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## Typewriters typing typist: a performance history

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TYEWRITERS TYPING TYPIST:  
A PERFORMANCE HISTORY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
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In

The Department of Communication Studies

By  
Sarah K. Jackson  
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## ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the ongoing exploration of the multiple ways visual and material artifacts perform. I take a look at how typewriters or rather how two representations of typewriters perform. I focus on two different images of working women, each rendered in terms of a popular female stereotype of the period. I selected the images because they bookend a period of time in which typewriters emerged to the fore as an efficient tool of reproduction in the business world. In turn, two different perspectives on the relationship between the typist and her typewriter, woman and machine, are provided. The study demonstrates how visual images, an advertisement from the early 1900s and a photograph from the 1920s, can be perceived and analyzed as performance events that tell us something about the cultures that produced and transmitted them and also about our current culture and how we perceive events we recall. Further, it shows us how practical performance methods contain conceptual-theoretical discourses that help us discuss how and why people perform. I undertake a critical historiography aiming to discover how the images perform certain histories. To do so, I focus on key elements in each image – the typewriting machine in Chapter Two and the woman as typewriter in Chapter Three – tracking and describing histories associated with each. In Chapter Four, I apply the stories and issues I’ve collected to an investigation of each image, adding to the perspective mix the basic “laws of theatricality” as conceptualized by Vsevolod Meyerhold. Although Meyerhold developed and experimented with his laws within the same time period that concerns me, I do not intend to draw direct correspondences between the images and Meyerhold’s application of the laws. Rather, I find the laws helpful to understanding and articulating how the images perform. That is, the laws will determine what makes for “performance” in this case. They offer a vocabulary for analyzing the images as performance events and, especially, for discussing the double-sided complexities that emerge in those events.

## CHAPTER ONE AN INTRODUCTION

It is a Collection of Sorts, these typewriters I find. Perhaps it is the other way around, and it is the typewriters that find me. I am a collector. I find typewriters in junk stores, thrift stores, yard sales, and the attics of loved ones. I hunt until there in a pile of junk it appears, sometimes broken, other times in perfect condition. Either way, they have been tossed out and deemed useless by their prior owners, and I take it upon myself to restore them, or to let them be – for they are never useless, but rather they are a source of creative inspiration to me. In “Unpacking My Library,” Walter Benjamin describes book collecting similarly, writing, “the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element, which in a collector mingles with the element of old age. For children can accomplish the renewal of existence in a hundred unfailing ways” (61).

Sitting down at my desk I stare. My typewriter is in front of me on the wooden desk my father built for me a few months earlier. I want to write a story. I want to write a story about love. I stare at my typewriter and think about the task at hand. Do I really want to write about love? Do I really want to write about love on this machine? It jams so easily compared to my MacBook across the room. Also, my mind wanders when I typewrite and stories emerge that don’t arise when using my laptop. This is very bohemian of me I think. I am aware of my choice to use this old technology over the new and how different technologies affect and effect consciousness differently. This is very smart of me I think. My mind wanders into a million different pieces, casting me back into the twenties for some reason. The typewriter comes alive, and I begin . . .

White satin, full length. Diamonds lining the loose hanging scoop neck. Low back exposing clammy skin, cold against the porcelain claw leg bathtub. Her name is Gertrude O’Connor, and she is smoking a cigarette.

From a young age I have been drawn to typewriters. I have been drawn to their appearance, but there is something else that attracts me to them. Or should I say there is something about me that attracts them to me?

On the third floor of my grandparent's turn of the century home, there is a large black iron Royal typewriter sitting on top of a table with a reading lamp lurking over it. As far as I know it hasn't been used in years, but remains where it has been since I was a child and likely for years prior to my birth. Stored in my mother's office there is a medium size grey electric typewriter (I've forgotten the brand) that my mother uses only when she has formal papers to type. On the floor of Penfold's living room is an old black iron typewriter that we debated as to whether it was too heavy for him to take to Chicago. Rummaging through the heaps of junk at Big Locks in Makanda, Illinois, I find my own typewriter. It is mustard yellow and small, and it sits on my desk where my computer should be. I use it for special occasions only. The following typewriters found me at the same location: an electric Smith-Corona that I sent to my brother on his twenty-seventh birthday and makes a sound all too loud for its size; and an antique baby blue Royal that Dylan repaired on the kitchen floor of his apartment late one evening while I played an imaginary violin with an actual bow, insisting that learning to play a real violin would be my contribution to the Genius Club, which we also established that evening as a result of the Royal repair. Dylan now uses the Royal due to his bad eyesight and problems with light reflecting off his computer screen. I have seen pages and pages he has typed while sitting at his kitchen table smoking cigarettes.

I have been fascinated with typewriting machines since I was old enough to "play office" as a young girl. I enjoyed watching the levers move as I pressed each key. I typed nonsense as quickly as I could so as to hear the ding of the bell telling me I had reached the end of the margin. I would type official documents on my mother's typewriter at record speeds. I would

sit at my grandfather's typewriter pretending to type detective documents in a smoky *film noir* scene. My fascination grew.

In this study, I take a look at how typewriters or rather how two representations of typewriters perform. The study was sparked by a creative piece I wrote in a course I took at Louisiana State University on performance histories and historiography. The piece informed my final project, a genealogies of performance concerning typewriters. My research entailed studying the development of typewriters, the physical and psychological training involved in learning to typewrite, the Taylorization and mechanization of typewriting techniques, and the female typists who used the machines. I was drawn to the women, understanding that their mass emergence into the male dominated business world was enabled by the successful mass-production of the typewriter (in 1873 to be exact). As the typewriter became a permanent fixture in offices, so too did typewriters – the word referring to both the machine and the female typist in the early years. While the machine is often credited with liberating women from the confines of the home, it also is singled out as limiting women's options in the business world. Perceived as a machine that copies, the typewriter is barred from jobs that (again, as perceived) require thought.

My research spurred my critical interest and my sensory imagination. I wondered, for instance, if typewriters were depicted as mindless machines of reproduction in the early years or were they depicted some other way so as to make their performance(s) more appealing to the viewer. I decided to check out visual archives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There, amidst photographs, drawings, and advertisements of typewriters, I found two images on which I decided to base my study. I selected the images because they bookend a period of time in which typewriters emerged to the fore as an efficient tool of reproduction in the business world. They also are complex images embedded with many stories about or related to



typewriters. In addition to those I mentioned above, these stories include the industrialization, urbanization, and mechanization of labor in the U.S.; resulting class, race, ethnicity, and gender tensions; the women's suffrage movement; and the part mass media played in defining women's roles by circulating images of women in the workplace and other contexts. As Carolyn Kitch observes in *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, "the image of the working woman was evidence that women were entering the public sphere not only through the indulgence of buying mass-produced goods but also through the work of selling them" (34), and we might add, producing them too. Images of the working girl represented the future for many women concerned with social and economic mobility. The images I have selected feature two different working women, each rendered in terms of a popular female stereotype of the period. In turn, two different perspectives on the relationship between the typist and her typewriter, woman and machine, are provided.

### SUBJECTS OF STUDY

Below, in Figures 1 and 2, are the main subjects of my study: an illustration and a photograph of a woman and her typewriter. The illustration is a 1906 advertisement for Fox Typewriters formatted as a postcard, which then allowed for its mass distribution. I discovered the image on the Virtual Typewriter Museum webpage. Robert Paul created the museum in 2000, and continues to curate it, encouraging typewriter collectors to contribute images they have in their private collections. This image was donated by the P. C. and Weil Collection.

The illustrated woman below is a variation on the Gibson Girl, an extremely popular stereotype of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like the Gibson Girl, the woman wears modest clothing that flatters her hour glass figure, and her hair is bundled atop her head.



Figure 1. “It’s a Fox” (Virtual Typewriter Museum)

Less like the Gibson Girl, who typically cultivated an aloof attitude, this woman engages the viewer with a cheerful smile seeming both to show off and look for praise regarding the piece of paper she has typed. Further, while the Gibson Girl would snub any association with “a fox” (whether animal, female type, or machine), this gal seems pretty happy about it.

Figure 2 is a photograph taken in the 1920s. The exact year is unknown. The image was donated to the Virtual Typewriter Museum by the Typistries Collection. The function of the photograph is unclear as there is no information regarding its production, ownership, or distribution. However Robert Paul explains that many early nineteenth century photographs like this one have surfaced and been categorized as typewriter erotica.



Figure 2. *Flapper Straddling Typewriter* (Virtual Typewriter Museum)

As depicted, the woman epitomizes the flapper, a 1920s stereotype known for her erotic androgyny (a child in a short dress or smock with bobbed hair) and rebellious attitude. While often depicted in the midst of dancing and drinking, this particular flapper appears to be working or at least she is plucking at the keys of a typewriter positioned between her legs. Along with her coy glance toward the viewer, the curtained background suggests that she is “working” in a boudoir rather than office, which begs the question why might that be? Alice Kessler-Harris helps me connect the image to the workplace when she observes that the depiction of working women as flappers implied that they were exactly what businessmen would like them to be – “sexually free . . . flighty . . . and irresponsible” – thereby quelling fears that they posed a threat

to men in the workplace. On the other hand, “by masking women’s real possibilities, the guise of the flapper enabled [women] to emerge from their homes and into the business world” (226). It would appear then that the image performs a contradiction, a pose of submission and subversion.

## METHOD

In the chapters that follow, I undertake a critical historiography aiming to discover how the images perform certain histories. To do so, I focus on key elements in each image – the typewriting machine in Chapter Two and the woman as typewriter in Chapter Three – tracking and describing histories associated with each. In Chapter Four, I apply the stories and issues I’ve collected to an investigation of each image, adding to the perspective mix the basic “laws of theatricality” as conceptualized by Vsevolod Meyerhold. Although Meyerhold developed and experimented with his laws within the same time period that concerns me, I do not intend to draw direct correspondences between the images and Meyerhold’s application of the laws. Rather, I find the laws helpful to understanding and articulating how the images perform. That is, the laws will determine what makes for “performance” in this case. As described below, they offer a vocabulary for analyzing the images as performance events and, especially, for discussing the double-sided complexities that emerge in those events.

Lastly, in the current chapter and those that follow, you will note that I introduce my formal discussion with short, explicitly creative pieces. My aim is to acknowledge my partiality and explore it; to investigate why typewriters call on me to collect them and remember their stories.

## VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD’S LAWS OF THEATRICALITY

Vsevolod Meyerhold was born in Penza, Russia, in 1847. Penza was a small trading center southeast of Moscow. After a year of law school, Meyerhold decided to pursue an acting

career instead, attending the Moscow Philharmonic Society where he studied under Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Once he completed his degree, he joined the Moscow Popular Art Theatre co-founded by Danchenko and Constantin Stanislavski, the latter whom had a profound influence on Meyerhold's work as a director. Like Stanislavski, Meyerhold strove to develop useful methods for training actors that focused on their intellectual and imaginative capabilities as well as their physical instrument. Unlike Stanislavski who geared his methods toward realism – i.e., creating the illusion of real life on stage – Meyerhold inclined toward highlighting theatre *as* theatre, toward the artifice of the theatrical event.

Meyerhold felt that realistic theatre left nothing to the imagination. Audience and actors alike went unchallenged because the acting and the *mise en scène* were as close to “the real thing” as possible. As Meyerhold argues, “your imagination was silenced, and whatever the characters said about the landscape, you disbelieved them because it could never be as they described it; it was painted and you could see it” (Meyerhold 26). Meyerhold believed that it was impossible to fix realistic theatre and advocated renovation instead, feeling that “in order to innovate you have to renovate – and he meant the popular theatres of old” (Pitches 25). Drawing on the presentational and highly physical performance traditions of the marketplace, fair, and carnival, Meyerhold aimed his renovation toward the masses more so than the upper crust. A key source was the *cabotin*, “a strolling player” and “kinsman to the mime, the histrion, and the juggler” who works “miracles with his technical mastery” and “keeps alive the tradition of the true art of acting” (Meyerhold 122). Inspired by the *cabotin*, Meyerhold developed basic laws of theatricality that influenced his aesthetic and he aimed to realize in composing his theatre pieces. These laws or characteristics include stylization, rhythmic discipline, a visual and physical emphasis, improvisation, the quotation of popular culture practices, and featuring the double-life of theatre and performance, which entails mask, trickery, and the grotesque.

The composition method of stylization contains and informs the other elements. In his early “introduction of the principle of stylization,” Meyerhold explains:

With the word “stylization” I do not imply the exact reproduction of the style of a certain period or of a certain phenomenon. . . . In my opinion the concept of “stylization” is indivisibly tied up with the idea of convention, generalization and symbol. To “stylize” a given period or phenomenon means to employ every possible means of expression in order to reveal the inner synthesis of that period or phenomenon, to bring out those hidden features which are to be found deeply embedded in the style of any work of art. (Meyerhold 43)

In order to stylize a text, period, phenomenon, or artwork, it would appear one should identify the conventions of the source style, distil them to an essence (a synthesized expression), and then expand on the essence in various ways so as to reveal the “hidden features” or meanings embedded in the source. As Jonathan Pitches offers, one reduces a style to an essence and then exaggerates and extends that essence in various ways (52). Other elements of Meyerhold’s brand of theatricality, such as mask, and additional methods, such as biomechanics, are based in the idea of stylization. A character or human movement is distilled to a few deemed essentials, which then are exaggerated. The distillation economizes and sharpens expression while the exaggeration (in scale but also as a result of the shifting network of signs) extends it, allowing for multiple and often contradictory meanings to emerge.

Musicality refers to the rhythms of a piece. For Meyerhold, rhythms emerged not only from actual music played during a performance, but from the words and movement of a given text, the actors’ voices and bodies, their movements and interactions with each other and in relation to the set and props. Actors were expected to create physical scores for their characters (stylize their character rhythmically) and then integrate and orchestrate their multiple scores so

as to develop the musical dynamics of the piece as a whole. “Ultimately,” Pitches observes, “the use of ‘real’ music, live or recorded was subordinate in [Meyerhold’s] mind to the actors internalizing the *concept* of musicality” (98-99; emphasis in original).

“Music is [the actor’s] best helper. It doesn’t even need to be heard, but it must be felt. I dream of a production rehearsed to music but performed without music. Without it and yet with it, because the rhythm of the production will be organized according to music’s laws and each performer will carry it within himself.” (Meyerhold quoted in Pitches 99)

Apparently, this law of theatricality was at work in the Moscow Art Theatre’s production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* since, as Meyerhold describes:

The atmosphere was created, not by the *mise en scène*, not by the crickets, not by the thunder of horses’ hooves on the bridge, but by the sheer musicality of the actors who grasped the rhythm of Chekhov’s poetry and succeeded in casting a sheen of moonlight over their creations. (Meyerhold 32)

“Casting a sheen of moonlight” in ways that highlight the creative double-life of theatre – its not not real life paradox – was a key concern for Meyerhold and one way he featured the double-life was by means of mask. Mask refers to all external components of a character including costume, movement, gesture, facial expression, and actual face masks. A mask allows the user to reveal certain parts of his or her character while concealing others. They allow an actor to stylize a character to an essence and then, through exaggeration or extension, alter or counter the essence – for instance, by revealing the other side, the backside of the mask. In his discussion of the *Commedia dell’arte* character, Arlecchino, Meyerhold elaborates on the importance of mask. Forced to wear a coat of multicolored patches and sporting a constant smile, the servant Arlecchino appears to be a “foolish buffoon. But look closer! What is hidden behind the mask? . . . the all-powerful wizard, the enchanter, the magician” (Meyerhold 131).

Further, while the performer takes care to use mask techniques to clearly demarcate the front and backsides of the character's mask, she also takes care to reveal the "infinite range of shades and variations . . . the extreme diversity of character" that lie *between* the poles, again "with the aid of the mask" (Meyerhold 131). In this way, the actor "invests the theatre with all the enchantment of chiaroscuro" and thereby encourages the audience to use their imaginations too (Meyerhold 131).

Meyerhold's use of stylization and mask often results in the grotesque, which Meyerhold defines as:

"something hideous and strange, a humorous work which with no apparent logic combines the most dissimilar elements by *ignoring their details and relying on its own originality, borrowing from every source anything which satisfies its joie de vivre and its capricious, mocking attitude to life.*" (*Bolshaya Entsiklopedia* quoted in Meyerhold 137; emphasis in original)

In other words, the grotesque mixes opposites and celebrates incongruities so as to highlight and investigate the same in everyday life. For an example, Meyerhold calls on the dynamic contrasts in Gothic architecture, explaining that while "the soaring bell-tower expresses the fervour [sic] of the worshipper," the "projections decorated with fearsome distorted figures direct one's thoughts back towards hell" (Meyerhold 138). Thereby, the grotesque "prevent[s] excessive idealism from turning into asceticism" and "beauty from lapsing into sentimentality" (Meyerhold 138-139). It also unsettles the spectator, switching him "from the plane he has just reached to another which is totally unforeseen" (Meyerhold 139). In the following example from Aleksandr Blok's play, *The Fairground Booth*, the audience expects to see a romantic rendezvous between the two lovers. Suddenly, however:



“[One of the clowns takes it into his head to play a prank. He runs up to the LOVER and sticks out a long tongue at him. The LOVER brings his heavy wooden sword down on the CLOWN’S head with all his might. The CLOWN is doubled over the footlights, where he remains hanging. A stream of cranberry juice gushes from his head.]

CLOWN [in a piercing yell]. Help! I’m bleeding cranberry juice!

[Having dangled there for a while, he gets up and goes out. . . .]” (quoted in *Pitches* 63)

Romance turns to comic slapstick turns to tragedy, the clown lying mangled at the edge of the stage. Just as suddenly, however, the audience is made aware of the artifice of the clown, his mask, the apparent beating, and the play when he yells, “I’m bleeding cranberry juice!” The abrupt avowal of the theatrical “truth” makes the fictive “truth” strange and leaves the audience confused, angry, and laughing simultaneously. As Meyerhold states elsewhere, the grotesque “invites the spectator to solve the riddle of the inscrutable” (Meyerhold 139).

Clearly, the double-life of theatre is tricky and a brief mention of tricksters positions this idea in an active agent. Generally, tricksters are culturally produced and bound agents that deliberately and tactically get around the constraints of social norms and practices by using but altering the same. They pirate expressive materials and forms from diverse sources and re-function them through irony, parody, travesty, and bricolage among other tactics. Although tricksters are often employed by disempowered groups, they also can work for the privileged and empowered. Because their destabilization of norms occurs through humor, tricksters often evade authorities who might be upset by their trickery if they thought it was serious. In my discussion of masking and the grotesque are examples of the kinds of tricks Meyerhold played in his productions. He also assumed a trickster persona and pseudonym in his own life in the years prior to the Russian Revolution. When employed as director of the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, the owners forbade his doing avant-garde or political work, and so he assumed the

name Dr. Dapertutto when involved in producing less conventional works in small theatres and cabarets in and around St. Petersburg.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, under Vladimir Lenin's rule, the Russian people were concerned with the industrial and scientific reconstruction of the Soviet Union so as to catch up with the progress of other industrialized nations. During this period, Meyerhold's theatrical practices were embraced and respected since they also furthered the Soviet cause. However, once Joseph Stalin assumed power and the aesthetic of socialist realism came to the fore, Meyerhold's non-realist inclinations fell out of favor. The Stalinist government disapproved of his work, and he was executed in 1940.

It was during the Leninist period that Meyerhold developed biomechanics, which is a series of exercises aimed at improving the performer's physical technique and expressivity. Biomechanics consists of sixteen exercises or etudes, including "Shooting the Bow," "Slap in the Face," and "Throwing a Stone," all of which are designed with the laws of theatricality in mind. Biomechanics distills movement to its fundamentals, which includes a tri-part rhythm, and once learned, the fundamentals can be applied (improvised) to the situations the actor encounters on stage. Further, the method draws on popular practices and, via the simple plots and movements of the etudes, the performers learn and enact principles of contrast and opposition, both of which are central to the idea of the double-life of theatre.

Below is a description of Meyerhold's "Shooting the Bow," an etude I learned and taught to a group of fellow graduate students. Like all etudes, "Shooting the Bow" is introduced and concluded by a *dactyl*, which is a simple exercise of upward and downward movement that helps performers concentrate their energies and coordinate their movements.

(a) The actor executes two dactyls; the second dactyl is performed at a very fast tempo.

...

- (b) The actor falls to the floor.
- (c) He draws his arms and legs together.
- (d) Rising on his right foot, he slowly draws up an imaginary bow.
- (e) The actor advances with his left shoulder forward and his right foot back.
- (f) Spotting an imaginary target, he transfers his weight from his right foot to his left and back to the right foot.
- (g) Describing an arc with its center at his right shoulder, the actor's balance is shifted from the right leg to the left and back again to the right.
- (h) He draws an imaginary arrow from his belt, or imaginary quiver.
- (i) Very quickly he bends his upper torso toward the floor.
- (j) Now, slowly, the actor straightens up, holding his extended arms in a rigid position.  
The left arm is drawn out toward the front and the right arm thrown back to a slightly lower level. . . .
- (k) He slowly loads the imaginary bow and draws it back.
- (l) The actor aims.
- (m) He fires with a shout.
- (n) His body immediately contorts like a sprung bow into positions of "refusal." (Gordon 93-94)

Each distinct move of the etude consists of and is executed in terms of a tri-part rhythm of action. The first part (*Otkaz*) is an action of preparation, often a slight movement that opposes and thereby propels the second part (*Posil*), which is the realization of the action, after which occurs the third part (*Tochka*), a moment of pause and punctuation or a transitional movement from one action to the next. By featuring the tri-part rhythm in physical training, Meyerhold requires his performers to deconstruct the parts and movements of the body, study and perfect

them, and then put them back together again – not unlike the process of fixing and fine-tuning a machine. The rhythmic training results in precise, fluid, and efficient movement, and it encourages the actor to think and act rhythmically, musically, with or without musical accompaniment.

As was the case with his artistic processes generally, Meyerhold developed biomechanics by drawing on diverse popular practices of the time and from the past, such as Taylorism, Reflexology, Constructivism, and *Commedia dell'arte*. In the early nineteenth century, U.S. inventor Frederick Winslow Taylor developed principles of motion economy for industrial labor, which by 1918 had spread to Russia. By eliminating superfluous physical movement and developing precise, timed, and regulated motions, workers increased their product output and thereby factory profit. Taylor integrated factors such as rhythm, balance, fatigue, and rest minutes to create a system of work cycles that allowed laborers to work quickly with the least amount of strain. Meyerhold drew on Taylorism to develop biomechanics, observing the similarities between Taylor's sequences of movement and rest and the tri-part rhythm of action. He also appreciated the precision, efficiency, and musicality of the Taylorized factory worker, likening her movement to that of dance: "Movements based on these principles are distinguished by their dance-like quality; a skilled worker at work invariably reminds one of a dancer; thus work borders on art" (Meyerhold 198).

Unlike the subjective psychological approach of emotional excitability that, in large part, Stanislavski used to develop his system, Meyerhold based biomechanics on the more objective understanding of reflexology. Attributed to Ivan Pavlov and popular in both the U.S. and Russia in the early twentieth century, reflexology is "a theory of the mind based on the premise that we can only understand what we can *objectively* measure, that is, physical processes, not subjective moods" (Pitches 71; emphasis in original). Pavlov's theory was based on his testing stimuli and

response phenomena in dogs to start and then humans. His experiments led to his conclusion that “animals [including humans] are, in effect, rather like machines: we don’t act, we *react*, in response to external stimuli” (Pitches 72; emphasis in original). In turn, emotion is not a result of the “inner workings of the mind” but rather the stimuli of “physical positions and situations” (Pitches 72). It is a reflex. Pavlov’s theories were in accord with Meyerhold’s emphasis on external physicality as that which excites emotion not only in the actor but in the audience too. While Meyerhold believed that certain patterns of muscular activity prompted certain emotional states, he also believed that these states varied given the individual and his or her background and material circumstances.

Biomechanics and especially Meyerhold’s post revolutionary work were inspired by the Constructivist aesthetic of the early twentieth century. Countering realist illusions and based in the pragmatics of industrialism, Constructivism also drew on the Cubist inclination to deconstruct and reassemble objects so as to view them from multiple angles; Rayonist paintings, which depicted the rays of light reflected off an object rather than the object itself; and the Futurist tendency to portray bodies in motion. The integration of these influences resulted in the Constructivist aesthetic that featured the elemental geometry and mechanical operations of actual things (e.g., a person on a platform in a theatre) in actual time and space. As interdependent producers of the creative product, the actor and other stage components were deemed equal partners aesthetically, and the actor was required to move with rhythmic sensitivity to the particularities of the set, costume, lights, and theatrical venue generally. The latter was often an outdoor public space rather than a traditional theatre so as to include many people in the piece, reach a broad public mass, and highlight the populist politics of Constructivism. As Rosa Lee Goldberg describes, “liberally laced with news of social and political events, ideology and the

new spirit of Communism, [the outdoor venues and popular practices] seemed the perfect vehicles for communicating the new art as much as the new ideology to a wide public” (38).

Lastly, biomechanics was influenced by the popular tradition and forms of *Commedia dell’arte*. The early titles and simple plots of the etudes were often based on *Commedia dell’arte* titles and plots or at least the slapstick sequences within plots. And just as *Commedia dell’arte* requires improvisation on stock plots and characters, so too biomechanics is based on the understanding that performers will adapt the basic elements to the specific movement requirements of a given play.

My summary of Meyerhold’s laws of theatricality provides a foundation for my application of the laws in Chapter Four of the study. There, I draw on the laws as a conceptual discourse to help me analyze the ways in which the two images (the advertisement and the photograph) perform. First, however, I provide back stories for the main components of the images. In Chapter Two, “Performing the Typewriter,” I concentrate on the typewriter as a machine. I provide research concerning the invention of the typewriter in conjunction with industrialization and the mechanization and Taylorization of the body in the workplace. In Chapter Three, “A History of Typists and Female Types,” I focus on the figure of the woman in each image. I track a history of working women in the U.S. beginning with Colonial times through the 1920s. In my summary, I stress the diverse tensions that arose as women increasingly left home to work for wages in industry and the commercial sector. I then address stereotypes of women popular during the Gilded Age through the 1920s, particularly as they pertain to working women. With Chapters Two and Three in mind, I call on Meyerhold’s laws of theatricality in Chapter Four, “Performing Complex Positions.” My aim is to discuss how the images perform in light of their histories. I am especially interested in if and how the images stylize content and form: distill phenomena such as the female figure and the typewriter to

essences, which then are extended and exaggerated through their design and juxtaposition with other elements. Put another way, I am interested in if and how the images leak the excess they attempt to contain by means of the distillation, and of what that excess consists.

### SIGNIFICANCE

This study contributes to the ongoing exploration of the multiple ways visual and material artifacts perform. The study demonstrates how visual images, an advertisement and a photograph, can be perceived and analyzed as performance events that tell us something about the cultures that produced and transmitted them and also about our current culture and how we perceive events we recall. Further, it shows us how practical performance methods contain conceptual-theoretical discourses that help us discuss how and why people perform. Lastly, the study contributes to scholarship concerned with historiographies, specifically how certain performance perspectives and practices help us explore and express certain “truths” we find in the remnants of the past.

## CHAPTER TWO PERFORMING THE TYPEWRITER

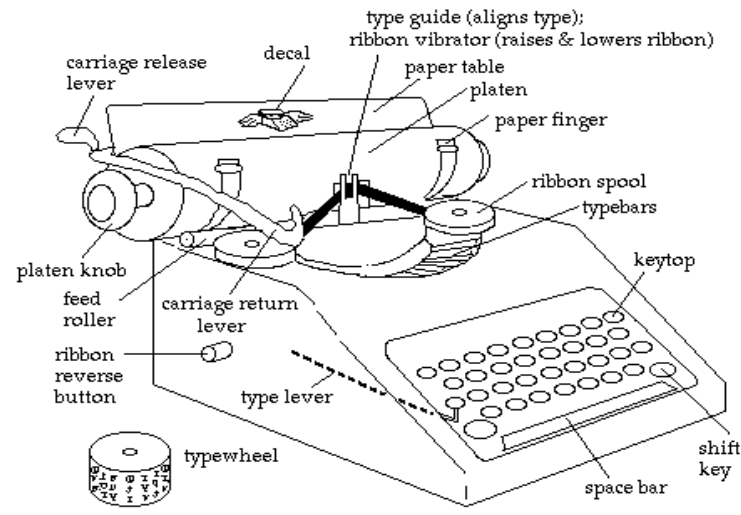


Figure 3. *Twentieth Century Typewriter (Polt)*

I sit down to type a letter to my dear friend in Washington State with no immediate thoughts in my head. At the age of twenty-five I have one person to whom I write letters from time to time. It is for these letters that I often lug out my typewriter and spend hours pecking away random thoughts. In this world of email, instant messaging, and web cam internet calling, I have managed to hang on to one person that prefers the postal service. It is our way of checking in with each other. Letters arrive in my mailbox with new addresses from across the country informing me of his current location. We tell each other of our current thoughts and desires and also the random incidents in our lives. Often the content of the letters deal with nothing in particular and certainly nothing that would be considered important by an outside party. Nonetheless, when I receive a letter from my friend, I understand that he took time out of his day to sit and think and go through the process of typing a letter for me. Knowing the work he put into typing a letter to me is meaningful, and I want to return the gesture. Anticipating an hour's worth of work, I sit down, curl my legs beneath me, and prepare to write; preparing to type/write. I crack my neck, pop my fingers, and draw the typewriter near. I slouch over it and



begin typing. . . It is slow and my fingers are not trained to press this hard. I. (delete). I make more mistakes. Pressing (delete). I go backwards more often than forwards. I (delete) over and over and over again. It is slow. It is slow and painful. I give up and revert to the two finger search and tap technique one uses when no training in typing has occurred.

Deqr(delete). dear(delete). Dear Penfold.

Slumping in my desk chair, I cannot settle in a comfortable position. I reach for the typewriter on the desk in front of me, but am forced to sit up straight, which my body is not used to doing for any length of time. Frustrated, I give up, slump back down and resign myself to the slow and inconsistent tap tap tap of typewriter keys, wondering, “How did anybody have the patience to do this?”

### TYPEWRITER HISTORIES

The race to invent a typing machine so as to replace handwritten documents and make dictation more efficient was inspired by changes in western life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The typewriter is emblematic of the industrialization, urbanization, and mechanization of social life in the U.S. and elsewhere during this period. In Meyerhold’s terms, we might understand the typewriter as a stylized object – the distillation of the period to a style that holds trajectories of excess – that effects a typewriter style of performance. In this chapter, I track the invention and mass production of the typewriter in an historical context, linking it to movements such as urbanization, industrialization, and the mechanization of the corporeal body. In this way, I demonstrate how the typewriter can be understood, in Meyerhold’s terms, as a stylized object.

Typewriter after typewriter after typewriter was invented, assembled by ambitious hands and distributed to eager hands ready to trust a machine to help the work of the human hand. One by one, each typewriter became outdated and was replaced by a new and more efficient model. Although a monumental invention, the time of the typewriter was short lived. By the late twentieth century, the most efficient typewriter was replaced permanently by the word processor. Just as quickly as they were mass-produced, they were discarded. They now live in junk stores, antique shops, attics, and basements, broken, abandoned, and full of stories of the lives of people who sat and spent their days typing on the now seemingly worthless machine. Typewriters might be obsolete in our digitally operated world, but they left an imprint that cannot be erased easily.

In *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting*, Darren Wershler-Henry claims that from the early eighteenth through the late nineteenth centuries, the typewriter was invented at least fifty-two times by as many as 112 inventors. Wershler-Henry tracks the many different reasons for the many different attempts, such as wanting to print with moveable type, creating automata, and producing prosthetic writing devices for the blind and deaf. Further, each invention resulted in different qualities, many of which were applied to the first successfully mass-produced typewriter, the Remington No. 1, invented by Christopher Latham Sholes and Carlos Glidden in 1873.

In 1647, William Petty invented the pantograph, which was an instrument that duplicated a document while it was being written. The pantograph was often used by lawyers, merchants, scholars, and registrars. In 1803, Charles Willson Peale, friend of Thomas Edison, invented the polygraph, which was used to copy words as they were written. In appearance and purpose the machine was similar to today's polygraph machine.

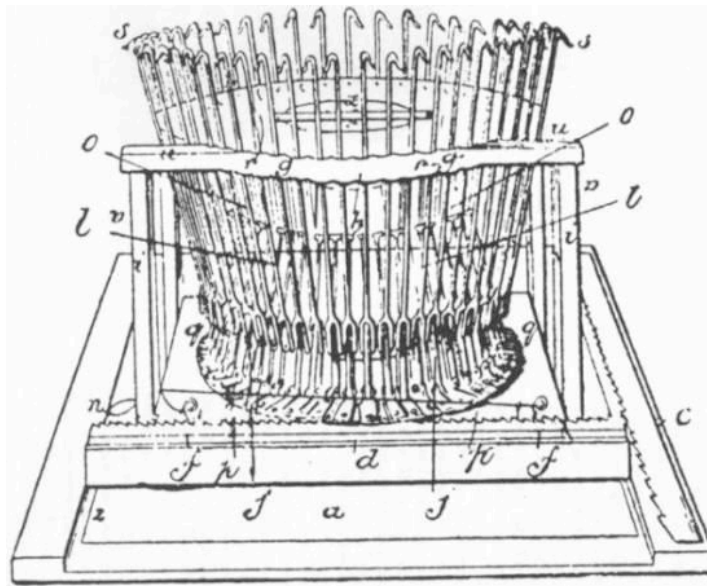


Figure 4. *Plume Ktypographique* (Cartucceria)

In 1833, Xavier Progin developed the *Plume Ktypographique*. The operator worked the keys by pulling on a series of hooks, triggering type bars below them to make an impression on the paper. Charles Thurber of Massachusetts developed the Patent Printer. This machine consisted of forty-five plunger-style keys mounted on a circular frame. The frame would spin, soaking the keys with ink after which the operator would select the desired letter and push it down. In 1852, John Jones of New York created the Mechanical Typographer, which was similar to Thurber's machine, except it only had one key. Both of these machines were made with the intent to help the blind. Jones mass-produced 130 of his model, but his factory burned down, taking all the machines with it. Pellegrina Turri also contributed to the creation of typing machines to help the blind. He built a typing machine as a favor to his patron, the Countess Carolina Fantonio de Fivizzono, who had extremely bad vision. The machine helped the Countess to write clearly and rapidly. The writing ball was perhaps the most popular and efficient typing machine to help serve the blind. Pastor Hans Rasmus Johann Mulling Hansen, head of the royal Danish "Deaf and Dumb" Institute in Copenhagen, created the writing ball.



Figure 5. *Writing Ball* (Eberwein)

The machine consisted of a spherical configuration of keys that were pressed down, imprinting the paper below. The writing ball was also the first typing machine to incorporate the ribbon system, in 1878.

The quest to develop a writing machine also was of interest to inventors intrigued by automata. Wershler-Henry defines automata as a “machine that performs a particular task without any apparent outside control” (52). Automata are usually very expensive windup toys produced for amusement. Owners of automata often toured Europe and North American putting their toys on display for the general public.

Between 1753 and 1760, Friedrich von Knaus, director of the Physical and Mathematical Institute in Vienna, created an eight foot typing automaton. As illustrated in Figure 6, the base appears to be wooden or iron, decorated with a wreath. Perched atop the base are four eagles. Their wings hold up a large model of the solar system. Atop the solar system is a small cherub sitting at an easel, holding a pen. Inside the solar system is the writing mechanism that is attached to the cherub. The mechanism is pre-programmed before the audience arrives. When the audience is present, the cherub carefully writes the pre-programmed words on the easel,

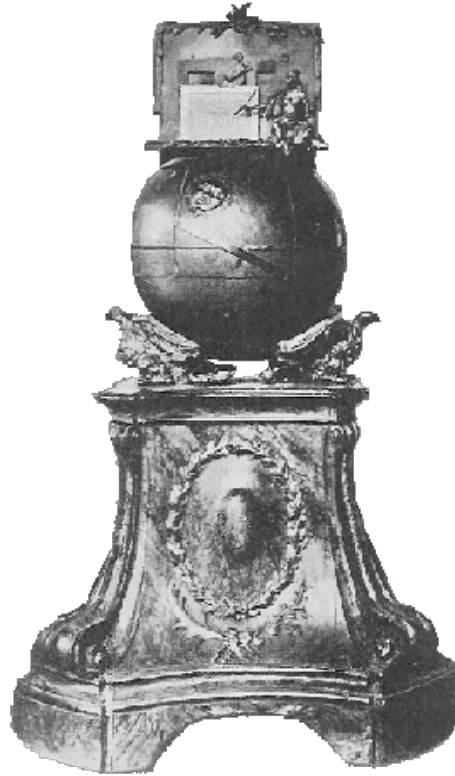


Figure 6. *Automaton atop the Globe* (Wershler-Henry 53)

107 words to be exact. What makes this automaton significant is that rather than God atop and “writing” the fate of the universe below, there is a boy. By means of his writing automaton, von Knaus suggests that the universe is made or at least perfected by enlightened man and his discoveries and inventions. In broader terms, von Knaus echoes the sentiments set forth by the seventeenth century philosopher, mathematician, and scientist René Descartes.

Descartes’ best known principle, “I think, therefore I am,” situates human existence in conscious thought rather than in transcendent fate and faith. The principle also influences Descartes’ view of the human body, which was controlled by (although it could affect) the superior mind. As Descartes argues in *Treatise on Man*, the human body is not unlike that of a beast’s, which is like a machine since it is “made up of matter” and its “faculties” can “be explained by mechanical means” (Wood 7). For Descartes, the one difference between beast-machines is that humans have immaterial minds or souls, which interact with the body at the

pineal gland. As Gaby Wood explains in *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*, Descartes' theory of dualism reflects both his belief in the superiority of the mind over the body, man over beast, and the time period when philosophers and scientists of a materialist-rationalist bent met significant opposition from the more powerful if threatened church.

In the eighteenth century, Julien Offroy de La Mettrie extended Descartes' notions, writing, *L'Homme machine* or *Man a Machine*. In his book, La Mettrie argues that like all animals the human body is a “self-winding machine, a living representation of perpetual motion” that does not require an immaterial mind or soul to animate it (quoted in Wood 13). The “human machine” animates itself “mechanically . . . automatically” like the rest of nature (quoted in Wood 14). To do “away with spirits” in *L'Homme machine*, La Mettrie draws on examples of automata, particularly Jacques de Vaucanson's flute player and digesting duck (Wood 14). In sum, he proposes that while “humans may contain more springs and wheels than animals . . . they do not contain anything other than springs and wheels” (Wood 15). “They are at bottom only animals, perpendicularly crawling machines” (quoted in Wood 15).

The philosophical conundrum regarding the relationship between man and machine received a duplicitous treatment in 1772, when a Swiss watchmaker by the name of Pierre Jaquet-Droz and his son, Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz, created *L'Ecrivain*.



Figure 7. *L'Ecrivain* (Luder)

As shown in Figure 7, the well dressed young man sits at a desk writing. On some occasions, he (or the pre-programmed mechanism within him) writes, “I think, therefore I am,” and on other occasions, “I do not think, therefore I am not.” On the one hand, the automaton suggests that the Jaquet-Droz team agrees with Descartes. Without immaterial thought, there is no existence. On the other hand, the mechanism clearly exists and is able to communicate thoughts like a man. So, what is the difference? Notably, the father and son team were imprisoned for their automata appearing too much like humans.

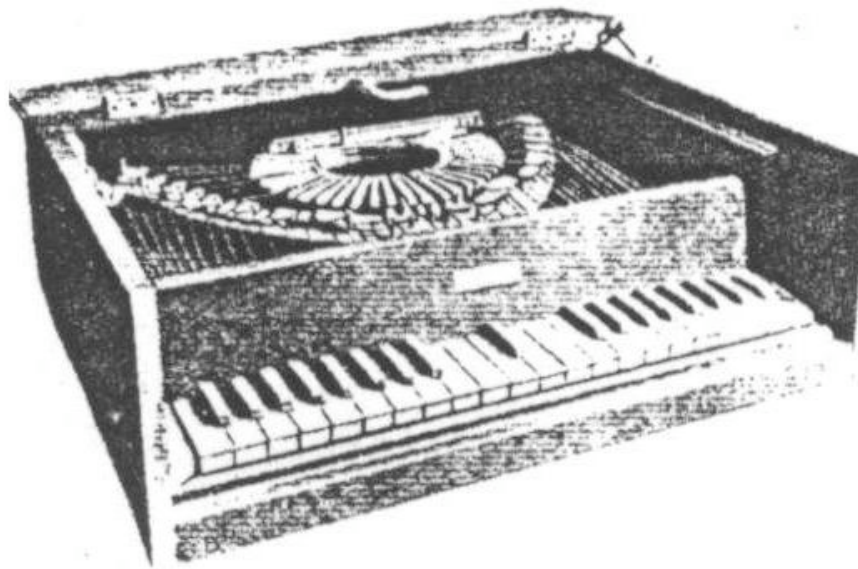


Figure 8. *The Feminized Keyboard (Cartucceria)*

Another area of typewriter development concerned machines that featured keyboards similar to those of pianos or harpsichords. Common in the late nineteenth century, the piano style was used to feminize and domesticate the new, potentially intimidating technology. The targeted consumers were women too, one advertisement running, “The type-writer is especially adapted to feminine fingers. They seem to be made for type-writing. The type-writing involves no hard labor, and no more skill than playing the piano” (Harrison quoted in Wershler-Henry 52). Advertisements that associated the typewriter with women’s work operated both to attract

women to the machine and make the idea of women working (typing) less threatening to men. The strategy feminized, naturalized, and trivialized the typewriter and act of typewriting.

It was not until the 1870s that the first mass-produced typewriter was created by Christopher Latham Sholes. Sholes was a U.S. mechanical engineer who invented the typewriter with partners Samuel Soule and Carlos Glidden. The trio sold the patent to Eliphalet Remington who began to manufacture the product in 1873. The machine was a success in many ways. For one, it enabled the transition from handwritten to typewritten documents, making business and other correspondence more efficient.



Figure 9. *The Remington No. 1* (Life)

Along with the benefits, there were a few drawbacks. The Remington No 1. was heavy, making it difficult to carry and move. The mechanics of the keys and levers were not yet perfected, causing the use of the machine to be somewhat unreliable and frustrating. One of the most significant problems with the Remington No. 1 was the positioning of the keys. To start, they were positioned in alphabetical order, which caused the most used letters to be next each other, which led to the keys jamming. At first, the problem was minor because typists were using the two-finger method. However, when the ten-finger method was established, in 1878, the jamming increased. Sholes re-organized the keys in what came to be called the Qwerty system.



In the Qwerty system, the most frequently used keys are spread across the keyboard. The system derives its name from the letters on the first six keys of the lettered keys on the typewriter.

Many scholars argue that the QWERTY system was arbitrary in large part. Bruce Bliven basis his argument on the fact that, rather than the two hands being used equally, the left hand makes fifty six percent of all keystrokes when typing in English. Further, the little finger of the left hand is overworked since it is responsible for striking the two most difficult keys on a manual typewriter, the shift-lock and the back space keys. Wershler-Henry agrees, but argues that forty-eight percent of all finger motions on the QWERTY keyboard are left handed, whereas an optimal number would be no more than 33 percent (156). In 1896, Sholes tried to implement an alternative layout of the keys, but since so many people had learned the Qwerty system it was deemed counterproductive to alter their arrangement. Whether one types on a typewriter or a computer, the Qwerty system is used to this day.

### INDUSTRIALIZATION, URBANIZATION, AND MECHANIZATION

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the United States was largely an agrarian society. Labor was decentralized in individual homes where products such as textiles and furniture were made by skilled individuals who also farmed, raised livestock, or provided some other service in agriculture. Although labor was divided by gender, women's work was both valued and profitable. As industrialization spread across the U.S. in the 1800s, farm machines eased the number of hands required to farm the land, and many rural folks migrated to urban centers to compete for factory work with newly arrived immigrants. Rather than highly skilled individual producers, once rural and also urban individuals found themselves in assembly lines performing a single unskilled action in a line of individuals performing similar unskilled actions – all estranged from the final product and profit at the end of the line. As Alice Kessler-Harris explains:

Urbanization and expansion of transportation encouraged the development of new systems for distributing goods, centralizing jobs, and providing incentives to efficient production. The new factories accounted for huge productivity increases, allowing employers to lower prices as they reaped larger profits. They thus discouraged home production except at very low wages. (29)

Focusing her study on wage-earning women in the U.S., Kessler-Harris proceeds to observe that the devaluation of domestic products and economies resulted in many women (often single, widowed, or in need of two incomes to support their families) taking to factory work. Her statistics are surprising to those who imagine the nineteenth century as a period when women did not work outside their homes:

In 1840, about half of the total number of workers in manufacturing, including those who worked at home, were female. So were nearly one quarter of those who worked in factories. The totals varied by region. About 65 percent of New England's industrial labor was female. But only 10 percent of southern factory workers were free white women. Some mills depended almost entirely on female workers: 85 to 90 percent of the operatives in New England textile mills were women. Shoe and hat manufacturers, in the process of centralizing their production into factories, drew on women for all the unskilled phases of their operations. (48)

In Chapter Three, I extend my discussion of wage-earning women when I concentrate on the role of the female office worker, particularly typists.

In most cases, blue-collar industry jobs entailed the use of machines so as to increase efficiency and productivity. Since humans used and interacted with the machines, it followed that their bodies needed to be trained so as to increase product efficiency and output too. The disciplining of bodies for these purposes applied to office as well as to factory workers. To

(re)train bodies as and to work with machines, Frank Gilbreth developed what came to be known as motion studies. He observed the working technique of bricklayers, noting the amount of motions involved in laying bricks. Wershler-Henry reports that Gilbreth “decided that adjusting the spatial relationships between the bricklayer’s body and tools would make the task easier to perform and more efficient overall. By doing this he concluded that what once took eighteen movements would only take four and a half” (145). Gilbreth and his wife Lillian Moller published their theories in 1911, in a book titled, *Motion Studies*. This book includes observations of factory workers and ways to economize their movements.

A similar study of the body was undertaken by inventor Frederick Winslow Taylor who directed his efforts toward the scientific management of bodies so as to augment the product output and profit of factory production lines. By means of his studies, Taylor discovered that workers strained their muscles unnecessarily and were awkward, excessive, and inefficient in their movements (Gordon 88). To address the problems, Taylor developed work cycles, which were sequences of movements with pauses that allowed workers to produce the greatest work output with the least amount of strain. Efficiency of movement was realized through the segmentation of motions, their precise repetition, regulated (tri-part) rhythms, and the eradication of excess motion. Followers of Taylor abstracted principles from his studies in order to make his findings more universal. Some of these principles include the use of flowing curved motions, the simultaneous and symmetrical use of arms and hands, and all motions done with the least amount of strain and exertion. In the technique of typewriting, taylorization involved consideration of the distance between the worker and her desk, the position and posture of the body, the height and angle of the chair, and the positioning and movement of the wrists and fingers.

### MECHANIZATION OF HABITS

We tend to forget the training and discipline involved in many of the tasks we perform.

In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton focuses on the task of learning to write. He explains:

Writing is a habitual exercise of intelligence and volition which normally escapes the notice of the person exercising it because of this familiarity with the method of procedure. Everyone who can write proficiently knows how to form each letter so well and knows so well each word they are about to write that they have ceased to be conscious of this knowledge or to notice these particular acts of volition. Each of these acts, none the less, is accompanied by corresponding muscular action. (77)

Connerton calls on Foucault to examine how bodies are disciplined to write, defining disciplinary control as “imposing the best relation between a set of gestures and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed” (77). Foucault cites LaSalle who is a handwriting disciplinarian and describes learning to write as a kind of gymnastics for the muscles. In other words, our bodies do not know writing movements instinctually. It is only through the repetition of a writing pose and actions that we learn them, and they become naturalized. Foucault explains that the impetus to repeat (to learn to write) is compelled by the reward and punishment system of panoptic discipline – i.e., the idea that we act as if we are being scrutinized constantly by an authoritative eye-I who has the power to reward us, in this case for learning how to write correctly. At first the disciplinary apparatus is evident, a parent or teacher surveying, correcting, and praising the young writer for staying on task. Eventually, after intense repetition of the task, the writer internalizes the surveillance, makes it her own or becomes subject to it. As a result, she monitors herself and, as pertinent, others too.

Foucault’s ideas of panoptic discipline and surveillance are at work when typing. The typewriting woman internalizes the disciplinary mechanism, self-surveying her labor in light of the unseen but all seeing punishment and reward system, which is epitomized by the machine she

types on. As she types, the machine records and (before her very eyes) shows her, her every success and failure. In a sense, the machine makes her internalization of surveillance material, visible, binding the writer of type to the machine that types her.

When typewriters were introduced to the public, the action of typing was an unfamiliar skill and people had to be taught how to do it accurately and efficiently. Typewriting books, lessons, and classes were common. In 1925, William F. Book published *Learning to Typewrite*, a popular “how to” that covers the psychological training one needs to undergo to learn to typewrite. Book’s process offers a specific example of Foucault’s theories of disciplining bodies.

The book is divided into three parts. In part one, “The Psychology of Skill and Laws Which Condition its Acquisition in Typewriting,” Book uses seven chapters to detail the psychology of skill and the laws that govern its acquisition across fields of learning. Book addresses the basis for the acquisition of a new skill, the general nature of the learning process, and how to improve, strengthen, and fix habits.

In part two, Book applies the psychological laws to typewriting, providing a detailed analysis of learning to typewrite. As in part one, the idea is to learn and fix certain habits conducive to becoming an expert typist. Apparently, typing is difficult as it takes Book four hundred pages to articulate the psychological more so than physical steps required to typewrite efficiently. A large portion of the book deals with the mechanization of habits achieved through repetition, which also enables accuracy and speed. Involved here is disciplining the body through stimuli and response. Book writes:

Since the acquisition of skill consists of acquiring a new mode of response or one or more series of such responses, the chief problem in any case of learning becomes one of ascertaining how such responses are originated and permanently attached to the

appropriate stimulus. This requires the taking of the four steps described: (1) originating the new response or doing the thing to be learned a first time; (2) selecting this successful response, or attaching it to the appropriate stimulus or desire to make that particular response; (3) improving or perfecting the response; and (4) fixing it by much more practice. (40)

The remainder of part two focuses on increasing speed and the environmental and psychological problems that can arise while learning how to type. Book addresses how teachers can help students overcome problems, such as fatigue, the interruption of irrelevant stimuli, and individual biases toward learning.

In part three, Book focuses on the role of the teacher in learning how to typewrite. He addresses how teachers should provide directed rather than undirected learning, inculcate productive habits, and encourage students to have positive attitudes toward learning and improving their typing skills. Book proceeds to explain the importance of measuring students' improvement and growth and selecting typists for specific vocations based on their abilities and skills.

### TYPEWRITER POSITIONS

While typing, the position of the body was of utmost importance. By positioning the body correctly, both comfort and efficiency were enabled. Inventors, producers, and typewriting teachers put a lot of thought into the height of the typing table and chair and the amount of space between the typist and typewriter. The distance between all of the components (the table, chair, typewriter, and typist) became Taylorized – scientifically configured in order to get the best, most efficient results. In *The Wonderful Writing Machine*, Bruce Bliven describes the ideal arrangement:

[The typist] sits erect in a comfortable position, with her feet flat on the floor and her arms relaxed. Her typewriter table and her chair are of such heights that her arms slope off the keyboard. Her elbows are in, her wrists are rather low; her fingers are curved and close to the “home” keys. She strokes the keys firmly, using finger action entirely. Her arms and wrists are motionless. Her eyes are on the copy. She doesn’t look for line endings; she waits until the ping of the bell tells her the right-hand margin is near. She returns to the next line as soon as possible after the bell has sounded for the next round, and she *throws* the carriage, a hefty sock, holding the fingers of the left hand almost flat and close together, striking the carriage-return lever with the second joint of the index finger. (140; emphasis in original)



Figure 10. *A Young Lady at Work* (Bliven 51)

Bliven’s description helps us see and sense the body disciplined involved in typing. The precise description highlights the scientific management of the body, down to the fingers and their movement. If we look closely enough, we can see Meyerhold’s tri-part rhythm in the typist’s striking of the keys. Otkaz (the pre-gesture or preparation for action) is seen as she positions a given finger above a given key. Posil (the action) as her finger makes contact with the key. And

Tochka (the rest) as her finger rises and pauses after the strike of the key. The tri-part rhythm central to biomechanics is repeated over and over again as the woman types.

Notably, the typist Bliven describes is different from the automatons I described earlier in the chapter. She does not type mindlessly, at best indifferently. Instead, she types as if she were in a boxing match, striking the keys firmly, throwing the carriage “a hefty sock,” and listening for “the ping of the bell” that signals “the next round.” Unlike the automatons subjected totally to their mechanics, she types with agency and risk, as if there is something at stake (e.g., pride, employment, self-advancement, family sustenance, women’s rights) in performing typing well.

On the other hand, the typist’s use of her body – like that of a boxer – indicates a certain class of worker, particularly at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She may perform typing in a white collar office, but her actions and position are blue collar. In “Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920,” Michael Kimmel explains that at the turn of the century class codes were informed by Cartesian dualism, or the understanding that the mind was separate from and superior to the corporeal body, which operated in a biomechanical way – e.g., responding, habitually to the ping of a bell for instance. As a result, blue collar laborers who worked with machines or used their physical bodies like machines (i.e., in repetition) were aligned with the inferior body while white collar laborers were aligned with the superior mind. The rub in the equation, according to Kimmel, was that middle and upper class men suffered a “crises of masculinity” (13) since their physical bodies were less muscular and, so they perceived, less virile than their lower class counterparts. Put another way, the might of the machine threatened their control of it. To redress the crisis, the white collar class underwent health regimes of various kinds, the will of the mind perfecting the contingencies of the body.



One example of their gaining brawn while retaining brain (i.e., class) is found in advertisements for “manly concoctions,” such as breakfast cereals (Kimmel 26). In 1901, C. W. Post developed and promoted Grape Nuts as “brain food for the burgeoning white collar class because ‘brain workers must have different food than day laborers’” (quoted in Kimmel 26). A little different example concerns distinctions made between parlor and patent furniture. In “Nineteenth-Century Patent Seating: Too Comfortable to be Moral,” Jennifer Pynt and Joy Higgs explain that parlor seating was seen to represent middle and upper crust refinement and morality precisely because it was rigid, upright, and immobile in design and structure. An erect posture implied inner strength and sophistication, the mind exerting its superior will over the fallible body (Pynt and Higgs 7). Patent furniture, on the other hand, was associated with the working class. It was designed to help the body perform specialized tasks in an efficient, comfortable, and stress free way – very like Taylor’s scientific management of bodies.

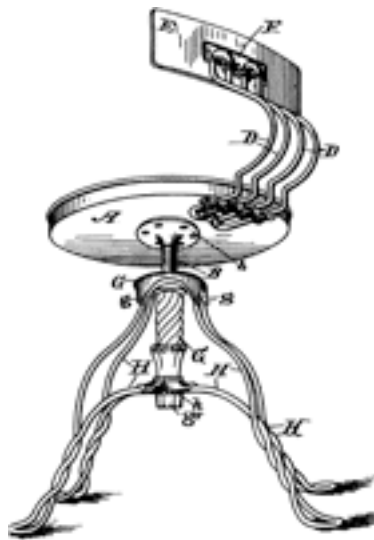


Figure 11. *The Typewriter's Chair* (Pynt and Higgs 2)

Within the category of patent furniture, an interesting distinction arises between chairs made for typing and writing. Based on the scientific study of task requirements, efficiency, and comfort, the Writer's Chair reclines so as to allow contemplation whereas the Typewriter's Chair

does not. As validated by scientific research, the designers found that thought and reflection is not required of typing whereas it is required of writing (Pynt and Higgs 4). Significantly, at the time, writing was associated most with men and occurred in the privacy of their offices or home libraries whereas typing was associated with women and occurred in the public office space. Apparently, it was understood that typists do not need to contemplate word choices, but rather reproduce words already chosen by others who were reclining and thinking elsewhere. In our current age where writing and typing are one for the vast majority, I wonder why we don't have more writing-typing chairs that recline.

In this chapter, I traced a history of typewriters, particularly those that highlighted the quizzical relationship between men and machines and the attempts made to develop a mass-produced machine that was efficient. I placed the typewriter in the context of U.S. industrialization and practices of mechanizing the working body, such as Taylorism and panoptic discipline. I paid particular attention to the taylorization and mechanization of typists as they learn the habits of typewriting. I addressed how Cartesian dualism influenced perceptions of class in white and blue collar workers at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the perceptions resulting in white collar men desiring to perfect their corporeal bodies as they might parts of a machine without becoming mechanized themselves. I associated this discussion with Bliven's description of the female typist as a kind of boxer. While his word choices acknowledge the robust agency of the typist, they also connect her with blue collar labor – which is detrimental only in so far as such labor was aligned with the mindless body, an automaton pre-programmed to respond to the ring of a bell. In Chapter Three, I address female workers directly by discussing a history of women in the workplace and the popular female stereotypes that emerged to support, denigrate, or question that history.

### CHAPTER THREE A HISTORY OF TYPISTS AND FEMALE TYPES

Gertrude O'Connor, a young woman of nineteen, slips into a short, drop-waist, off-white dress. As she zips the seam of the dress, she places her tiny feet into her high heeled Mary Janes. You see, she is in a rush. She grabs her beaded purse, pausing to check for cigarettes, and on her way out the door, she pauses again. Then grins, realizing there is no need to call out to anyone to tell anyone when she will be home. You see, Gertrude lives alone, and she is running late. She locks the door and rushes off into the damp night, her dress quivering to the click of her heels on the brick pavement. She walks past a corner market, a stationary shop, a men's and then women's boutique, the local post office, coffee shops and restaurants, all closed for the evening. She hastens her pace as her destination nears. As she walks down the stairs of the smoke filled jazz club she lights a cigarette and heads toward the bar. Ordering a stiff gin and tonic she shimmies to the music as it washes over her.

Gender roles were changing in the 1920s. Women had gained the vote in 1920 and more diverse job opportunities were available to them, which in turn allowed more women to delay marriage and pursue financial independence on their own. Further, in the wake of World War I, youth especially were challenging Victorian values, resulting in a decade of rebellion and experimentation, sexual and otherwise. The stereotype of the flapper emerged at this time, and while often characterized as an irresponsible party girl, she also carries the code of leaving home as a single gal; of locking her door and rushing off into the damp night to enjoy herself at a jazz club. And to afford such pleasures, it was just as likely that the flapper locked her door and rushed off to work in the morning hours too.

While, in the 1920s, there was a huge influx of women into the public workplace, women have always worked, inside and outside the home. Inside the home, they have received no or low pay for their labor, and it has gone unnoticed for the most part. While outside the home the

story is similar, because the labor site is public and can be publically scrutinized and because it is the traditional site of labor for men, the work done there is more highly valued (and studied) than is domestic labor.

In this chapter, I draw on Alice Kessler-Harris' study, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, to summarize the story of women's labor in the U.S. from the Colonial period through the 1920s. The summary moves toward and focuses on women in the office site serving as secretaries, receptionists, and typists. In this way, I provide a labor context for the two images that concern me. In the second part of the chapter, I turn my attention to stereotypes of women marketed by the mass media during the decades that correspond to those of the two images – i.e., the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1920s. My general aim is to understand and express the many stories that are embedded in the visual signs of the two images, particularly that of the female typist.

### A LABOR HISTORY OF WOMEN

In Colonial North America, it was expected that both men and women work in order to feed their families and build self-sustaining homes. While labor was divided according to gender, the divisions were not as rigid as they were to become in subsequent centuries. Women worked in and around the house preparing food, making clothes, candles and soap, and tending to the farm animals and garden. Men worked in the fields. Nonetheless, it was common for men and women to help each other with their responsibilities, especially when tending to arduous or timely tasks, such as harvest or a spring cleaning.

During the Colonial period, labor divisions were most apparent in regards to slavery, immigration, and the owning of land. While white immigrants became servants and had laws to protect them, African Americans were enslaved without laws to protect them. Male servants made more money than female servants, while female slaves were worth more money than male

slaves because they were able to reproduce – i.e., bear children thereby increasing the “property” of the slave owner. As regards owning land, in some colonies, the death of a (white, landowning) husband enabled his wife to inherit land. Thereby, she gained a degree of independence and political influence. However, as the country grew and stabilized, such laws were altered making it illegal for women to purchase or inherit land. Because of the changing laws, single and widowed women often found themselves in a tight spot, dependent on the charity of others. As the number of female colonists increased (e.g., by the end of the seventeenth century the number had multiplied), the number of women in the noted situation increased too.

In the mid to late eighteenth century, during the decades of the revolution, two events occurred that altered the aforementioned pattern. First, spinning mills opened, and second, the Stamp Act of 1764 was passed. Needful of a lot of cheap labor, the mills hired women, employing not only the poor but also young single women of agricultural backgrounds looking to help their families back home, improve their lot in life, gain a dowry, meet a husband, or have an adventure in a bustling mill town. Given the times, the mill owners’ hiring of women and the women taking the jobs were viewed as “patriotic” since the mills’ success contributed to the economic strength and independence of the burgeoning republic. Further, rather than rely on charity, women of need could provide for themselves, thereby fulfilling their patriotic duty. The Stamp Act was pitched on similar grounds, namely, the purchase (hence production) of domestic products was a patriotic act.

A number of paradoxes arose as a result of women heeding the call of patriotism during the revolutionary period and entering the workplace. Over the course of the nineteenth century, many of the products once produced in the domestic home were replaced by manufactured goods, causing the home to be less self-sufficient than in earlier centuries. While “cheaper” in

time to purchase rather than make fabric, for instance, the purchase required cash, which for some families or single women required that the woman work outside the home. In other words, if you were strapped for cash, you had to find work. According to Kessler-Harris, by 1840, a number of women *were* strapped for cash. At least half of the people who worked in manufacturing were female, the number much higher in the northern industrial states than in the south. In fact, some factories in New England were completely dependent on female labor. While 20% of wage-earning women worked in manufacturing, 70% were domestic servants. The remaining 10% took jobs as teachers, nurses, typesetters, or book binders.

Second, while many women and families became reliant on the woman earning wages, the woman's access to jobs was dependent on fluctuations in the male workforce and often the latter was determined by the nation's involvement in wars. Throughout the history of wage-earning women in the U.S., there is a recurrent pattern of women being encouraged to work prior to and during times of war and "shut out" in the aftermath, when men return from war to reclaim the jobs they left. The paradox is that the men's return does not address single, married, and widowed women who are or have become dependent on earning wages, who *need* to work (much less those who desire to work); it makes their situation worse.

A common strategy to control the number of women in the workplace was (and is) to demean them, for example, by paying them lower wages than their male counterpart, refusing them job security, and denying them growth positions. Another strategy of the nineteenth century especially was to construct the working woman as a degraded, sometimes even scandalous, type. As Kessler-Harris explains, the noted construct was aligned more with married and widowed women than with young single women who, conceivably, could quit their jobs once they married. These views are a part of the broader code of domesticity or the domestic sphere as compared to the public sphere. Kessler Harris explains:

[From the 1830s on] the growth of industry and urbanization had increased the number of men who worked in impersonal factories outside the immediate surroundings of home and community. Simultaneously, the old Puritan ethic which stressed morality, hard work, and the common welfare was supplemented by the ethic of laissez-faire economics, which emphasized individualism, success, and competition. The concurrent redefinition of home and family required more constricted women's roles. Men who worked hard to achieve success in the wider world would need wives who were emotionally supportive and who could manage the household competently. . . . [This] domestic code contributed to stability by encouraging, even coercing, the male head of household to work harder in order to support his family and provide for his wife. For his wife to be earning income meant that the husband had failed. (49, 51)

In a matter of a few decades, then, women who had been encouraged to enter the workplace to enable economic growth were encouraged to stay home so as to enable economic growth – the seeming contradiction countered by the understanding that women now served “as the repository of the higher moral and ethical values lost in the cold business world” (Kessler-Harris 49).

Kessler-Harris continues:

Republican virtue, once vested in the notion that women's economic contribution inside and outside the family would enhance the freedom of the nation, had utterly reversed itself. Women who had been told in 1820 that their economic independence would sustain the family discovered by 1840 that they could sustain the republic only by raising virtuous children. (71)

In addition to expecting men to realize financial success on their own and increasing women's dependency on their husbands, the domestic code contributed to the establishment of rigid class distinctions over the course of the nineteenth century. The upper and middle class

women who could afford to stay home and raise “virtuous children” were thought to enact “higher moral and ethical values” than those of the middle to lower classes who had to work to make ends meet. The latter often included newly arrived immigrants and free African Americans. As a result of the demographics, perceived “neglect” of the family was aligned not only with class and gender but particular ethnicities and races.

According to Kessler-Harris, just prior to the Civil War, “roughly half of all women” had never undertaken wage work. “Of the remaining half, about two-thirds stopped working at marriage and one-third was somehow or other engaged in an endless effort to earn income” (70). Reflecting the labor pattern I mentioned earlier, the Civil War opened up new work opportunities for women, such as clerical positions in business and government, teaching and nursing posts, and additional jobs in factories. Due to the immense number of men killed during the Civil War, the noted opportunities continued in the immediate aftermath much to the chagrin of what we might recognize as the “moral majority” of the period – i.e., those men and women who were financially secure enough and religiously inclined to monitor the morality of others. Kessler-Harris describes this group’s perceptions of the unmarried working woman of this time:

Unmarried women threatened to undermine the family by their personal moral laxity: they might have unchaperoned contacts with men, spend money profligately, dress immodestly, or use profane language, as well as indulge in sexual liaisons. And they contributed to a rising tide available for work. They thus depressed wages for all workers to the lowest possible level, depriving men of sufficient incomes to marry and creating an unending problem. (98)

While adjusted to the changing circumstances of the post war period, the domestic code of the antebellum period remained intact in the minds and hearts of many.



Over the course of the late nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, the U.S. expanded its industrial reach westward, aided by the immense number of inventions and advancements in industry and other fields. During the same period, birth rates dropped significantly, and women, both married and single, entered the workplace in increasing numbers. The lower birth rates meant that women spent less time rearing children, which equated to less time required in the home. The invention of time-saving appliances also reduced labor in the home, although as Kessler-Harris explains the impact was double-edged. The new gadgetry saved time and reduced the need for domestic help while it also placed the work on a single woman, isolating her in the home. Hence, women who could afford to hire help to run the new gadgetry did so, freeing up their time to pursue other activities. From the 1870s on, many women enrolled in the new colleges for women that opened in the latter part of the century. Once they completed their educations, many women proceeded to secure jobs in the workplace as educators, nurses, office and social workers, and to a lesser extent, as doctors, lawyers, and scientists. Women also formed groups advocating equal rights in the workplace, thereby contributing to the ongoing struggle for women's emancipation generally.

Within the ranks of wage-earning women, there was a hierarchy of class, ethnicity, and race. White (typically Anglo) women born in the U.S. of affluent families were able to afford an education and be hired for higher paying "cleaner" jobs, such as those of college professor, lawyer, doctor, dentist, chemist, and office supervisor. Less affluent white women (born in the U.S. or immigrants) who could speak English and afford short training courses often took jobs in offices. Women of color and less affluent women who could not speak English well were employed on the factory line, as waitresses, or as domestic servants. Notably, while assembly line jobs paid better than lower level office positions, women preferred the latter because of the class and race or ethnic status aligned with each. Simply, an office job was a "white collar" job

whereas a factory job was not. The types of jobs also bore different codes of femininity, the domestic code of the mid nineteenth century yet at work. For instance, it was believed that women did not sacrifice their femininity if they trained for and took jobs as teachers or nurses. While jobs as doctors or business managers paid well, they were less compatible with woman's "natural" inclination (and duty) to marry, bear and raise children.

Focusing on office work at the turn of the century, we find that the introduction of the mass-produced typewriter created more opportunities for women in business, placing them in direct competition with men for office jobs. Because typewriting replaced many handwriting tasks in offices; because more woman than men trained as typists; and because women were paid less than men, they posed a very real threat to men entering at the same level. Further, it was understood that "the machine required nimble fingers – presumably an attribute of women," while it also required "no initiative" – another presumed attribute of women (Kessler-Harris 148). As one office manager put it, women were more "temperamentally reconciled" to the simple repetitive task of typewriting than were their "ambitious" male counterparts (quoted in Kessler-Harris 149). In sum, typists were not expected to think but "simply to copy" (Kessler-Harris 148). In addition to her mindless efficiency at the typewriter, female typists also were desirable to employers because they were women, and therefore they "possess[ed] all the sympathetic and nurturing characteristics of a good wife" (Kessler-Harris 149). Of course, while women may have garnered the many entry level jobs more easily than did men, they did not advance to the higher paying, more challenging positions as did men.

By the 1920s, the demands of housework decreased further as wood floors, outside pumps, and coal fires were replaced by linoleum, inside plumbing, and electricity respectively. Birth rates decreased and, in some places, women had the option of birth control. Along with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, these changes

provided women with a newfound sense of freedom and control over their lives, and they continued the process of challenging norms of gender and sexuality they found oppressive.



Figure 12. *The Gibson Girl* (Gibson)

#### STEREOTYPES OF WOMEN

In 1897, the *Ladies' Home Journal* ran a series of six illustrations by Alice Barber Stephens titled, "The American Woman." The six drawings mapped out the literal and figurative terrain open to proper young women at the close of the nineteenth century, depicting proper young women doing diverse activities inside and outside the home. The images helped to "create a series of pictures of the New Woman who held on to old values as she entered the new century" (Kitch 19). There were no men in the pictures, and they showed women at home taking care of children and the elderly, socializing in public, shopping and working in department stores, practicing religion, and training in the female arts of vocal and instrumental music, drawing, painting, literary study, and dance (Kitch 20). The pictures demonstrated that the place of women in U.S. life was changing through a gradual rather than radical process of integrating old and new roles and activities (Kitch 18).

In *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Carolyn Kitch explains that Stephens' illustrations were indicative of a broader

phenomenon regarding the New Woman. Drawing on mass media images circulating at the turn of the century, Kitch describes the New Woman as one of increased independence and diversity. The New Woman may be married or not, or she may be putting off marriage for a time in order to pursue a career. If married, she has a satisfying relationship with her husband, is the model of motherhood, and is successful outside the home in a job or some other vocation. Notably, the image and lifestyle of the New Woman can be obtained by all classes of woman, not just the affluent and well educated, or so the popular press that Kitch surveys implies.

A particular version of the New Woman was the very popular Gibson Girl, who made her debut in *Life* in 1890. Named after her creator, Charles Dana Gibson, the Gibson Girl was an idealized conglomerate of the Anglo-American woman. A vague and therefore adaptable beauty who was both independent, almost haughty at times, and delicate, fragile. By 1900, she was a well recognized stereotype, depicted in head, torso, and full body portraits on “silverware, pillow covers, chairs, tabletops, ashtrays, scarves, and wallpaper, sheet music, and advertisements” (Kitch 41). As with the women in Stephens’ illustrations, the Gibson Girl dressed with a modest elegance, pursued diverse activities, including higher education and marriage, and played diverse roles. She was never depicted as inferior to men; in fact, it often appears she has a good-humored upper hand. The Gibson Girl was promoted and accepted as a positive stereotype for women, a model of democratic refinement for women of all classes, although the main target was the burgeoning middle to upper crust.

While positive images of independent women were produced throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, images of apprehension and skepticism also emerged, many criticizing women’s growing independence as manifested in her “choice” to work outside the home. Such women were accused of being selfish and just a little bit brash – at the extreme,

hussies – for leaving their families and pursuing their own careers. The male editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Edward Bok, represents this stance when he writes:

“It is a very fine line which divides unconventionality in a girl’s deportment from a certain license and freedom of action, which is so fraught with danger – a very, very fine line. And yet on one side of that line lies a girl’s highest possession: her self- respect, and on the other side her loss of it. That line is the fence, and a girl cannot be too careful about removing one stone from it.” (quoted in Kitch 31)

The editor clarifies his point by domesticating the term “independence,” claiming, “the poorest, hardest-working woman in her home is a queen of independence compared to the woman in business” (quoted in Kitch 32). In other words, there are morally sound, responsible women who stay at home and care for their families and morally lax women who are so reliant on men that they venture into the workplace looking for them.

In “Consuming Manhood,” Michael Kimmel sounds a similar note in his study of a “crisis of masculinity” that he claims occurred during this same period (13). One aspect of the crisis was that some felt and argued that U.S. culture was becoming feminized in both the workplace and at home. In so far as the working woman competed with men, she threatened their rightful place and job security. She also threatened the institution of marriage, working side by side with husbands whose wives were at home. Thirdly, the working woman who was married demeaned her husband by implying that he was unable to provide fully for his family. Lastly, and somewhat paradoxically, some feared that male children were being feminized – turned into sissies – by their mothers. Solutions to the crisis included campaigns to persuade women to stay at home and assume more traditional roles of domesticity. The popular press encouraged men by creating images of the ideal man, depicting him as a broad shouldered youth in fashionable (successful) dress or involved in manly activities, such as competitive sports and

rugged camping and hunting trips. Boys were to participate in similar activities, for instance through the Boy Scouts, so as to offset their mother's influence.

Another strategy was the mass media production and transmission of female types that countered the positive images of the New Woman, particularly the attractive Gibson Girl. Stereotypes, such as the party girl, the gold digger, and the vamp were developed to allude to women who ventured too far from home into the public sphere. An image of simultaneous progression and repression, the party girl frequented dance halls where she drank 'til drunk, flirted with men, and danced her scandalous dances. The gold digger was a middle or lower class woman who seduced men for their money, requiring that she enter their social spheres. Calling on Sarafina Bathrick, Kitch's description of the vamp suggests how the type represents all women of the period who chose to leave home:

"The vamp is dark, she is sexual, she is volatile, she is mobile, and above all, she lives alone, outside the sphere of home and family." Bathrick further notes that the character of the vamp as a creature of public space served to preserve (not challenge) the nineteenth century opposition between public and private life and to equate women's appearance in public with their desire to ruin men and the family. In this view, there was only a fine line between a vamp and a prostitute; so too was there only a fine line between prostitutes and all women who left the home, for any reason. (61)

The threat of women gaining independence and conservative fears regarding the same are figured forth in the above illustrations by Coles Phillips that appeared in *Life* magazine. In both images, the female figure is large and claims focus while the male figures are small and barely visible. In *Net Results*, the woman is depicted as an alluring spider, a temptress preparing to devour the men she attracts to and catches in her web. The second illustration shows a woman of the Gibson Girl aesthetic chased by tiny men in suits carrying butterfly nets.



Figure 13. *Net Results* (Kitch 65)



Figure 14. *The Butterfly Chase* (Kitch 68)

Given the visual signs, it would appear the woman is the butterfly the men hope to catch, although given their scale and her indifference their success seems unlikely. In fact, it appears the woman could swat away the poor pests at any moment if she deigned to notice them. Images such as these were common in the early 1900s. While men were portrayed as helpless and insignificant creatures, women were portrayed as heartless seducers and destroyers of men.

While the suffragette movement and the increasing number of women in the workplace suggest reasons for the conservative imagery, such imagery also represented fears and uncertainties regarding modernity – i.e., due to industrialization and urbanization, the departure and break from earlier so-called traditional beliefs and values and how they were expressed.

The Great War of 1914-1918 was a key player in giving rise to questions regarding modernization, particularly the role and impact of industrial technologies. Prior to World War I, many placed their faith in the promise of the industrial machine while others were skeptical, fearing that it would dehumanize and destroy humankind. The skeptics were more accurate than not as World War I proved to be a scene of inhumane acts enabled by “advanced” technologies and resulting in the death of millions of soldiers and civilians. In *The Shock of the*

*New*, Robert Hughes observes, “That joyful sense of the promise of modernity, the optimism born of the machine and of the millennial turning point of a new century, was cut down by other machines” (57). Innocence was lost and chaos prevailed.

The overwhelming feeling of loss and destruction is evident in art works of time. Of the war, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth. Any writer who said otherwise lied” (quoted in Hughes 58).

Hemingway was not alone in his sentiments, the younger generation especially feeling betrayed by those who had perpetrated the war with errant rationale and fueled it with mass-produced war toys. They desired a fresh start and sense of hope or, as Hughes describes it, a condition of “cultural infancy” (60). Avant-garde movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism answered their call, critiquing modernity and embracing experimentation, ambiguity, play, and chance. If machinery was the driving inspiration of Futurism, the play of the child, madman, and naïve was the inspiration of the Dadaists and Surrealists.

The condition of cultural infancy and the play of chance and ambiguity were evident in everyday life trends too. For youth in the U.S., the Roaring Twenties were times of reckless abandon marked by dancing, drinking, smoking, sexual freedom, and jazz. Young people (who could afford it) embraced a lifestyle that was drastically different from their elders and that was epitomized in the female stereotype that emerged from their raucous play: the flapper.

The flapper is a young, whiskey-swilling, cigarette-smoking, bobbed-haired gal dressed in a short, sleeveless shimmy dress that quivers as she dances to the beat of ragtime or jazz. On the one hand, the flapper is a child in character and appearance. Unlike the Gibson Girl’s silhouette of elegant curves, the flapper bears an androgynous shape created by the loose-fitting, drop-waist dress that renders her skinny, flat-chested, and hipless. Often portrayed as silly,



selfish, and immature, her character traits are childlike too. On the other hand, the flapper is an independent woman, unmarried and free to do what she wants, sexually and otherwise.



Figure 15. *Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks* (Kitch 127)

Figure 16. *The Flapper* (Parker 105)

### ***The Flapper by Dorothy Parker***

The Playful flapper here we see  
 The fairest of the fair  
 She's not what Grandma used to be, --  
 You might say, au contraire.  
 Her girlish ways may make a stir,  
 Her manners cause a scene,  
 But there is no more harm in her  
 Than in a submarine.  
 She nightly knocks for many a goal  
 The usual dancing men.  
 Her speed is great,  
 But her control is something else  
 again.  
 All spotlights focus on her pranks.  
 All tongues her prowess herald.  
 For which she well may render thanks  
 To God and Scott Fitzgerald.  
 Her golden rule is plain enough  
 -Just get them young and treat them  
 rough.

While often depicted in the popular press as jobless – just passing through a phase before settling down to marriage – in everyday life there were plenty of flappers who held down jobs. In fact, Kessler-Harris speculates that women gained access to employment by assuming the flapper image. She explains:

Glamorous, economically independent, sexually free, and of course single, the flapper represented what a business community would have liked its young women workers to be. In return for limited economic and sexual freedom, women were encouraged to adopt a flighty, apolitical, and irresponsible stance. The image meant to guarantee only peripheral involvement in the task of earning a living: an extension of women's supportive functions in the male world without the threat of competition. By masking women's real possibilities, the guise of the flapper enabled them to emerge from their homes and into the business world. (226)

In other words, the flapper batted her mascara lashes to land a job and get paid a wage. And, as Dorothy Parker surmises, there is “no more harm” in this performance “than in a submarine” (Parker 105), a notion supported by Kessler-Harris when she claims:

In practice, however, the flapper image contained the seeds of every woman’s freedom. Once having escaped their father’s houses, young women leapt beyond temporary secretarial jobs into graduate and professional schools. Access to the business world legitimized the goal of independence. Once present, it could neither be confined to the unmarried nor removed from those who took husbands. (226)

The flapper type was nourished on the silver screen, Hollywood becoming a lucrative industry in the 1920s and the screen a perfect place for industries, such as fashion, to pitch their products. In *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, Jane Gaines provides a back story to this point. She explains that film producers and directors wanted their actors and sets to appear new, chic, and up-to-date, a desire that fashion designers were only too happy to fulfill. In turn, viewers of the fashions shown in the film learned what products they might purchase to realize the chic imagery for themselves. And, as Gaines explains, such products were available. “If one walked into New York’s largest department stores toward the end of 1929 one could find abundant evidence of the penetration of Hollywood fashions, as well as a virulent form of moviemania” (107). For instance, store clerks would dress in the fashions of the movie stars, thereby providing consumers with the concrete image and product they desired. A quick perusal through *Everyday Fashions of the Twenties As Pictured in Sears and Other Catalogs* demonstrates that the display and consumption of a chic image were not limited to big city stores and consumers. “Smart Flapper Models” (dresses), a “Paris Inspired Stunning Coat,” and “The New Freedom in Corsetry” were available to any mail order customer for a mere \$8.98, \$35.00,

and \$2.95 respectively (Blum 92, 99, 95). In other words, fashion and particularly flapper fashion in this case were affordable to women of diverse economic classes.

While Hollywood depicted plenty of upper crust flappers, the everyday “mail order” type was evident too: young and unmarried, bobbed-haired and short-skirted, smart and sassy, and working as a secretary or typist, the flapper type made working girls fashionable and even glamorous. Propelled by the screen, the office gal became a trend setter. As Bruce Bliven notes, “When [the typist] bought shirtwaists to wear to work, shirtwaists became a big mail-order item for farmer’s daughters who had never typed a letter in their lives” (8). While a hot commodity for fashion, the office worker also “was, in the aggregate, a symbol of all young women with more than average education who had enterprise enough to go out, learn a skill, and make some money” (Bliven 8). As Kessler-Harris anticipated, she held the kernel of every woman’s freedom.

According to Kessler-Harris, women took their opportunities for economic independence seriously, although their attitude did not equate necessarily to others taking them seriously, particularly their male boss or supervisor. It should come as no surprise that within the office setting, men’s work was valued as requiring thought and skill while women’s work was dismissed as mechanical, requiring little intelligence and skill. Anyone can learn to type. In *The Iron Whim*, Wershler-Henry details the predicament:

The once inclusive category of clerk was increasingly subdivided between those tasks which required “decision making” skills and those, like typing, which were “mechanical” in nature. This distinction masked what was in reality a division of labor along gender lines: men, who were felt to possess superior intellectual abilities and greater strength of character, continued to be placed in positions which allowed them to rise in the

administrative ranks, while women were confined to jobs which were in effect occupational dead ends. (92)

The idea that men's work required intellectual ability while women's work was merely mechanical emerged in advertisements as women's bodies were often linked to the machines they operated. In addition to the "It's a Fox" advertisement, I find the following images particularly striking in this



Figure 17. *The Typewriting Girl*  
(Virtual Typewriter Museum)

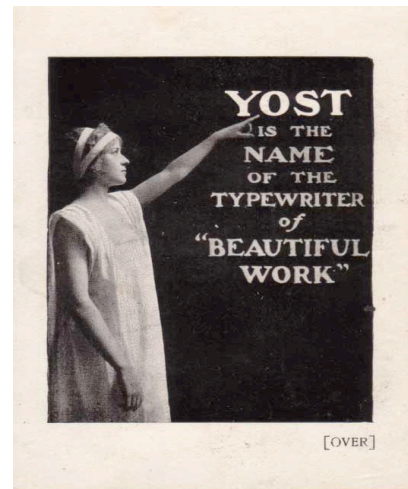


Figure 18. *Yost Advertisement*  
(Virtual Typewriter Museum)

When I look at typewriter advertisements, I can't help but wonder for whom they were made. I suspect advertisements were pitched to the businessmen who purchased the machines as well as to the women who used them. As depicted in Figure 17, a common typewriter ad included a photograph of a little girl playing with a typewriter. In *Sexy Legs and Typewriters*, Paul Robert argues that this tactic was aimed at the female consumer, appealing to her nurturing inclinations and emotions. I wonder. My skepticism of Robert's claim and rationale is answered by Anne Friedberg in her book, *Window Shopping*. Friedberg counters the common view that women exercise consumer authority when she explains:

Leisured women who conspicuously spent their husband's money functioned only as a "chief ornament," whose consuming behaviors were only a further visible sign of a man's social power. . . . She remained a social hieroglyph – an ideogrammatic, almost pictographic character – a triangulated inscription like the commodity itself. (58)

In other words, just as women are interpolated to view a film through the "male gaze" that constructed it (Mulvey 27), so too they view and consume products through male codes of desire – internalized and rationalized as their own of course. As I discuss in Chapter Four, the childlike figure of the flapper picking at the keys of the typewriter while she gazes innocently, coyly, languidly, mindlessly, slyly at the viewer is similar to the child depicted in Figure 17. The child (like) operates to temper the erotic sensuality of the image, allowing it to be marketed to both men and women simultaneously.

As shown in Figure 18, another advertising strategy took the typewriter completely out of the ad and replaced it with the figure of a beautiful woman. In this case, the caption reads, "Yost is the name of the typewriter of beautiful work." The lack of the typewriter and the presence of the woman pointing to the brand name plays on the interchangeability of the woman and the typewriter.

In many advertisements, word play proved significant to the rhetoric, often accomplished by using "typewriter" to refer to both the woman and the machine. One ad for a Royal typewriter is extremely telling in these terms. It includes a photo taken in the early 1920s, the date deduced from the type of typewriter and the woman's dress style and hairdo. The woman sits at an office desk holding a pencil and taking what appears to be dictation. A large black Royal typewriter is directly in front of her. She is working diligently with a serious expression on her face. The caption reads, "The Private Secretary who uses an Easy Writing Royal Typewriter increases at once her efficiency and her value" (Robert 27). The ad clearly appeals to

the employer, likely a man. By purchasing a Royal typewriter for his secretary, he is helping himself by increasing the quality of work and decreasing the amount of time it takes to complete the work. Because of the increase of quality and efficiency of work, the secretary becomes more valuable to her boss. The object and woman are conflated here, both objectified as products one can consume and, so it appears, in the privacy of one's own office or mind.

In this chapter, I tracked a history of women's work from Colonial times through the 1920s in an attempt to context women's work outside the home, particularly that of the female office worker and typist. I also aimed to illustrate how tensions regarding working women emerged in the mass media. As more women entered the workforce, thereby gaining economic independence and destabilizing gender roles, mass media illustrations and ads remarked on the noted changes through the development of female stereotypes. Of particular interest to my study are the stereotypes of the Gibson Girl and Flapper. To conclude the chapter, I took a look at how typewriter advertisements conflate the typist and the machine she operates, the merger objectifying the typist as an efficient machine and her work as mindless or childish.

## CHAPTER FOUR PERFORMING COMPLEX POSITIONS

She is stuck. She is stuck in mid movement. She is stuck in mid thought. She is stuck so close to punching the last key and pulling the paper from the machine. Completed. But before she can press the last key, she gets stuck. Hands. Feet. Legs. Back. All stuck at calculated distances from the large machine in front of her. Her dress freezes at the onset of a swish to and fro. Her hair is molded neatly to her head as fly-away pieces of solitary strands become fixed in mid flight. I see her face in profile, her eyes staring intently at the task she will not complete. I wonder what she is thinking as her photograph is taken, and she is captured in this position? The photograph encapsulates her. It traps her.

Upon closer scrutiny however I can see (trapped in the snap) the faintest of smiles, planned or unconscious, I cannot tell. Whatever the case, it draws me in, and her glazed stare, flawless hair, and fixed position become something more. It is as if her smile gives her life beyond the image. It disturbs and punctuates the other elements, giving rise to that “blind field” Roland Barthes attributes to the *punctum* where subjects emerge from the frame to continue living beyond the field of vision (*Camera Lucida* 57, 59).

Her freeze breaks. She presses the last key – a period – pulls the paper from the carriage, walks to her boss’s office to drop off the document, returns to her desk, grabs her coat, puts it on, and leaves work for the day. Un/stuck, her position is complex.

While initially I read the two images that concern me as visual artifacts that perpetuate negative stereotypes of women in the workplace, upon study and reflection, I find the women in the images to be clever, playful, and powerful as well. They claim a subversive agency, questioning and critiquing the roles they are asked to perform in their respective images.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the invention of the typewriter alongside other technological advancements and bodily practices involved in operating new technology in the U.S. In Chapter

Three, I discussed a history of female wage labor in the U.S. and stereotypes of women that emerged in the mass media at the turn of the century through the 1920s. In this chapter, I call on Meyerhold's laws of theatricality to investigate how the two images perform in light of the histories I have collected. Just as Meyerhold used stylization to distill material to an essence and then exaggerate or extend it so as to express complex meanings, so too the images that concern me have been stylized. The back stories of each component in the image have been distilled to an essence that economizes expression. However, in the juxtaposition of the components – female figure, her costume, hairstyle, and pose, in relation to the typewriter, furniture, and space – the economy of expression is countered by the excess that it holds. That which has been distilled leaks out. In this way, the visual signs become double- or multiple-voiced, and the trickster tactics of mask and the grotesque emerge to expose the double-life of the image.

Below I divide my discussion of how the images perform into two sections. First, I address what I call the front stage mask, namely, the distilled essences that appear to be up front and evident. Then, I address what I call the back stage mask or those meanings that exceed the distillation due to the juxtaposition of the components and their embedded stories.

### FRONT STAGE MASK OF STYLIZATION

The female figure rendered in each image is a female stereotype – a distillation of womanhood to a material, corporeal form popular to her time. The woman in the Fox advertisement bears visual signs of the ideal young woman of the Victorian period, “Mr. Gibson's American Girl,” while the woman in the photograph is typed as a flapper. To review, the Gibson Girl is:

A tall, radiant being, her gaze clear, fearless, and direct, her nose slightly and piquantly uptilted. Her lips fine-modeled and alluring. Her soft hair crowning a serene brow and caught up into a dainty *chignon*. The graceful column of her neck raising the décolletage



that barely concealed her delicately- rounded bosom. Her slim waist emphasized by the bodice cut of her gowns, gowns still with the vestige of a bustle and with full, smoothly-fluent skirts. (Kitch 39)

Additional characteristics of the Gibson Girl include corseted waists and an aloof yet confident demeanor. Our subject looks similar. Her hair is the same style of the Gibson Girl, piled and loosely gathered atop her head. Her clothing, very much in line with Victorian fashion with its long skirts that tighten around the waist, is modest yet flattering to her hourglass figure.

However, as I look at the advertisement, I see something different about this Gibson Girl.

Instead of the aloof or serious expression of most portrayals of the Gibson Girl, this woman is openly smiling. Her body is not in an elegant position. Instead she is contorted. Her torso faces the viewer while her lower half faces the typewriter.

The woman in the 1920s photograph is rendered as a flapper with her short dress, stockings, and bobbed hair. As Kitch describes, “her shape, defined by height and almost no width, was a stark contrast to the Gibson’s American Girl’s upright hourglass figure or sexy curves. She was flat-chested and skinny, made up mainly of arms and legs. She wore a sleeveless, short dress and roll-top stockings that were often falling down” (122). The woman in the photograph shares these qualities. Her loose fitting dress, her stockings, and Mary Jane shoes are the same style of attire as worn by the stereotypical flapper. Her playful and child-like demeanor also is characteristic of a flapper. However, this woman appears to be doing something a little different. Although flappers were often described as androgynous and child-like, this subject also is sexual and powerful as she straddles the typewriter bench, holding the typewriter between her knees.

The typewriter also is a distilled item in each image. Recalling Chapter Two, it distills modernity to industrialization, the machine, and the mechanization of the body through training

processes such as Taylorism and Reflexology. It also reminds us of the ongoing belief at the time in the Cartesian split between the superior mind and the inferior body, resulting in the categorization of jobs in terms of mental or physical prowess. Since it was believed that typewriting required “no initiative” (i.e., thought) save “simply to copy,” it was considered an inferior job suited to women because of their temperament and “nimble fingers” (Kessler-Harris 148). There is good reason then or at least an intriguing story for why a woman rather than a man is shown with a typewriter in each image.

In broader terms, this same imagery is embedded with the long and complex history of women working inside and outside the home. In other words, the two female typists are dependent on and contribute to the history of women entering the workplace (as typists in this case) in pursuit of financial gain and independence. While I would argue this labor history is unavoidable in the very placement of a woman and her machine in the same image, it is not the featured story. Rather, the distillation of the labor history serves stories of domestication and eroticism or sex work.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the increasing number of women who were entering the workplace threatened conservative gender roles, which contributed to a crisis of masculinity and the development of negative stereotypes of working women. As Kessler-Harris summarizes:

Women who left the home to peruse economic independence threatened the domestic code and, threatened to undermine the family by their personal moral laxity: they might have unchaperoned contacts with men, spend money profligately, dress immodestly, or use profane language, as well as indulge in sexual liaisons. And they contributed to a rising tide available for work. They thus depressed wages for all workers to the lowest

possible level, depriving men of sufficient incomes to marry and creating an unending problem. (98)

In light of the negative views of working women, the use of the Gibson Girl type in the Fox advertisement is strategic since the type carries codes of both the domestic and commercial spheres. As a New Woman, the Gibson Girl is as successful at home as she is at school or in business, thereby tempering the negative views one might hold towards her. Further, given the ill-defined setting in the ad, this particular Gibson Girl could as well be at home (typing a letter to “My Dear” friends about the merits of a typewriter) as in an office (copying dictation from her boss to an undisclosed “Dear” – perhaps herself – regarding the merits of a Fox). It’s not clear, and I suspect the ambiguity was deliberate on the part of the admen so as to quell fears arising from the display of the typewriter and its typical operator, a woman. The ambiguity also allows the product to be marketed to a broad consumer base: bosses or supply purchasers in offices and the New Woman at home or in an office setting.

In other words, the distillation of (white collar) working women to a Gibson Girl type helps to domesticate the perceived threat working women posed to men in the workplace. The domestication is enhanced by the action and pose of the woman. She is not depicted in the midst of the typing, rendered as a highly disciplined and efficient laborer within commerce and industry. Her labor is concealed in favor of showing the completed results: a short letter pulled from the carriage in response to which the woman smiles broadly. The results suggest typing (on a Fox) is easy, no sweat, and the woman is proud of her accomplishments. However, unlike the Gibson Girl type who is supremely self-confident, the woman’s explicit “showing off” of her accomplishment implies a desire for praise.

The woman’s pose suggests from whom she desires praise. As compared to the recommended position for typing shown in Figure 10, the woman’s pose appears uncomfortable

and inefficient. It also is sexualized. In other words, the woman and her machine are ciphered through the male gaze. The viewer sees “the fox” through (heterosexual) male desire. Rather than sitting in a taylorized typing chair, the woman sits on a stool that is too high in relation to the desk and typewriter. The height causes her to hunch to reach the typewriter, which then shoves her bust forward and her derriere backwards. The focus on the bust and the behind is accentuated by the tensive twist of her torso, which allows her to be rendered both facing the typewriter (sitting on the desk) and displaying her torso to the viewer. The emphasis also is realized by the ruffles that decorate her derriere and the awkward lift of her right arm that further exposes her chest. By virtue of the design of the ad, the typewriting machine is sexualized too as the woman’s bust and thighs frame and envelop it. Further, the smooth round edges of the typewriter resemble the smooth round edges of the woman. In these ways, the woman and machine are distilled to a sexualized object, a woman-machine that is like a fox. Or, rather, “it *is* a fox,” no question about it. However, due to the double codes of the Gibson Girl type and the ambiguous setting, this fox does not threaten gender norms as much as combine “the good of the old” (domestic sphere) with “the best of the new” (commercial sphere).

The 1920s photograph performs a similar if more extreme story. Like the Gibson Girl in the Fox ad, the flapper in the photograph is not depicted typing. In fact, there is no paper to be seen anywhere, in or out of the typewriter. Rather, the woman fiddles with the keys of the typewriter, which is positioned between her legs on a bench that she straddles. Her skirt is raised exposing her stocking covered legs and Mary Jane heels. The woman looks directly at the camera and smiles coyly at the viewer. She seems happy and to be enjoying herself. Work (as in typing) appears to be the furthest thing from her mind. As in the Fox ad, the setting is ambiguous. In the background, elaborate curtains drape to the floor covering in part an intricate

window, behind which there appears to be another room. It would seem the woman is either in an elaborate over-decorated office or in a home setting, such as a boudoir.

Like the Fox ad, the photograph dismisses the disciplined training and skill involved in typing and thereby dismisses female labor generally and in office settings in particular. The history of female wage earners is distilled to the fiddling of fingers on keys; in other words, it is sexualized and in more explicit ways than in the Fox ad. Calling on Kessler-Harris, the image represents “what a business community would have liked its young women workers to be. . . . flighty, apolitical, and irresponsible” and thereby supportive of “the male world without the threat of competition” (226). While this flapper may have emerged from her home into the business world, her economic independence is questionable or, more to the point, we have the sneaking suspicion that she might be employed in that oldest of professions.



Figure 19. *A Typist and her Boss* (Virtual Typewriter Museum)

As Robert Paul explains, the photograph falls in the category of typewriter erotica, the main subjects often being “secretaries.” Above is another example. With bare legs propped up and exposed, the secretary touches her boss’s jacket lightly while holding a pencil (a phallus)

between her fingers. Excited, the man looks down as she presses a typewriter key with a finger of her other hand. Once again, there is the festoon of curtains in the background accompanied in this case by an intricate dressing screen such as we might find in a bedroom.

In typewriter erotica, the intersection of titillating subject matter, typewriters, and photography is intriguing in light of Lawrence Levine's account of the emergence of highbrow and lowbrow cultural categories in the U.S. in the late nineteenth through twentieth centuries. Informing the cultural hierarchy was the Cartesian perspective, implemented by those with the power and inclination to police culture by distinguishing between the superior mind and its highbrow expressions and the inferior body and its lowbrow products. In addition to cultural practices that highlighted the corporeal body, such as burlesque, erotica, and wrestling, lowbrow culture included the reproductive machines of industry and commerce, such as typewriters and cameras, and those bodies that used or ran them. In other words, photography was not considered an art because like typing it copied rather than created art and anyone could do it with relatively little training – or so that was the perception. Put in counter culture terms, photography democratized art. "It was the perfect instrument for a society with a burgeoning middle class, which could now satisfy itself with processes and images that had previously been confined to elite circles" (Levine 161). We might recall that the lowbrow flapper functioned similarly. According to Kessler-Harris, "the flapper image contained the seeds of every woman's freedom. Once having escaped their father's houses, young women leapt beyond temporary secretarial jobs into graduate and professional schools. Access to the business world legitimized the goal of independence" (226).

On the one hand, then, the erotic photograph distills the many stories embedded in its components to a sexualized image of a working girl, a prostitute in short. On the other hand, the conglomerate of lowbrow aspects suggests there might be a powerful counter force at work in

the image – a class based counter that does not elide the objectification of the working woman as much as reveal other facets therein.

### BACK STAGE MASK OF STYLIZATION

In this section, I concentrate on the second stage of stylization. Having discussed how the images distill their many stories to essences that economize expression on the front side or front stage of the mask, I am interested in how the essence is countered by its own excess. I am interested in exploring that which is concealed back stage, or on backside of the mask. In other words, back stories have been distilled to an essence that economizes expression in each image. However, the economy of stylization is countered by the excess it holds. So, that which has been distilled leaks out and can be seen, for example, by a juxtaposition of elements. The double- or multiple-voiced tactics of mask, the grotesque, and tricksters enable my investigation revealing the theatrical double-life of the images. Like Meyerhold's theatre, the idea is "not to smooth out problems or to resolve paradoxes but to let them resonate within the minds of . . . [the] audiences" or viewers (Pitches 1-2). The resulting performances are complex, revealing the possibilities as well as the limitations in playing for and tricking the audience simultaneously.

As I argued in the first section of the chapter, the images distill the complex history of working women in the U.S. to a Gibson Girl and a flapper type. By means of domestication and sexualization, the types temper the threat of female labor in the male dominated work place – the Gibson Girl inclining more toward domestication and the flapper more toward sexualization or eroticism. In doing so, the physical and psychological discipline and training required of typing is concealed. While the typewriter machine implies labor (i.e., imagine the images *without* the machine), the labor is quickly upstaged by the figure of the woman whose pose operates to mask the labor. The pose subjects the typewriter to itself, while both are subjected to the male gaze and desire. Put another way, the woman's pose contains the quintessential hooked cane of the

theatre that yanks the disliked performer, “Labor” in this case, back stage and tells her to be quiet. Remaining on stage are the well liked performers of “Domesticity,” “Erotica,” and “Leisure,” quite happy it seems to conceal the threat women and their labor pose to men and “their” world.

However, on a broader level, by concealing labor the images hazard discipline. They hazard the show of disciplined bodies contributing to the economic system with efficiency. In other words, they hazard the show of that which discipline tries to control, namely, bodies of excess and unpredictability: grotesque bodies.

As you will recall, for Meyerhold, the grotesque is “a humorous work” that borrows from diverse sources, mixes opposites and celebrates incongruities so as to express its “*mocking attitude to life*” (Meyerhold 137; italics in original). Mikhail Bakhtin elaborates on the grotesque, claiming it as one of two fundamental principles of carnival, the other being laughter. Based on the understanding that societies divide the collective and individual body into high and low domains, the grotesque body highlights and celebrates the public enactment of low domain imagery and actions, such as defecation and copulation, eating and drinking to excess, the show of genital organs and sexually encoded body parts such as butts and breasts and orifices generally, and human-animal analogies, such as pigs, dogs, and bitches. “It’s a fox.” The grotesque body is a body that exceeds itself so as to intermingle with the world, and thereby it is always a “double body” (Bakhtin, “The Grotesque Image of the Body” 93). For Bakhtin, carnival laughter is “the laughter of all the people. . . . [I]t is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants. . . . It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 12). For Bakhtin, then, there is no transcendent victim or hero in carnival. Together, the two principles aim to invert (temporarily or permanently) social norms so as to *level* social hierarchies. As Bakhtin writes, the principle function of carnival is “degradation, that is, the



lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract . . . to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body" (*Rabelais* 19-20). Notably, carnival degradation is not only destructive but potentially gives rise to alternative bodies, identities, relationships, and meanings, and for this reason it can pose a very real threat to social order and control. Hence, carnivalesque-grotesque bodies and activities are often contained within institutions by discourses and bodily practices that discipline or regiment them, turn them into consumer commodities, or exterminate them.

The 1920s erotic photograph inclines toward the grotesque due to the explicit sexuality of the female figure and in relation to the typewriter. In Meyerhold's terms, the photograph is humorous because of the incongruous relationship between the woman as posed and the machine, between animate corporeality and inanimate machinery or, in classic gender terms, between female and male, boudoir and office, leisure and labor. Further, in Bakhtin's terms, neither the woman nor the machine is advanced as superior to the other; both are demeaned equally we might say – the woman due to her "eye candy" pose and the typewriter due to the flapper's coy (or is it indifferent) fiddling with it. Lastly, neither the woman nor the machine appears concerned with meeting economic expectations of labor efficiency, product output, and progress. It is a moment of leisure, carnival "blow off," carefully hemmed in by the private setting of the fictive world and by the photo as commodity in the theatrical, commercial world of the viewer. Of course, the very need to context the carnival as private (which on the meta-level of production is public) implies its threat to social norms.

Looking at the photograph, we see that there are multiple carnival threats to social norms at work. First, the woman's body is grotesque by accentuating the low domain through sexualization. Next, as I suggested earlier, the image of the flapper in the work place represents blue collar workers in white collar spheres. This connection is made elsewhere through Bliven's allusion of typing as boxing. We recall that Bliven's allusion to typist as boxer locates typists in

a particular class. Although she is working in a white collar office, her actions, which echo those of a boxer, mark her as blue collar. Thus marking her work as blue collar, mechanical, and mindless. The typewriter is linked to low culture due to the fact that was believed that intellectual thought was not required for its use. And finally, the image is represented in the form of a photograph. Photography in itself was considered lowbrow art. Due to its mechanical nature, it was thought to lack “true” artistic merit and therefore deemed the art of the masses. As all of these signifiers collide, we realize that the scene occurring in the photograph as well as the photograph itself represents a conglomerate of carnival elements. So, we have a middle-class woman displaying her sexuality, working outside of the home, with a machine, being portrayed through a mechanical reproduction. She represents the threat of lowbrow, low domain, and low class. She could be read as a child, working girl, or as a lazy person. The flapper becomes a threat that could counter norms of domesticity, labor efficiency, and Art. The photograph displays the threat of carnival degradation and the rise of alternative bodies and classes.

As I look at the photograph, it seems to me the flapper is aware of the threat she poses. First, due to the odd office- boudoir setting and the mocking made of typing, the photograph acknowledges its artifice. It is not a real performance of typing- sex, and as a result, it establishes a double-life that the female figure substantiates and takes advantage of. The flapper’s smile and return gaze at the camera implies she is aware of the blatant sexualization of her body and the typewriter. As Kessler-Harris offers, “By masking women’s real possibilities, the guise of the flapper enabled [women] to emerge from their homes and into the business world” (226). She plays the role of the playful and sexual flapper so as not to be perceived as a threat. However, she also straddles the typewriter, appearing to desire and poke fun at it, tease it, simultaneously. Whether the typewriter is understood as man, machine, or even modernity, she controls it. At the extreme, we might say she figuratively, “screws” it. The effect is that she and

her fiddling are trivialized so as not to appear threatening while simultaneously countering social norms. She sends a tricky, double coded message for different audiences.

While I wouldn't say that the rhetorical aim and effect of the Fox advertisement is carnival degradation, I do think that the Gibson Girl as performed in the ad introduces low or lower domain codes than those commonly associated with the Gibson Girl. The depicted figure is not "a tall, radiant being" with a "delicately-rounded bosom," "fine-modeled" lips and a "serene brow." Neither is she haughty with a "piquantly uptilted" nose (Kitch 39). Rather, the woman is round almost plump with an ample bosom and behind, an enthusiastic demeanor, and an open-mouth smile. Her corporeality exceeds that of the ideal Gibson Girl, and in this way she is a double (voiced) body. She refers to but re-functions the ideal – lowers it to the material level – so as to articulate the working class women who actually used typewriters in office settings. In this way, the ad communicates with office managers looking to purchase many "Foxes" while it also tempers the threat of many "Foxes" by means of the domestic signs I discussed earlier. Put another way, the labor mass is acknowledged so as to encourage mass consumption while it also is controlled via the domestic signs of individuation and separation.

Another tricky aspect of the Fox ad concerns its sentimental signs. In *Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women: The Female Trickster in American Culture*, Lori Landry explains that the domestic sphere was influenced by sentimentalism, which stressed sincerity, modesty, Christian morality, and refined manners. To express their "discontent" with the domestic sphere (Landry 35), female tricksters of the nineteenth century performed the sentimental role. That is, by donning the conventions of sentiment in the novels, poetry, advice manuals, newspaper columns, etchings and illustrations they composed, and in their own comportment, women were able to move between the private and public spheres more easily than if they rebelled against the expected role. By speaking and acting through sentiment, they could proffer opinions and take

action on social issues of the day, such as slavery, prostitution, living conditions of the poor, and unfair labor practices, as well as focus on matters pertinent to marriage, raising a family, and keeping a home. Performing sentimental allowed women to not only challenge restrictive domestic codes but perform domesticity in public and thereby make it a social (rather than a private, individuated) concern. Often coupled with humor, the sentimental pose allowed women to address incongruities in the lives of women at home and in public and thereby challenge restrictive patriarchal ideologies.

The stereotype of the Gibson Girl is sentimental due to her moral sensibilities domestic virtuosity. Although she moves in and out of the domestic sphere her sentimentality tempers her threat. So, while middle-class women left the home to work in offices to perform the role of secretary and typist they were expected to uphold their virtuosity as a wife and mother. An employer observed in the *Ladies' Home Journal*,

I expect from my stenographer the same service I get from the sun, with this exception: the sun often goes on a strike and it is necessary for me to use artificial light, but I pay my stenographer to work six days out of every seven and I expect her all the while to radiate my office with sunshine and sympathetic interest in the things I am trying to do. (quoted in Kitch 149)

Women were expected to possess nurturing and sympathetic characteristics while she performed routine tasks.

Our Gibson Girl looks the part and is even playing or pretending to play the part. She puts on the mask of sentimental by taking on the style of the Gibson Girl and plays sentimental in order to survive in the male dominated work place.

The contortion of her body to reveal her exaggerated bust and behind indicate to me that she is aware of her objectification and sexualization. However, what is most telling to me is her

smile. What is she smiling about anyway? Is she enthusiastic about the paper she has typed or is she mocking it? At first glance the smile seems enthusiastic, but upon closer scrutiny, it does not seem like a smile at all. Her face seems to be forced into the shape of a smile, but displaying something other than happiness. Instead of a smile could it be a grimace or scowl directed towards the viewer and/ or producer of the image? Her questionably enthusiastic and sincere smile about the work she has just completed (although the paper appears to be blank) pokes fun at the incongruity, and uses it to her benefit. She understands the stereotype of the Gibson Girl and the limitations as well as the possibilities attached to it. The woman in the Fox ad is aware that by putting on the mask of the Gibson Girl and performing the sentimental or domesticity in the workplace (ie displaying her nurturing and sympathetic qualities associated with being a good wife and mother) while performing a task that is thought to require “no initiative” allows her transgress gender and economic boundaries and not to be perceived as a threat by men.

As I think of how the smiles operate in the two images, I am reminded of a live performance that was based on Meyerhold’s practices. In a performance methods course I took at Louisiana State University, I focused my attention on biomechanics. Understanding Meyerhold’s constant interest in and activation of the double-sidedness of life, I wondered whether biomechanics was a practice that supported, criticized, or queried the mechanization of the body. To explore my question, I wrote a performance assignment that a classmate, Brianne Waychoff, had to develop and perform. Specifically, I asked that she perform one of Meyerhold’s etudes for fifteen minutes to see how the body deals with mechanized activity or labor. Although Brianne had the option to show the body tiring and “malfunctioning” in light of its “limits” as a machine, she performed a body determined not to break down: a merit to the principles and goals of taylorized discipline and labor. However, there was a moment during the performance when a smile broke briefly across Brianne’s face. I am not sure whether the smile

was deliberate or not, but whatever the case at that moment something leaked out, and it can be read in a number of ways that draw on the principles of the double-life.

First, the smile can be read as an interruption to discipline, a moment when the unpredictable excesses of the body escape control and leak out. In this way, the smile is an acknowledgement and mocks the efficiency of mechanization and can be understood as grotesque. An alternative reading is that her smile supports and substantiates taylorized discipline and labor. In this case, mechanization is a good thing, resulting in happy laborers who are fulfilled as producers of the cultural products they make. In other words, the smile is ambiguous. Viewers can understand it in diverse ways and as such, it does not answer any questions; instead it poses contradictions. As we know for Meyerhold, the idea is, “not to smooth out problems or to resolve paradoxes but to let them resonate within the minds of. . . [the] audiences” or viewers (Pitches 1-2). The smile is tricky, double-voiced, and reveals what the mask of discipline attempts to conceal. In both Brianne’s performance and my subject’s performances, the smile functions to clue us in that there is a double-life in the image-performance.

I would like to conclude this chapter by addressing two photographs I found close to the end of my study. The photographs portray a reversal of roles of the male boss and female typist. When I first read through Robert’s *Sexy Legs and Typewriters*, I missed these photographs. I found them during my second read. They were located in the humorous section of the book. Apparently the idea of reversing boss and typist roles is so far fetched that it is assumed audiences will find it funny. Indeed, as I read about the images, I found that women posing as bosses and men posing in “inferior” positions such as a typist was a popular form of humor. The first photograph appears to have been taken in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. It shows a man in a suit sitting at a typewriter with a woman standing in back of him. Their

location is ambiguous as there is no backdrop indicating to the viewer that it is set in an office. Instead, it could be anywhere.



Figure 20. *An Up-to-Date Typewriter* (Robert 38) Figure 21. *Dictation* (Robert 35)

The woman leans over to kiss him, and the man turns to receive the kiss. However, just before making contact, the woman stops, smirks, and returns the gaze of the camera. The caption below the photograph reads, “An up-to-date typewriter.” As I view the image, it does strike me as funny, and it leaves me a little perplexed. I do not read the woman’s smile in the same way as I read my subjects smile. I cannot decide if the photograph is subversive in the way I find my subjects to be or if it mocks the labor of the typist in a humorous manner.

The second photograph titled, “Dictation,” also is not dated, but based on attire it appears to have been taken in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. It consists of a “Before” and “After” shot. The “Before” shot shows a woman sitting and taking dictation from her boss. This half of the photograph appears to be an office with the boss’s desk, the typing desk, and what

appears to be a window behind them. The boss dictates the typist in this half. The “After” shot indicates that the pair has married. This half of the photograph, however, appears to be set in a domestic space. In place of the window is shelving that contains jars and other kitchen accessories. The boss’s desk has been replaced by some sort of table or counter area that now holds the nearly invisible typewriter while the typing table is left out of the photograph entirely. In this half, the former typist now appears in an elegant coat, hat, and boa. Her posture has changed from diligently sitting at the typing table taking dictation from her boss to clearly standing in a superior position to the man who nearly cowers in the corner. By spanking him with her umbrella she now dictates the somewhat intimidated boss/ husband as he leans over the typewriter, diligently doing as he is told. It almost seems as though he is not typing, but doing the dishes as his wife dictates him. Again, as I look at the photograph the reversal is so obvious that it is difficult to tell if it is empowering women in the workplace or poking fun at the possibility of women in charge.

These images represent complete role reversals of the male boss and the female typist. While my subjects of study are more implicit in their trickery, these images take female trickery to the next level by giving overt rather than covert power to the women. But, I question if the explicit trickery of the women in Figures 20 and 21 are doing the same kind or double-life work that I read as occurring in my subjects. What these final images portray are jokes or uncomfortable truths of the period. They stage masculine paranoia by overtly displaying the threat that women pose both to domestic norms, but also to men’s position in the workplace. In a sense, they show the consequences that would be felt by men if women were allowed in the office. Men are shown in awkward positions and as being superfluous while the women are in dominating positions. Yet the explicit nature of the carnival reversal contains the trick, it displays women’s trickery and mocks it and parodies it. These images can be compared to the



images in Chapter Three, “Net Results” and “Butterfly Chase,” in which women’s threat to dominate and toy with men was overtly displayed and made humorous so as to ease, but highlight the very real threat. On the optimistic hand the men experience what it is like to do the work of the typist, and perhaps they realize it is not as mindless as they might have made it out to be. On the other hand, understanding that the images were meant to be humorous and even cute entertainment, the overt reversal of power does not strike me as subversive the way that the subjects of my study do. Derived from the Gibson girl and the flapper types, my subjects strike me as more complex. They slip under the radar and perform the double-life in a more subtle and tricky way.

## CHAPTER FIVE A CONCLUSION

Since I began writing this study, I have gotten rid of one typewriter and added another to my collection. It is a baby blue Underwood circa 1950s. It worked when I bought it in the antique district of Denham Springs, Louisiana.



Figure 23. *Blue Underwood* (photo by Author)

It was hidden in a tiny upstairs room in an old house that had been converted into an antique shop. Since I bought it the carriage has stopped working. It is loose and won't hold its position. My typewriters rest upon my bookshelves, pieces of art displayed along side my favorite books. I have placed my newest typewriter on my new bookshelf that a dear friend built for me. Across the room, my old mustard yellow typewriter sits on an old blue bookshelf my parents bought for me surrounded by my favorite authors. J. D. Salinger, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kurt Vonnegut, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Dorothy Parker, Edna St. Vincet Millay, and Michael Chabon keep my typewriters company. They are on display. I look at them often, but I rarely use them. Physically, technologically, they are obsolete, useless. But, they continue to spark my imagination in a way that new technology does. Perhaps that is why I keep my yellow typewriter next to my favorite books. As I stand looking at my collection with the knowledge I have gained

over the past couple of years I wonder what attracted me to them initially? Or, shall I say, what attracted them to me? It was and remains a mutual attraction I think. Perhaps it is nothing more than my obsession with obsolete technology. Perhaps it is this obsession that demands that I try to understand the histories of production and operation of out-dated objects. Now, after all my research, the typewriters continue to perform their histories here on my personal display. I stand looking at my mustard yellow typewriter, and I think about writing this entire study on it, with its smooth metal keys and ink ribbon pressing each letter to the paper. It strikes me as funny and as a kind of sell out that I have written a thesis about typewriters on my sleek compact MacBook. I attempted to understand the work of typists and now realize that there is a gap between them and I no matter how much I collect or how much I research. It is a gap I can never fully understand.

When I began this project, I knew a few things for sure. First, I knew I wanted to combine my interest in visual culture with my interest in performance studies. Second, I knew that I wanted to attempt genealogical research. This project contributes to the ongoing conversation between visual culture and performance studies. I agree with Brian Rusted when he argues that studying moments of performance brings embodiment back to images. He tracks the intellectual history of visual culture and discusses its relationship with the politically fraught field of anthropology. He writes:

Not only are the concerns about power relations and the discipline's complicity with a nineteenth century colonial project insurmountable, the discipline itself is imagined as destitute of critical or reflexive resources to engage these issues. Without rehearsing the dynamic, diverse and multi-vocal character of critical practices within anthropology, statements such as these open up a new round of questions about whether or not visual culture is itself launched on a colonizing project if it requires that formative disciplines be represented with such *fixity*. (257; emphasis in original)

Rusted proceeds on to discuss a disembodiment of subject and researcher that often occurs in the visual. He explains, “there is no question though that often what passes as critical research moves away from visual objects to consider images detached from the mess of human practices” (258). Studying the performances that occur within the visual is productive and puts bodies back into the visual. To realize this aim, Rusted suggests we study the visual, cultural, performative, and spatial dynamics within the frame. By studying these things, we are able to discuss embodiment within the visual. My goal for this project was to link the visual subjects to actual bodily practices and then consider the consequences and possibilities of the practices.

In my study, I applied aspects of Foucault’s method of genealogy to conduct research of objects displayed within visual artifacts. When I first began my research I read in Bliven’s *The Wonderful Writing Machine* that Charles Latham Sholes was deemed the “savior of women” due to his successful production of the typewriter. Below is an image bearing the noted title, and you will notice that the women with their drop-waist dresses and short bobbed hair bear a close resemblance to the flapper.

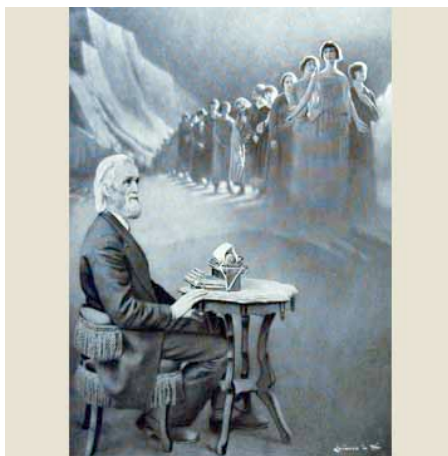


Figure 24. *Sholes, the Savior of Women*. (Virtual Typewriter Museum)

Of course, the history-herstory of the typewriter entering the office did not begin with Sholes. History does not begin with a single origin and develop linearly. It also is never final. It is more like, “a web or network of events that is difficult to unravel” (Foucault 145).

Genealogies work to, “identify the accidents, the minute deviations or, conversely, the complete reversals, the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us today” (Foucault 146).

Finally, Foucault explains rather than the “inviolable identity of origin” at the historical beginning of things, “it is disparity.” (Foucault 142). And, according to Foucault, it is the job of the genealogist to unearth the disparate histories. He explains that the goal of the genealogist is to, “study the beginning--numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by an historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events” (Foucault 146). For Foucault, genealogy is a form of carnival. By unearthing multiple and disparate histories genealogy reverses capital “H” history. Furthermore, it situates the body as a site of history. Foucault explains, “The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances” (Foucault 153). Therefore, in Chapters Two and Three, I sought to do the work of the genealogist by tracking multiple histories of women and typewriters.

In Chapter Two, I tracked the invention and mass production of the typewriter in an historical context and linked the typewriter to other specific social-historical movements, such as urbanization, industrialization, and ideas of mechanization of the corporeal body. The body is the inscribed surface of events.

In Chapter Three, I summarized women's labor in the U.S. from the Colonial period through the 1920s eventually focusing on women in offices as secretaries, receptionists, and typists. Through my summary, I established a labor context for the two images. In the second part of the chapter, I turn my attention to stereotypes of women marketed by the mass media during the decades that correspond to those of the two images. My general aim was to understand and express the many stories that are embedded in the visual signs of the two images, particularly that of the female typist.

In Chapter Four, I applied Meyerhold's laws of theatricality to analyze the images. Weaving together my research from the prior two chapters with Meyerhold's principles helped me to analyze how the women were performing distillation and excess. Through stylization the women and the typewriter were distilled to their essences. However, they also leak out excess and provide alternative ways of reading each image. Complex cultural histories are stylized in the images, and as they circulate, the stylized meanings circulate too. Using Meyerhold became a productive way to use performance to discuss and analyze the ways in which the images perform excess and finally how the women can be read as trickster figures. Foucault reminds us,

The success of history belong to those who are capable of seizing the rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules. (Foucault 151)

Meyerhold allows me to read the images not only as performing, but as subversive performances that fail to provide any answers and instead chose to revel in contradictions and incongruities.

## FUTURE PATHS OF STUDY

It was difficult to narrow down my paths of research for this project. There are many tracks of research left to explore. At this point, there are two tracks that especially spark my interest as a visual culture and performance studies student. The first applies Foucault's idea of surveillance through the study of architecture, specifically office spaces, in order to explore how the layout of offices and the physical placement of the typist contribute to her public display and monitoring. Then, I would then like to compare office layouts with research on domestic home spaces and how they contribute (or not) to the display and monitoring of women. A related concern is how office and home spaces are represented in mass mediated forms, such as film and televisions. One case study for this research would be the television show, *Mad Men*, which is a television show currently running on AMC. It is a period drama that takes place in New York in the early 1960s. It deals with office dynamics of ad men and their female secretaries and typists. It also addresses domestic issues prevalent in the early 1960s.

Also, I would like to find and study journals of women who worked in offices as typists. I think personal writings from typists would contribute to my argument that they play the role of the trickster.

She sits down at the wooden desk her father built for her four years earlier and thinks of a story to write. Spring rain pours down on the cement streets outside. Banana trees sway in the wind, and a large cat sits on the brick ledge of the screened in porch. It is late Saturday night, and she wants to start a new story. She has put her typewriter away for some time and in its place sits her shiny white MacBook. However, this time she doesn't know the story she wants to write. Once it was about love, but now it seems more likely to be about memory and forgetting and writing memories long forgotten. Perhaps that is a love story of sorts, but a different kind I think. She turns her focus to the machine in front of her and thinks about the hours she has

poured into this machine. Her relationship is different, but surely creativity is sparked through it too.

My pinky finger moves to press the last period on my laptop keyboard, and I am done. I lean back in my desk chair and stare at the screen. The only thought in my head is that I have spent the last year researching and writing about typewriters on a laptop. And this thought strikes me as being very funny. So I laugh.



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## VITA

Sarah K. Jackson received her bachelor's from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois. She luckily stumbled across performance studies her second year of her undergraduate career. The rest of her bachelor's degree was spent writing, performing, taking photographs, and above all, being hugely inspired by her professors and fellow students. With help from her professors Craig Gingrich-Philbrook and Ronald Pelias she decided that a master's degree in performance studies was something she wanted to pursue. She began her master's degree in performance studies at Louisiana State University in August, 2006. She began teaching public speaking classes and assisted her professors in several film classes. She will graduate in August, 2009, and plans to continue on with her education.