The Professional Spoils of War
German Women Architects and World War I

In a 1957 newspaper interview given toward the end of her life, Elisabeth von Knobelsdorff (1877–1959), Germany’s first female diplomaed architect, identified “the day of Sarajevo” as the start of her architectural career. Although hired by the prestigious firm of Mebes and Emmerich following her graduation from Berlin’s Technische Hochschule in 1911, the war, in her recollection, rescued her from professional marginalization. Knobelsdorff was not alone in greeting war as a form of professional salvation. By 1914, an emerging generation of female architects in Germany was looking for work. Women had obtained the right to matriculate at the prestigious state-run technical colleges beginning in 1905 in Bavaria and culminating in 1909 in Prussia and Braunschweig. The initial trickle of women into building professions—before 1914, they represented just 1 percent of all architecture students at German Technische Hochschulen—transformed rapidly under the circumstances of war as well as women’s growing attraction to the field. Between 1914 and 1918, the total number of women studying architecture tripled, and with the departure of male students for the front, the percentage of women in the classroom rose dramatically—to nearly 30 percent at some schools. As their presence in the discipline grew so did the pressure for increased postgraduate career opportunities. During the Wilhelmine period, women were barred from taking state exams for the civil service, the largest employer of architects in Germany. Women architects were thus limited to private practice, either their own or, more commonly, as assistants in private architectural firms. Moreover, they were expected to confine their activities to small-scale domestic projects, leaving monumental architecture to the men. Ambitious, talented, and determined—the first female architects often graduated near or at the top of their class—they chafed at the restraints imposed upon their practice.

The war, therefore, represented a professional boon to female architects. Here was the chance to innovate and build on a large scale. The military also offered reliable state employment comparable to the civil service and the possibility to approximate the career trajectory that most academically trained male architects took for granted. Thus, professional opportunism, commingled with patriotism, motivated many female architects to pursue military work. The loss of military records impedes a precise accounting of the number of women engaged in such efforts, but other sources indicate the involvement of about a dozen female architects—roughly a third, I estimate, of all German women either practicing or training in the profession by 1918. Without a doubt, women architects proved willing contributors to war.

In this essay, I explore the professional advances made by German women architects working for the military during World War I and weigh those gains against their postwar history, characterized by renewed hardships and setbacks. I conclude by evaluating the lasting consequences...
of their military experience in the context of revisionist histories on women’s wartime labor. Rejecting an emancipatory view of war, feminist scholarship of the past two decades has emphasized the illusory social and economic advances made by female workers during the two world wars in the face of redomestication policies adopted by Western governments in peacetime. My research on a specific professional group, German women architects, reveals a somewhat more positive picture and suggests that a clearer distinction needs to be drawn between the experiences of women in the general workforce and those of highly trained female professionals operating within a different framework of limitations and aspirations.

Mobilization: Duty to the Fatherland and Expanding Professional Horizons

Shortly after Germany issued mobilization orders on 1 August 1914, Knobelsdorff presented herself for military duty (Figure 1). Her later reconstruction of these events indicate that she was unwilling to accept volunteer status and demanded to be officially drafted, a request refused by the military authorities. With the intervention of her father, a powerful retired general, she nonetheless succeeded in securing a regular draft notice. Her title was reportedly field architect at the rank of lieutenant, which would make Knobelsdorff not only Germany’s first female soldier—over sixty years before women were admitted to the West German armed forces—but also the nation’s first female officer.4

Other women architects also presented themselves for duty in those first days of war, and their welcome was enthusiastic, although Knobelsdorff was probably the only one who was actually drafted. In this initial phase of women’s work for the military, female architects were assigned to areas far removed from the fighting. This would change as technically trained personnel grew scarcer during the war. By 1918, the military authorities were desperate for architects both at home and in war zones and actively recruited women.5

Knobelsdorff was first posted to the training grounds at Döberitz, a rural location a few miles west of Berlin. The grounds, essentially a collection of fields, were rapidly transformed in the war’s early phase into facilities for the training and housing of recruits and the internment of prisoners of war. Knobelsdorff’s projects included designing and executing officers’ quarters and transformer stations as well as the restoration of a burnt church. In 1915, she was joined in Döberitz by Princess Victoria zu Bentheim (1887–1961), a young architecture student at the Berlin Technische Hochschule. Bentheim was given minor utilitarian projects, such as designing and supervising the construction of stables, although some of her work—including the design of a cemetery gate (Figure 2) and a memorial oak grove for fallen soldiers—was not without symbolic importance.6

Women architects working for military building departments were granted unprecedented levels of responsibility in the design and supervision of large-scale projects, through which they acquired new technical expertise. For example, Cornelia Serger von Panhuys, entering her fifth year of architectural study at the Berlin Technische Hochschule, presented herself on 4 August 1914 to the Prussian Military Building Department in Berlin as a volunteer technical aid for mobilization work. Given the dearth of trained personnel and the “very pressing construction tasks, the building department accepted the help with gratitude.” Her work encompassed the on-site supervision of and financial accounting for the conversion of three sites, including part of the technical college, into reserve military hospitals. The range of her learning experiences was thus broad, from repairing elevators to equipping sterilizing and operating rooms.7
The Fronts: From Reconstructing Villages to Designing Barracks

As the war progressed and efforts shifted from preparation to rebuilding, some women architects found work in East Prussia. Russian military advances into East Prussia and the German army’s ferocious battles to reclaim the territory left devastated villages and towns in their wake. The Gumbinnen District Building Office, undeterred by the novelty of women architects, employed three to help with the reconstruction effort. At least two were graduates of Berlin’s Technische Hochschule: leaving behind a desk job at the Prussian Military Building Department in Spandau, Margarete Wettcke arrived in Gumbinnen in 1917, where she was joined the following year by Charlotte Cohn (1893–1983), who had previously contributed to reconstruction efforts in Pillkallen and Tilsit. Faced with shortages of time and money, the women focused their attention on producing workers’ housing as simply and inexpensively as possible.8

In August 1917, Knobelsdorff was transferred to the Building Department of the Supreme Command of the Second Army in occupied northern France. Her position as deputy to the department head gave her a wide range of responsibilities. An attestation for service written in 1919 by her commanding officer, an architect named Ludwig, described Knobelsdorff’s manifold activities in detail. Ludwig emphasized the thorough knowledge Knobelsdorff gained in the operations of a large building department, of which she was put in charge during his absences. He also made repeated references to the war-related nature of the work, with its particular demands and conditions. According to Ludwig, Knobelsdorff “was entrusted with supervis-
ing the construction of several field hospitals [as well as] setting up monumental and makeshift lodging for officers, soldiers, and horses; domestic offices, latrines, bathing facilities, [and] laundry and disinfection buildings. Furthermore, she was responsible for installing a dam in an arm of the Schelde [River] in Valenciennes." Because all the work was carried out by the department, including that normally undertaken by a contractor, Knobelsdorff acquired detailed knowledge in the workshops of the various trades as well as of technical aspects of plumbing, heating, and lighting. In later years, the architect fondly recalled this period of her career, when she was freed of the tedious office tasks typically assigned to junior architects.9

Needing to build everything “from the general’s house to the delousing facility” quickly and with limited resources, this work encouraged—indeed, required—an innovative approach to design. Knobelsdorff thrived in this environment and became known for her experimentation with prefabricated buildings and furniture; “her improvisations,” a reporter later remarked, “were as famous as her stubbornness.”11 In particular, she designed a barrack structure with a triangular foundation that could be rapidly assembled from prefabricated parts; it became known as the “Knobelsdorff barrack.” After the war, she filed a patent for her work on prefabricated dismountable structures.12

Beyond unprecedented professional opportunities, the experience of being part of an occupying force was as exceptional for a woman as she herself was for the army. The reporter who interviewed Knobelsdorff in 1957 still found the situation incongruous (or amusing) enough to weave it into his description of her work at Valenciennes: “Often enough one could see, not far from the front, a slender woman on a bike on muddy roads chasing after a train to ascertain that no one was stealing building parts from her; the ‘sergeant-major’ of the building department was notorious on account of her exactitude.”13 This image redeploys the fin-de-siècle stereotype of the liberated “new woman” on her bike to humorously convey Knobelsdorff’s feisty tenacity in the midst of a wartime operation. In his report, Ludwig commented on other qualities that enabled his deputy to prove herself in this milieu, such as “her self-assurance in planning, skillfulness, and sure manner with the workers and craftsmen on the building site.” He also praised his architect’s behavior during times of danger. Moreover, her excellent language skills, a result of the education and social polishing she had received as a woman of the upper classes, proved useful in dealing with the French and English prisoners of war who chiefly composed her labor force.14

Bentheim transferred with Knobelsdorff, her friend and mentor, to France, where both remained until the end of the war. Although Bentheim’s papers contain various drawings and documents from this period, including secret maps, the precise nature of her architectural work for the army is unclear. The drawings, some of which were submitted as part of her diploma project for the Berlin Technische Hochschule, include detailed diagrams of enemy hospital barracks, a floor plan for the conversion of a school building into a field hospital, and surveyed renderings of Valenciennes’s citadel and canals.15

Architecture in the Service of Propaganda and Diplomacy

While other women architects were active in the field, Emilie Winkelmann (1875–1951) contributed to the war effort on the level of propaganda and diplomacy (Figure 3). In 1907, Winkelmann opened her office in Berlin’s fashionable West End, establishing the first architectural firm owned by a woman in Germany.16 Highly successful, her office expanded to fifteen employees, including junior
female architects. Perhaps less than professional experience, which she already possessed in abundance, Winkelmann gained symbolic capital through her war efforts. Her papers contain fragmentary evidence for two war-related projects: a traveling exhibition on Kurland (on the eastern front) and the House of Friendship (Haus der Freundschaft) planned for Constantinople. According to the architect’s own account, General Erich Ludendorff entrusted Winkelmann with undertaking work on the Kurland exhibition. This show, which traveled to various German cities in 1917 and 1918, was organized by the Deutsche Ausland-Institut, an organization founded in Stuttgart in early 1917 to study German expatriates and promote German interests abroad.

The House of Friendship (also called Dostluk jurdu) was the brainchild of Ernst Jäckh, executive secretary of the German Werkbund, and the German-Turkish Association based in Berlin and Constantinople. The building was to stand as a symbol for and a step toward the realization of a greater middle Europe (Mitteleuropa), a proposed cultural and political federation uniting Germany with her allies in Central Europe, including the Balkans and Turkey. Constantinople’s historic center was chosen as the site for the building “and the undertaking enjoyed the support of the Sultan as well as the German Kaiser.” In 1916, the Werkbund organized a design competition, inviting twelve prominent male architects to enter. Winkelmann’s exact role in the competition is unclear: Berlin University’s Oriental Institute commissioned her to undertake preparatory work, and she also submitted her own designs. Since she was not among the architects invited to participate, these drawings were probably done for a noncompetitive category, customary in architectural competitions of this sort.

The competition guidelines envisioned the House of Friendship as a tangible, ongoing meeting point for cultural exchange between the German and Turkish peoples. Although the benefits of a Mitteleuropa federation were portrayed as mutual, this relationship was not exactly one of equals: “As broad a circle of the Turkish population as possible should be gradually introduced through their contact with the House of Friendship to the greatness of German culture and should recognize the usefulness of a continued engagement with it.” The building was expected to be of “monumental” importance in giving physical form to these lofty ideals. Numerous facilities to be incorporated within the House of Friendship included exhibition spaces, two large auditoriums, conference rooms, German and “Oriental” libraries, and a spacious cafe. The guidelines also emphasized the desirability of taking into account local customs, particularly the separation of the sexes.

German Bestelmeyer won the competition with a bland classicist design that was considered the least controversial of the lot. The contradictory ideologies implicit in the Mitteleuropa idea manifest themselves in the architects’ struggles to express a notion of cultural hegemony that nonetheless claimed to reject the model of Western European imperialism. Hans Poelzig’s design, for example, although considered the most innovative and adept at organizing a vast, multipurpose space, was also criticized for dominating its setting, which, as Julius Posener wryly observed, “would have been appropriate if Germans had conquered Constantinople.” Winkelmann’s designs suggest a similar uneasy grappling with how to visually represent this German-Turkish union. A drawing marked “Lösung I Dostluk jurdu” (House of Friendship Solution I) presents a monumental, highly classicist scheme that contains few references to local architectural traditions beyond the shape of a dome or lattice-covered windows. A design labeled “Lösung II Dostluk jurdu” (House of Friendship Solution II), offering a partial view of the facade, is more successful in balancing Western and Eastern elements, particularly in the portico with Islamicized arches that are faintly marked in the drawing (Figure 4). This version is also more human in scale. A view of an interior courtyard suggests an intimate space that draws upon Middle Eastern domestic architecture for its inspiration (Figure 5). In the screened openings of the second story, we see Winkelmann responding to the restrictions on the mixing of the sexes.

The House of Friendship as imagined by Winkelmann and her fellow architects never came to fruition: the site was cleared and construction began in 1918, but it was halted by Germany’s defeat and never completed.

Making Claims: Women’s Military Work as the Basis for Integrating the Civil Service

From these brief accounts, we see that women architects participated in multiple dimensions of the war effort, from propaganda to defense and rebuilding, and found therein a new range of outlets for their skills. Further clues to such activity—a notation in school records at the Dresden Technische Hochschule that architecture auditor Annemarie Foerster was on military leave, for example, or stories passed down within the Knüppelholz family about the bridges that cousin Margarete built during the war—suggest additional layers of this history that await excavation. In particular, we need to know more about female architects’ war-related work for municipal building offices. Here, too, new opportunities arose. Between 1914 and 1916, Grete Schroeder-Zimmermann (1887–1955), who studied with Poelzig, built bridges for the municipal authorities in Breslau. Else Riessen, a
Figure 4  Emilie Winkelmann, drawing labeled “Lösung II Dostluk jurdu,” undated (ca. 1916)

Figure 5  Emilie Winkelmann, drawing labeled “Dostluk jurdu, Skizze, Hofecke,” undated (ca. 1916)
decade later, in an unofficial capacity, Knobelsdorff also undertook “large-scale constructions designed and executed according to city planning and artistic principles.” Furthermore, the compensation they received equaled that of their male colleagues in similar positions. Hilde Radomski, in a report on women’s professional status in the wartime economy, observed that the military seemed pleased with the performance of its female architects, based on the duration of their employment and the raises they received. Marelle concluded that since women’s military service had been rated so highly, the civil service should also be opened to women.

Peace and its Aftermath: Memorialization, Professional Integration, and Unemployment

The end of the war launched a period of uncertainty for women architects. Returning from France with other demobilized soldiers, Knobelsdorff asked herself, “Now what do I do?” It was a question that must have confronted many women architects who had found employment through the war effort. With the establishment of the Weimar Republic and its constitutional guarantee of legal equality for women, the civil service was opened, in principle, to all. Soon thereafter, women applied to become state architects, but acceptance was not forthcoming. Once again, Knobelsdorff took the lead battling Prussian authorities who feared that integrating the civil service would increase unemployment among male architects. Knobelsdorff’s four years of war service, however, weighed heavily in her favor. After lengthy resistance, she was permitted to take the exam and passed it with high distinction in June 1921. Called to service as a government architect for Potsdam later that summer, Knobelsdorff became Germany’s first female Regierungsbaumeister.

Knobelsdorff’s only known project from this period is a war memorial, now lost, for the Potsdam Provincial Court. A decade later, in an unofficial capacity, Knobelsdorff also designed a war memorial for Jakobsdorf, Silesia (Figure 6). In 1919, Bentheim designed a memorial to Steinfurt’s war dead, which still stands in a park adjacent to her family’s castle (Figure 7). These two women architects and former “soldiers” thus participated in a prestigious architectural enterprise that flourished after the war: memorials to fallen comrades.

In postwar Germany, different reactions to military defeat and the beginning of a new political era resulted in radically opposed ways of remembering the war dead. Helmut Scharf, in his book on German memorials, argues that the memorialization of World War I during the Weimar era was deeply informed by the competing ideologies and ongoing political struggles of the new republic. He identifies two types of memorials: those sympathetic to the new republic, which emphasized the war’s revolutionary aftermath and the birth of a new political order; and those that contributed to a cult of the dead and, implicitly, the heroization of the old nobility and its deeds. Generally speaking, the former tended toward the use of dynamic compositions and abstract forms inspired by expressionist and constructivist art, while the latter privileged stable compositions and symbolic forms referring to Germany’s past. Moreover, while a progressive artist such as Käthe Kollwitz evoked the experience and pain of the individual in her memorialization of loss, politically conservative patrons preferred a sentimentalized and generalized conception of a heroic Volk. The settings of the two types of memorials also differed, with the revolutionary monuments often situated within cemeteries or religious spaces and the death-cult memorials placed at urban or rural sites chosen exclusively for their military significance.

Both Knobelsdorff, from a Junker family, and Bentheim, a member of the nobility, belonged to political classes that lost much of their power in the establishment of a democratic republic. (In this respect they were unusual, for most architects, whether male or female, came from educated middle-class families.) Their memorials share certain characteristics with the conservative type outlined by Scharf. For example, both Knobelsdorff’s Jakobsdorf and Bentheim’s Steinfurt monuments are stable in their compositions and recall traditional memorial forms. Knobelsdorff’s adopts the form of a torch, topped by an eternal flame, while Bentheim’s is a variation of an obelisk surmounted by a cup. Both are in landscape settings, the romantic aspects of which are emphasized in a postcard of the Jakobsdorf memorial as well as an engraving of the Steinfurt monument etched by Elisabeth zu Bentheim, Victoria’s sister (Figure 8). The Jakobsdorf memorial is insistently collective: a collective death, a collective debt, and the memory of a shared, glorious national past. The text reads: “To its Heroes of the World War, 1914–1918, in memory, grateful Jakobsdorf; erected under the victory oak from 1870–1871.” The loss...
Figure 6  Elisabeth von Knobelsdorff, War Memorial, Jakobsdorf, Silesia (now Poland), ca. 1930

Figure 7  Victoria zu Bentheim, War Memorial, Steinfurt, Germany, 1919
of the war is thus transformed by the shadow of an earlier victory. In Bentheim's conception—created a decade earlier, at that moment when the return of soldiers from the front sharpened the absence of the missing—the individual is remembered and speaks directly to the viewer. At the base of the monument is inscribed: "We sacrificed life when Germany was in need."

Each stone brick (except for the corners) of the memorial bears the name of a resident of Steinfurt who did not return from war. Bentheim's design is thus difficult to categorize in simple terms, for although it heroizes the dead, it balances their unity—the tower that these young men built together in death—with their individual loss.

Although Knobelsdorff and Bentheim shared in the dislocation experienced by their respective social classes, they themselves—as women—were enfranchised by the new political order. Their positions might thus be expected to be more complex vis-à-vis the memorialization of a past era that had been politically restrictive for women. Yet, the memorials they created suggest that in conceptualizing Germany's defeat, Knobelsdorff and Bentheim identified first and foremost as the "officers" they had been.

As women architects attempted to break into the civil service, they also sought access to professional organizations. Therese Mogger, a Düsseldorf architect, was accepted in 1919 as the first female member of the Federation of German Architects (Bund Deutscher Architekten). For many years, however, she remained its only one. Serger von Panhuys joined the Federation of Technical Employees and Civil Servants (Bund der technischen Angestellten und Beamten) in 1920, probably as its first female member. Germany's oldest architectural organization, the Berlin Association of Architects (Architekten Verein zu Berlin [AVB]), had already accepted its first female architect member—with some resistance—in 1912. Not surprisingly, it was Knobelsdorff. Significantly, five women became members of this society between 1912 and 1919—and four listed military service on their application. After this period, no new female members entered the AVB until 1928. In total, between 1920 and 1938, only seven additional women joined the society. These totals underscore the considerable gains made by the earlier generation of women architects.

In a long series of firsts, Knobelsdorff's entry into the civil service proved to be among her last acts of integration. Politicians confronting demobilization, a rapidly escalating economic crisis, and mounting unemployment scapegoated
married women with jobs as selfish dual-income earners who should surrender their positions to needier men. In 1923, the government passed legislation reducing the civil service that targeted married women and nontenured employees. Having married the year before, Knobelsdorff was let go, only two years into her service. She thus became Germany’s first retired female government architect. Married women architects working for municipal authorities encountered dismissals even earlier: Schroeder-Zimmermann later recalled that she had been released from Dresden’s Building Department in 1919 on account of a decree that dismissed all married women whose husbands returned from the front.

Once again, women architects found themselves dependent on the private market. This market, however, was not what it once had been. Already slowed by war, the private market ground to a halt during the economic crisis of the early 1920s. Having watched their savings disappear in the hyperinflation of 1922–23, and with unemployment raging, few individual clients were willing to invest in new building projects. Nor could female architects look to the women’s movement, their most important prewar institutional client, for work. From the turn of the twentieth century through the early war years, the women’s movement had recruited female architects to help reshape women’s experience of the built environment and give form to their new spatial needs. This period witnessed the creation of a host of innovative architectural projects funded by female patrons and designed by women architects, including a residence for female university students, a women’s hospital (to be run solely by female doctors for female patients), a women’s retirement community, and apartment buildings for single career women. The war brought an end to many of these women-centered initiatives, which were not revived by the politically debilitated and financially impoverished bourgeois women’s movement of the Weimar era. With suffrage, partisan politics divided the movement as it struggled to accommodate itself to a new political system. The movement’s lack of a clear mission after achieving many of its prewar demands was dispiriting and made it even less attractive to young women, who felt little affinity with the concerns of an aging group of feminists. The financial collapse that affected individuals also affected women’s organizations, which struggled to survive with sharply decreased revenues. By the mid-1920s, as economic recovery began, the educational, social welfare, and charitable organizations that had been the focus of the prewar women’s movement declined as their functions were increasingly assumed by socialist municipalities and state governments. Thus, the prewar momentum of building activity associated with these causes and sponsored by the women’s movement was never fully recovered.

With hindsight, one might ask whether the gains of war ultimately outweighed that which had been lost: specifically, the vitality of the women’s movement and all that it represented for women architects. How does one measure the benefits of learning how to build an army hospital, for example, against the loss of constructing a hospital for female patients and doctors? Regardless, both kinds of opportunities disappeared when the war ended. In this respect, the postwar situation for women architects resembles the legacy of French women’s wartime employment, as assessed by Steven Hause: “Viewed in one way, the war enabled working-class women to find new kinds of work and acquire new skills, just as it permitted middle-class women to capitalize on their previous training. But, from a different perspective one can see that these women found jobs that would disappear or be reclaimed by veterans after the war, while leaving prewar jobs they could not hope to recover.”

The postwar years were, of course, also difficult for male architects. The utopian works on paper by the Glass Chain architects, for example, flourished partly due to a lack of practical activity. Yet, unlike their male colleagues, women architects could not count on finding work in an economic upturn. Although they had made substantial gains before and during the war, their position remained insecure.

Nonetheless, some female architects found work in the private sector. Schroeder-Zimmermann worked as an interior designer in Breslau. Serger von Panhuys was hired by two construction firms in Berlin where her work drew on the technical skills she had acquired during wartime. Before retiring from architectural practice in the late 1920s, Knobelsdorff obtained private commissions for houses in the Potsdam area. Bentheim became the director of the Ducal Building Office in Steinfurt, where she undertook restoration work as well as new building projects. She also established a private clientele, drawn largely from the German nobility. Winkelmann maintained her architectural firm, although the number of clients declined. For those unable to find work within Germany, emigration presented itself as an alternative to unemployment. Cohn, for example, emigrated to Palestine in 1921 and worked there as an architect for four decades. Other destinations included the United States and Central Europe. Still others, however, gave up architectural practice in the face of persistent unemployment.

Assessing the War Experience
In light of this professional aftermath, what was truly gained by the war experience? Was real progress achieved, even if it was undermined by the economic shifts and crises of the early Weimar Republic, or were the professional successes...
of the war years illusory? Revisionist scholarship on the history of women during the two world wars has questioned the “watershed” approach that treats war as a professional turning point for women. Joan Scott points out that it is difficult to measure improved status or to say “what constitutes an improvement or revolution.” “Was,” she asks, “the gendered system transformed or reproduced in the course of the extraordinary conditions generated by wartime?”

Margaret and Patrice Higonnet emphasize that “gains apparently due to women’s war effort, like the vote, cannot be explained by a simple connection to war.” Rather, progress during this period must be seen in continuity with efforts made before the war.

Responding to the above issues in reverse order, there can be no doubt that female architects owed their professional advancement during and after the war to earlier campaigns by the women’s movement that had resulted in educational reforms and improved employment opportunities for women. Was the gendered system transformed? The military’s willingness to accept female architects does not mean that all reservations about women as architects were nullified. This was made abundantly clear to Knobelsdorff when the state balked at hiring her as a government architect. Old attitudes were not easily swept away. Walter Gropius, the director of the newly opened Bauhaus in Weimar, refused all requests by women to join his architectural classes, directing them instead to the “women’s department,” synonymous with the textile workshop. More generally, he sought to reduce the number of women admitted, fearing that an imbalance favoring “feminine,” craftsy tendencies would “[endanger] the goal of the Bauhaus—architecture.”

Feminist scholars have argued that women’s wartime labor represented less a shift in attitudes about gender than a willingness to tolerate—for a short time—a perversion of the “natural” order. As Margaret Higonnet writes, “Propaganda reminded female defense workers that they were not themselves—that is, not ‘natural’—but behaving temporarily like men.” In Germany, authors of articles such as “Die Männlichen Frauen” (The Manly Women) expressed gratitude to women for stepping into men’s shoes at a time of national crisis while insisting on a return to “natural” gender roles at war’s end.

Even if they were considered unavoidable, these temporary transgressions fostered anxiety: in 1916, the German parliament attempted to pass legislation ensuring that wherever women and men worked together, women would be subordinate to men.

Despite this resistance to change, it would be wrong to dismiss what women architects achieved by way of experience and improved status during the war. Although female architects’ professional progress in the Weimar era was frustratingly slow in comparison to the prewar years, the war period was, I believe, a turning point. Women architects, as Marelle argued in 1916, proved their mettle—they had taken on the tasks of their male colleagues and performed them well. It is unlikely that Knobelsdorff would have been able to desegregate the civil service without her military record. Though she was soon dismissed, others gradually followed in her footsteps. The integration of professional associations must also be included among the achievements facilitated by military credentials.

Yet, it is also true that older prejudices and patterns were reinscribed in the postwar era: women architects were once again directed toward the domestic (a famous example being Grete Schütte-Lihotzky’s mass-produced kitchen models for the Frankfurt housing settlements). The military experience thus might be regarded as a partial victory for women architects: if, in the end, the spoils of war were mostly reclaimed, women were not left entirely empty-handed.

Notes
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7. The above quote is from a Beschäftigungsnachweis (employment certificate) issued to Serger von Panhuy by the Preussisches Militärbauamt Berlin IV, dated 1 Dec. 1914. It describes in detail the work she performed and is preserved among the architect’s papers: Cornelia Monzel [née Serger von Pan-
huy] Papers, private collection. She also outlined her military activities in her membership application to the Architekten-Verein zu Berlin; see Cornelia Serger von Panhuys, membership file no. 6786, AIVBA.

8. Radomski, “Mittlere und höhere Frauenberufe,” 163; Margarete Wettcke, membership file no. 6856, AIVBA; Charlotte Cohn, membership file no. 6858, AIVBA; and Marelle, “Architektinnen im Militärdienst.”

9. Ludwig, annotation, 15 Dec. 1919, private collection. The annotation was signed by “Intendant und Baurat Ludwig” and bears the stamp of the Reichsarchivministerium.


12. Goebel, “Knobbi wollte selber bauen” (see n. 1). For the patent application filed on 7 July 1919 by Knobelsdorff for “Bauwerk für transportable und zerlegbare Fachwerkbauten,” see Patentblatt 44, no. 48 (1920), 1454.


15. Victoria zu Bentheim Papers, FBA.


17. Emilie Winkelmann, autobiographical statement, 1950, Emilie Winkelmann Papers, Berlinische Galerie (hereafter BG), Berlin.


19. Winkelmann, autobiographical statement; and Johanna West to Frau von Saldern, 10 Oct. 1978, Emilie Winkelmann Papers, BG.


21. Campbell, German Werkbund, 96.


23. The competition guidelines suggested the use of screens, which also conformed to local building practices. See “Grundlagen für den Wettbewerb um den Bau des ‘Hauses der Freundschaft’ in Konstantinopel.”


27. “Wiens erste Architektin,” Neues Wiener Journal, no. 8826 (1918), 3–4. I am grateful to Leslie Topp for bringing this article to my attention.

28. Marelle, “Architektinnen im Militärdienst” (see n. 6).

29. Radomski, “Mittlere und höhere Frauenberufe,” 202 (see n. 5).


31. Goebel, “Knobbi’s wollte selber bauen” (see n. 1).


33. Helmut Scharf, Kleine Kunstgeschichte der deutschen Denkmale (Darmstadt, 1984), 266–79.

34. For an indepth discussion of the social and economic backgrounds of female architects in the Wilhelmine period, see Stratigakos, “‘I Myself Want to Build’” (see n. 2).

35. It would be interesting to know whether Knobelsdorff’s Potsdam memorial, completed soon after her return from the front, differed in tone from the later Jakobsdorf monument. For a brief description (based on a secondary, unattributed source), see Schmidt-Thomsen, “Frauen in der Architektur,” 25 (see n. 16).


37. Monzel Papers, private collection (see n. 7).

38. These figures are based on surviving membership records at the AIVBA. See Despina Stratigakos, Skirts and Scaffolding: Women Architects, Gender, and Design in Wilhelmine Germany (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), 372–73.


40. Schroeder-Zimmermann, “Personalakte Grete Schroeder-Zimmermann” (see n. 26).

41. For a detailed discussion of these projects, see Stratigakos, A Women’s Berlin (see n. 16).


49. Margaret R. Higonnet, “Introduction,” in Margaret R. Higonnet et al., Behind the Lines, 7.


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Figure 1. Die Dame 40, no. 1 (Oct. 1913), 34
Figures 2, 7. 8. Fürst zu Bentheimisches Archiv, Steinfurt
Figures 3, 6. Private collection
Figures 4, 5. Berlinische Galerie, Berlin