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The Urban Jungle: Americanism and the Jazz Age in Weimar Germany

[pre-print, subject to change; for *Constructing America /Defining Europe*, ed. by J Verheul J, R Gillett, J Hung. (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2019)]

Americanism in Weimar Germany

For a few years in the 1920s, the German public was absorbed by a heated debate about “Americanism” and “Americanization”. The controversy about these catchwords was a barely disguised discourse about the industrial, technological and cultural modernization of the Weimar Republic, and its consequences for society at large. Evoking the “Americanization” of Germany provided intellectuals with a medium to discuss the radical social changes they witnessed, and suggested ways of coping with the ‘crisis of classical modernity’ (Detlev Peukert).¹ The key term “Americanism”

¹ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (London, 1993); Philipp Gassert, “Amerikanismus, Antiamerikanismus, Amerikanisierung. Neue Literatur zur Sozial-, Wirtschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des amerikanischen Einflusses in Deutschland und Europa”, in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 39 (1999), pp. 531–561; Egbert Klautke, “Anti-Americanism in Twentieth Century Europe”, in *The Historical Journal* 54 (2011), pp. 1125–1139; Bernd Weisbrod, “Das doppelte Gesicht Amerikas in der Weimarer Republik”, in Frank Kelleter and Wolfgang Knöbl, (eds.), *Amerika und Deutschland. Ambivalente Begegnungen* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 194–210.

suggested precision, but remained vague: in 1927, at the height of the debate, the “Augsburger Post-Zeitung” thought it necessary to explain the meaning of the term to its readers: “One of the most common and best-known catch phrases today is the word ‘Americanism’, which the majority of people uses to summarize everything that is deemed typically American, namely: capitalism, materialism, automobilism, the perfection of film technology, advertising techniques, sport, radio, jazz, in short everything that represents America for the majority of people.”²

Public interest in everything American certainly reflected the increased power of the USA, who had emerged as the only genuine winner of the First World War and assumed a key position in international relations, due to its economic and financial power, and despite the official “isolationism” of the Coolidge and Harding administrations.³ More important for the German infatuation with America was the model-character of American society: many German observers believed that the USA allowed them a glimpse into their own future. “America” became a chiffre for “modernity” in its various cultural, economic and political forms. American civilization

² Ch. Demmig, “Das Erwachen des Internationalismus in Amerika”, *Augsburger Post-Zeitung*, 8 February 1927, p. 3: “Eines der heute gebräuchlichsten und bekanntesten Schlagwörter ist das Wort ‘Amerikanismus’, in dem die Mehrzahl der Menschen all das zusammenfaßt, was als typisch amerikanisch gilt, nämlich: Kapitalismus, Materialismus, Automobilismus, Vollkommenheit der Filmtechnik, der Reklametechnik, Sport, Radio, Jazz, all das, was überhaupt für die meisten Amerika selbst ist.” (Translation by the author, E. K.)

³ Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion. American Political, Economic and Cultural Relations with Europe 1919–1933* (Ithaca, NY und London, 1984). Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); David Ellwood, *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

was thus either presented as a role-model to be emulated, or as a warning sign for the risks and dangers of fully modernized societies. Hence the catch-phrase “Americanism” often referred more to the imaginations of German commentators than to American social and economic realities. Literary critic Rudolf Kayser, the publisher of the leading literary journal “Die Neue Rundschau”, went even further and suggested that the phrase Americanism had “nothing or only little to do with the American”. To him, Americanism was a “new orientation to being” that had grown out of European traditions and conditions; Americanism was a “new European method”.⁴

The majority of German admirers of America were mainly interested in the economic and technological Americanization of Germany. Adapting American technology and copying American business methods would allow Germany to regain her economic strength and thus restore her position as a leading power, at least within Europe. The enemies of Americanism abhorred such views. For them, Americanism was not a possible solution to, but the root-cause of the crisis of modernity. The deficiencies of American society showed the fatal consequences of exaggerated and one-sided modernization, they claimed. The cultural and intellectual consequences of economic Americanization seemed intolerable. Anti-American authors thus exterritorialised their hatred of modern society: they blamed Americans for imposing their superficial and utilitarian values on Germany (and by extension, the whole of Europe), thus undermining and destroying her culture and traditions.⁵

⁴ Rudolf Kayser, “Americanism”, in *Vossische Zeitung*, 27 September 1925, reprinted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 395.

⁵ On the European dimension of these debates see Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations*

In 1927, the journalist Adolf Halfeld published the most comprehensive anti-American treatise, entitled *Amerika und der Amerikanismus* (“America and Americanism”), which contained a detailed and unrelenting assault on American society and the values that underpinned it.⁶ Halfeld had worked in the USA for German newspapers and presented his book as the first-hand report of an eye-witness. It was meant as a warning sign to his fellow Germans of the dangers of Americanization who seemed to celebrate and follow the principles of Americanism and Fordism, i.e. the business model of Henry Ford as laid out in his hugely popular autobiographical books.⁷ Halfeld’s book was enthusiastically reviewed in several conservative and right-wing publications, but it remained the only book of its kind published during the Weimar Republic, and should not be mistaken as representative for the “German mind”, even though it contained an almost complete list of German complaints, accusations and stereotypes about “the Americans”.⁸ Halfeld portrayed them as superficial, materialistic

(New York und Cambridge, 2012); Egbert Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten: „Amerikanisierung“ in Deutschland und Frankreich (1900–1933)* (Stuttgart, 2003); Thomas Raithel, “‘Amerika’ als Herausforderung in Deutschland und Frankreich in den 1920er Jahren”, in Chantal Metzger and Hartmut Kaelble, eds, *Deutschland – Frankreich – Nordamerika: Transfers, Imaginationen, Beziehungen* (Stuttgart, 2006), pp. 82–97; Alexander Schmidt, *Reisen in die Moderne: Der Amerika-Diskurs des deutschen Bürgertums vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg im europäischen Vergleich* (Berlin, 1997).

⁶ Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus: Betrachtungen eines Europäers* (Jena, 1927).

⁷ Henry Ford, *Mein Leben und Werk* (Leipzig, 1923, 22nd edition Leipzig, 1924), see Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten*; Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York and Oxford, 1994).

⁸ Hermann Fackler, “Amerika und der Amerikanismus”, in *Die Tat* 20 (1928/29), pp. 58–60; Alfred E. Günther, “Der Amerikanismus und die Amerikanisierten”, in

and unrefined. In Halfeld's long-winded description, the typical American, clean-shaved, dull and narrow-minded, came across as a "big child" only interested in making money, but unable to spend it reasonably. Americans had no interest in the arts, philosophy and literature, and appreciated only utilitarian forms of science that could be "applied". American society was a "planned civilization" that suffered fatally from a lack of history and culture. To Halfeld and his followers, Americanism was seductive and dangerous: Since the Americans advertised their "way of life" as a model to be followed and emulated, naïve Germans had to be warned of the dire consequences of any form of Americanization.⁹

The supervisor of Halfeld's Ph.D. Dissertation at the University of Hamburg, the economist Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, had played a major part in the debates about Americanism when he recommended Henry Ford's business model as a way to solve Germany's economic and social problems. As a "reactionary modernist", Gottl-Ottlilienfeld coined the term "Fordism", which he distinguished from "Taylorism" because of its focus on "service": Fordism, he claimed, offered a solution to Germany's economic problems and at the same time provided a defense against socialism and bolshevism. Fordism corrected the flaws of market economies, it guaranteed private

Deutsches Volkstum 1929.1, pp. 419–426; Alfred Ehrentreich, *Americana*, in *Die Tat* 19 (1927/28), pp. 789–792. Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten*, p. 276.

⁹ Dieter Heimböckel, "Die USA als neusachliches Schreckgespenst. Adolf Halfelds *Amerika und der Amerikanismus* (1927)" in Jochen Vogt and Alexander Stephan (eds), *Das Amerika der Autoren. Von Kafka bis 09/11* (Munich, 2006), pp. 87–98; Egbert Klautke, "Kronzeugen des Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland und Frankreich. Adolf Halfeld und Georges Duhamel", in *Welche Modernität? Intellektuellendiskurse zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich im Spannungsfeld nationaler und europäischer Identitätsbilder*, ed. by Wolfgang Eßbach (Berlin, 2000), 173–91

property but avoided the injustices of excessive capitalism and improved the living standards of ordinary workers.¹⁰ Therefore, the USA, the most advanced and successful market economy, was immune to the threat of a socialist revolution. As the liberal economist Moritz Julius Bonn put it: “Happy workers are not revolutionaries.”¹¹

The publication of Henry Ford’s autobiography and Gottl-Ottlilienfeld’s contributions were part of a wide-ranging debate about the opportunities and dangers of American-style “rationalization”, mass production and standardization which formed the core of German debates about Americanization.¹² Gottl-Ottlilienfeld’s and other

¹⁰ Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, *Fordismus? Paraphrasen über das Verhältnis von Wirtschaft und technischer Vernunft bei Henry Ford und Frederick W. Taylor* (Jena, 1924); Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, *Fordismus: Über Industrie und Technische Vernunft* (Jena 1926). Roman Köster, *Die Wissenschaft der Aussenseiter: Die Krise der Nationalökonomie in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 2011), pp. 191–206. The fitting label “reactionary modernists” has been introduced by Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).

¹¹ Moritz Julius Bonn, *Geld und Geist. Vom Wesen und Werden der amerikanischen Welt* (Berlin, 1927), p. 72: “Zufriedene Arbeiter sind nicht revolutionär.” See also Theodor Lüddecke, *Das amerikanische Wirtschaftstempo als Bedrohung Europas* (Leipzig, 1925), p. 84; Friedrich Aereboe, *Wirtschaft und Kultur in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika* (Berlin, 1930), p. 12.

¹² Philipp Gassert, “‘Without Concessions to Marxist or Communist Thought’: Fordism in Germany, 1923–1939”, in David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt, eds, *Transatlantic Visions and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776* (Cambridge and New York, 1997), pp. 217–242; Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten*, pp. 191–213; Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*; Rüdiger Hachtmann and Adelheid von Saldern, “‘Gesellschaft am Fließband’. Fordistische Produktion und Herrschaftspraxis in Deutschland”, in *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, online

reactionary modernists' position was an attempt to introduce a truncated version of Americanism to Germany; a form of Americanism reduced to "technological rationality" ("technische Vernunft") which ignored other aspects of American society, from mass culture to its democratic traditions. Americanism reduced to technology, efficiency and rationalization appealed to the National Socialists, too: it does not come as a surprise that Gottl-Ottlilienfeld reached the peak of his career during the Nazi era when he held a chair in economics at the University of Berlin and became a member of Hans Frank's "Academy of German Law".¹³ In this respect only, Adolf Halfeld followed his academic supervisor: he continued his career as a journalist seamlessly during the Third Reich and provided the Nazi regime with another anti-American pamphlet during the Second World War.¹⁴

Jazz in Weimar

Towards the end of *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, Halfeld commented on the success of jazz music, which he presented as a typical product of the planned, artificial American society. Similar to other features of American civilisation, Halfeld explained jazz music as part of the heritage of "puritanism": "The vulgar, noisy, raw and hysterical syncopes of Jazz expressed, in an artificial way, a sense of life which for centuries didn't have the right to exist in the Puritan world but which now, having

edition, 6 (2009), at URL: <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Hachtmann-Saldern-2-2009>

¹³ Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich: Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung, 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1997), p. 24ff.

¹⁴ Adolf Halfeld, *USA greift in die Welt* (Hamburg, 1942).

become cynical because of material abundance, turns to violent revolt.”¹⁵ According to Halfeld, Jazz was the adequate expression of American superficiality. It provided distraction and helped Americans cover up their “inability for life” (“Unfähigkeit zum Leben”). To the “soulless masses of the planned civilization” of America, the mindless entertainment of Jazz music offered the only effective stimulant.¹⁶ Jazz music provided German critics of Americanism with evidence for the cliché that Americans had not made any original contribution to world culture, and might not even be capable of doing so. The fact that the white Americans had taken their national music “from the negro” showed their artistic incompetence and the inferiority of their civilisation, in contrast to the Old World.¹⁷ In this perspective, Jazz did not count as “culture”, but merely as entertainment, similar to the sentimental romances and childish comedies produced in Hollywood.

Other critics were even more irritated by the success of Jazz music in Germany than Halfeld. The composer Hans Pfitzner, who also protested against other forms of musical modernism including Arnold Schoenberg’s twelve-tone music, described Jazz as the “musical expression of Americanism” and warned of the threat of “racial alienation” it posed to German culture. He likened the performances of Jazz-bands in Berlin’s theatres and nightclubs as the “American tanks in a battle against European culture” (“die amerikanischen Tanks der Geisterschlacht gegen europäische Kultur”).

¹⁵ Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, p. 239: “In den vulgären, lärmenden, rohen und hysterischen Synkopen des Jazz kam ein Lebensgefühl zum künstlichen Ausdruck, das Jahrhunderte hindurch kein Existenzrecht in der puritanischen Welt besaß und nun, durch wirtschaftlichen Überfluß zynisch geworden, zur gewaltsamen Revolte schreitet.”

¹⁶ Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, 239–40.

¹⁷ Fritz Behn, “Amerikanismus in Deutschland”, in *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 26.9 (1929), pp. 672-674, at p. 673.

To Pfitzner, Jazz embodied the exact opposite of the cherished German traditions he wanted to preserve. Jazz was a decadent form of music “without soul, depth and content, far from the realm of beauty, alien to us, sensation, a narcotic, ringing vulgarity”.¹⁸ In 1929, the National Socialist ideologue Alfred Rosenberg (1893–1946) established a “Combat Alliance for German Culture” (“Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur”) which declared Jazz music as “alien” and “decomposing”. Rosenberg further radicalized the anti-American critique of Jazz music when he combined antisemitism, racism and anti-Americanism and presented Jazz as part of a conspiracy aimed at undermining and destroying German culture: “Berlin is being conquered. Not only by Jews, but by mulattos and niggers, who are presented to the urban mob as foremost artists.”¹⁹

Quite in contrast to such radical, uncompromising critics, a range of authors welcomed the arrival of Jazz music in Germany, while embraced it enthusiastically. Other authors enthusiastically embraced Jazz music as soon as it arrived in post-war Germany. With reference to the prohibition, the journalist Hans Siemsen celebrated the

¹⁸ Hans Pfitzner, “Die Ästhetik der musikalischen Impotenz”, in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vo.: 2 (Augsburg, 1926), pp. 99–281, at pp. 113–17. (“ohne Seele, ohne Tiefe und Gehalt, fern vom Bereich des Schönen, uns wesensfremd, Ohren- und Lachkitzel, Sensation, Betäubung, tönende Gemeinheit”). On Pfitzner see Tim Lörke, *Die Verteidigung der Kultur: Mythos und Musik als Medien der Gegenmoderne* (Würzburg, 2010), pp. 97–112.

¹⁹ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Sumpf. Querschnitte durch das „Geistes“-Leben der Novemberdemokratie* (Munich, 1930), p. 25: “Berlin wird erobert. Nicht von Juden allein, sondern von Mulatten und Niggern, die als erste Künstler dem Asphaltpöbel im Frack vorgeführt werden.” See Alan Steinweis, “Weimar Culture and the Rise of National Socialism: The *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*”, in *Central European History* 24 (1991), pp. 402–423.

effect of the new music and compared it to Charlie Chaplin's films: "America, so they say, doesn't have any alcohol anymore. Well, it doesn't need any, because it has Jazz-bands. These are musical groups which make you drunk without alcohol."²⁰ Siemsen admired the subversive, undignified quality of Jazz (das "Würdelose"), which defied the values of traditional German society. "If the Emperor had danced jazz – all this would have never happened", Siemsen was convinced.²¹ On a general level, the success of Jazz music in Germany provided clear evidence of the impending "Americanization" of European culture to both critics and supporters.²² Jazz music was considered the most American contribution to modern culture, quite in contrast to the cinema, which was equally successful, but was, after all, an European invention that had already been established before the First World War, and only recently been appropriated by

²⁰ Hans Siemsen, "Jazz-band", in *Die Weltbühne* 17.1 (1921), pp. 287-88, at p. 287: "Amerika hat, so sagt man wenigstens, keinen Alkohol mehr. Es hat auch keinen nötig. Es hat Jazz-bands. Das sind Musikkapellen, die einen ohne Alkohol besoffen machen."

²¹ Hans Siemsen, "Jazz-band", in *Die Weltbühne* 17.1 (1921), p. 288: "Hätte der Kaiser Jazz getanzt – niemals wäre das alles passiert." See J. Bradford Robinson, "Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure", in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 107-134; Thomas J. Saunders, "How American was it? American Culture from Weimar to Hitler", in Agnes C. Moeller, (ed.), *German Pop Culture: How „American“ is it?* (Ann Arbor, 2004), pp. 52–65.

²² In addition to Pfitzner, 'Die Ästhetik der musikalischen Impotenz', p. 115, see Hans A. Joachim, "Romane aus Amerika", in *Die Neue Rundschau* 41.2 (1930), 396-409; siehe Eichstedt/Polster, *Wie die Wilden*, 35-37, 48-50, Bernd Ostendorf, "Die amerikanische Kulturindustrie und ihre Rückwirkung auf Deutschland am Beispiel des Jazz", in Wolfgang Reinhard and Peter Waldmann, eds., *Nord und Süd in Amerika: Gemeinsamkeiten. Gegensätze. Europäischer Hintergrund* (Freiburg 1992), 1248-65, at 1253-55.

American entrepreneurs. When they judged the cinema, German critics made a clear distinction between American Hollywood films, which they considered shallow entertainment with no artistic value, and the European art films which had become accepted as contributing to high culture: even the most radical critics of Hollywood did not reject the cinema as a (new) medium, but the superficial and commercialized version of it emanating from the U.S.²³ In contrast to the cinema, Jazz music originated in America, and together with fashionable dances like the shimmy, fox-trot or charleston, represented the musical form of Americanism. Urban audiences in particular embraced and celebrated Jazz music, which proved to be as popular as Hollywood's slapstick comedies and Westerns. Jazz music and Hollywood films were often linked in the 1920s: large cinemas in German cities employed their own Jazz bands and used Jazz music to accompany silent movies. Moreover, Jazz music regularly featured on the stages of Berlin's large vaudeville, music halls and variety theatres, whose success peaked in the mid-to-late 1920s. Chorus girls in the style of the Ziegfeld follies of New York fame, with their famous synchronised kick-line, were an integral part musical "revues" and variety shows in Germany's capital, which in turn contributed significantly to the popularity of Jazz music that accompanied their performances.²⁴

²³ Ursula M. Saekel, *Der US-Film in der Weimarer Republik – ein Medium der "Amerikanisierung"? Deutsche Filmwirtschaft, Kulturpolitik und mediale Globalisierung im Fokus transatlantischer Interessen* (Paderborn, 2011), Thomas J. Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin* (Berkeley, 1997); Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment. America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London, 1984). See also Victoria de Grazia, "Mass Culture and Sovereignty. The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920-1960", in *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989), pp. 53-87.

²⁴ Wolfgang Jansen, *Glanzrevuen der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin, 1987), 132-33; Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1997), p. 170.

Immediately after the end of the First World War, German musicians were quick to imitate American jazz music, ‘Yazz’ or ‘Jass’. Well before American jazz musicians travelled to Germany and performed in front of live audiences, German musicians adopted the new, unfamiliar musical style which had been introduced to Europe during the First World War. The “Jazz-band” quickly became a cultural phenomenon in post-war Germany, performed by Germans for Germans. Journalists, cultural critics and musical experts immediately began debating and interpreting the phenomenon “Jazz-band”, which accompanied the “dance-craze” of the immediate post-war period. Working musicians without any first-hand experience with American jazz music learned about the characteristics of this unfamiliar musical style from quickly produced textbooks and manuals.²⁵ The journalist Franz Wolfgang Koebner published in 1921 the first of a number of German books about Jazz, which mainly addressed musicians. At the same time, Koebner provided a cultural history of Jazz music and explained the development of this unique style.²⁶

Berlin was the natural “home” of German Americanism during the “roaring twenties”. Already before the First World War, the rapidly expanding capital city of the German Empire had been described as the “Chicago on the Spree” and the “most American city of Europe”. During the Weimar Republic, Berlin became the unrivalled capital of modernity in Germany, and in particular its buzzing night-life made it the centre of cultural Americanism.²⁷ “Authentic” and “original” American musicians

²⁵ Jonathan O. Wipplinger, *The Jazz Republic: Music, Race and American Culture in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2017), pp. 37-39.

²⁶ F. W. Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy. Brevier der neuesten Tänze* (Berlin, 1921).

²⁷ Reinhard Rürup, “‘Parvenu Polis’ and ‘Human Workshop’: Reflections on the History of the City of Berlin”, in *German History* 6 (1988), PP. 233–249, at p. 234;

arrived in Berlin only after the currency reform in 1924; during the years of inflation performing in Germany had not made economic sense for American musicians. The first African-American bandleader to perform in Berlin was Sam Wooding, whose band “Chocolate Kiddies Negro Revue” arrived in 1925 and made a lasting impression. Josephine Baker, another icon of the Jazz age, arrived in Berlin the same year. After raving successes with her shows in Paris, she became an instant sensation in the German capital where she performed together with Claude Hopkins’s Jazz orchestra. Her burlesque costumes and performances provided Berlin audiences with a mixture of sexualised dances and jazz music that met the expectations of Europe’s capital of nightlife and entertainment.²⁸

By the end of the decade, in addition to working musicians who had adopted the new American styles without first-hand experiences and without any ambition to produce “original” American jazz, some German Jazz bands had reached a respectable level of musical achievement. The most famous of Berlin’s Jazz combos were *Weintraubs Syncopators*, founded by the pianist Stefan Weintraub shortly after the war. In 1928, when they also recorded their first records, Weintraub’s band accompanied Josephine Baker on stage of the musical “All aboard” (“Bitte einsteigen”), and in 1930 they appeared in Joseph von Sternberg’s film “Der Blaue Engel”, accompanying the young Marlene Dietrich. Before their forced emigration in 1933, Weintraubs

Walther Rathenau, *Die schönste Stadt der Welt* [1902], (Berlin and Vienna 2002), p. 23; Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, p. 154–186.

²⁸ Cornelius Partsch, *Schräge Töne. Jazz und Unterhaltungsmusik in der Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart, 2000); Wipplinger, *The Jazz Republic*; Heinz Steinert, *Die Entdeckung der Kulturindustrie oder: Warum Professor Adorno Jazz-Musik nicht ausstehen konnte* (Vienna, 1992).

Syncopators contributed to a further twenty motion pictures. A further example of a respected German jazz musician was Erich Borchard, who had worked in the USA as a musician during the First World War, and performed in Germany with bands such as *Eric Concerto's Yankee Jazz Band* and *Eric Borchard's Atlantic Jazz Band*. The "Comedian Harmonists" adapted the style of American vocal group "The Revellers" with huge success, and were even invited to perform in America.²⁹

The self-proclaimed "King of Jazz" Paul Whiteman provided a version of Jazz music that was more palatable for middle-class audiences and thus contributed to the general appreciation of Jazz in Germany. Whiteman performed the first staging of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" in New York in 1924, which provided a perfect template for his approach to Jazz as symphonic music. In 1926, Whiteman arrived on the stage of Berlin's *Großes Schauspielhaus*, and made a lasting impression. Frank Warschauer, the critic of the *Vossische Zeitung*, commented in his review of Whiteman's concert: "Jazz: the most entertaining and vital phenomenon in contemporary music. Moreover, the only musical mass movement. Not only in America but everywhere."³⁰ Taking Jazz music to a concert hall by itself demonstrated the

²⁹ Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 51-54; Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 6-7; Ekkehard Jost, "Jazz in Deutschland: Von der Weimarer Republik zur Adenauer-Ära", in Klaus Wolbert (ed.), *That's Jazz. Der Sound des 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Musik-, Personen-, Kultur-, Sozial- und Mediengeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt, 1997), pp. 357-378; Rainer E. Lotz, *Amerikaner in Europa*, in Wolbert, *That's Jazz*, pp. 291-297; Cornelius Partsch, *Schräge Töne: Jazz und Unterhaltungsmusik in der Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart, 2000).

³⁰ Frank Warschauer, "Jazz: On Whiteman's Berlin concerts", [1926] in *Weimar Sourcebook*, pp. 571-72.

acknowledgement of Jazz music by the cultural establishment of the city. Performed by a full-scale symphonic orchestra which included a full string section (later the “big band”), Whiteman’s interpretations of Jazz, and “jazzified” versions of classical themes, appealed to audiences beyond the demimonde of the capital’s night clubs and cabarets, on account of the “orderly”, well-arranged and rehearsed performances, which abandoned the improvisations of the “hot” Jazz performed by smaller combos.³¹

With Paul Whiteman’s “symphonic Jazz” and its German appropriations in mind, the defenders of Jazz music denied that this style was merely wild, unregulated noise and pointed at the level of refinement of contemporary Jazz music. Bernhard Egg, the author of “Dictionary of Jazz” complained about those critics who had no first-hand experience of Jazz music and never actually listened to it. Egg conceded that the early attempts to copy Jazz music in Germany had included excesses such as cow-bells, the hooting of horns and gun shots, and often produced nothing but an enormous noise that had little to do with music. In the meantime, however, Jazz music had matured and changed profoundly. It bore little relation to its wild beginnings.³² Paul Bernhard agreed: “Today, Jazz music provides contemporary musical art for educated people at a modest price.”³³

In addition to live performances, recorded music played an increasingly important role in the dissemination of Jazz music in Germany from the mid-1920s onwards. With the stabilisation of the German economy in 1924, more middle-class families could afford to purchase their own gramophones and listen to Jazz music inside their own homes. The invention of electronic microphones improved the quality of these

³¹ Partsch, *Schräge Töne*, p. 111-12; Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 84-98.

³² Egg, *Jazz-Fremdwörterbuch*, p. 3

³³ Paul Bernhard, *Jazz: Eine musikalische Zeitfrage* (Munich, 1927), p. 28.

recordings significantly. Next to records directly imported from America, the German label “Brunswick”, founded in 1926/27, became an important mediator for American and “domestic” Jazz music in Germany.³⁴ Equally important for providing Germans access to Jazz music was the “wireless”: in 1924, the first radio programme featuring “Jazzbandmusik” was aired by Radio Munich, and between 1924 and 1933, radio stations in Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne regularly presented Jazz-programmes, which occasionally included Hot Jazz performed by American musicians such as Sam Wooding or Jack Hylton, but mostly “Germanized” symphonic Jazz performed by domestic orchestras and combos.³⁵

It was only a small step from Paul Whiteman’s Symphonic Jazz to the adoption of Jazz in contemporary art music in the 1920s. By the end of the decade, the critic and musicologist Alfred Baresel stressed the importance of Jazz music even for “serious” European art music. Jazz was not simply a fashionable trend, he argued, but converged with the development of European art music, because it represented a new understanding of art and life. Therefore, genuinely modern, contemporary composers had been influenced by Jazz music and incorporated elements of it in their works.³⁶ The most famous example of this trend was Ernst Krenek’s opera “Jonny spielt auf”, one of the “Zeitopern” (“contemporary operas”) of the Weimar Republic which appropriated elements from the musicals and vaudeville shows of the period. Other composers who

³⁴ Partsch, *Schräge Töne*, p. 115-17.

³⁵ Partsch, *Schräge Töne*, p. 120.

³⁶ Alfred Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch. Ein praktisches Handbuch für Musiker, Komponisten, Arrangeure, Tänzer und Freunde der Jazzmusik* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 15. Further Bernhard Egg, *Jazz-Fremdwörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1927); Bernhard, *Jazz*. On Baresel see also Kater, *Different Drummers*.

experimented with this cross-over of classical and popular music included Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill.³⁷ A further example of the recognition Jazz music received as “serious” music beyond mere entertainment was the establishing of a course in Jazz music in 1928 at the renowned Hoch’s Conservatory, a private college for musical education in Frankfurt. In 1927, the director of the conservatory and former teacher of Paul Hindemith and Theodor W. Adorno, Bernhard Sekles, announced that the school had decided to start teaching Jazz the following year in an effort to provide musicians with a solid education, and to elevate the status of Jazz music as practised in Germany. The announcement was followed by a heated debate about the character and status of Jazz music that extended far beyond the musical establishment.³⁸

Almost all attempts to define and explain Jazz music were based in racial stereotypes. Not only the racist critics like Pfitzner or Rosenberg, who decried Jazz as “nigger music” or “jungle noise”, stressed the African-American origins of Jazz. Sympathetic commentators also praised Jazz for its “natural” and “fresh” qualities as “black” music. The origins of Jazz music were to be found “with the negroes”, Alfred Baresel explained. White Americans had been happy to let African-Americans follow

³⁷ Dorothea Redepenning, “Jonny spielt auf: Die trügerische Lebenslust in Opern der Weimarer Republik”, in *Menschen-Bilder: Darstellungen des Humanen in der Wissenschaft*, ed. by Markus Hilgert and Michael Wink (Heidelberg, 2012), pp. 181–203; Andreas Eichhorn, “‘Amerika als Wunschbild zukünftiger Gesellschaft?’ Zur Rezeption von Ernst Kreneks Oper *Jonny spielt auf*”, in *Amerikanismus–Americanism–Weill: Die suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne*, ed. by Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski (Schliengen, 2003), pp. 171–183.

³⁸ Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 141-143; Kaspar Maase, “A Taste of Honey. Adorno’s Reading of American Mass Culture”, in John Dean and Jean-Paul Gabilliet (eds.), *European Readings of American Popular Culture* (Westport 1996), pp. 201-211; Steinert, *Entdeckung der Kulturindustrie*, pp. 63-67.

their natural talent for music and dance, since they were too absorbed by their businesses and work schedules to even develop their own popular or national music.³⁹ Baresel tried to defend Jazz music against those critics who had jumped at the opportunity to denounce it as “nigger culture” (“Niggerkultur”) and “negro clamour” (“Negergejohl”). Instead, he declared the “primordial rhythms of the primitives” as “genuinely healthy”.⁴⁰ To Hans Siemsen, Jazz was a hybrid form of music, a cross between European dance-music and American “negro- and nigger-music”.⁴¹ Baresel agreed and defined contemporary Jazz as a mixture of folkloristic and civilizational elements, hence racist critics were aiming at the wrong target.⁴²

While German commentators stressed the African, “primitive origins”, they considered it, paradoxically, as a typically urban and modern music that reflected the experience of life in the rationalized, industrialized city. From this angle, Jazz music appeared as the soundtrack of the modern metropolis, reflecting the fast pace of city life and the regimented patterns of a Fordist society. The characteristic element of Jazz was the merging of the “excessive rhythms of the negro dances” with the machine-like regularity and order of Anglo-Saxon civilisation. Just as modern civilisation as a whole, the new music and the accompanying dances were the product of the organised and regulated chaos of the big city. This paradoxical mixture of primitive and civilised

³⁹ Baresel, *Neues Jazzbuch*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Baresel, *Neues Jazzbuch*, p. 21; siehe Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, pp. 170-71.

⁴¹ Hans Siemsen, “Jazz-band”, in *Die Weltbühne* 17.1 (1921), pp. 287-88: “Kreuzung zwischen europäischer Tanz- und amerikanischer Neger- und Niggermusik”.

⁴² Baresel, *Neues Jazzbuch*, p. 9. Similar Alfred Rundt, *Amerika ist anders*, p. 134: “Der Jazz ist nicht rein negerisch, er ist auch nicht rein amerikanisch. Der Jazz ist negro-amerikanisch.”

elements had led to the global dominance of the “Jazzband”.⁴³ Jazz music, with its “savage” and “primitive” origins, appeared as the musical expression of modern, urban life. It was the adequate musical form of the American way of life, where technology reigned and set the standards.⁴⁴ The journalist Paul Landau heard the “tact of the machine age” when he listened to Jazz. It represented the “rhythm of the machine age which emanated from the noise of the factories, the din of the urban streets over into our dance halls”.⁴⁵ Fritz Giese came up with similar images: to him, Jazz was driven by a rhythm that was pacing exactly like an industrial machine, a race car or the neon lights of billboards on the commercial buildings in big cities. The Jazz bands had discovered the rhythmic patterns of the metropolis with their speed, their noises, their acoustic symphonies, and had thus turned the pulses of the centres of industrialism, of Fordism and Taylorism, into a musical form. The result was a the characteristic polyphony of the big city which inspired by the assembly line, the long distance train and the airplane.⁴⁶

The “Tiller Girls”, one of many female dancing groups who performed on the stages of Berlin’s music hall and vaudeville stages, embodied and visualized the convergence of technology and culture during the Jazz age, and thus symbolized the effects of the cultural Americanisation of Germany. Berlin’s cabarets, music halls and vaudeville theatres included Jazz music regularly into their hugely successful shows, and thus contributed to the success of Jazz music during the Weimar Republic.⁴⁷ Chorus

⁴³ Egg, *Jazz-Fremdwörterbuch*, 3; see Bernhard, *Neues Jazzbuch*, pp. 28, 45–46, 64.

⁴⁴ Rudolf Hensel, *Die Neue Welt. Ein Amerikabuch* (Hellerau, 1929), p. 250.

⁴⁵ Paul Landau, “Girlkultur: Von der Amerikanisierung Europas”, in *Westermanns Monatshefte* 71 (1926/27), pp. 565-568, at 565.

⁴⁶ Fritz Giese, “Das tanzende Amerika”, in *Velhagen und Klasings Monatshefte* 41.2 (1927), pp. 544-548, at 545.

⁴⁷ Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, pp. 169-70.

girls were an important element of these revues, musicals and variety shows. The Tiller Girls were the most famous of these ‘girl’ groups (the terms ‘girl’ or ‘girls’ remained untranslated in 1920s Germany, and thus entered the German language) even though they had been established by John Tiller in Manchester, England. Since the Tiller Girls were hired by the theatre director Hermann Haller while performing in New York’s Empire Theatre, they were perceived in Germany as the ultimately “American” girl troupe. Next to the original Tiller-Girls – “Often copied, never matched” – Berlin audiences could enjoy Haller-Girls, Admiralsgirls, Scalagirls and Hoffmann-Girls. Their performances were characterised by a perfectly synchronised choreography; uniformity of appearance and motions was the main impression the “Girls” made on the German public.⁴⁸

The popularity of the Tiller Girls provided the psychologist Fritz Giese with a way to understand and explain the “American mentality”. To find out why and how America had surpassed Germany, and how Germans could learn from American successes, the bulk of the German literature on American technology and business did not provide an answer, Giese claimed. Even after reading this literature, the real reason for America’s success remained unknown. Instead, Giese argued, the fashionable dancing girls such as the Tiller Girls could provide insight into the underlying driving forces of American life. Such a study would contribute greatly to cultural philosophy and studies in *Völkerpsychologie* (literally “folk psychology”).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Jansen, *Glanzrevuen*, pp. 89-92, 121-24; Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, pp. 175-178; Reinhard Klooss and Thomas Reuter, *Körperbilder: Menschenornamente in Revuetheater und Revuefilm* (Frankfurt, 1980).

⁴⁹ Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur: Vergleiche zwischen europäischem und amerikanischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl* (Munich, 1925), pp. 13-15. On German “folk psychology”

Giese described the “Girls” as “dancing bodies” which had been drilled and taught in simple, specific techniques. They were “machines of movement” with an astonishing impact, based on a causality that made one wonder. Their uniform and synchronized performances were the artistic adaptation of the technological-artificial rhythm which originated in modern assembly-line production, the Taylor-system and the modern metropolis. Thus the Tiller-Girls mirrored the advantages as well as disadvantages of uniformity, which Giese presented as the main character trait of the Americans: “[Uniformity] prevents from the fragmentation that we have, it focuses powers, it enables the creation of common pre-conditions, as the example of the Girls so clearly shows. But it also prevents exceptional high individual achievements, and instead replaces these with the good average.” The Tiller-Girls represented the triumph of the machine, the idea of technological, collective ‘man’ who had replaced the free-willed, confident and creative individual. According to Giese, the best evidence for this far-reaching shift in society was the impact of technology on culture, entertainment, music and dancing.⁵⁰

Even though of a very different political orientation, the journalist Siegfried Kracauer, in the 1920s cultural editor of the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, agreed with Giese that interpreting the Tiller-Girls provided an opportunity to locate the present in the process of History. Thanks to Kracauer’s canonization as one of the most important

see Egbert Klautke, *The Mind of the Nation: Völkerpsychologie in Germany, 1851-1955* (Second edition, New York and Oxford, 2016).

⁵⁰ Giese, *Girlnkultur*, pp. 15, 25, 82-83. “Sie [die Gleichförmigkeit] hindert die Zersplitterung wie bei uns, sie sammelt die Kräfte, sie ermöglicht die Schaffung von einheitlichen Vorbedingungen, wie es das Beispiel der Girls so überaus klar erweist. Aber sie steht auch der individuellen Hochleistung entgegen, sie setzt an die Stelle derselben den gut gehobenen Mittelmenschen.”

German theorists of modernity, the Tiller-Girls have become familiar to German academics in the latter half of the twentieth century. To Kracauer, the Tiller-Girls were one of those surface appearances, which on account of their unconsciousness, provided direct access to the essence of an era, more so than judgements of contemporaries about their own age.⁵¹ Kracauer used a perspective very similar to Giese's and thus provided a view of the Tiller-Girls which might have dramatically overstated the importance of their allegedly American *chorus line*.⁵² To the left-leaning Kracauer, the Tiller-Girls were "products of the American factories of distraction" and represented the disappearance of the individual in the machine age. There were no more individual girls, but only indissoluble complexes of girls whose movements were mathematical demonstrations. In the modern world, controlled by the machine, technology and rationality, human beings counted only as parts of a mass, not as individuals. The Tiller-Girls demonstrated the emergence of the new aesthetic of the machine age: they formed a mass ornament out of the modern human beings acting in unison. According to Kracauer, the structure of the mass ornament, and hence the Tiller Girls, represented the general structure of contemporary society which was determined by capitalist processes of production. Just like capitalist production, the mass ornament was "an end to itself".⁵³

⁵¹ Siegfried Kracauer, "Das Ornament der Masse" [1927], in idem, *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 50-63 (50).

⁵² See Helmut Lethen's classic *Neue Sachlichkeit, 1924-1932: Studien zur Literatur des "Weißen Sozialismus"*, (second edition, Stuttgart, 1975), pp. 43-45, who stresses more the differences than the similarities between Giese and Kracauer.

⁵³ Kracauer, *Ornament der Masse*, p. 50-53.

While Giese and Kracauer drew far-reaching conclusions from their observations of the Tiller Girls, they were not the only intellectuals who saw the “American” kick-line as a sign of the times.⁵⁴ The Viennese satirist Alfred Polgar, who had moved to Berlin in the 1920s, explained that the term “Girls” was a *plurale tantum* and could only be used in the plural form: “Putting one girl next to another doesn’t turn them into ‘Girls’: this is only achieved after the addition, the melting of the individuals into a collective.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Paul Landau depicted the girls as a “single collective entity” (“einziges Kollektivwesen”) whose training standardized them like a mass produced American consumer article.⁵⁶ The caricaturist Paul Simmel visualized this notion for the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung” when he presented the Tiller Girls, placed on an assembly line, as the identical products of a Fordist factory.⁵⁷ In these images, the Tiller-Girls represented the new kind of human being created by a thoroughly rationalized and standardized society. In this “brave new world”, there was no room for individuality or personality, which disappeared under the onslaught of the faceless, standardized crowd. In addition, the popularity and fame of the Tiller Girls and other, similar dancing groups gave anti-American critics an opportunity to complain about the “masculinization of

⁵⁴ Erich Kästner came up with the untranslatable pun of the “ewig gleichen Beinerlei” of the Tiller-Girls: “Chor der Girls” [1929] in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Cologne, 1959), p. 143.

⁵⁵ Alfred Polgar, “Girls” [1926], in idem, *Auswahl: Prosa aus vier Jahrzehnten*, ed. by Bernt Richter (Reinbek, 1968), pp. 186-87, at 186: “Girl neben Girl gestellt wie die Posten einer Summe machen noch lange keine ‘Girls’, das macht erst die vollzogene Addition, die Verschmelzung der Einzelnen zum Kollektivum.”

⁵⁶ Landau, *Girlkultur*, p. 567; similar Giese, *Tanzendes Amerika*, p. 546

⁵⁷ *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 28 March 1926, p. 411, reproduced in Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, p. 182.

women”. A large number of German observers were convinced that American society was “dominated” by women, who set the cultural standards and manipulated their money-making husbands.⁵⁸ Americanization, it was feared, would bring about the reversal of traditional gender roles and thus destroy the foundation of European societies.⁵⁹ Still, the discussion about the Tiller-Girls overlapped only partly with views of the dominant position of women in American society, which critics regularly presented as evidence for the dangers of American civilization. Adolf Halfeld for instance, the crown-witness of German anti-Americanism in the 1920s, had devoted a whole chapter on the threat of American “cultural feminism”.⁶⁰ The Tiller-Girls, however, symbolized less the dangers of American “cultural feminism” than the fusion of culture, economics and technology under in a truly Americanized society.

⁵⁸ Landau, *Girlkultur*, 567.

⁵⁹ Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten*, pp 300–307.

⁶⁰ Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, pp. 209–227.