of the shop windows, apparently considering both options but more drawn towards consumer goods. The diorama *Bequemlichkeit* [comfort] shows a reading couple enjoying a comfortable home equipped with central heating and two pet dogs.

In early 20th-century museums, dioramas were used to present mounted animals in an environment representing their natural habitat. They were also employed to explain industrial processes by presenting three-dimensional factory models or to reconstruct and present historical scenes. Dioramas were employed to offer a more intimate, engaging and holistic view of the objects they displayed. It is not clear why the organisers of the 1937 exhibition used this form of representation. Perhaps they wanted to suggest that the voluntarily childless inhabited a foreign and bygone world of urban consumer culture. This made sense given that the birth rate had risen significantly since the end of the depression. That this trend was not to continue was not yet apparent. However, the vividness with which the pleasures of childlessness were staged might have encouraged envy rather than loathing.

VII. Representations of Childlessness, a Synchronic Comparison

The visual representations analysed in this paper were produced with different intentions. They wanted to entertain, to amuse, to inform or to scandalize. Yet, in depicting childlessness, they drew on a common set of motifs that by the 1930s appears to have become rather standardized. These motifs should not be misread as documentary. Childless couples were not necessarily well-off,⁴⁸ and their reasons for being childless could be much more diverse than represented. However, for a stereotype to work, it needs to resonate with contemporary fears, expectations and perceptions. Three aspects seem especially worth noting.

(1) Many images from the 1920s and 1930s refer to the integrity of the body and to the high importance attributed to slimness and fitness. As is well known, Weimar and Nazi Germany witnessed an obsessive body cult.⁴⁹ The images of the childfree woman suggest that pregnancy and childbirth were seen as potentially threatening to the body project of the New Woman. A number of caricatures could be added at this point that addressed possible tensions between a woman's interest in sports and a sporty figure and the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth. They showed women who would rather compete in sports than be pregnant or who would not breastfeed because the fashion of the 1920s did not tolerate a voluptuous bust [figures 21, 22]. It seems plausible to assume that the growing belief in the malleability of the body, the interest in shaping it with the help

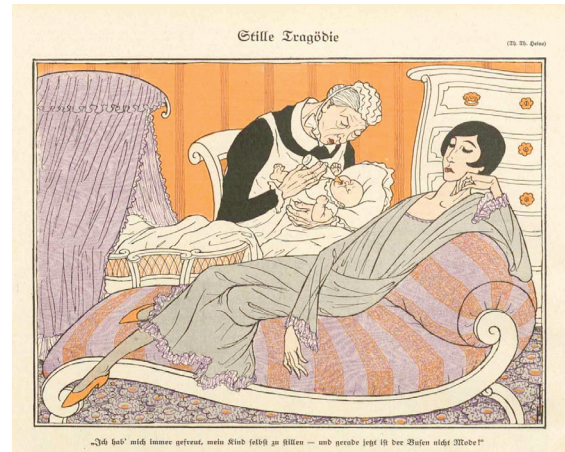


Figure 21. 'Quiet Tragedy', *Simplicissimus*, 30 (1925), 440. 'I always looked forward to breast-feeding my child - but now busts are out of fashion.' Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, © DACS 2014.



Figure 22. 'Sport in Marriage', *Simplicissimus*, 29 (1924), 372. 'You have ruined me.... This year, I surely would have beaten the world record in the long jump.' Image courtesy of Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar. With permission of Dr. Dagmar von Kessel, Munich.

of diets, cosmetics, sports, pharmaceutical products, and even plastic surgery made pregnancy and childbirth and the danger and pain they still entailed less acceptable. As Patricia Stokes has shown, Weimar women increasingly rejected the idea of suffering and sacrifice in childbirth and pursued comfort by buying patent medicines and by asking to be delivered in twilight sleep.⁵⁰ In the late 1920s and during the Nazi period, attempts to re-sacralise maternal suffering were clearly underway. Mothers' Day, introduced in the late 1920s, was presented as an occasion to venerate mothers.⁵¹ And the idea that motherhood provided a service to the nation, comparable to men's military service, was widely propagated.⁵² However, demographic data suggests that despite propaganda efforts and financial incentives to have (several) children and despite a ban on advertisements for contraceptives and a crackdown on abortion, the younger generation of Germans continued to prefer small families.⁵³ The visual representation of the childless woman reflects, I would argue, an acute awareness of the threats, pregnancy and motherhood could pose to the newly mastered, modern body.

(2) The images from the 1920s and 1930s often show the childless woman in a private setting. They represent the home not as a place of drudgery and endless toil but of relaxation. Reclining on a sofa, the childless new woman indulges herself smoking and reading – pastimes which before had been associated with male privilege.⁵⁴ The female reader had, of course, already been an object of the artistic gaze before, but compared to 19th-century paintings, the images from the 1920s and 1930s show women confidently turning their back on household chores or the demands of their husbands. The women readers as depicted in caricatures and propaganda do not apologize for their leisure pursuits, and they are not being surprised in an unguarded moment.⁵⁵ Their posture might resemble that of the 19th-century nude, but they are fully dressed (even wearing shoes), not dishevelled and certainly not available to the male spectator.⁵⁶ Their gaze is not directed towards the audience, nor does it turn to the men in the pictures.

Modern architecture and interior design were highly politicised aspects of Weimar culture. Although the housing situation was very strained, even a small flat could be turned into a comfortable, modern home if a couple remained childless. Modern interior design promised less housework and more time for the homemaker. But as expectations regarding good mothering expanded, this time was easily absorbed.⁵⁷ It was the childless woman who could profit best from the promises of modern design as she commanded time and money not only to create a home that would suit her but also to use it according to her own needs.⁵⁸ The stereotypical figure of the lounging childfree woman could only work because relaxation at home was not associated with boredom but with pleasure within a comfortably designed space

and with freedom from household drudgery. Yet this stock image also reaffirmed that a married woman's place continued to be in the home.

(3) Childlessness is presented as an issue closely connected to gender conflict and issues of dominance and equality. In *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* and in the caricatures but also in some of the abortion reform films and texts, voluntary childlessness was represented as subverting the gender order by rendering men helpless and passive. 'Why would I want to ruin my figure just so that you can enjoy fatherhood?' argues a typical example of the frivolous married woman in *Kreuzzug des Weibes*.⁵⁹

Spousal relations were in a process of redefinition during the 1920s, which meant that the realities of married life needed to be negotiated. To settle on childlessness could express a commitment to equality within a marriage. 'We are a modern marriage, we don't need kids,' replied one of the soldiers whom Max Marcuse interviewed for his study on practices of contraception in 1917.⁶⁰ Childlessness during the early years of a marriage meant that couples had time and space to negotiate the terms of their relationship. The concept of 'Kameradschaftsehe', widely discussed throughout Germany around 1930, meant exactly this: a marriage on probation that could be easily dissolved if it turned out to be disappointing.

VIII. Recent Representations of Childlessness in Diachronic Perspective

In this, the last part of my paper, I will turn to recent images of childlessness. I want to explore how a diachronic comparison of images might add additional layers to our interpretation of the visual materials studied so far and foster a deeper understanding of current debates. The images I want to look at form part of a heated debate that started shortly after the millennium and continues today. In March 2002, the German parliament discussed the report of a committee of enquiry on demographic change. The report documented significant changes in the age structure of the German population and called for a reorganisation of the German welfare state. During the following years, the German public was subjected to a crash course in demographic thinking. Alongside concerns about the aging of the German population and the resulting demands on the welfare state, it was the allegedly common childlessness among university-educated women that captured the public imagination.⁶¹ In the absence of reliable life-course data on the prevalence of childlessness, cross-sectional data was used to claim that up to 40% of German women who held a university degree would remain childless.⁶² The ensuing debate not only increased public awareness regarding demographic issues, but also paved the way for changes in census practices and for a new policy that favours families with

Christina Benninghaus, 'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany



Figures 23, 24. Book cover from 2003: *Woman's Life Without Children: The Intentional Decision Against the Mother Role*, by permission of Weiss Werkstatt, München, and pedestrian-only icon.

two working parents and significantly reduces the opportunity costs of having a child for couples with higher incomes.⁶³ The so-called *Elterngeld* was explicitly introduced as a measure to encourage childbearing amongst educated middle-class women.

The public debate on childlessness not only startled the German government into action, but also inspired a growing body of sociological, psychological and journalistic inquiries into the dynamics of childlessness. And it raised feminist concerns, as the ongoing debate seemed to delegitimise the decision to remain childless.⁶⁴ A spate of books and articles was published that aimed to give a voice to women who did not intend or had not intended to become mothers. Unless they were purely geared towards an academic audience, these books needed compelling covers to attract readers.⁶⁵

Two strategies to depict childlessness were developed: pictograms and photographs of a single woman or a couple. Susie Reinhardt's book on women who are childless by choice shows a stylised female figure, familiar to the readers as part of the 'pedestrians only' icon [figures 23, 24]. On the road sign, the woman extends her hand towards a little child. On Reinhardt's book cover, this child is missing. The still extended arm makes the slightly elongated figure look more dynamic as she walks towards an open horizon, unencumbered by the obligations of parenthood. The colours of the cover (an intensive pink for the bottom half, a warm orange for the slightly smaller top half) indicate



Figure 25. *Perfectly happily childless? Voluntary childless graduates. A qualitative empirical study of the life situation and future plans of female Austrian graduates* (2006) used with kind permission of Moritz Cordon.



Figure 26. *Childfree or: why people without offspring aren't freeloaders* (2011) Used with kind permission of Herbig Verlag.

that the femininity of the childfree woman is not at stake and that her future life will be emotionally satisfying. The screaming yellow title reminds readers that this book is meant to make a statement.

Other publications on voluntary childlessness use pictograms that show crossed out children or storks [figures 25, 26]. By using invented or redesigned icons, the covers avoid the pitfalls of associating childlessness with the image of a specific type of person. Furthermore, they allude to social expectations surrounding motherhood that are subverted or challenged when people choose to remain 'childfree'. After all, pictograms are often employed not only to convey information but to visualise rules and regulations.

A second visual strategy to depict childlessness was chosen for the cover of Sonja Siegert's and Anja Uhling's book *Ich will kein Kind* [figure 27]. The cover shows the photograph of a woman, probably in her late thirties, who sits on a swing and smiles at the camera. The picture, presented as a snapshot, captures the woman almost in mid-air. her feet high above the ground, she is obviously enjoying her current state. The picture conveys a sense of playful energy and of mundane independence: wearing trainers and jeans, the woman appears well-equipped for a walk along the deserted and windy North Sea beach on which the picture was probably taken.

Christina Benninghaus, 'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany



Figure 27. *I Don't Want a Child: 13 Stories About an Unpopular Decision* (2013). Used by permission of Mabuse-Verlag.



Figure 28. *Childless – So What?* (2006). Used by kind permission of K&S/Orac.

To be understood as a visualisation of childlessness, the photo, like the redesigned icons, must refer to a child. This aim is reached by placing the woman on a swing, which seems to signal that she is not interested in parenting, that is, in endlessly pushing the swing. Instead, she enjoys swinging herself. Again, social rules are invoked and subverted as the swing has been built and is usually reserved for children. Unfortunately, however, the image can also be read as infantilising the woman who seems unwilling to give up the social role of a child. Interestingly, a very similar image has been used for another publication on childlessness [figure 28].

Although the individualising photograph and the typifying pictogram might seem very different at first sight, the book covers show similarities that point to broader cultural perceptions of childlessness. First, both Reinhardt's and Siegert's and Uhling's book covers visually link childlessness with freedom of movement and an open horizon. By implication, motherhood is associated with being tied down or at least slowed down by a child. For the images to work, readers must accept that independence and flexibility are highly desirable.

Second, whether resorting to pictograms or photographs, publishers and authors apparently want to stress that childlessness defies social expectations. This corresponds with the intentions of



Figure 29. Book cover: *Generation Childless: Beyond Birth Strike and Compulsory Motherhood*, published 2008. Used by permission of Jorge Schmidt and corbis images



Figure 30. Book cover: *Life Without Children. When Women Don't Want To Be Mothers*. Used by permission of Rowohlt Verlag

the authors who see their books as part of a larger struggle which aims at legitimising childlessness. That such a struggle is still or again believed to be necessary is worth noting. Surveys in attitudes towards childlessness do not indicate that voluntary childlessness is seen as especially problematic in Germany. And very high levels of childlessness among the most highly educated parts of the population do not suggest that childlessness is particularly frowned upon.⁶⁶

Third, the covers present childlessness as a woman's issue, although the research behind the books actually shows that men, their reproductive interests and their willingness or unwillingness to commit themselves are important factors in explaining female childlessness. I have found only two German book covers that show a couple. One of them presents two slightly grotesque cartoon-like figures who are running energetically [figure 29]. While the male figure is taking the lead, both are similar in size and they run at the same cadence, which indicates equality. They seem unified in the attempt to avoid parenthood.

Only one of the covers – published in 2002 and, hence, predating the demographic debate – alludes to the pleasures of consumption and to a fulfilled emotional and sexual life that might

Christina Benninghaus, 'No, Thank You, Mr Stork!': Voluntary Childlessness in Weimar and Contemporary Germany

be associated with childlessness [figure 30]. Later covers seem to avoid such associations. This seems quite striking when compared to some recent Anglo-American publications. In these, the decision to remain childless is often depicted as motivated by a couple's wish to enjoy life and the pleasures it has to offer. On the cover of *Kidfree & Lovin' It!: Whether by Choice, Chance or Circumstance*, by Kaye D. Walters, published in 2012, a couple on a beach is shown running hand in hand towards the sun and the sea [http://www.kidfreeandlovinit.com/Kidfree_Web_Site/Kidfree_Book.html]. In August 2013, *TIME* magazine equally associates the decision to be childless with beach life. The cover of the issue on *The Childfree Life: When having it all means not having children* presents a bird's eye view of a man and a woman lying on a white beach, heads almost touching, arms slightly intertwined. The photographer Randal Ford wanted this picture to express connectivity, to show a heterosexual couple as a family unit. [<http://lightbox.time.com/2013/08/01/behind-the-cover-randal-fords-america/#1>] To visualise this connectivity, the man and the woman wear swimwear in matching colours. They are both wearing sunglasses and even their hair colour seems to be identical. But while both are beautiful, their bodies are



Figures 31, 32. Different editions of '*No Kid*', originally published in French in 2008; used by permission of Rowohlt Verlag and Emblem/McClelland & Stewart

very explicitly gendered. His appears straight and square. Both his shoulders and hips touch the ground, while her body curves, her head bends towards him, her pelvis is slightly twisted, so that her body appears slimmer than it is: A soldier and a dancer, a tree and a vine.

National differences can also be observed with regard to Corinne Meier's book *No Kids* which has been published in a number of languages. On the French, German and Italian edition we see a 'No Kids'-icon, the Spanish edition shows a crossed-out pram, but the English edition presents a drawing of a well-dressed couple enjoying ball-room dancing [figures 31, 32]. Anglo-American publishers appear more willing to underline the pleasures and financial benefits of childlessness and its compatibility with traditional gender concepts.

Only one German book cover harks back to the visual tradition of the lounging childfree woman: Viola Roggenkamp's book, *Woman Without Child*, published in 2004. It has an aesthetically ambitious cover that alludes to sensuality and self-indulgence both by its colour – a warm, velvety orange-red – and the small female nude [figure 33]. The cover very nicely captures the tone and sentiment of the book, which presents a (fictitious?) all-female symposium on childlessness in the course of which twelve women share their personal histories while enjoying an elaborate meal.

Roggenkamp's account presents many strikingly different perspectives on childlessness, includes historical references and demographic information, and invokes strong and sometimes contradictory feelings. Readers are invited to contemplate their personal reaction to and experience of childlessness and motherhood but also the wider social dimensions of individual reproductive decisions. It is this mood of contemplation that is captured by the image on the cover, contrasting remarkably with the dynamism that often dominates other recent book covers. We see a detail of Don Diego Velazquez's 17th-century painting of a female nude known as *The Rokeby Venus*. Venus is looking into a mirror that reflects



Figure 33. Book cover: *Woman without child: Conversations and Stories – A Symposium*, published 2004; with kind permission of Frauke Weise

her face. In the original, Cupid, Venus' son, is holding the mirror. But this reference to the child has been deleted by cropping the image.⁶⁷ Hence, readers might mistake Venus – goddess of love, beauty, sex and fertility – for a childless woman. Though probably not obvious to the vast majority of German readers, the cover, which appears so pleasing and calm, also includes a political reference: in March 1914, Velazquez's painting was heavily damaged by the suffragette Mary Richardson. The picture on the book cover, hence, refers to the pleasures of contemplation – more readily available to non-mothers than to mothers – but also reminds us of a long history of women's struggle for equal rights and the ability to control their own sexual and reproductive bodies. The book cover thus captures both feminist defiance and pleasurable self-indulgence.

On the whole, the covers I have analysed of recent German books on voluntary childlessness avoid associations with pleasure, consumption and – interestingly – also with women's work. The two major characteristics of the childfree woman seem to be her independence and her determination not to fulfil social expectations of motherhood. In contrast to earlier images, the childfree woman has left the house, a clear indication of her growing emancipation. She also does not seem to bother about the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth. This surely reflects the diminishing health risks faced by pregnant women, but it might also point to an unwillingness to recognise the physical realities of biological motherhood.⁶⁸

The covers clearly reduce the complexity of issues around voluntary childlessness. They do not allude to the financial pressures that stop poorly paid couples from having children, nor do they hint at the difficulties faced by women who want to combine a career and motherhood. Conflicting interests of men and women, so prominent in the 1920s and 1930, are not visualised, despite the fact that the books themselves clearly show that reproductive decisions are still usually made within existing relationships and, hence, can be very contentious. If couples appear in the new images, they seem to be in agreement. As political statements, the covers encourage women to recognise and to express their objections to motherhood. Current debates both in Britain and in Germany indicate that such an encouragement might indeed be necessary. However, the images also seem to suggest that there isn't really much which needs to be discussed – who would argue with traffic signs? In my view, the political stance expressed by the images comes at too high a price. It tends to downplay the complexities of reproductive decisions, which are partly determined by economic structures, which affect partners and which can only be regarded as purely private matters in societies that have given up on the idea of the welfare state. In my view, feminists should not try to close the debates on childlessness but

should embrace the possibilities it offers. Motherhood mandates surely need to be unmasked and rejected, but they are no more worthy a target than the ever-growing demands of neo-liberal capitalism. The private continues to be political.

IX. Conclusion

Census data and visual sources suggest that voluntary childlessness is not a recent invention. Already during the 1920s many couples delayed having children, and a substantial proportion did not have any children at all. Demographers have wondered about the rise in childlessness that occurred in parallel with the drop in the birth rate. They have pointed out that multiple causes overlapped. Economic hardship and political crises both contributed, but a more complex explanation needs to include cultural factors. In this article, I have not focussed on the changing value of children but have argued that we also need to pay attention to the changing value of childlessness. A comparative perspective suggests that the meaning of childlessness has shifted over the past one hundred years. As cultural historians have shown, even the most basic emotions and relationships change over time. This is also true for childlessness. If we at first sight ‘see little motivation for women at the turn of the century to remain childless’, this does not necessarily indicate that such motivation did not exist.⁶⁹ Changes in attitude to childlessness might obscure historically specific motifs that might not seem terribly important or even plausible to us. Further research is necessary to better understand just how exactly different parts of the population imagined a childfree life. But a comparative analysis of widely circulating visual representations of childlessness indicates several reasons: the allure of a rapidly expanding consumer culture, felt acutely after a time of war, economic crisis and hyperinflation; the physical pains and corresponding fears associated with pregnancy and birth; the pride taken in a modern home and the space childlessness offered for experimentation within a marriage.

¹ Research for this article was supported by a M4Human-Fellowship of the Gerda Henkel Foundation. The author wishes to thank the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their detailed and very constructive critique of an earlier draft. Many thanks also to Chitra Ramalingam, Simon Szreter and Sandra Maß who took the time to comment on an earlier version. Special thanks are due to Fran Bigman for being such a careful and supportive editor. Thank you to Howard Nelson for expert advice on language-issues and translations. I would like to thank the authors, graphic designers, publishers, curators and archivists who allowed me to use their work, provided scans, offered advice and helped to track down copyright holders of the images used in this essay. Substantial effort has been made to comply with copyright law. Please address any copyright queries to csmb3@cam.ac.uk.

² Statistical evidence on levels of childlessness will be presented in part II of this article.

- ³ During the 1920s, a number of German sociologists studied family life and generational relations. However, the topic of intentional childlessness is hardly touched upon. Some information can be gleaned from Max Marcuse's study on contraction to which I will briefly refer in Part VII. For a refreshing contemporary take on the rise in 'wilful sterility' in the United States see: Leta S. Hollingworth, 'Social Devices for Impelling Women to Bear and Rear Children', *American Journal of Sociology*, 22 (1916), 1, 19-29. The author rather gleefully reported that the many strategies used by society to pressure and to coax women into motherhood were losing steam. 'The time is coming, and is indeed almost at hand, when all the most intelligent women of the community, who are the most desirable child-bearers, will become conscious of the methods of social control.' Once aware of their manipulation, these women would often refrain from accepting the 'great sacrifice of personal advantage', the danger and suffering involved in childbearing. If they were still expected to have children, some 'adequate compensation, either in money or in fame' had to be offered.

In the US, debates on childlessness started around the turn of the century. In 1901, the sociologist Edward A. Ross coined the term 'race suicide' to describe a process by which 'the higher race quietly and unobtrusively eliminates itself' by not having enough children.' Theodore Roosevelt used the occasion of his 6th annual message to congress to warn against the dangers of 'wilful sterility'. On pronatalism in the US see: Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future. Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in The United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

In Germany, debates on the decline of the birth rate and corresponding population issues started somewhat belatedly, especially when compared to France. See: Christiane Dienel, *Kinderzahl und Staatsräson. Empfängnisverhütung und Bevölkerungspolitik in Deutschland und Frankreich bis 1918* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1995).

- ⁴ On childlessness in Britain according to the 2010 census see: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/fertility-analysis/cohort-fertility--england-and-wales/2010/cohort-fertility-2010.html>. For U.S. data see: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/25/childlessness-up-among-all-women-down-among-women-with-advanced-degrees/>.
- ⁵ On attitudes towards childlessness and on a 'culture of childlessness' that seems to have emerged in Germany see: Tomás Sobotka and Maria Rita Testa, 'Attitudes and Intentions Toward Childlessness in Europa', in: *People, Population Change and Policies : Lessons from the Population Policy Acceptance Study, Volume 1 : Family Change*, ed. by Charlotte Höhn, Dragana Avramov and Irena E. Kotowska, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 177-211. Sebastian Klüsener, Karel Neels and Michaela Kreyenfeld, 'Family Policies and the Western European Fertility Divide: Insights from a Natural Experiment in Belgium', *Population and Development Review*, 39, 4 (2013), 587-610.
- ⁶ Jody Day, 'Childlessness is a political, as well as deeply personal, issue', *The Guardian*, 9 Dec. 2013, p. 26. The article prompted more than 1300 comments. An article by Sarah Rainey ('Helen Mirren confronts the final female taboo', *The Telegraph*, 4 Feb 2013) illustrates the double-bind-situation faced by current feminists: Are childless women in need of advocacy, does the stigma of childlessness need to be confronted or should talk about childlessness be avoided as it is 'quite simply, nobody else's damn business'? In their recent book on childlessness, Siegert and Uhling explicitly address the problem. While they do not want childless women to have to justify their reproductive decisions, they want to give women 'a chance to speak about their goals, their aspirations and also their reasons for not having a child.' The resulting situation 'is really a paradox.' (Sonja Siegert and Anja Uhling, *Ich will kein Kind. Dreizehn Geschichten über eine unpopuläre Entscheidung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Mabuse-Verlag, 2013), p. 12.
- ⁷ Both sculptures were on show in the exhibition 'From Death to Death and Other Small Tales' in the National Art Gallery of Scotland, 2013.
- ⁸ See e.g. the very elaborate late 16th century tapestries made for or possibly made by Magdalena Platter, née Jeckelmann, wife of famous physician Felix Platter, which show Sarah and Hagar. The Platters were involuntary

- childless but raised several children. On the tapestries see: Jenny Schneider, 'Zwei Bildstickereien', *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte*, 22 (1962), 114-117. On Felix and Magdalena Platter see: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Beggar and the Professor: A Sixteenth-Century Family Saga* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997).
- ⁹ On the gravestones of Föhr see: Walter Lüden, *Redende Steine. Grabsteine auf der Insel Föhr* (Hamburg: Christians, 1984).
- ¹⁰ On the centrality of comparison and contextualisation see: Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 3rd Ed. (London: Sage, 2012) offers a good introduction to various approaches in visual studies. Historians will find Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001) especially useful.
- ¹¹ Population discourses had, of course, a long history reaching back to the 18th and even the 17th centuries. By the late 19th century, the rise of experts, an increasing belief in science and more sophisticated statistical methods certainly contributed to the importance attributed to demography. However, the urgency with which the declining birth rate, differences in reproductive behaviour and infant mortality were debated in the early 20th century cannot be disconnected from the enormous changes in reproduction occurring around 1900. For a discourse analysis of demographic debates both in Sweden and in Germany see: Thomas Etzemüller, *Ein ewigwährender Untergang. Der apokalyptische Bevölkerungsdiskurs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007).
- ¹² Simon Szreter, 'Falling Fertilities and Changing Sexualities in Europe Since c.1850: A Comparative Survey of National Demographic Patterns', in: *Sexual Cultures in Europe: Themes in Sexuality*, ed. by Franz X. Eder, Lesley A. Hall and Gerd Hekma (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 159-194.
- ¹³ Cornelia Osborne, *The politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (London: Macmillan, 1992); Dienel, Christiane, *Kinderzahl und Staatsräson. Empfängnisverhütung und Bevölkerungspolitik in Deutschland und Frankreich bis 1918* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999).
- ¹⁴ Michael Anderson, 'Highly Restricted Fertility: Very Small Families in the British Fertility Decline', *Population Studies*, 52, 2, 1998, 177-199, quote p. 178.
- ¹⁵ Jürgen Dorbritz and Karl Schwarz, 'Kinderlosigkeit in Deutschland – ein Massenphänomen? Analysen zu Erscheinungsformen und Ursachen', in: *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaften*, 21, 3/(1996), 231-261.
- ¹⁶ Statistisches Reichsamt (Ed.), *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Volume 452.1: *Volkszählung. Die Familien und Haushaltungen nach den Ergebnissen der Volks- und Berufszählung 1933*. Heft 1: Die Ehen im Deutschen Reich nach der Zahl der geborenen Kinder, (Berlin: Verlag für Sozialpolitik, Wirtschaft und Statistik, 1937), p. 1/14. The figures for Berlin are taken from 'Neue Beiträge zum deutschen Bevölkerungsproblem', *Sonderhefte zu Wirtschaft und Statistik*, 15, Berlin 1935, p. 41.
- ¹⁷ 12.7% had three, 5.8% four and 4.1% five and more children. These figures, however, also included children born to the couple before marriage. A rapid succession of a number of births in the first years of marriage was clearly becoming very unusual. This was especially true for women living in larger cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants. Here the respective proportions were 7.6, 2.8 and 1.9%. (Statistisches Reichsamt, Ed., *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, p. 1/9 and 1/14).
- ¹⁸ On regional differences in the spread of venereal diseases in Germany during the first third of the 20th century see: Lutz Sauerteig, *Krankheit, Sexualität, Gesellschaft. Geschlechtskrankheiten und Gesundheitspolitik in Deutschland im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1999) pp. 68-88, esp. p. 81. The prevalence of venereal disease in Britain and possible demographic consequences are currently being studied by Simon Szreter. For a re-evaluation of the evidence presented to the Royal Commission on Venereal Disease (1913-1916) see: Simon Szreter, 'The Prevalence of Syphilis in England and Wales on the Eve of the Great War: Re-visiting the Estimates of the Royal Commission on Venereal Disease 1913-1916', *Social History of Medicine* (2014), pp. 508-529.
- ¹⁹ The state of the art of infertility diagnosis, prognosis and therapy is summed up in: J. Veit, *Handbuch der*

- Gynäkologie*, 3rd Edition ed. by W. Stoeckel, Vol. 3: F. Engelmann, *Sterilität und Sterilisation*, (München: Bergmann, 1927), pp. 1-278.
- ²⁰ Michaela Kreyenfeld und Dirk Konietzka, 'Kinderlosigkeit in Deutschland – theoretische Probleme und empirische Ergebnisse', in: *Ein Leben ohne Kinder. Ausmaß, Strukturen und Ursachen von Kinderlosigkeit*, 2nd edition, ed. by Dirk Konietzka and Martina Kreyenfeld (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2013), pp. 13-45, here p. 16f.
- ²¹ On the variability and plasticity of human reproduction and the need to explore reproductive choices see Josef Ehmer, 'The Significance of Looking Back: Fertility before the "Fertility Decline"', *Historical Social Research* 36 (2011), 2, pp. 11-34.
- ²² In an influential article from 1991 focussing on the fertility transition in the US, S. Philip Morgan argues that 'childlessness in the past, as in the present, was most often caused by a series of postponements.' (S. Philip Morgan, 'Late nineteenth and early twentieth century childlessness', *American Journal of Sociology*, 97, 3 (1991), pp. 779-807. Quote on p. 780 and 800) Morgan dismisses the possibility of people intending permanent childlessness as he sees 'little rationale for women to choose (permanent) childlessness when they are young'. But even if we assumed that only temporary childlessness was intended, this would still ask for an explanation. Why was childlessness becoming more attractive? In a more recent article, that summarizes the available demographic research on 20th-century childlessness, Rowland accepts 'postponements as a key factor in childlessness', but sees these postponements as pointing towards 'indecision and lifetime ambivalence, which in the longer run may produce "voluntary" and "involuntary" childlessness.' (Donald T. Rowland, 'Historical Trends in Childlessness', *Journal of Family Issues*, 28 (2007), 1311-1337, quote p. 1332.)
- ²³ On childlessness as a recurring and normal element of social life especially in Western Europe and on different attitudes and coping strategies see: *Ageing without Children. European and Asian Perspectives*. Ed. by Philip Kraeger and Elisabeth Schöder-Butterfill (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).
- ²⁴ On the 'value of children' approach in sociology see: Gisela Trommsdorff and Bernhard Nauck (ed.), *The Value of Children in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Case Studies from Eight Societies* (Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers, 2005); Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
- ²⁵ The New Woman/Modern Girl has fascinated contemporaries and historians alike. That she was very prominent within popular culture is more than obvious. On her visual representation see Alys Eve Weinbaum et al., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Patricia Gozalbez Cantó, *Fotografische Inszenierungen von Weiblichkeit. Massenmediale und künstlerische Frauenbilder der 1920er und 1930er Jahre in Deutschland und Spanien*, (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012).
- ²⁶ On decadence and sterility see: Urte Helduser, 'Hoffnungslose Geschlechter'. Unfruchtbarkeit als Pathologie der Moderne, in: *Wie natürlich ist Geschlecht? Gender und die Konstruktion von Natur und Technik*, ed. by Ursula Pasero and Anja Gottburgsen (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2002, 319-333. On the growing literature on decadence and homosexuality see e.g. the literature review by Lothar Machtan. Review of Domeier, Norman, *Der Eulenburg-Skandal: Eine politische Kulturgeschichte des Kaiserreichs* and Winzen, Peter, *Das Ende der Kaiserherrlichkeit: Die Skandalprozesse um die homosexuellen Berater Wilhelms II. 1907-1909* and Wippermann, Wolfgang, *Skandal im Jagdschloss Grunewald: Männlichkeit und Ehre im deutschen Kaiserreich*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. December, 2010.
- ²⁷ On the association of intentional childlessness and teddy bears see: Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the future. Pronatalism, reproduction, and the family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 97. Quote from Lydia Commander, 'The House Without a Child', *Delineator* 71(1907), 720-23, quoted in Lovett, *Conceiving the future*, p. 97.
- ²⁸ The Film was released in Britain as 'Dancing mad' in January 1928.

- ²⁹ Several adverts in the trade journal *Film-Kurier* celebrate the success of the film. One of them quoted nine positive reviews from newspapers. Another claimed that the film had always been sold out when showing at the Berlin Capitol although the week before Christmas was usually somewhat slack. (See: *Filmkurier*, 18 Dec 1926 and 1 Jan 1927.)
- ³⁰ Review of 'Dancing Mad' in *The Bioscope*, 70, 24 Feb 1927, p. 71
- ³¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1994), p. 131.
- ³² For a well-argued comparison of film and novel see Maren Dorner, 'Alte Antworten auf neue Fragen? Die Stummfilmkomödie *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* (1926)', *WerkstattGeschichte*, 28 (2001), 86-97.
- ³³ Mihaela Petrescu, *Vamps, Eintänzer, and Desperate Housewives: Social Drama in Weimar Literatur and Film*, PhD Thesis, Indiana University 2007.
- ³⁴ On 'Maternité' see: Cheryl A. Koss, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Childless: The Politics of Female Identity in *Maternité* (1929) and *La Maternelle* (1933)', *Historical Reflections*, 35, 2, 2009, pp. 3-20.
- ³⁵ For the history of sex reform and of abortion see: Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex. The German Movement for Birth Control & Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Cornelia Osborne, *Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).
- ³⁶ On abortion on stage, in films and in fiction see Osborne, *Cultures of Abortion*, pp. 26-63. On film see Ursula Keitz, *Im Schatten des Gesetzes. Schwangerschaftskonflikt und Reproduktion im deutschsprachigen Film 1918 bis 1933* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2005).
- ³⁷ Wolf, Cyankali, 1929, part 4. ('Aber soll ich mir wegen eines Zufalls einen ganzen Winter verderben lassen, jetzt, da ich in bester Form bin! Mein Hockeyteam in Davos erwartet mich dringend.')
- ³⁸ Karin Theesfeld, *Abtreibungsdramen der Weimarer Republik*, in: *Realistisches Schreiben in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Sabine Kyora und Stefan Neuhaus (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), pp. 193-214.
- ³⁹ On almanacs and their rather problematic visualisation techniques see: Marija Dalbello and Anselm Spoerri, 'Statistical representations from popular texts for the ordinary citizen, 1889-1914', *Library & Information Science Research* 28 (2006), 83-109. The famous 1911 Hygiene Exhibition at Dresden incorporated a section on statistics that offered an introduction to international population and medical statistics and included information on the growth of populations, their age and social composition, on fertility and mortality, and the quantitative importance of different causes of death. See: E. Roesle, *Sonder-Katalog für die Gruppe Statistik der wissenschaftlichen Abteilung der Internationalen Hygiene-Ausstellung Dresden 1911. Eine Einführung in die Ergebnisse der internationalen Bevölkerungs- und Medizinalstatistik* (Dresden: Verlag der Internationalen Hygiene-Ausstellung, 1911)
- On popularisation of statistical knowledge and more specifically on the models mentioned below see: Sybilla Nikolow, 'Statistische Bilder der Bevölkerung in den großen Hygieneausstellungen als Wissensobjekte', in *Das Konstrukt der Bevölkerung vor, im und nach dem 'Dritten Reich'*, ed. by Rainer Mackensen und Jürgen Reulecke (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), pp. 476-488.
- ⁴⁰ Sybilla Nikolow, 'Imaginäre Gemeinschaften. Statistische Bilder der Bevölkerung', in: *Konstruierte Sichtbarkeiten. Wissenschafts- und Technikbilder seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Martina Heßler (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 2006), pp. 263-278, ill. 3 on p. 272.
- ⁴¹ Married women were asked to give the year of their marriage and the number of children born within this marriage. Children born out of wedlock who were legitimised with the marriage were included as were children who were stillborn, had died after birth or were no longer living with their parents. The figure hence exaggerates childlessness because illegitimate children and children from earlier marriages were excluded but at the same time it also underestimated childlessness by counting stillborn children and those who had died shortly after being born.
- ⁴² For quotes see: Matthias Weipert, 'Mehring der Volkskraft'. *Die Debatte über Bevölkerung, Modernisierung und*

- Nation 1890-1933* [in italics] (Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag, 2006), p. 53.
- ⁴³ Friedrich Burgdörfer, *Volk ohne Jugend. Geburtenschwund und Überalterung des deutschen Volkskörpers* (Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinkel Verlag, 1937).
- ⁴⁴ Original: 'Man spart lieber, um ein Motorrad oder Auto, um Grammophon oder Lautsprecher und hundert andere Dinge anschaffen zu können, als um sich etwa zu dem einen Kind noch ein zweites oder gar ein drittes und viertes anschaffen zu können. Das kann man sich einfach nicht leisten. Der 'Wille zum Auto' hat sich z.B. trotz der Not der Zeit erfolgreicher durchgesetzt und behauptet als der 'Wille zum Kind.' (Burgdörfer, *Volk ohne Jugend*, p. 85f)
- ⁴⁵ Otto Helmut, Ed., *Volk in Gefahr. Der Geburtenrückgang und seine Folgen für Deutschlands Zukunft* (23 ganzseitige Tafeln mit Text) (München: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1933). The images I will discuss, are taken from the first edition. As a comparison with later editions (e.g. 10th edition 1939) shows, some images were dropped while others were redesigned. It is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to these variations.
- ⁴⁶ Ludwig Stephan, *Das Dresdner Hygiene-Museum in der Zeit des deutschen Faschismus (1933-1945)*. PhD Thesis, Medizinische Akademie 'Carl Gustav Carus', Dresden 1986.
- ⁴⁷ I cannot do justice to the body of literature on National Socialism and consumer culture. But see: Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross and Fabrice d'Almeida, ed., *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- ⁴⁸ The 1933 census clearly showed that childlessness was widespread in all non-agricultural parts of the population, even if it was more widespread among lower middle-class and middle-class than working-class couples. For those marriages which had been founded between 1924 and 1928, the proportions of childless couples were 21.6% for workers, 28.3% for the self-employed, 29.3% for civil servants and 33.3% for employees. Among farmers and agricultural workers, by contrast, only 12.6% of all couples were still childless after five to eight years of marriage.
- ⁴⁹ See e.g. Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany. A Social History, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- ⁵⁰ Patricia R. Stokes, 'Purchasing Comfort: Patent Remedies and the Alleviation of Labor Pain in Germany Between 1914 and 1933', in *Pain and Prosperity. Reconsidering Twentieth-Century German History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003), pp. 61-87.
- ⁵¹ Karin Hausen, 'Mütter, Söhne und der Markt der Symbole und Waren: Der deutsche Muttertag 1923-1933', in *Emotionen und materielle Interessen: sozialanthropologische und historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, ed. by Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 473-523.
- ⁵² Elizabeth D. Heineman, 'Whose Mothers? Generational Difference, War, and the Nazi Cult of Motherhood', *Journal of Woman's History*, 12 (2001), 139-164.
- ⁵³ On Nazi politics in the sphere of reproduction see Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 1995, Ch. 6.
- ⁵⁴ Fritz Nies, *Frau und Lektüre in der Karikatur*, in: *Die lessened Frau*. Ed. by Gabriele Signori (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009) In the caricatures collected by Nies, women appear in a number of roles: as enemy opposed to reading, as passive, as participant reader. That a woman would read while her husband was not reading, appears as a subversion of more traditional gender roles.
- ⁵⁵ On representations of women reading see *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, ed. by Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). In their introduction, the editors point out that 'act of reading for women is often an assertion of individuality, a separation from societal restrictions and expectations, or to use Janice Radway's words, a 'declaration of independence'.' See also: *Die lessened Frau*, ed. by Gabriela Signori (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz in Kommission, 2009).
- ⁵⁶ On the European tradition of the nude and the relationship between art and publicity see: Stefan Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).
- ⁵⁷ On architecture and women's special role as supporters of modernisation see: Bruno Taut, *Die neue Wohnung*:

die Frau als Schöpferin (Leipzig: Klinkhardt&Biermann, 1924). On the famous Frankfurter Kitchen as designed by Grete Lihotzky see: Martina Hessler, 'The Frankfurt Kitchen as a model for modern life and the 'traditional' practices of users' in: *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users*, ed. by Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 163-184. On the increasing importance attached to motherhood see: Ann Tayler Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). On scientific motherhood see: Rima Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

- ⁵⁸ *Gilgi*, the quintessential modern girl as described by Irmgard Keun in her 1928 novel with the same title, cherishes the room she has rented. Still living with her (adoptive) parents, Gilgi uses the room as a study, but also as a place to meet her friends. She has decorated the room according to her wishes and – not surprisingly – the furniture also includes a divan.
- ⁵⁹ Intertitle: 'Für deine Vaterfreuden werde ich meine Figur nicht verderben.' Translation quoted from Usborne, *Cultures of Abortion*, p. 33.
- ⁶⁰ Max Marcuse, *Der Eheleiche Präventivverkehr, seine Verbreitung, Verursachung und Methodik. Dargestellt und beleuchtet an 300 Ehen* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1917), p. 23.
- ⁶¹ Links to a large number of contributions to this debate can be found at http://www.single-generation.de/themen/thema_kinderlose_in_deutschland5.htm
- ⁶² The 2008 Micro-census survey showed that this claim was exaggerated. For West Germany, the proportion of childless women among tertiary-educated women born in the mid-60s is believed to be somewhat above 30%, in comparison to only 13% in East Germany. See: Tomás Sobotka, 'Fertility in Austria, Germany and Switzerland: Is there a Common Pattern?', *Comparative Population Studies*, 36 (2011), 263-304, esp. Fig. 11 p. 286.
- ⁶³ Alongside a change in the divorce laws, the new *Elterngeld* marks a departure from the traditional forms of German family policy which very much favoured (and continue to favour) the breadwinner family by offering substantial tax refunds to married couples with only one full-time earner. The *Elterngeld* is also expected to increase gender equality as the full 14 months of the substitute income can only be claimed by single mothers or fathers. Parents in a relationship must split the time, with each of them taking a minimum of two months.
On changes in census practices see: Dirk Konietzka and Michaela Kreyenfeld (ed.), *Ein Leben ohne Kinder. Ausmaß, Strukturen und Ursachen von Kinderlosigkeit*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Springer Verlag, 2013), Preface of the new edition, p. 1.
- ⁶⁴ On the debate see e.g. the special issue on 'Kinderlosigkeit' ed. by Christina Benninghaus and Pia Schmid, *Feministische Studien*, 1 (2005).
- ⁶⁵ For an early academic publication without a cover image see: Christine Carl, *Gewollt kinderlose Frauen und Männer. Psychologische Einflussfaktoren und Verlaufstypologien des generativen Verhaltens* (Bad Homburg: VAS Verlag, 2002).
- ⁶⁶ On attitudes towards childlessness see: Eva-Maria Merz and Aart C. Liefbroer, 'The Attitude Toward Voluntary Childlessness in Europe: Cultural and Institutional Explanations', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74 (June 2012), 587-600; Tomas Sobotka und Maria Testa, Attitudes and Intentions Toward Childlessness in Europa, in *People, Population Change and Policies: Lessons from the Population Policy Acceptance Study* ed. by Charlotte Höhn, Dragana Avramov and Irena Kotowska, Volume 1: Family Change (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 177-211
- ⁶⁷ Note the similarity to the Reinhardt image where the child has been deleted from the 'pedestrian only' icon.
- ⁶⁸ Recent works by a number of female photographers who work on motherhood, pregnancy and childbirth refer to the scarring of the female body by pregnancy, birth and nursing. See: <http://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/home-truths-4>.
- ⁶⁹ Morgan (1991), p. 800. On Morgan's argumentation see FN 22 of this paper.