and August 1976. His father, David Turner, was Wood's chief patron during the artist's early career; his grandfather was the model in *John B. Turner, Pioneer.* Wood dated this painting twice: "1928" in the lower left *under* the oval frame, and "1930" at the edge of the frame in the lower right. Although historians have considered this work to be post-Munich, I suspect this is wrong. Based on the early date and the style of the piece, Wood probably began the portrait sometime in 1928 and dated it before leaving that fall for Munich, where he stayed until Christmas. In 1930 he made revisions to the painting, and dated it anew when he added the oval frame, a shape in keeping with the neo-Victorian features of *American Gothic.*

44. Mrs. Wood's early biography appears in Rinard, "Return from Bohemia," chap. 1.

45. Dorothy Dougherty, "The Right and Wrong of America," *Cedar Rapids Gazette,* Sept. 5, 1942.

46. See Koen, "Art of Grant Wood," and quotations from Grant Wood's lectures and interviews in the clippings in the Nan Wood Graham *Scrapbooks,* Archives of American Art.

47. There are several major collectors of *American Gothic* caricatures. I am grateful to Nan Wood Graham, Edwin Green, and Price E. Slate for having made their large collections available to me. My own collection, begun only in the early 1970s, already numbers hundreds of items.

48. For an extended discussion of the image in American culture, see my "*American Gothic:* The Making of a National Icon," in *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven, 1983), 128–42.

19 The Question of Difference: Isabel Bishop's Deferential Office Girls

Ellen Wiley Todd

I didn't want to be a woman artist, I just wanted to be an artist. *Isabel Bishop, December 16, 1982*

I hope my work is recognizable as being by a woman, though I certainly would never deliberately make it feminine in any way, in subject or treatment. But if I speak in a voice which is my own, it's bound to be the voice of a woman. *Isabel Bishop, 1978*

Both "masculine" and "feminine" are not essences, but social categories formed through changing social experiences. They are not only imposed from outside us, they are also experienced subjectively as part of our understanding of who we are. But in a patriarchal culture it is clearly the case that women are forced to adopt a masculine viewpoint in the production and consumption of images far more often than men are required to adopt a feminine one. *Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look?" (1987)*

For Isabel Bishop, the middle years of the Depression brought a succession of professional and personal milestones. Following her first one-woman show at the new Midtown Galleries in New York in 1933, she met and married Dr. Harold Wolff in 1934. She left her studio living quarters at 9 West Fourteenth Street, facing Hearn's Department Store; moved with her husband to a residence in the Riverdale section of the Bronx; and leased a new studio at 857 Broadway, with a view of the northwest corner of Union Square. In 1936 she gained considerable attention when the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased *Two Girls* (fig. 19.1). Reviews of her one-woman exhibition in that year and again in 1939 acknowledged her independence of the influence of Kenneth Hayes Miller (Bishop's teacher and mentor at the Art Students League) and proclaimed her well on her way to being one of America's best women artists. By 1941 she was elected to the National Academy of Design—the establishment of the American art world.[1]

Bishop's shift away from Miller's sphere of influence occurred when she set aside the Milleresque shoppers, women at their toilettes, and still lifes. By 1936,

Figure 19.1 Isabel Bishop, *Two Girls,* 1935. Oil and tempera on composition board, 20 × 24 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arthur H. Hearn Fund, 1936 (36.27).

when Raphael Soyer painted *Shop Girls,* Bishop had begun to paint Union Square's other working women—the office workers who made up the clerical staffs of the banks, public utilities, insurance companies, and small offices in the district. Whereas the view from her old studio had inspired such early works as *Dante and Virgil in Union Square* and *Department Store Entrance,* her new studio looked down on the square itself, populated by those she called its "regular denizens": the unemployed men congregating at the base of monuments who became the subject for paintings like *The Club* and for many drawings and etchings, and the young working women, occasionally waitresses but more often than not office girls, who worked nearby. Bishop frequently sat in the park and sketched these girls as they relaxed during their noon-hour break, or she asked them to come to her studio and pose.

Bishop's paintings of youthful, female office workers in the 1930s are sometimes bust-length portraits of individual girls in work clothes, often wearing the exaggerated hats popular in the second half of the decade. A work like *Tidying Up* (ca. 1938; fig. 19.2) is a penetrating close-up study of character, physiognomy, and mood. In other works, such as *Lunch Hour* (1939; fig. 19.3) or *At the*

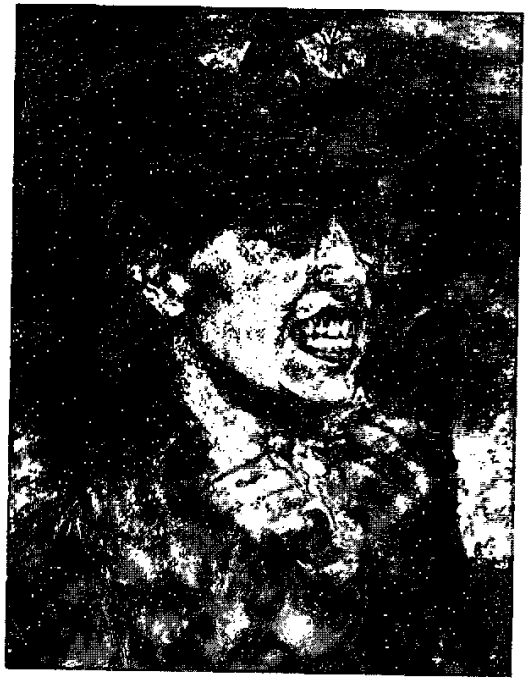

Figure 19.2 Isabel Bishop, *Tidying Up,* c. 1938. Oil on canvas, 15 × 11½ inches. Copyright Indianapolis Museum of Art, Delavan Smith Fund.

Noon Hour (1939; fig. 19.4), two office workers appear together, usually outdoors and always in shallow, undefined settings. Stylistically, these works combine the artist's respect for established artistic traditions with her modernist practice of structuring and articulating the picture plane. Arranged against a faint grid and thick repeating horizontals, Bishop's studied surface compositions are animated by fully realized figures, modeled in a soft chiaroscuro, and painted with pale amber tints reminiscent of old master paintings. At the same time, her images also draw together conventions of genre paintings—as evidenced by quiet scenes of everyday life around Union Square—and figure studies, in which posed models assume the burden of pictorial expression. Placed in shallow, minimally defined settings outside the working environment, Bishop's relaxed young office workers remain self-absorbed or interact with one another but never directly engage the viewer. They lean on walls, eat ice-cream cones, converse quietly, share a book, or discuss a letter. Often they touch or link arms during their interchanges, suggesting a womanly closeness or camaraderie. Dressed in slightly wrinkled office attire, the women themselves are neither glamorous nor unattractive. Although Bishop's pictures of neighborhood women

Figure 19.3 Isabel Bishop, *Lunch Hour*, 1939. Oil and tempera on gesso panel, 27 × 17½ inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Isabel Bishop and D. C. Moore Gallery, New York.

were frequently compared to those of her teacher Miller and their close friend, the artist Reginald Marsh, the comparisons had more to do with their common urban site and the old master origins of their figures than with the types of women they painted. None of Bishop's women become sexualized stereotypes, and none are old enough to be matrons. Her sedate young women bear little resemblance to Marsh's Union Square workers, the blonde bombshells found in images like *Hudson Bay Fur Company* (Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio). And, though stocky rather than svelte, Bishop figures are not made up of the repetitious rounded forms and idealized faces of Miller's shoppers. These are quiet, pleasant genre pictures; nothing about these young women seems striking, garish, unusual, or confrontational.

Bishop's representations of young working women depict a less sexually charged feminine ideal, one deemed more appropriate for the workplace. By

Figure 19.4 Isabel Bishop, *At the Noon Hour*, 1939. Tempera and pencil on composition board, 25 × 18 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass., James Philip Gray Collection.

embodying in her pictorial language a middle-class ideology of office work that prescribed business conduct proper for women in the 1930s, the artist simultaneously constituted and negotiated class and gender difference. A growing number of interwar publications on women and work championed this same ideology. Statistical surveys and government reports set out the facts about the office worker's job, charting institutional, social, and economic changes brought about by new office technology and the upheaval of the Depression and predicting the office worker's future.[2] These studies were less sanguine in assessing the constant changes in her occupation than were the popular periodical studies and advice manuals that helped to define the ideal office worker and contributed to the myth of occupational and social mobility connected to office jobs.

No matter what the focus of their study, writers for all these publications, many of them women social scientists, social workers, or job counselors, offered women a competitive model of success grounded in a discourse of gender difference and social mobility. Specifically, they argued that if a woman served her

superiors with wifely loyalty, behaved deferentially, and dressed modestly, she might advance in her job. More important, in bringing her "natural" caretaking and homemaking skills to the office, she would be preparing herself for the successful marriage that both she and society considered her ultimate achievement.[3] Like the literature of the period, Bishop's pictures constructed an ideal of a modest, deferential office worker without reference to the material circumstances of the typical office worker's life. Her paintings can be aligned with mainstream 1930s thinking on women's roles that was part of the moderate discourse of the revised new woman. Within that discourse, Bishop's works also embody notions of female achievement and class mobility that can be linked to an ideal of liberal individualism. This ideal shaped the way Bishop characterized her subjects and perceived her own role as an artist.

"Difference," Griselda Pollock reminds us, "is not essential but understood as a social structure which positions male and female people asymmetrically in relation to language, to social and economic power and to meaning. . . . To perceive women's specificity is to analyze historically a particular configuration of difference."[4] According to Pollock, such gender imbalance in a particular social structure and its supporting ideology fosters a variety of possible and contradictory positions for an individual, all subject to constant conflict and negotiation. Many of these negotiations are played out in visual and verbal texts, themselves products and producers of ideology that are subject to the codes and conventions of their own institutional practice. As a female artist viewing her female subjects, Bishop—sometimes unwittingly—participated in contemporary discussions about women's roles and office work in the 1930s. The way she presented her subjects, within the range of representational practices available to her, simultaneously blurred and clarified the sites where gender and class difference were debated in the 1930s. To paraphrase Rosemary Betterton on the engendered practices of looking, I also wish to suggest that Bishop moved between a masculine and a feminine viewpoint in producing her images, thereby carving out a more prominent viewing position for the middle-class female viewer of her work.

By the time Bishop introduced the female office worker into the iconography of American scene painting, she had become, like the saleslady, a highly visible member of the workforce. One out of every three New York City working women held some kind of clerical position. Union Square's four neighborhood banks, the Guardian Life Insurance Company, Consolidated Edison, and all the smaller offices alone provided close to ten thousand clerical jobs. Bishop herself observed that "there were an awful lot of small businesses around," and she believed that many of her models and clerical subjects were from these smaller offices.[5]

According to contemporary statistical surveys the women who filed, sorted mail, and typed were usually white, native-born, unmarried, and recently out of high school; Bishop's office girls confirm the demographic profile. In clerical work, the field that had expanded most rapidly for women between 1890 and 1920, native-born white women had always taken approximately 90 percent of the jobs.[6] These women tended to be under twenty-five years of age. A number of polls from the 1920s suggest that white middle-class female workers preferred marriage to a career, and many dropped out of the work force when they married or, more frequently, when their first child was born.[7]

In the 1930s the young female clerical worker continued to dominate the business work force. A 1934 survey of New York office workers found that the median age ranged from twenty-four to twenty-seven, with women in banks, insurance companies, and utilities on the low side of the median. A number of businesses, particularly insurance companies that required substantial clerical help, preferred to hire inexperienced workers. Employers usually liked to train and promote from within the organization as upper-level vacancies occurred. Because an immediate superior could rapidly instruct a beginner in routine tasks, most businesses found it uneconomical to search for a worker with particular job skills.[8]

To judge from the extreme youth of most of Bishop's office workers, they were beginners and were probably unmarried. The 1930 census reported that only 18.3 percent of women in clerical jobs were married, as against dramatically higher percentages for women in trade, domestic service, and manufacturing and mechanical industries. By 1934 the percentage had dropped even further.[9] Observers of occupational trends analyzed the statistics in several ways. The economist Grace Coyle, who looked to the economic and psychological states of the women, argued that in agriculture, industry, and domestic service women continued to work after marriage from economic need, whereas women professionals had a desire for "independence, self expression and the use of expert skill."[10] Clerical workers fell somewhere between: they usually married men who could support them, and the work was not challenging enough to keep them in the work force.

At the same time, however, employer and fellow employee pressure against the married clerical worker was stronger than in almost any other occupation. It was much easier, for example, for married women to acquire and retain department store sales positions than office jobs. Some of the pressure was exerted by the traditional ideology of woman's proper place. Coyle suggested that both husbands and employers wanted "to defend the 'American home' from subversive tendencies," and therefore to keep married women at home. Other pressure came from female coworkers. With increased competition for jobs in the

Depression, single women workers wanted married women to leave the jobs to those who needed them. In any case, many of the larger institutions had such strict policies against the employment of married female workers that women chose not to report their marriages or retained their maiden names to avoid losing their jobs.[11]

The place of Bishop's women in the office hierarchy is difficult to generalize. Although occupational categories varied with the type of business, larger offices had more specialized and stratified positions; in smaller offices where there were fewer workers—and where Bishop believed many of her subjects worked—office girls shared several tasks. Because the categories of office work required different levels of education and skill, each had a different status. File clerks and junior clerks were at the bottom of the clerical ladder. These were the youngest, least experienced, and least educated, some of whom had left school to take their positions. Next came file and general clerks; Bishop probably painted some of these women, since insurance and utility companies employed vast numbers. For these jobs a general high school education was sufficient.[12]

Office machine operators, followed by typists, were next in the occupational hierarchy, making up but a small proportion of the clerical population. Since most women who learned typing also took high school or business school shorthand, they moved into the next higher and more populous category of stenographer. These women, especially in smaller offices, usually performed a variety of

Figure 19.5 Isabel Bishop, *Young Woman*, 1937. Oil and egg tempera on masonite, 30¼ × 22¼ inches. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Henry D. Gilpin Fund.

tasks beyond taking and transcribing dictation. Bookkeepers, cashiers, and general telephone operators were also at the level of the stenographer. Finally, the secretary was at the top of the occupational scale. She had mastered all the skills of the occupations below her, was given more responsibility, and usually had the privilege of working for a single employer. She was often a woman who had worked her way up from a stenographic position in the company.[13]

From the information compiled, one can begin to draw a composite of Bishop's office worker. She was a young high school graduate, unmarried, on the job for only a year or two. The figure in *Young Woman* (1937; fig. 19.5), however, is on her own, poised and self-confident. Middle- to upper-middle-class urban viewers of this work, familiar with the business world, might well have identified her as a stenographer working her way up the office ladder.

Bishop's pictorial strategies and her depiction of the appearance and behavior of these women suggest that both her attitude toward the working girl and her conception of that girl's life and job differed from those of Raphael Soyer. Bishop's paired office workers, in *Lunch Hour* and *At the Noon Hour* (see figs. 19.3 and 19.4), seem more relaxed than those in Soyer's *Office Girls* (fig. 19.6). Unlike Soyer's figures—cropped at the waist, placed against the picture plane, and packed closely together—Bishop's are complete, placed on shallow stage-like settings with enough room to move. Soyer's women move quickly through the environment; Bishop's women are still; they either lean against a wall or sit or stand in relaxed contrapposto poses.

Both Soyer and Bishop depict ordinary women, and both individualize their models. They define the self-presentation of femininity as emotional expression. But Soyer's women are uniformly melancholy or serious. The directness with which they confront the viewer or go about their business suggests further that they have acquired some measure of knowledge and experience. The emotional range—from joy to wistfulness—that Bishop observed in her women was broader and her depiction of moods more subtly nuanced than Soyer's, thanks to the complex transitions between light and dark through which Bishop explores the characterizing topographies of these young women's faces.

While Soyer's women are psychologically isolated from one another, Bishop regularly painted physically and emotionally intimate interchanges between women. In *At the Noon Hour* two women lean against the wall chatting, and one links her arm companionably through the other's. Their shoulders and thighs also touch. The same closeness appears in *Lunch Hour*, where two women rest against the edge of a Union Square fountain, their shoulders touching as they turn toward one another, sharing secrets over the pleasure of an ice-cream cone.

Bishop's emphasis on the warmth of these interchanges and the degree of her subjects' engagement with one another overrides, without fully obliterating, the

Figure 19.6 Raphael Soyer, *Office Girls*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 26 × 24 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

sensuous projection of their femininity toward the viewer. In this aspect of her female imagery, Bishop differs from Soyer, and even more from Miller and Marsh. Where Soyer's models seem "gently sexualized" on one level, his sympathetic response to them as individuals remains stronger than any projection onto them of masculine desire. With Marsh such a projection is overt to the point of exaggeration; with Miller it is somewhat less obvious. Even where Bishop's models assume more self-conscious poses of display, their provocativeness is never depicted as assertive, nor are they blatantly sexualized. The taller woman in *At the Noon Hour* (see fig. 19.4), for example, stands with her right foot before her left, her left hip slightly forward, her right arm akimbo. But her looser dress (almost all of Bishop's women wear softly draped or loosely tailored costumes) masks the curves of her figure. And her energies are directed as much toward her friend as toward an unseen masculine viewer for whom she puts herself on display.

While it is part of the structure and economy of looking that women in art are available to the masculine spectator, Bishop's paintings construct a larger space for the feminine viewer.[14] Paintings of paired working women also envision a same-sex sphere so circumscribed, thanks to the intimacy between the women, that a female viewer—another woman—may comfortably be drawn into the intimate circle. Finally, the space in which looking occurs is itself intimate. Because of the fluid surfaces and a close-value palette employing a narrow range of pastel colors, a viewer is made to draw closer to the works both to distinguish the figures and to observe the intricate surfaces that surround them. Within this closer range the gender-specific transactions occur.

In fact, when these works began to be exhibited in the late 1930s, some of the critical discussion—concerning viewing itself as well as the relative "strength" of Bishop's women—broke down along gender lines. Where Emily Genauer praised Bishop's "clearly defined faces and figures," her "superb draftsmanship and modelling," and her "sensitivity," other critics faulted her "indistinct, nebulous manner" of defining forms. Edward Alden Jewell of the *New York Times* complained of the need for "an uncommon amount of squinting" to see figures that were themselves too "pallid and frail and washed out to emerge." James Lane, who later spoke of Bishop's "unconventional and glorious" women, initially found them shy, "bloodless and lacking in vigor." Forbes Watson felt that Bishop's "extremely close searching for subtle values" sometimes led to a "neutrality approaching timidity."[15] As male critics described her, Bishop's young woman was a descendant of the fragile steel-engraving lady.

Late nineteenth-century images of women in interiors portrayed the social phenomenon of women's separate, often ritualized, activities; the term *homosocial* has been used to describe this separate, predominantly domestic realm of female interaction. In Bishop's paintings, women are depicted carving out a similarly separate and intimate arena, now in the modern urban environment—where women are most susceptible to the masculine gaze. Seen in this light, the works impart a degree of quiet strength to these female intimacies.

In Bishop's as in Soyer's works, women are "in transit," outdoors, suspended between environments. But Bishop's environments are so ambiguously defined by her intricate painting techniques that her women are potentially anywhere and nowhere within the settings. *At the Noon Hour* shifts constantly between foreground, background, and figures, with value shifts and horizontal brushstrokes suggesting several spatial interpretations. No matter how the picture is finally read, the space is ambiguous, and the women potentially relate to more than one environment.

Although the appearance of Bishop's youthful workers corroborates the historical profile of Depression era office workers, a tension exists between the depiction of ordinary women posed in a seedy neighborhood and the beauty of light, color, and carefully manipulated surfaces that eradicate all references to work. Bishop's firmly modeled figures in works like *At the Noon Hour* occupy spatially ambiguous settings created either by thick globs of paint that accentuate the surface of the canvas or by soft veils of horizontal strokes that blur contours and link figures to one another or to their background. Though formally

posed, her women are surrounded and overlaid by this fluid, constantly shifting atmosphere. Such an abstraction of pictorial setting disguises her female subjects' specific identity as workers outside the home and suggests that their spatial and temporal positions are tentative rather than fixed. The figures themselves are equally dynamic, their hands and arms animated by quavering pencil strokes. The fragility and transience resulting from this technique are heightened by the warm light and close gradations of pastel colors that illuminate the women's youthful faces.[16]

There are other things we need to know about these women. What, for example, did their jobs allow them to do, and what did their appearance and behavior signify in the late 1930s? They are outdoors, away from their working environments, looking pleasant and content and seeming to suffer little from their jobs. But there is also a sense that they renew themselves through repose, quiet conversation, or the refreshment of an ice-cream cone. Their clothing, generally fashionable, looks rumpled, owing to Bishop's scumbled surfaces and sketchy pencil marks. In *Lunch Hour*, for example (see fig. 19.3), the wrinkles and limpness of the jacket worn by the figure at right detract from an overall impression of tidiness. Such naturalistic touches keep these predominantly optimistic works from being overidealized or overromanticized representations of office workers' lives.

Well-established perceptions about office work help us situate Bishop's pictorial language in the broader discourse of women and work. By the 1930s popular books like *If Women Must Work, Manners in Business,* and *She Strives to Conquer* celebrated office work as the ideal stopgap for young women between school and marriage; in offices, hours were shorter than in factories or stores or domestic service, the surroundings more pleasant, and the pay better.[17]

Clerical jobs were valued not only because offices were quieter and cleaner than factories but also because office work provided a chance to get ahead—to achieve what Grace Coyle defined as "the rise to business success so highly esteemed among us."[18] Within the office a young woman could rise to the top of the stenographic pool or even, in rare cases, achieve executive status. The social interaction in an office was considered superior to that in a factory or department store. In a small office a young woman whose parents had been manual laborers could transcend class and social background through interaction with better-educated superiors. The work itself remained free of the stigma of manual labor, allowing the office worker to achieve a middle-class standard of femininity. Interpersonal relationships in an office could stimulate a woman to greater personal achievement and loyalty to her institution. The institution in turn could reward her with promotions and better pay.[19]

Given this situation, the fluidity of Bishop's surfaces can be read in two ways: it destabilizes the position of the woman as a worker with access to economic power even as it unfixes the boundaries of gender and class to project the possibility of such access.

In fact, the blurring of boundaries seems to have been Bishop's goal. As early as 1939 the artist equated her formal quest for "painterly mobility," manifested in her intricate painted surfaces, with the possibility of social betterment for her subjects. Bishop viewed the continuous horizontal strokes in her works as the web that links her figures to the environment and thereby suggests mobility in these otherwise still figures. In extensive discussions of her 1930s imagery held prior to her 1975 retrospective exhibition, Bishop reiterated her goal of showing these office workers' potential for upward mobility in American society. Her theory of painterly mobility as a metaphor for social mobility was also based on her sense that one could identify the lower classes.[20] "It seemed to me that in order to say what I felt I wanted to say about them, girls or men had to be classifiable. I don't think you can classify the upper middle class. The upper middle class is not definable in our society, but these young people are class-marked in the sense that you understand they are socially limited. But what I feel about them—and I really do feel strongly about these things—is that I know so many instances where, if they want to move, in a social sense, they can . . . and it's that mobility that connected for me."[21] Bishop amplified her statement, emphasizing her optimistic view of upward mobility. "I was conscious of their being class-marked, but not class-fixed. If I succeeded in making them seem to the onlooker that they could turn and move in a physical sense, this opened up a subjective potential which could include the mobility of content. I mean it made it possible to suggest, or at least the suggestion was already there, to my mind, that if a physical movement takes place who can tell what other kind of movement might take place."[22]

Bishop's concern with her subjects' potential came in part from her own early awareness of class and gender difference. The artist's childhood home was located next to the urban working-class neighborhood in Detroit where her father was a poorly paid high school Latin teacher. Because both parents were from upper-middle-class families and wished to maintain the appearance of that position, social contacts with the neighbors were minimal. Bishop recalled in a 1975 interview that "though we didn't have the money, we identified with the big houses on the next block. I wasn't supposed to play with the children on my block or be connected with them but I wanted to be. I thought, 'Oh they have a warmer life than I do—they all know each other and see each other and we are isolated.'"[23]

Caught between two social classes, Bishop learned about the restrictions and exclusions of each and acquired her own attitudes about social limitation and social mobility. When she came to New York in 1920, her fortunes changed. She received a monthly stipend from a well-to-do relative that allowed her to concentrate on her education and to move in circles with artists of her own social, educational, and now economic circumstances. This economic support continued until 1934, when she married Wolff, a prominent neurologist.[24] Bishop recognized that her changed economic situation allowed her greater occupational and social mobility—advantages not accessible to her subjects—but she was nonetheless optimistic about the relation between social mobility and individual initiative. The artist credited much of her own success to a rigorous six-day-per-week work schedule and to her slow, thoughtful production of images. Her story, and the one she envisioned for her subjects, was, in some ways, a version of the Horatio Alger success story, now told with female characters.

A 1936 newspaper article characterizing the artist-model dynamic involved in the production of *Two Girls* defines the professional distance Bishop maintained in interactions with her subjects. She asked a waitress from Childs', where she regularly had breakfast, to model. Miss Riggins agreed and brought a friend, Miss Abbott, with her to the studio. Almost every day for six months the two waitresses sat for Bishop. As Miss Riggins described it, she and Miss Abbott—the two women married and lost touch with each other until the newspaper piece brought them together—talked about everything from movies to boyfriends to fashion while Bishop worked. Bishop wrote of the period, "I never did know their first names. They'd come up from Childs' and just sit and talk. I don't know what about. I couldn't tell if I had to. I made dozens of sketches of them. Finally I thought I had something."[25] Although Bishop's same-sex interest in her subjects enabled her to depict a relationship of female intimacy, class and professional distance kept her from forming bonds with her subjects. This distance can be read as respect, professionalism, or neutrality, but it is also consistent with objectifying the models in terms of class. Though class distance in Bishop's works is never what it is in Marsh's, it remains, now strongly modulated by the commonality of gender.

Even so, Bishop wished to blur class and gender divisions, to infuse her imagery with her own optimism about the possibilities for working women. Though she idealized her ordinary models through the use of pastel tones and light, she never wished to divest them of their individuality. A comparison of photographs of her models for *Two Girls* (fig. 19.7) with the painting (see fig. 19.1) demonstrates that she retained the look of the actual women while suffusing their features with a soft light that emphasized their youthful seriousness.

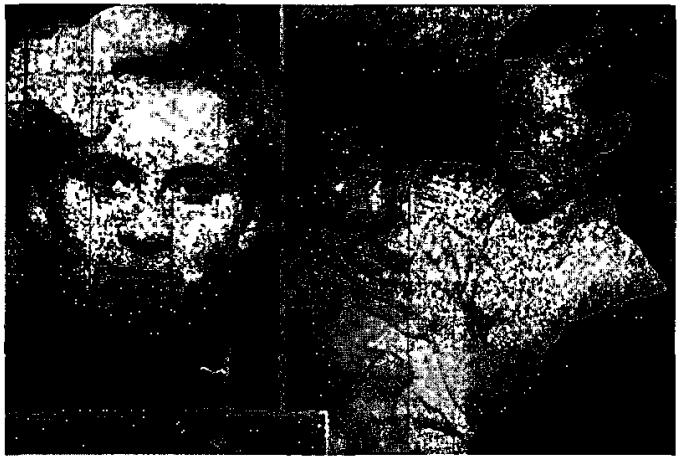

Figure 19.7 Photographs accompanying William Engle, "Portrait of *Two Girls* Bought by Metropolitan, Reunites Two Ex-Waitresses Who Posed for It," *New York World-Telegram*, Feb. 27, 1936: 3.

By seeing her women as self-sufficient individuals in a subtly shifting environment rather than as sexual stereotypes, Bishop conveyed her own optimism about working women and American life in general toward the end of the 1930s. She also attempted to suggest that these women could transcend the limitations of class, sex, and occupation, much as she had by achieving success from a marginalized position as a woman artist in the mid-Depression. She believed that they had freedom of choice, even if economic evidence suggested the contrary. Bishop's professed attitudes and her general liberal humanist stance can be read in terms of women's potential for achievement and in light of the broader political assertions of individual rights in the Popular Front movement. Bishop's late participation in the Artists' Congress and her secession from it to join the more pluralist Society for Modern Artists suggest her awareness of her own social and political agenda.[26]

As a consequence of her upbringing, her experience as a woman artist in a male-dominated set of art institutions, the value humanism placed on an old master tradition, the discourse of new womanhood that celebrated the virtues of individual achievement, and her place within a specific political context of ideas, Bishop brought middle-class values and expectations to the studio, where she produced her "realist" representations of working women without engaging

them in situations that spoke about their lives. In Bishop's view neither the working women nor Union Square's unemployed men, who also became subjects in her paintings, were the victims of society, or of an inegalitarian culture, or of ideology. Bishop wrote or spoke about this often in conjunction with the unemployed men she painted. She denied that she was socially conscious in painting these men in the Depression, claiming that they were "aliens by temperament," eccentric and not to be pitied: "I don't say their economic disadvantages haven't something to do with their condition but essentially they are persons who are eccentric. They are really hedonists. I got to know them as I had a series of them come up here [to her studio]. They would bring each other and they would take anything they could lay their hands on." She also acknowledged that her intent in her images of these men was nothing like that of Soyer, who sympathetically portrayed men unemployed as a result of the Depression, whereas Bishop's men were a regular feature of any society. As a genre painter preoccupied with the characteristic movements of the human figure, she endeavored to capture their routines. Her more "generalized" intent allowed her to position herself outside the debates on art and politics that frequently intruded on discussions of subjects connected to the Depression.[27]

In his 1975 article on Bishop, the critic Lawrence Alloway faulted Bishop's upper-middle-class worldview, in which social mobility results from diligence. The artist's theory of painterly mobility as a metaphor for social mobility remained unconvincing, Alloway argued, because "the fact that you can cross the street does not mean that you can cross social barriers in the same way."[28]

In fact, by 1936, just as Bishop began painting office workers, many of the occupational advantages that had once made clerical work seem a path to upward mobility were rapidly disappearing. The economists, social scientists, and job counselors who compiled statistical studies and wrote the rapidly growing body of advice literature for women entering the working world came to recognize that office workers' lives and expectations had altered drastically. Wages dropped dramatically with the Depression, and socially conscious researchers, aware of the cost of living for workers, claimed that reports of high wages had been exaggerated even before the crisis.[29] *Fortune* magazine, in its lengthy analysis of the office worker's life, attributed low office wages to the youth of most office workers, who were under thirty and retired from the workplace with marriage: "The American office, to a great part of its female workers, is not a career but a device by which a woman works her own way through maidenhood" and into marriage.

> Capitalistic economy, which takes into account not only economic but social factors, has profited from this circumstance as might be expected. If the great majority of office girls were in business not for the business but for their lingerie then there would seem to be no particular reason why business should not reciprocate in kind. The girls, since their ambition was elsewhere, would not complain and business, since its ambition was itself, would profit. The consequence is a low, sluggishly rising, and generally despondent wage scale paid by business with a fairly clear conscience and accepted by the young ladies *faute de mieux*.[30]

In short, the ideology of office work, buttressed in part by statistical evidence, operated with that of woman's proper place to justify keeping the wage scale low.[31] Underscoring employers' views on women's lack of economic and career motivations was evidence that males in clerical positions earned twice as much as women and advanced more rapidly.[32]

Apart from diminished wages, working hours during the Depression were frequently extended in smaller offices and jobs combined. While some institutions failed during the crisis, creating an ever-diminishing job pool, others stopped hiring. Of all the low-level white-collar fields, except sales, office workers suffered most from unemployment.[33] When businesses started to hire again following the brief economic upturn in 1936, there was a new problem—an oversupply of office workers. "Business at its rosiest could not possibly absorb all these girls," wrote Helen McGibbon. Many job counselors faulted the high schools for overdeveloping office-training programs and for failing to counsel women away from the standard feminized occupations like office work and teaching.[34] Since competition for these jobs was keen, women accepted low wages and beginning positions rather than have no job at all. As one writer observed, "Too many girls everywhere are still walking into employment agencies, vague and untrained, with the hopeless statement: 'I'll take anything.'"[35]

Technological change and the reorganization of offices bred dissatisfaction among those who found jobs. With more sophisticated office machines and the scientific application of mass production, workers who had previously executed a variety of related activities now performed repetitive tasks in stenographic pools, supervised by an office manager who distributed projects like a factory foreman. With increasing centralization and specialization, some offices adopted methods of payment used in factories, setting piece rates for typing, billing, and transcribing.[36]

The streamlined procedures that helped businesses reduce higher-level staff and distribute work more efficiently had negative effects on the office girl. Because they reduced the number of coveted secretarial positions, they necessarily altered her expectations for improving her status. Work became boring, and offices reported more illness among those engaged in single repetitive tasks. The

office machine operator lost track of how her job contributed to the business as a whole, and as a result her loyalty to the institution diminished and she felt alienated from coworkers and superiors alike. As job mobility diminished—one contemporary survey reported that 88 percent of office managers sought clerks who would be satisfied to remain clerks—the office girl became another cog in a vast production machine.[37]

In luminous outdoor settings, away from the workplace, Bishop's youthful office workers seem impervious to changes in the office environment. The only possible markers of labor and class are their costumes and occasionally sober expressions. More than other Depression era images, Bishop's paintings appear to preserve a disappearing ideal of female labor. This ideal was foreign to Soyer, even though he, like Bishop, used everyday outdoor settings, sketched on site, and arranged figures in studio poses. But with his spatial configurations, lighting, and palette in a work like *Office Girls* (see fig. 19.6), Soyer conveys some of the tension, monotony, and fatigue of women in routine jobs. They are crowded in an urban setting, placed directly against the picture plane, and surrounded by other figures. The pace of urban life prevents human interaction and repose. One figure rushes quickly by and another looks out, engaging the viewer with her weariness. Soyer's backdrop, unlike Bishop's soft veils of color and light, is one of dark, roughly painted office buildings. Finally, the figure of an unemployed man, at left, serves as a reminder that the economic crisis continues.

Though Soyer was more cognizant than Bishop of the effects of the workplace, his image, like hers, avoids direct engagement with the socially problematic issues of women's labor. Drawings from the Communist periodical the *New Masses* use the direct, sketchy conventions of graphic media to show the clerical workers as exhausted, or at least hardworking—conventions that since the turn of the century had come to be associated with images of social protest.[38] In M. Pass's 1926 drawing of a typist (fig. 19.8), the monotony, fatigue, and meager rewards of repetitive clerical work are crystallized in the image of a typist agonizingly bent over her machine. By contrast, Bishop's paintings avoid negative social commentary or any expression of a need for dramatic change. Instead, the clerical worker relaxes in an obscured outdoor milieu. Having fashioned a deliberate construction of womanhood according to her interpretation of artistic conventions, Bishop contributed to what in turn became part of the rhetoric defining the exemplary office worker.

Bishop's idealization of young women using an established model of artistic beauty assumed a particular meaning in the 1930s, when the office worker's prettiness became increasingly important to her job. Job counselors suggested what job applicants should wear and how they should behave, resorting to strategies that capitalized on conservative ideas about women and their role.

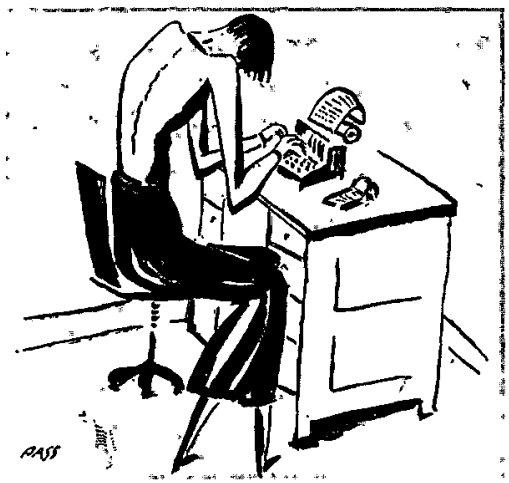

Figure 19.8 M. Pass, drawing of a typist. *New Masses* 1 (May 1926): 27.

They encouraged the practice of sex-typed behavior—the occasional use of flattery or sex appeal—but more often advocated modest dress and deferential manners.[39]

If Bishop's young women look reasonably fashionable, it is because they had to be. Dozens of job advice manuals contained some version of the following counsel: "A business girl may be a mental giant with every qualification for the job she seeks, but that won't help her half so much as wearing the right clothes and make-up and looking clean. Theoretically, one's appearance should have nothing to do with getting a job, but it actually counts 75%. . . . Gone are the days when a girl could look dowdy at the office and get away with it. You no longer hear an employer say of his secretary 'she doesn't look like much but how can she type!' He is more apt to say, 'I've an A-1 secretary now, and *is* she a looker!' "[40]

"Prettiness" depended more on good grooming than on glamour or sex appeal. Bishop focused on this particular preoccupation in *Tidying Up* (see fig. 19.2). With a light touch, she captured the young new woman "revising" herself in that most awkward of grooming moments, when she grimaces into her compact to check for lipstick on her teeth. Job manuals in the 1930s, forerunners of 1970s and 1980s dress-for-success guides, advocated moderation in all details of dress and fashion. Writers recommended against large flashy jewelry, bright makeup, and bright-colored clothes. Recognizing that most business girls operated on small salaries (and marveling at the clerical worker's ingenuity at dressing

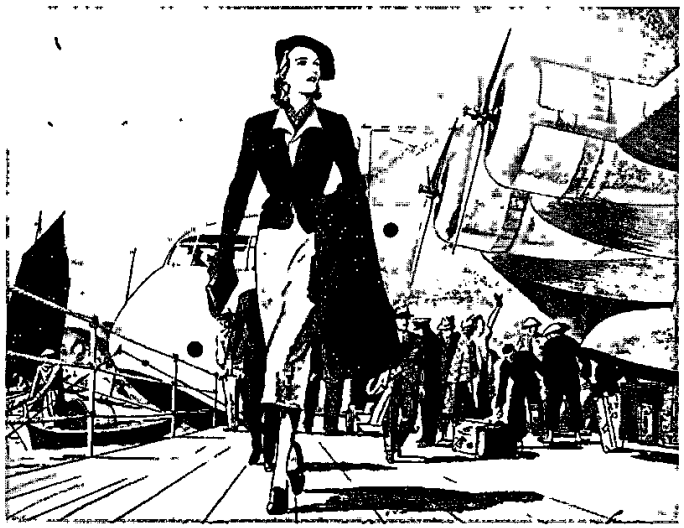

Figure 19.9 Advertisement for American Express Travel Service, *Harper's Bazaar*, Sept. 1, 1937: 159.

well for so little), counselors suggested conservative clothes, coordinated around a single color (preferably black, navy, gray, brown, or dark green), that would last for several seasons. Most appropriate were tailored dresses and suits in plain colors with white or matching blouses. Ornate trim belonged on afternoon dresses, which were out of place in the office. The higher women went on the occupational scale, the more simply they dressed.[41]

By such standards, many of Bishop's office workers appear appropriately fashionable. The subject of *Young Woman* (see fig. 19.5) is the very model of fashion success. Her short jacket with its single button and wide lapels resembles styles from the middle of the decade. With her tailored suit, neatly brushed blond hair, and poised demeanor, she looks like the self-confident business woman about to be met by an American Express travel representative in a 1937 advertisement that reads, "A lady alone enjoys the luxury of American Express Travel Service" (fig. 19.9). Other Bishop women seem less well turned out, like one young woman in *Lunch Hour* who wears a blouse with puffy sleeves. In *At the Noon Hour* (see fig. 19.4), the women wear dresses with flounces—the kind of sheer, fluffy dress deemed inappropriate for office work.

Besides trying to be pretty, fashionable, and well spoken, the young office girl competed for jobs by cultivating a modest, deferential manner. She adopted

the new womanhood exemplified by Dorothy Bromley's "feminist-new style," her voice and gesture demonstrating the "feminine" qualities intended by "nature."[42] Bishop's pictures show a narrow range of behavior in pose, gesture, and expression. Often serious, these women appear gentle and straightforward in their attentiveness to one another. Many stand in relaxed poses, confining their gestures to subtle inward motions. Their demeanor seems passive and responsive rather than provocative. When the subjects seem flirtatious, they are charming, never raucous or overtly sexual. Fundamentally, they are more receptive than argumentative, and they never affront.

The right personality supposedly had everything to do with obtaining, keeping, and advancing in one's job. Counselors devised recipes, which included a dash of polyvalent charm mixed with the right blend of efficiency. Hazel Cades, in *Jobs for Girls*, defined this "right attitude" as a perfect balance of irreconcilable polarities. "It is difficult to define charm, and popularly it is not supposed to be a factor in business, but it is and if you have it you are apt to stand a better chance of getting the job you want. . . . Sometimes in business it is called the right attitude and it is really a combination of friendliness and reticence, of assurance and modesty, of ambition and willingness to do anything, of today's accuracy and tomorrow's vision. It is the ideal attitude of the girl who is willing to take any job and work hard at it while she admits no ultimate limitations."[43]

Job counselors recognized that women were relegated to mechanical and boring jobs. They no longer hid the nature of clerical work. Now, however, they encouraged women to show an interest in their menial tasks, strengthening the chain of production through personal dedication to the company and its goals.[44] By encouraging the right attitude, job counselors perpetuated a myth of easy advancement even as a decrease in the number of skilled secretarial positions lessened the possibilities for rapid upward mobility.

From all quarters women were advised to defer to everyone else's needs. In a book implausibly titled *She Strives to Conquer*, Frances Maule advised women to surrender their will and freedom to the interests of superiors. Other writers advised women to dust a male boss's desk, run his wife's errands, and perform a host of other domestic tasks—no matter what the cost in overtime or the personal sacrifice—to get ahead. *Fortune* magazine's long 1935 article on women in business was the most overt attempt to validate women's subordinate role in the workplace. Its author claimed that a woman's intention to marry and her willingness to be directed by a man relieved her of the ambition that would have made a man restless in her job.[45] Moreover, the boss needed her in this job because social and economic change had created a "new woman," one vastly different from the dutiful upper-class Victorian model. A man, instead of being master in his home, was now the mate of "a more or less unpredictable woman," and

he "resented it." The new office worker (especially the private secretary) replicated the woman his father had married, a daytime wife who knew "all the affairs, all the friends, all the friends' voices, all the idiosyncrasies, all the weakness of one man."[46]

A woman's "power" in the workplace came from her ability to behave in a deferential "womanly" manner according to an ideology that valued her subordination to the demands of male superiors. Since office work depended on a woman's extending her reputedly natural domestic skills to the public sphere—where she made the work environment more pleasant and inviting and managed the office efficiently—she achieved a success with which men could not compete, one that, as the *Fortune* author concluded, "was a triumph for [her] womanhood and not for [her] ambition."[47]

The pictorial narrative structure of Edward Hopper's *Office at Night* (fig. 19.10), one of the few paintings of the period that shows a secretary in an office, encapsulates the contradictions in popular advice literature. It gives visual form to the ambiguous power and gender relations embodied in the boss-and-private-secretary or male-and-female relationship. The secretary has power. A fully realized figure, she towers above her boss and controls not only the access to and organization of office information (the filing cabinet) but also office "production." In the visual field, Hopper emphasizes the secretary's desk and typewriter. They protrude into the lower lefthand corner of the painting, and along with the filing cabinet and the boss's desk they become an important third term in the painting's triangular configuration of work. The secretary's power is subverted, however, by the very stance that affirms it. She is the ultimate office ornament, a male painter's construction of objectified womanhood; her impossibly twisted seductive posture displays her breasts and buttocks simultaneously for both the male viewer and, should he look, the boss. She "controls" the office décor with her beauty and her simple attire—a plain blue dress with a white collar. But her dress clings to her body, whose curves are emphasized by the chair arm that insinuatingly penetrates the space beneath her buttocks. With her pose and her dramatic black hair and makeup she oversteps the boundaries of charm to overtly sexual, and therefore questionable, behavior, which the fair-haired male checks by not meeting her gaze. Ironically, her eyes are so shaded by heavy makeup that her mysterious gaze can be (as Victor Burgin points out) either directed and predatory (hence filled with power) or downcast and modest (hence deferential). Although she appears able to move freely in the office, pictorially everything blocks her access to the seat of power behind the man's desk: the filing cabinet and desk intersect to create an unbridgeable gap. Another gap exists between her desk and his. She generates no activity but waits for instructions. Because the narrative is in suspension, the contradictions are not resolved.[48]

Figure 19.10 Edward Hopper, *Office at Night*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 22⅜ × 25⅛ inches. Collection of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1948.

Male artists like Hopper focus on the office worker as ornamental and sexual, available to the male; Bishop refused to sexualize her models. Even though a degree of objectification occurs that can be read as a difference of class, Bishop still sees them as modest, pleasant young workers. Deferential behavior, it was argued, allowed women either to compete for jobs and rise through the ranks *or* to attract a man and retire from the workplace, the other avenue of success for the office worker. Against all feminist arguments that women worked for personal fulfillment and from economic need, the *Fortune* author asserted that the *imitation* of marriage explained and justified the existence of the female secretary, whereas the *probability* of marriage made women willing to work at low wages in positions where advancement was almost impossible.[49]

In the 1930s job counselors urged women to engage in social activities "with an eye out always for a satisfactory marriage." No one wanted to pound a typewriter forever, and women entering the field were encouraged to overlook the tediousness of the work since it would be temporary. Writers warned women against obvious office romances, and one counseled them not to set their sights on

men beyond their own social station, for the rising executive was more interested in the "junior leaguer or the society girl outside."[50] Comments like these suggest that a persistent stigma—grounded in class bias—attached to the woman who worked.

Still, it was frequently argued that office girls made ideal wives. A woman office worker had studied the male temperament firsthand. Borrowing a page from the "companionate marriage" and professionalized homemaker manual, she understood that marriage resembled a business partnership. She also knew the importance of her husband's business relationships and would willingly entertain on short notice to further them. The wife, who had all the advantages of sharing a home with a man, could learn a great deal from the secretary, who did everything to make life easier for him: "A fault-finding wife who thinks only of her own selfish interests and what she can get out of her husband for herself or the children, is little better than the gold-digging stenographer whom she fears. Often a man becomes so fed up with discord at home . . . that he naturally turns to the girl who stands by him eight hours a day with praise instead of blame. . . . You very seldom see the wife who works shoulder to shoulder with her husband, who keeps herself pretty and attractive for his sake if not for her own, losing him to his secretary, or to any other woman."[51]

The ideology of woman's proper place permeated the advice literature for office workers and other job holders in the 1930s. Work was a preparation for marriage, a vehicle for finding a husband, and even a permissible pursuit for a wife if an economic necessity. But it was rarely seen as a substitute for marriage. In *Letters to Susan*, an example of a popular form of advice literature in the 1930s, a middle-class mother responded to her college-age daughter who had been offered a training-level position in a chemistry lab. Susan was engaged to Mark; although her mother urged her to accept the position because economic conditions remained uncertain, marriage, she insisted, ought to be a woman's main job. "She ought to give it most of her time and the best of her energy, and she can't do it if she's employed and being paid to give just those same things to her employer. . . . A man needs his courage restored and a woman who works 8 hours can't do that. In marriage either husband or wife must be willing to make the outside the home needs of the other predominant."[52]

Preceding the letters in this volume, each of which addressed a different issue, was a preliminary essay entitled "The Situation," detailing the changed conditions in women's lives in the postwar world and offering some suggestions on how women should prepare for them. A woman's destiny was less clear than a man's because she had now to earn her own living and "manage her life successfully if someone else earns it for her." Unlike a man's life, hers was a gamble because she had to wait until her emotions "reached fulfillment" or until they were "permanently channeled into the pursuit of some major interest."[53]

Unlike a man, who actively selected his interests and goals from an array of possible choices, a woman was presumed to be concerned primarily with domestic life. Consequently, she had to await the right opportunity and react to it. She had to learn to respond to external stimuli—whether a male superior's work assignment or his social invitation—rather than develop skills that would allow her to initiate and direct her own behavior. To be selected by men for work and marriage and to be successful on the job and in the home, she had to display compliant, womanly qualities, and she had to wait. Furthermore, what she waited for was still dictated by an ideal of womanly service. Woman's work, at home or in the workplace, enhanced the lives of those around her: "Some kinds of women's work lead to the creation of beautiful things, some to the relief of distress and soothing of pain, some to the training of little minds, while still others go to the making of laughter or to the comfort and pleasure of all."[54]

Bishop's paintings often portray a young woman, in repose and relaxed, who waits or responds to stimuli around her. In such works as *Laughing Head* (Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio), a solitary woman gazes at something beyond the confines of the picture and smiles or laughs. Within the picture plane she is unfettered because an ambiguous, shifting setting places no limits on her options; but these are the options of a temporary and transitional working life. The warm shimmering illumination that distinguishes the artist's painterly surfaces and sets her subjects' faces aglow suggests optimism, but it is so generalized that it in fact belies the inegalitarian conditions of office workers' lives during the Depression. Bishop's paintings also avoid the tawdrier features or downtrodden side of Union Square that Marsh and Soyer more readily acknowledged.[55]

In devising strategies by which women could succeed in the white-collar business world, writers of advice manuals promoted a contradictory set of instructions. They perpetuated a patriarchal model of individual success based on competition—a model that was particularly strong in white-collar businesses in large cities like New York. This model assumed equal access to opportunity through hard work, thus downplaying both gender and class difference. Yet these writers also relied on and ultimately reinforced well-established conceptions of gender difference, particularly attitudes about a woman's nature, her capabilities, and the roles she could be expected to fill. The belief that a woman needed to be more womanly to get ahead, even if such behavior restricted her to feminized occupations, was held by men and women alike. Thankful for jobs during hard times, many women were willing to dress in the prescribed fashion, behave

modestly, and ultimately ignore their fellow office workers' collective demands for better wages and working conditions. Writing in the *Woman's Press* and in *Independent Woman,* 1930s activists who struggled to improve the clerical worker's situation often met resistance from women schooled in the traditional models of "success" perpetuated in the advice literature.[56] As one writer summed up the situation, "Women who hope to be cooking their lunches in their own homes before the year is out are not women to be organized in unions for the improvement of their pay."[57]

Bishop's post-franchise generation of professional women believed that equality was a matter of individual responsibility achieved within established institutions. Although Bishop herself believed strongly in "women" (many of her close friends were women artists), she did not advocate "feminism" in the sense of women's collective endeavors. She never participated in any women's organizations or separate exhibitions for women. Attempting to downplay gender difference in favor of individual achievement, she claimed she wanted to join the art world, not "to be a woman artist" but "just . . . to be an artist."[58]

Though she earned early critical and financial success in the mainstream art world—jurors for important national exhibitions awarded her prizes for both graphics and painting, and major museums purchased her works—she was always characterized as America's best *woman* artist. Moreover, critics placed careful limits around her achievement. Most reminded the public that she was Kenneth Hayes Miller's "pupil" and had made "slow" progress. Henry McBride spoke of Bishop working "the *little* plot of ground she has preempted" and of her "restricted" range. In 1937, one critic even claimed that Bishop's most obvious qualities were "modesty and charm."[59] Critics, colleagues, and friends alike attributed to her the very prerequisites for success that she had inscribed in her subjects.

Bishop became one of the first artists to give the office worker a place in the urban iconography of easel painting. Her images of these clerical types—stocky and unglamorous yet ennobled through artistic conventions that focused on a woman's figure and face—negotiate gender and class difference according to an ideology of office work whose sometimes contradictory notions of mobility and femininity were shared by the artist. Although she depicted her women as self-possessed individuals rather than sexualized objects, she never envisioned them as productive workers in the society in which she saw (and had herself seized) great opportunity. Nor did she see them suffering from an entrenched set of attitudes about roles and occupations. Both the occupational and social spaces of her lower-level workers remained distant from her own and she interacted with her subjects only as studio models. The ambiguous spatial envelope around her casually posed figures, however, suggests a contested middle-class ideal of femi-

ninity that has been destabilized by the Depression, a time when the demands of work and family were particularly acute. If Bishop's painterly suggestion of mobility and potential remains unconvincing as a metaphor for women's social or economic progress, it nonetheless embodies 1930s perceptions of mobility and femininity assigned to the young, deferential office worker whose proper working life was lived in a transitional space between the public and the domestic spheres. As visual representations of the contradictory discourse on women and work, Bishop's paintings helped to reinforce the belief that even outside the home, a woman had her proper place.

Notes

This is an abridged version of chapter 7 in Ellen Wiley Todd's *The "New Woman" Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993). Locations are provided for paintings that were illustrated in the original publication but not here.

The first epigraph is from an interview with the author, Dec. 16, 1972. The second is from a 1978 interview with Patricia Depew for the film *Isabel Bishop: Portrait of An Artist,* distributed by Films Inc., Chicago, as quoted in Helen Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop* (New York, 1989), 36. The third is from Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," in *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media,* ed. Rosemary Betterton (London and New York, 1978), 221.

1. See, for example, "Isabel Bishop Finds Critics Receptive," *Art Digest* 13 (Feb. 1, 1939): 21; "New York Criticism: A Miller Pupil's Shackles Loosen," *Art Digest* 10 (March 1, 1936): 16; and Bernard Myers, ed., *"Sleeping Child,* by Isabel Bishop," Scribner's American Painters Series 9, *Scribner's* 122 (November 1937): 32; and "New Paintings Shown by Isabel Bishop," *New York World-Telegram,* Jan. 21, 1939: 16.

2. See, for example, Grace L. Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Women in the Modern World* 143 (May 1929): 184; Orlie Pell, "Two Million in Offices," *Woman's Press* 33 (June 1939): 256; and Ethel Erickson, *The Employment of Women in Offices,* U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau Bulletin 120 (Washington, D.C., 1934), 3, 7. For important historical overviews, see Lorine Pruette, ed., *Women Workers through the Depression: A Study of White-Collar Employment Made by the American Woman's Association* (New York, 1934); Margery Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, 1982); and Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression,* Contributions to Women's Studies 15 (Westport, Conn., 1980).

3. See, for example, Loire Brophy, *If Women Must Work* (New York, 1936); Hazel Rawson Cades, *Jobs for Girls* (New York, 1928); Dorothy Dayton, "Personality Plus—or Minus," *Independent Woman* 15 (November 1936): 343, 362; Frances Maule, *She*

Strives to Conquer: Business Behavior, Opportunities, and Job Requirements for Women (New York, 1937); Elizabeth Gregg MacGibbon, *Manners in Business* (New York, 1936); and Ruth Wanger, *What Girls Can Do* (New York, 1926).

4. Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London and New York, 1988), 56.

5. Interview with the artist, Dec. 16, 1982.

6. Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 11–12; U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *The Occupational Progress of Women*, 17, as quoted in Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," 180.

7. Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 13, 41.

8. For hiring policies, see MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 26; Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 14, 27.

9. In the 1934 New York survey of 14,025 clerical workers, only 10.1 percent reported that they were married. Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 12–13, 29.

10. Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," 183.

11. Ibid., 183; and Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 13.

12. Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 5–8; and Wanger, *What Girls Can Do*, 112.

13. Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 5–7; and Wanger, *What Girls Can Do*, 113.

14. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York, 1972); and Rosemary Betterton, ed., *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media* (London and New York, 1987), 10–14.

15. Emily Genauer, "Miss Bishop Rates High as Painter," *New York World-Telegram*, Feb. 15, 1936: 15; Edward Alden Jewell, as quoted in *Art Digest* 13 (Feb. 1, 1939): 21; James W. Lane, "Bishop," *Art News* 41 (June 1942): 42, and Lane, "Canvases by Isabel Bishop, Painter of Subtle Tonalities," *Art News* 37 (Jan. 21, 1939): 12; and Forbes Watson, "Isabel Bishop," *Magazine of Art* 32 (January 1939): 52.

16. Bishop's technique was complicated, and she took many months to complete a single painting. She worked in either oil or tempera, building up meticulously crafted layers of paint. The pencil strokes, which she added toward the end of the process, often to a surface still wet, suggest where a contour might appear without really defining it. As a result, the pencil strokes seem to hover above the surface, implying motion.

17. In most New York offices women worked a thirty-nine-hour week, seven hours a day with four hours on Saturday mornings, except during the summer. In large offices good benefit packages might include two weeks of paid vacation, one week of paid sick leave, some group insurance, and small bonuses. Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 29–33.

Clerical wages seem to have been considerably better than those of domestic, industrial, and sales workers. In the early 1930s a beginning file clerk in a large institution seems to have made about a dollar a week more (or around $17) than a beginning saleswoman in a major department store, and a secretary two to five dollars a week more than an upper-level saleswoman (or around $42.50). My own estimate is based on an evaluation of several median wage charts in Erickson, *Employment of Women* (20–23), modified by reports of somewhat lower salary ranges in "Women in Business II," *Fortune* 12 (August 1935): 85.

18. Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," 181.

19. Erickson, *Employment of Women*, 1.

20. In "Isabel Bishop, the Grand Manner, and the Working Girl," *Art in America* 63 (September 1975): 63, the art critic Lawrence Alloway identified this technique as a metaphor. The artist's own statement was from her article "Concerning Edges," *Magazine of Art* 32 (January 1939): 57–58.

21. Sheldon Reich, *Isabel Bishop*, introduction by Martin H. Bush (Tucson, 1974), 23.

22. Reich, *Isabel Bishop*, 24.

23. Cindy Nemser, "A Conversation with Isabel Bishop," *Feminist Art Journal* 5 (Spring 1976): 15.

24. "Isabel Bishop," *Current Biography Yearbook* (New York, 1977), 63; and Karl Lunde, *Isabel Bishop* (New York, 1975), 169.

25. William Engle, "Portrait of Two Girls Bought by Metropolitan Reunites Two Ex-Waitresses Who Posed for It," *New York World-Telegram*, Feb. 27, 1936: 3.

26. For information on the Popular Front, the Artists' Congress, and the Society for Modern Artists, see the introduction to Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams, *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986).

27. Interview with the artist, Dec. 16, 1982. Quotations from Cindy Nemser, "Conversation with Isabel Bishop," 18; and Reich, *Isabel Bishop*, 14, 25.

28. Alloway, "Isabel Bishop," 63. Alloway also argued that Bishop's fully articulated theories about mobility were a way for her to assuage her conscience for her remarks about the social limitations of these figures, a judgment that may have been unfair given Bishop's values and her position in particular social and political discourses in the 1930s.

29. Grace Hutchins, *Women Who Work* (New York, 1934), 84. Hutchins, a writer with a Marxist perspective, quoted a 1926 National Industrial Conference Board report that showed 39 percent of all clerks received less than twenty dollars per week. Her study is an excellent foil for Lorine Pruette's study of white-collar workers on large salaries.

30. "Women in Business II," 55.

31. In New York, where employers generally paid the highest wages, stenographers dropped from $20-$40 per week to $15–25; typists, who earned $18-$30 in 1935, received $16-$18; "Women in Business II," 55. Grace Hutchins quotes a different, still lower scale and looks to some of the lower clerical occupations. In 1929 clerks earned $10-$22 per week; in 1931 their wages dropped to $8-$18 per week.

32. Hutchins, *Women Who Work*, 84; "Women in Business II," 50; and Elizabeth Gregg MacGibbon, "Exit—the Private Secretary," *Occupations* 15 (January 1937): 300.

33. A bookkeeper might absorb the jobs of a saleswoman, stenographer, and general clerical worker and work six days, eleven to fourteen hours each, for half her former wage. She dared not complain for fear of losing her job. Hutchins, *Women Who Work*, 84.

34. MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 165. Eunice Fuller Barnard, "Girl Graduate, 1936," *Independent Woman* 15 (July 1936): 203.

35. Barnard, "Girl Graduate," 203.

36. Caroline Ware, "The 1939 Job of the White Collar Girl," *Woman's Press* 33 (June 1939): 254–55; and Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," 184.

37. MacGibbon, "Exit—the Private Secretary," 296, reported that in one enormous

New York office, seventy-seven private secretaries, each of whom had served an executive, were replaced by twenty-two workers. See also Coyle, "Women in the Clerical Occupations," 185–86; and Ware, "1939 Job," 254–55.

38. Rebecca Zurier, *Art for "The Masses": A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911–1917* (Philadelphia, 1988), 126–32.

39. Scharf, *To Work and to Wed*, 100–101.

40. MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 12, 28.

41. In "Women in Business II" it was estimated that more than a fifth of an office girl's salary was spent on clothing. The most expensive items were silk stockings, at the rate of a pair a week (p. 85). See also MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 29; and Maule, *She Strives to Conquer*, 125.

42. Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Feminist—New Style," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 155 (October 1927): 552–60.

43. Cades, *Jobs for Girls*, 16; Dayton, "Personality Plus—or Minus," 343. Dayton wrote that personality was about 75 percent of getting a job, brains and technical training less than 25 percent. Her article discusses the increasing reliance on experts to help a girl change her voice and improve her personality, first by testing, then through a series of classes.

44. Brophy, *If Women Must Work*, 35–41.

45. Maule, *She Strives to Conquer*, 6; MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 66–72; and "Women in Business II," 55.

46. "Women in Business II," 55; Eugenia Wallace, "Office Work and the Ladder of Success," *Independent Woman* 6 (October 1927): 16–18.

47. "Women in Business II," 86.

48. For an extended discussion of this painting, see Ellen Wiley Todd, "Will [S]he Stoop to Conquer? Preliminaries Toward a Reading of Edward Hopper's *Office at Night*," in Norman Bryson et al., eds., *Visual Theory: Method and Interpretation in Art History and the Visual Arts* (New York, 1990); Victor Burgin, *Between* (Oxford, 1986), 184.

49. "Women in Business II," 55. The persistent belief that these jobs were temporary was buttressed by the departure of four out of five women from clerical occupations when they married.

50. MacGibbon, *Manners in Business*, 61, 116–27.

51. Ibid., 127.

52. Margaret Culkin Banning, *Letters to Susan* (New York, 1936), 92, 94.

53. Ibid., 7.

54. Wanger, *What Girls Can Do*, 4.

55. Unlike her nineteenth-century predecessors Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, who would never have thought of entering the cafés, nightclubs, and brothels that emblematized modern life for their fellow impressionists, Isabel Bishop accompanied Marsh to the burlesque and to striptease joints on occasion. But as a proper upper-middle-class female viewer and producer of representations of women, she could not "properly" or "publicly" (through paintings) enter those spaces or envision female sexuality in that way for herself or her female viewers.

56. By the 1930s there were a few small local unions that combined bookkeepers, stenographers, accountants, and occasionally saleswomen. In May 1934 the legislative

body of the YWCA, along with representatives of business and professional clubs, adopted resolutions identifying the welfare of office workers with that of other workers and proposing study and educational groups to help office workers prepare for unionization. Neither the movement nor the organization was widespread in the 1930s. Marion H. Barbour, "The Business Girl Looks at Her Job," *Woman's Press* 30 (January 1936): 18–19; Clyde Beals, Pearl Wiesen, Albion A. Hartwell, and Theresa Wolfson, "Should White Collar Workers Organize?" *Independent Woman* 15 (November 1936): 340–42; and Ware, "1939 Job," 255.

57. *"Women in Business II,"* 85.

58. Interview with the artist, Dec. 16, 1982.

59. Henry McBride, "Some Others Who Arouse Interest," *New York Sun*, Feb. 15, 1936: 28; Bernard Myers, *"Sleeping Child,"* 32.