

DIOGENES IN THE SUBURBS: AN EXAMINATION OF
AMERICAN ICONOGRAPHY IN WEIMAR GERMANY
IN THE PERSONS OF JOSEPHINE BAKER,
CLARENCE CHAMBERLIN, AND
CHARLES CHAPLIN

by

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A THESIS

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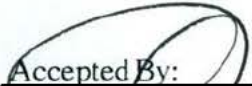
"Diogenes in the Suburbs: An Examination of American Iconography in Weimar Germany in the Persons of Josephine Baker, Clarence Chamberlin, and Charles Chaplin," a thesis prepared by Charles Evard Robinson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:



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The period of the Weimar Republic in modern German history was marked by a highly self-reflexive and productive cultural discourse, one that continues to attract a large scholarly audience. One aspect of this discourse was the dialogue on the meaning of America for German culture. This thesis examines, through the theoretical framework of Peter Sloterdijk, selected representations of this cultural output, contending that America served as a discursive element in this culture for a wide variety of German socio-economic and cultural concerns. Iconographical representations of American personalities serve as an excellent site of interpretation of these concerns. Through an examination of the iconography of Josephine Baker, Clarence Chamberlin and Charles Chaplin, this thesis finds that "Amerika" served the purpose of providing a complex discourse for the social and cultural problems faced in Germany during the Weimar period.

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CHAPTER I

AMERICAN ICONOGRAPHY AND WEIMAR CULTURE

Americanism is the new European catchword. It suffers the usual fate of catchwords: the more it is used, the less one knows what it means. It is certain that in this case the range of meanings is enormously broad, far exceeding particular minor phenomena, and that it applies to the fundamental character of our time. So the remarkable situation has arisen in which, for the designation of a truly radical change in the inner and outer forms of our life over the last few decades, we have no expression other than the name of a foreign continent that previously appeared to us infinitely far away, and not only in the geographic sense.¹

The “fundamental character of our time” professor Kayser described in 1925 referred to the parameters of experience and transformation typically grouped under the rubric of “modernism.” Within the Weimar Republic, the “catchword” of *Amerikanismus* functioned as a means of discourse on the nature of German society and the effects of modernization upon it.² The fragmented nature of this German society and its eventual denouement in the rise of the Third Reich have attracted increasing numbers of scholars in recent years, particularly in the recent post-unification struggles for a redefinition of what historical lessons the first German republic holds. In this scholarship, however, the terms “modernism” and “Americanism” remain notoriously vague. To provide definitions at this

¹Rudolf Kayser, “Amerikanismus,” *Vossische Zeitung*, 27 September 1925. Also published in *Weltbühne*, September 1925. Translations mine unless otherwise noted.

²Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Insider as Outsider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: Crisis of Classical Modernity* trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917-1933* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

initial stage would be of great benefit. Unfortunately, however, to do so in any exact sense is impossible and is most definitely *not* the goal of this project. In fact, it would be a contradiction in terms, for any attempt at definition must not disregard the inherently metastasizing identity of these terms as reactors, and descriptors as well as proponents of themselves. Yet another problem is the clear danger when one approaches the concept of “modernity.” Encountering modernization theory, one runs the risk of succumbing to the teleological presumption of many theories of development. Positing modernity as entailing development *toward* something colors and potentially renders highly spurious any theory exploring the cultural expressions of “progress” at the time.

What is to be done? Historian Jeffrey Herf dealt with the question bluntly, “There is no such thing as modernity in general.”³ Yet Herf focused an entire book on one facet of “modernity”; countless others have been proposed and executed. There does seem benefit in, as one historian has described the task, attempting to nail jelly to the wall, adding another new voice to this beleaguered dialogue, which, as this thesis seeks to prove, still holds valuable insights into the formations of social, political and cultural life in the early decades of the twentieth century. Accepting the broad scope of “modernism” as therefore elusive, this study will examine one method employed during the Weimar Republic to both understand and codify certain meanings of modernization in Germany. It thus is an attempt, to see the forest *for* the trees. *Amerikanismus* in this capacity provides a more manageable means of interpretation of Weimar discourse on modernity, much as it provided contemporaries a similar method of exploration.

Was this phenomenon an imposition of American culture on an unwilling old world? It seems not. Kayser asked, “Is Americanism not a new orientation to being, grown out of and formed in our European destiny?” “In fact,” he answers, “Americanism is a new

³Jeffrey Herf, Reactionary Modernism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

European method.”⁴ Kayser described this “method” precisely: as an inherently European practice for coping with a painful incorporation of new modes of thought and being, of rationalization and technology, into a society with a strong traditional culture. The pains of German modernization were particularly severe because of a relatively rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth century and the even more rapid dissolution of the Wilhemine society immediately after and coupled with the trauma of the First World War and postwar economic and political chaos. An identification of the pains of this transformation with an increasingly ubiquitous foreign presence, an American “Other,” provided alleviation for the distress of this process, while allowing for a reification of German exceptionalism.

In this new all-inclusive method, Germans imported cultural icons of all shapes and sizes into the cultural mainstream, in the process promoting many ideologies and agendas, some blatantly transparent, others subtly concealed. The German reception of two American celebrities, Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker, reveals much about the dynamic of this phenomenon.⁵ These personalities, as viewed and interpreted by the German-speaking press, went beyond the typical “perils and pleasures” dichotomy of *Amerikanismus* debate, and thus, escaped as well the narrow confines of the “Janus Face” model of modernity.⁶ Within a bipolar debate that pitted an embrace of technology and

⁴Kayser.

⁵The two were “American” ironically only by association. Chaplin was a British citizen his entire life and Baker was virtually a citizen of France, having developed the crux of her European identity while performing in Paris.

⁶This model posits a shifting relationship of markedly ambiguous positive/negative, traditionalistic/futuristic oppositions with which the society of the early twentieth century partially coped with the massive transformation of their everyday lives due to rapid socio-economic and cultural change. See also Peter Fritzsche, “Landscape of Danger, Landscape of Design,” in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, eds. Thomas Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 29-47; Beeke S. Tower, “‘Ultramodern and Ultraprimitive’” in *Ibid.*, 85-105.

progress against a general hostility to modernization as the destruction of traditional society, their reception afforded a new variant. While their discourse did reify this debate, it also circumvented its parameters, allowing for a subversion of the dichotomies of old and new, progress and tradition, America and Europe, as well. One must be careful at this juncture, to avoid succumbing to the ease of a “yes and no” model, wherein analysis may paint a picture either of simplistic pluralism or a wild ambiguity. It is absolutely vital to recognize the tension between the two, between reification and transcendence. The *kynetic* tropes of the reception of Chaplin and Baker, borrowed from the theory of Peter Sloterdijk, realize this tension within which there lies valuable insight into the culture of Weimar and modernism.⁷

Within the debate over American modernity, Chaplin and Baker reveal a third crucial trend, evinced by those who feared the onset of a depersonalized industrial society and the negative effects it might exert upon human nature, but who, at the same time, did not wish a flight toward a pastoral ideal. While much commentary maintained a fascination with modernity, much also expressed criticism of the rationalization of existence. Certainly this outlook often generated ambiguous relationships to the icons of America. Journalist and cultural critic Friedrich Sieburg grasped this aspect of *Amerikanismus* in his essay, “Worshiping Elevators.”

Without denying that a skyscraper and a forest both have their aesthetic value, I still do not agree that they are particularly to be recommended as ideal symbols....The machine need not be an enemy, nor should it be an object of worship....The machine can be understood, and, to the mechanic, is not a mystical object....One looks with regret at the replacement of Hölderlin’s Greece by America just because some people do not know what happens on

⁷Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, with a foreword by Andreas Huyssen. trans. Michael Eldred. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

the wheat exchange in Chicago or inside an electrical power plant.⁸

Within the broad expanse of this dialogue, Chaplin and Baker were perceived to possess characteristics that placed them in an uneasy relationship with *Amerikanismus*. They were seen to embody certain aspects of *Amerikanismus* and thus of modernity in general. Yet they also transcended typical American iconography. The popularity of Chaplin and Baker thus was linked to the widespread attractiveness of the tropes they were seen to reveal within a society enveloped in a particularly intense battle over the definitions of modernity. For Baker, these characteristics included a primitive identity, an irrational sexuality, and a departure from the established rationalistic conventions of her medium, the revue; and for Chaplin, a transcendent individualism, a resistance to technology, and recurring antimechanistic imagery.

A key factor in this popularity may be attributed to the nature of the media in which they performed: film and "jazz" dance. As concurrent developments of the late nineteenth century, film and dance (understood in this context as pantomime or cabaret style dance) emerged during a paradigm shift in the relationship of the individual to his or her surroundings, from the word to the image. The rapid development of the media of the illustrated weekly, the pulp novel and a variety of literary short forms (the feuilleton and reportage for example) crowded the perceptions of the individual in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, transforming the principal internalization of communication. Some contemporaries saw this change as a means of transcending a culture laden with irreducible idioms, "words," that hindered and overdetermined many of the positive aspects of life. The poet Hugo Hoffmansthal wrote of this conversion in 1893, echoing the words of Friedrich Nietzsche:

⁸Friedrich Sieburg, "Anbetung von Fahrstühlen" ["Worshiping Elevators"] *Die literarische Welt* 2 (23 July 1926), 8 in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. Edward Dimendberg, Martin Jay, and Anton Kaes. trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 404. Hereafter cited as WRS.

People are indeed tired of hearing speech. They are deeply revolted by words: for words have placed themselves before things....We are in the midst of a terrible process of completely squashing thinking under the weight of meanings....And thus there awakens a desperate love of all those arts which are exercised in silence: music, dancing, and all the arts of acrobats and jugglers.

Had he written this only two years later, after the birth of the motion picture, no doubt he would have included that form as well. This transformation is crucial to this thesis, as it created the new role of spectator for the audience and its perceptions which serves as the chief point of examination of this project.⁹

In order that the inscription of the iconography of Chaplin and Baker may be seen more clearly, a control exists for this project, which should serve to provide an example of *Amerikanismus* wherein the iconographical meanings are distinct. The reception accorded Clarence Chamberlin and Charles Levine, two American pilots who flew across the Atlantic and landed in Germany in June 1927, will be examined as a case study of the typical plasticity of the *Amerikanismus* model. The hope is that the case of Chamberlin and Levine will allow for an enumeration of some of the principal factors of *Amerikanismus*, thereby providing a base for the exploration of the more complex cases of Chaplin and Baker.

This project as a whole will focus on the iconography of the above-mentioned individuals and their "Americanness" as interpreted by Weimar Germans, drawing upon several branches of theory in its description of this iconography. The art historical structure of iconography as elucidated by Roelof van Straten (building upon the ideas of Edwin Panofsky) provides a working definition of iconic structures as a foundation for this analysis.

⁹Quoted in Anton Kaes, "The Debate About Cinema: Charting a Controversy (1909-1929)," *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987): 25. For an example of this thought in Weimar, see Johannes Molzahn, "Nicht Mehr Lesen!" ["Stop Reading! Look!"] *Das Kunstblatt* 12, no. 3 (3 March 1928): 78-82 in *WRS*: 648-49; Klaus Mann concurred in his memoirs, "The American myths were speechless." *The Turning Point* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1984), 293.

To begin, what is an icon? The Oxford English Dictionary offers, "an image, figure or representation...a simile...Images which are the aesthetic signs of the poem, analogous to the symbolic signs of scientific discourses. They have, as signs, semantic objects, or refer to objects; and, in addition, as iconic signs, resemble these objects."¹⁰ The original Greek, *eikon*, simply denotes "image." For the purposes of this project, "icon" should be understood as a representational site, an object around which a number of meanings are constructed (here the individuals Charlie Chaplin, Josephine Baker, Clarence Chamberlin and Charles Levine, as well as the second order meanings attendant to these personalities, like Chaplin's bowler and walking stick, Baker's banana skirt, and Chamberlin's plane).¹¹ In this context, both images and text will be read as icons. Particularly useful are the newspaper documents which were the lifeblood of the individual's connection to Weimar society. In the words of one talented propagandist, the editorial article should be viewed in this context as a "written poster."¹²

The exact nature of iconic meanings is determined by the environment of the reception of the icon. In this case, the principal concern is the interpretation and response to certain icons associated with America during the period of the Weimar German Republic, 1918-1933. Iconic meaning in this or any other environment is by no means static. Rather, its very identity consists in its constant state of flux. As malleable and polyvalent

¹⁰Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., ed. J.A. Simpson, E.S.C. Weiner, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. "Icon."

¹¹David Bathrick's study of boxing in Weimar is illustrative of this method of analysis, finding the figure of the boxer as symbolic of "profound cultural and political transformations in post-Wilhemian modernity." David Bathrick, "Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture," New German Critique 51 (Fall 1990): 114.

¹²Josef Goebbels, quoted in Modris Eksteins, The Limits of Reason: The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 74.

sites of meaning, icons are transformed through each successive use or interpretation, existing only insofar as they mediate discourse on social relations. Each use of the icon thus alters its meaning and prepares for further inscription by the community of origin. Literary theorist Dean MacCannell writes “an icon cannot be suspended in a single consciousness but can only exist in a group setting.” Icons in this context do not exist outside of communities with defined allegorical perimeters.¹³ The study of these allegorical perimeters and the social purposes they serve can prove highly illuminating of the society in question.

Roelof van Straten offers an art historical theory of iconography amenable to the purposes of this project in his book, *An Introduction to Iconography*.¹⁴ He defines three stages in iconographic research: the pre-iconographical description, the iconographical description and the iconographical interpretation. Categories envisioned to interpret works of art, the precise definitions of van Straten have been altered slightly to better suit the needs of a cultural historical analysis. The similarity to the three-tiered structure of Saussurian semiotics is not accidental and the dialectical process of meaning construction within that system should be viewed as quite similar. The following descriptions of van Straten’s stages are offered as evidence of the analytical framework of this project; the text of the project itself employs this method primarily because of its ability to grasp patterns of meaning in complex matrices.

Roughly, the pre-iconographical consists of a detailed factual description of the work in question. As a sample, examine Figure 13, a cartoon from the German newspaper,

¹³Dean MacCannell, “Sights and Spectacles,” in *Iconicity: Essays on the Nature of Culture*, eds. Paul Boussiac, Michael Herzfeld, Roland Posner (Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1986), 423.

¹⁴Roelof van Straten, *An Introduction to Iconography*, trans. by Patricia de Man. (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1995).

Berliner Tageblatt, entitled “Das Schweigen im Walde” or “Silence in the Forest.”

According to van Straten’s system, one finds therefore that the cartoon depicts a male figure in a bowler and a cane, walking alone on a light path within a dark and dense forest. Hung from the trees are many loudspeakers, and perched throughout are a great number of light and dark birds. “Without attempting to place things in relation to one another or to interpret them, we have drawn a pre-iconographical description.”¹⁵

Secondly, one would examine “Silence in the Forest” to construct the iconographical description, the subject of the work. One can see that the figure obviously represents the British film actor Charlie Chaplin. The next step is to develop the historical context of the cartoon. This cartoon appeared, on March 5, 1931, in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a major Liberal German newspaper published by the House of Ullstein. One would note that this occurred during Chaplin’s publicity visit to Germany to promote the film, *City Lights*. One would also be careful to mark the history and character of the cartoonist, Arthur Stadler, at this point in his career.

As van Straten writes, “The purpose of the third stage of iconographic research is to ask: ‘Does the work have a “deeper,” or secondary, meaning that could lie within the artist’s intention?’”¹⁶ In other words, might there be some purpose Stadler wished to convey aside from literally depicting Chaplin walking through a forest strangely bedecked with loudspeakers? In this stage, the analyst places the objects observed thus far into the complex matrix of meaning their interaction suggests. In the process, extensive knowledge of this period of history and the particulars in question is necessary as a rough map of meaning is constructed. For the historian, this necessitates research into the various points of interest the work suggests -- Charlie Chaplin, his association with America, the history

¹⁵Ibid., 5.

¹⁶Ibid.

of film at the time and of the Weimar Republic, the press within the Weimar Republic, “silence” as represented by loudspeakers, the significance of Chaplin alone in this forest, and the possible interconnectedness between any, all or none of these elements. From this, one might conclude that the cartoon might have been intended as a commentary upon the relationship of Chaplin and the silent cinema, which, by 1931, was alternately seen by many as archaic, or defended as humane and artistic. A fourth stage is then necessary to produce the final historical “meaning” of the work.

Van Straten describes this fourth stage, *Iconology*, as “the branch of cultural history that uncovers the cultural, social, and historical background of themes and subjects in the visual arts.” Where iconography literally translates as “image-describing,” iconology denotes “image-explaining.” Iconology may answer the question of possible “hidden meanings that were not explicitly intended.”¹⁷ This is the crucial stage for the historian as the diverse elements gathered in the previous stages must be assimilated in their socio-historical context. To continue the examination of Stadler’s cartoon one finds that during the Weimar Republic, the image of America occupied a significant role in cultural discourse, as representative of a diverse number of ingredients during a time of social and economic anxiety and uncertainty. Chaplin, as a major film star of the time, was associated with America along with his medium. Both served as a convenient discursive site for these anxieties. One finds further that this debate was carried out extensively in the German press, and one trope of this discourse focused around Chaplin’s identity as a silent film star in a climate of increasingly rapid technological progress including sound film, and so forth.

Van Straten’s iconological model thus informs one portion of this project. Iconology will serve as the central methodological model for historical analysis, allowing for a satisfactory explanation of the historical identity and context of the icons in question. The

¹⁷Ibid., 12-18.

larger concerns raised in this process of the semion of *Amerikanismus* will be discussed in light of the theory of *kynismus* envisioned by Peter Sloterdijk.¹⁸

Sloterdijk develops this theory in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*. He offers a particular vision of modernity, what he calls an “enlightened false consciousness,” which manifests itself in the cynicism of the modern condition. This false consciousness, the logical outcome of the Enlightenment, finds the individual disillusioned with the functioning of society, but fully integrated into its daily patterns of operation. In his view, the notion of Nietzsche’s will to power has spelled the death of philosophy in the twentieth century, resulting in a probable condition of being both enlightened and apathetic. In this situation, algodicy has replaced theodicy (algos=pain). In other words, the questions of existence have been altered, significantly and terribly -- the question at hand is no longer how the evil and misfortune of the world are reconciled with the existence of God, but instead, how might the individual survive this pain without God and without any higher meaning?¹⁹

Like Winckelmann, Sloterdijk returns to Greece for his solution to the modern condition. He finds this in the concept of *kynicism* as originally embodied in the classical philosopher, Diogenes. Sloterdijk views kynicism as the only form of subversion left open in the modern age. Essentially an uncivil enlightenment (“dog philosophy”), kynicism espouses a certain impudence in the face of tradition, a *Frechheit* (“cheekiness”). This naturally engenders conflict with the cynical status quo. This dialectical opposition becomes the battle of the unruly Diogenes against the idealistic Socrates, body against mind. One of the chief features of the kynic in this conflict is sensual embodiment -- the

¹⁸Dean MacCannell defines *semion* as “a cluster of associated signs.” MacCannell, 423.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 470.

chief failure of the Enlightenment project, in his view, is its failure to incorporate the body and the senses. Sloterdijk theorizes that a form of neo-kynicism has emerged since the late eighteenth century, finding examples of this in the works of Goethe and the Sturm und Drang movement and more recently with the Dadaists of the early twentieth century.

Cynicism and kynicism are defined by their opposition to each other, yet they frequently overlap. The Dada movement serves as an example of Sloterdijk's conceptions of both cynicism and kynicism and the complex interrelations and tensions between the two. Sloterdijk considers Dada as a collective act of subversion, a thumbing of one's nose at the accepted traditions, through an embrace of the trappings of modernity. "The Dadaists were the first who tried to take up the return of the repressed from a positive angle."²⁰ Yet the distinctions between cynicism and kynicism are complex, as he himself admits.

The Dada attack has both a kynical and a cynical aspect. The atmosphere of the first is playful and productive, childish and childlike, wise, generous, ironical, sovereign, unassailably realistic; the second aspect reveals strong destructive tensions, hate and haughty defensive reactions against the internalized fetish of the citizen, considerable projection, and a dynamic of affects of contempt and disappointment, self-hardening and loss of irony. *It is not easy to separate these two aspects.*²¹

Particularly important is Dada's penchant for spontaneous negativity directed at convention, what Sloterdijk calls "reflected negation." This may be best described as the rejection of meaning itself, of the notion that symbols must contain some consciously injected purpose. Dada, and in the larger picture, kynicism, functions as "antisemantics," in a world thoroughly conditioned in the essential precondition of meaning.

Sloterdijk's model is applicable to a study of *Amerikanismus* in Weimar for seven principal reasons. Firstly, as he himself argues, cynicism, while in full bloom chiefly in the post-1960s, did have its first modern expression in the intellectual and cultural life of

²⁰Ibid., 393.

²¹Ibid., 395. Italics added.

the Weimar Republic, what he calls the most “self-aware epoch in history,...a highly reflective, thoughtful, imaginative, and expressive age that is thoroughly plowed up by the most manifold self-observations and self-analyses.” In Weimar, cynicism was more acerbic and productive than at any other point in history, he asserts, making this fifteen year period a highly revealing focal point for what he calls the “cynicism of means.” He writes that, “The nineteenth century develop[-ed] a modern cynical consciousness that links a rigorous *cynicism of means* with an equally rigid *moralism of ends*.” The solution to this predicament is a *kynicism of ends*, namely the adoption of “a critical, ironical philosophy of so-called needs, in the elucidation of their fundamental excess and absurdity.”²² The tension between cynicism and kynicism is thus historically grounded in this period.

Secondly, Sloterdijk links the development of the modern cynic and his/her kynical companion to the urbanization of society.

Only in the city, as its negative profile, can the figure of the cynic crystallize in its full sharpness, under the pressure of public gossip and universal love-hate. And only the city can assimilate the cynic, who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals, on whom its liking for unique, urbane personalities depends.²³

As will be seen, the relationship between the tropes expressed by and around the *Amerikanismus* of Chaplin and Baker clearly resonate with the larger meaning of the metropolis.

Third, the sensual and anti-rational nature of kynical opposition accurately describes much of the iconography of Chaplin and Baker in Weimar Germany. Sloterdijk's

²²Ibid., 192-93.

²³Ibid., 4. Contemporaries clearly had developed this point in some depth. The most obvious case is Georg Simmel's sociology of the city. The “swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” engenders “the intensification of emotional life.” See “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” (1903) quoted in Kaes, 12. Another example is Karl Scheffler's 1910 indictment of American influence, Berlin: Eine Stadtschicksal [Berlin, A City of Fate].

admission of the complexity of his own cynical/kynical model finds an unlikely kinship with the complexities of *Amerikanismus* as seen in Chaplin and Baker. The unity of these two designs lies in the tensions inherent in their composition. Insights into the greater picture of German society in the early twentieth century are revealed within the dynamic of these tensions.

Fourthly, the kynical revolt is a revolt of the body, in which the aforementioned tensions play themselves out. In this dynamic, the manner of revelation of what is understood as truth has changed. Kynical expression must emerge through physicality rather than mere "head" intelligence, a trope repeatedly emphasized in the discourse surrounding Chaplin and Baker and what Sloterdijk refers to as "dirty materialism,"

The animalities are for the kynic a part of his [sic] way of presenting himself, as well as a form of argumentation. Its core is existentialism. The kynic, as a dialectical materialist, has to challenge the public sphere because it is the only space in which the overcoming of idealist arrogance can be meaningfully demonstrated. Spirited materialism is not satisfied with words but proceeds to a material argumentation that rehabilitates the body.²⁴

Fifth, Sloterdijk's theory is beneficial in comparison with modernization theory as a whole. When composing a theory of "modernity," one runs the risk of proposing a telos and an archaeology of development as well, thereby prejudicing any critical analysis proceeding from that model. If one were to examine Weimar for example, as a sign or symptom of the development of the West, a tacit assumption exists that there is in fact an endpoint of that development, thereby prejudicing any analysis before it is begun. Sloterdijk's system of thought avoids this pitfall by creating an survey of enlightenment which does not posit beginning or telos -- rather it is a theory of opposing consciousness in which the events and ideas of the Weimar period may be explored without hope of any

²⁴Sloterdijk, 105.

“final truth,” yet without fear of total inscription of the subject.²⁵

Sixth, Sloterdijk's model works well with the theory of the polyvalent meaning of icons described by van Straten. Sloterdijk refers at one point to the “theory of the double agent,” in which he describes the lack of self that exists in the modern individual who must negotiate between several identities and allegiances in the course of his/her daily life, producing a situation very similar to a “secret agent” scenario in which the actor knows often very little about the true nature of his/her actions, yet carries them out because that is simply, what s/he does. This actuality approximates the level of phenomenological pluralism inherent in the process of iconographical meaning construction. The complexities of self-identity in modern society are thus a corollary to the fragmentation of the public sphere.²⁶ Additionally, there is a temporal consideration vital to this theoretical conjuncture. Both Sloterdijk and van Straten, as interpreted in this project, focus upon the period of a nascent mass culture and society, and their ideas serve to probe the culture of this period and reveal glimpses of larger patterns of thought and action. This conjuncture provides this thesis with both a theory of the mentality of Weimar society, and also with a methodological theory that is directly connected to the concurrent development of the image as prime node of meaning in cultural development.

Finally, in locating Weimar as the crux of the unhappy consciousness and uncertainty and cynicism as the “life philosophy of crisis,” under whose “sign is happiness in uncertainty possible,” Sloterdijk's construction informs a discussion of the place of Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker in Weimar culture, and thus of that culture as a larger

²⁵Ibid., xvi, 216-17.

²⁶“The multiple-agent activity of the intelligentsia is characteristic of modernity.” Ibid., 114.

whole.²⁷ As the historian of popular culture Ray Brown writes “...it is axiomatic that the more unsure a society or group in a society becomes, the more icons they develop and the more blindly they worship them.”²⁸ These words accurately describe the social and cultural environment of Weimar, and the cultural grasping which found a broad array of answers. The tropes of the reception of Chaplin and Baker will be seen to reflect Sloterdijk’s notion of a “kynical revolt from below,” an affront to the standards of society through satirical laughter, defiant body action and a strategic silence.²⁹ He writes:

From this perspective, the significance of cheekiness is easily shown. Since philosophy can only hypocritically live out what it says, it takes cheek to say what is lived. In a culture in which hardened idealisms make lies into a form of living, the process of truth depends on whether people can be found who are aggressive and free (“shameless”) enough to speak the truth.³⁰

The question of critical agency begs an answer before further progress can be made. For the purposes of this study, a cross-section of the German-language press has been selected and examined for its reportage, poetry, fiction, illustrations, and essays concerning Chaplin and Baker and the larger phenomenon of *Amerikanismus*.³¹ The situation of the

²⁷Ibid., 124.

²⁸Ray Brown and Marshall Fishwick, eds. *Icons of America* (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1978), 292.

²⁹Sloterdijk, xvi. As Sloterdijk demonstrates, this “revolt from below” is *not* an implication of a popular uprising of thought from the lower segments of society. Rather it is a revolt, literally, from below the belt, a forced reception of the sensual and sexual nature of humanity that had been ignored by the Enlightenment project. This revolt exists in the play of the dialectic between cynical and kynical elements.

³⁰Ibid., 102.

³¹“German-speaking” of course entails much more than simply German nationals. Both Baker and Chaplin appeared in Austria and portions of their Viennese reception are included in this study. Both nations comprise, along with Switzerland, the greater nebulous body of “German culture.”

German press, as shown by historian Modris Eksteins, is particularly conducive to a study of meaning construction, because in contrast to a western objective journalism, the Weimar press was “encouraged to express opinions and judgements in their coverage, to become participants in controversies rather than to remain spectators.”³² This engendered a marked political stance in most of the Weimar press. This thesis attempts to combine insights gleaned from this subjective field of data on particular and highly revealing elements of Weimar culture. Siegfried Kracauer, literary and film critic for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, praised both the revue and the cinema for their ability to display “precisely and openly...the disorder of society.”³³ The pot has called the kettle black -- the reportage of Weimar, along with other forms of critical reception, “high” art, cartoons, illustrated magazines, diaries, all bear equal weight, along with the media of film, music, and dance, in highlighting the “disorder” and the order of Weimar. It is a situation, as Sloterdijk tells us, of conflation of critic and criticized, both awash in matrices and effected only very slightly at each intersection.³⁴

Furthermore, Baker and Chaplin’s status as creative artists behind the textual foundation of their iconography (i.e. their films and revue shows) must be qualified.

³²Eksteins, 73. A table of the breakdown of the Weimar press according to political ideology is provided here as Appendix A.

³³ Quoted in Peter Jelavich, “Girls and Crisis: The Political Aesthetics of the Kickline in Weimar Berlin,” in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche*, ed. Michael S. Roth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 225.

³⁴Sloterdijk quotes a passage from Walter Benjamin’s *Einbahnstraße* that seems highly relevant: “Fools, who complain about the demise of critique. For its time has long since run out. Critique is a matter of proper distance. It is at home in a world where perspectives and prospects are important and where it was still possible to assume a point of view. In the meantime, things have become much too close for comfort for human society. ‘Disinterestedness,’ the ‘unbiased perspective,’ have become lies, if not the completely naive expression of plain incompetence.” Sloterdijk, xxxii.

Much more went into the process. Their work was influenced by two significant factors. First, the broad array of production staff associated with the creation of Chaplin's films or Baker's revues should be acknowledged as having a diverse, and generally immeasurable influence upon the final product. Second, the composition of Chaplin's and Baker's performance was undoubtedly affected by a wide variety of subtle factors the likes of which only a psychological history might do justice. While no facile means of gauging the degree of effect these considerations exist at hand, it is unwise to proceed without mentioning these factors.

This study seeks to demonstrate that Chaplin and Baker tapped a vein underlying a very diffuse and brittle skin, inspiring a reception from a population of German journalists, critics and artists that desperately needed an outlet of expression for their enthusiasm and anxiety over the difficulties and "disorder" of the modern existence. This expression would take many forms, inspiring attitudes according to the political culture of the critics and artists themselves.

Intellectuals and critics of the Left, Center, and Right of the German political spectrum would adopt interpretations of American symbols as their political needs saw fit. Exceptions abound, but the following generalization suggest themselves. The German Left typically hailed these icons as being, on the one hand, signs of the general exploitation of the individual in later capitalist society, and on the other, as representations of the technological developments that would mark the arrival of a new era of history. The German center contained a wide variety of receptions which can be described best as ambivalent reactions to *Amerikanismus*, ones in which individual concerns predominated over any pure platform ideologies. Voices on the right typically described these icons as thoroughly negative threats to German *Kultur*.³⁵ All branches of society were quite ready

³⁵Estimates of number of publications on the right set by Modris Eksteins at about 1200. Eksteins, 80.

to incorporate these icons into their cultural economy. They were ignored by none.

CHAPTER II

*AMERIKANISMUS, MODERNITY VIA NEW YORK*Frontier Americanism

Amerikanismus consisted of a myriad of flavors: cinema, Wild West mythology, gangsters, jazz, Taylorism and Fordism, radio, and boxing among others. It is a confirmation of both the German need for a pliable discourse on modernity and the speed with which Americanism was adopted as such, that American iconography came to comprise crucial elements of German vocabulary. Many elements of this culture had begun to enter German society and consciousness as early as the nineteenth century.³⁶

'Nach Amerika!' Leicht und keck ruft es der Tollkopf...
 'Nach Amerika!' flüstert der Verzweifelte...
 'Nach Amerika!' sagt still und entschlossen der Arme...
 'Nach Amerika!' lacht der Verbrecher...
 'Nach Amerika!' jubelt der Idealist...

'To America!' reckless and free shout the foolhardy...
 'To America!' whisper the desperate...
 'To America!' quietly and determinately say the poor...
 'To America!' laughs the criminal...
 'To America!' cries the idealist...³⁷

Gerstäcker's poem evokes the multiple layers of meaning America held for Germans during

³⁶ The sheer variety of uses of the term "American" is astounding. One of the more extreme cases was August Sorel's use of the term in his 1905 book, The Sexual Question, in which Americanism is used to describe masturbation and the other degenerate sexual practices common in the United States, "apparently originating in the greed for dollars," in Sander Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 203.

³⁷ Friedrich Gerstäcker, "Nach Amerika" (1855) quoted in Theresa Mayer Hammond, American Paradise: German Travel Literature from Duden to Kisch (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1980), 53.

the nineteenth century. "America" first emerged in German literary consciousness with Sebastian Brandt's *Das Narrenschiff* in 1494. Beginning in the 1500s, the German vision of America centered upon the notion of the frontier and an emphasis on the savagery and purity of this land in contrast to a staid and decaying Europe. The title of Hans Staden's 1557 travel report exemplifies this attitude, "*Wahrheftige Historia und Beschreibung eyner handschaft der wilden nackten grimmigen Menchsenfresser Leuthen in der Neuenwelt Amerika gelegen*" ["A True History and Description of the Countryside and the Wild, Naked and Fierce Cannibals of the New World of America"].³⁸ Geographic distance combined with cultural ambivalence to lay the foundation for *Amerikanismus*. Harold Jantz offers four "myths" composing this period, which may be designated *frontier Amerikanismus*: 1) a golden age of primitivism as seen by Rousseau; 2) a brutal savagery; 3) a historical myth of the westward progress of civilization; and 4) the myth of America as the land of promise.³⁹

The image of America was influenced in large part by the increasing presence of American authors in translation. The most significant of these was James Fenimore Cooper, first translated into German in 1841. The potency of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* in German literature is well known, influencing a great number of authors, including Herder in his *Ideas on Natural History*. Additional elements of German popular literature of the 1860s and 1870s, such as the adventure story and the travel report, detailed certain elements of life as it was perceived to be in America.⁴⁰

³⁸Hammond, 47.

³⁹Harold Jantz, "The Myths about America" (1962) in *Deutschlands literarisches Amerikabild*, ed. Alexander Ritter (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1977), 39.

⁴⁰See Peter Michaelsen, "Americanism and Anti-Americanism in German Novels of the XIXth Century," in *Arcadia: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* 11, no. 3 (1976): 273.

Perhaps the best example of frontier Americanism was the author Karl May. Themes of the American West and Native Americans dominated his work from the beginning. The popularity of May's novels of the American West in the late nineteenth century is simply astounding. By far the most translated German author, estimates of the total printings of his works exceed 100 million copies in over twenty-eight languages. His first novel, *Der beiden Quitzows letzte Fahrten*, was published in 1876. May found quick success and a fortune churning out *Reiserzählungen* for the German public. His effect on the early development of a great number of Central European historic figures cannot be overstated. Remarks from Albert Einstein to Adolf Hitler and Albert Schweitzer attest to the pervasive influence of May's stylized vision of the West.⁴¹ Countless variations of May's characters have emerged in German popular culture since his death in 1912, the films by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Harald Reinl being not the least.

May's writings of the American West form part of the long tradition of Americanism in German culture. The West constructed by May conformed generally to the utopia first envisioned by Brand, although even from the time of Brand another model was clearly in operation as well, that of America as a land of disillusion and failed utopia. First envisioned as such in the early 1500s, America was blamed for the introduction of syphilis, and later tobacco, and still later for the impetus for the industrial revolution. In the nineteenth century similar critiques were put forth by authors such as Gottfried Keller, Wilhelm Raabe and Theodor Fontane. For example, Friedrich Kürnberger's critique of the

⁴¹Heribert von Feilitzsch, "Karl May: The 'Wild West' as seen in Germany," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27 (Winter 1993): 173. A few of the more interesting include: Carl Zuckmayer went so far as to name his daughter, "Winnetou." During the Second World War, Hitler had hundreds of copies of May's novels sent to his officers on the Eastern front in order for them to better understand the definition of true courage. Albert Speer has recalled that "Hitler would lean on Karl May as proof for everything imaginable and any account of Hitler should not omit references to Karl May." Colleen Cook, "Germany's Wild West Author: A Researcher's Guide to Karl May," *German Studies Review* 5 (February 1982): 67-86.

bourgeois existence, *Das Amerikamüde* (1855), describes an artist who departs Europe for the New World seeking vitality, only to return disheartened to Europe.⁴²

Thus by the time of Karl May's literary career, America possessed a well established dual identity in German literature, both utopian and dystopian. Within the fin-de-siècle culture of Germany, May's stories clearly exhibit this dichotomy. His narratives functioned, in part, to assuage liberal anxieties in German society by creating a discursive field outside of the area in question, offering a fantasized version of possible alternatives and models of behavior. Utopian possibilities were imagined at the intersection of cultures and continents. As with the society of the fin-de-siècle, there remained little ideological consistency throughout his writings. One critic has described his opinions as "fuzzy and contradictory."⁴³ However it is through these contradictory opinions that May serves as a fitting spokesperson for his age.

We have thus seen a shift in the tropes of Americanism. German interest shifted from evocations of the frontier and savages toward images of the future; the focus drifted away from the prairie and into the American urban landscape. As a model, America came to imply no longer an escape from industrialization, but freedom through a more advanced state of industrialization. By 1900, this shift was more or less complete. However, certain elements of primitivism remained. German children throughout the twentieth century have memories of childhood readings of May's "Winnetou." The land of "wild, naked and fierce cannibals" resonated still during the Weimar Republic, although alongside one which

⁴²Jantz, 46; Margaret North, "Karl May's Literary Background and Continuing Influence on German Culture," MA Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1980, 2-23; Clyde Irwin Wolverton, "Religion and Morality as Themes in Winnetou," MA Thesis, University of Georgia, 1974, 18-24.

⁴³Katja H. May, "A German Reaction to Native Americans: Karl May's Concept of Cultural Development," MA Thesis, University of Arizona, 1989, 16.

exemplified for many Germans an industrial modernization and cultural development. The First World War may be viewed as the watershed moment in the development of this second, or *industrial*, phase of Americanism, *Amerikanismus*.⁴⁴

Industrial Americanism

During the First World War, the German government had conducted a complex program of anti-American propaganda, revolving chiefly around depictions of President Wilson, which served to increase the cultural presence of America in Germans' notions of themselves and their society.⁴⁵ Naturally these impressions carried over into the postwar culture. As a victor of the war, the United States only further established itself as a significant presence in the mind of Germans during the postwar period. Industrialist Eugen Diesel commented on the situation in Germany in 1919, "Victors in war always become the unconscious ideal and the model of the conquered: America, which has conquered the whole world, has stamped its childish version of mechanistic style on our era."⁴⁶ As principal victor in war, America and the idea of America, by the nature of their growing availability, were certainly ripe for utilization.

To be sure, "America" offered itself as an iconic alternative to a culture fatigued with nineteenth-century idioms; a vitalist, symbolic alternative that promised to alleviate the "boredom" of German culture described by Bertolt Brecht in 1920, as well as one capable

⁴⁴Frank Costigliola, Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe: 1919-1933 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). See also Earl R. Beck, Germany Discovers Amerika (Deland, FL: University of Florida Press, 1968) especially Chapter XI; Nolan; and Peukert, 178-91; Tower, 89.

⁴⁵Klaus Schwabe, "Anti-Americanism within the German Right, 1917-1933," Amerika studien 21 (1976): 94.

⁴⁶Costigliola, 171.

of encompassing the various facets of rationalization and modernization in general.⁴⁷

Whatever medium it occupied, *Amerikanismus* should be viewed as a complex matrix of meaning, with observable patterns. Yet it was a descriptive that often merged with or simply digested native German institutions, making it difficult to ascertain any clear definition. For example, Max Bill, a student at the time, in his comments on the Bauhaus, the academy of arts and applied art founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, provides an example by conflating several facets of Americanism within European culture :

I see the Bauhaus as something bigger than it really is....Picasso, Jacobi, Chaplin, Eiffel, Freud, Stravinsky, Edison, etc., all really belong to the Bauhaus. Bauhaus is a progressive intellectual direction, an attitude of mind that could well be termed religion.⁴⁸

For Bill, the Bauhaus could contain the spirit of a great number of individuals and institutions, each tied in some fashion to contemporary transformations of European society and culture. "America" in this context was a highly fluid metaphor in that it was representative of many, often conflicting, emotions and concerns over the cultural redefinitions being played out in early twentieth-century Europe.

The predominance of *Amerikanismus* within Weimar culture was a product of four principal elements. The first of these was the omnipresence of American products, both economic and cultural, both actual and merely perceived. The direct imposition of distinctly non-German and non-European substance became a topic of great concern within German public discourse. The growing standardization of needs and goods was perceived

⁴⁷Quoted in Anton Kaes, "Mass Culture and Modernity: Notes Toward a Social History of Early American and German Cinema," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred Year History*, Joseph McVeigh and Frank Trommler, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 2:325. Brecht concluded his diary entry of June 18, 1920 with the comment, "Only America remains." His commentary should not be interpreted to insinuate that Weimar culture was uneventful, but rather spiritually desolate and exhausted.

⁴⁸Quoted in Willett, 120.

to be sweeping away the foundations of German *Kultur* and therefore the German nation itself. An element of inhuman technological progress and rationalization wedded itself to nineteenth-century notions of Americanism. In his essay, "The New World," Hannes Meyer, one-time director of the Bauhaus, lamented that "the Transatlantique undermines the concept of the homeland [Heimat]. The fatherland fades away. We learn Esperanto. We become citizens of the world."⁴⁹ Modernization not only appeared to spell an end for German culture, but moreover threatened domination by a distinctly *American* culture. In this sense, America replaced other representations of "the West" (France, England) as the symbol of un-German *Zivilisation*. Author Stefan Zweig protested the "power of the mono-culture" as a distinctly American creation:

What is the source of this terrible wave threatening to wash all the color, everything particular, out of life? Everyone who has ever been there knows: America....[We] are becoming colonies of its life, its way of life, slaves to an idea profoundly foreign to Europe: the mechanical idea.⁵⁰

Both Meyer and Zweig exemplify fears typical of a perceived "end of individuality," a complete absorption of the individual within the sphere of the new impersonal and mechanized universal society. They and many others bemoaned the submergence of German *Kultur* within the international model, based as it was, largely on American conventions.

A brief analysis of distribution figures of American and German films provides an interesting example of the disparity between actual and perceived Americanization.

Historian Frank Costigliola has found that 60 percent of films shown in Germany in 1925

⁴⁹Hannes Meyer, "Die Neue Welt" [The New World], *Das Werk* 13, no. 7 (1926) 205-24, in *WRS*, 447.

⁵⁰Stefan Zweig, "Die Monotonisierung der Welt" [The Monotonization of the World], *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 1 February 1925, in *Ibid.*, 398-99.

were of American origin.⁵¹ However, the power of this figure is undercut if one examines the ratio of the most popular films, foreign and domestic. In his tabulation of the most popular films of the Weimar era, Joseph Garnarz has shown that in 1925, only two of the top ten films (the 5th and 7th) were of American origin, thus indicating that regardless of the volume of American imports, German audiences favored domestic content. This pattern would continue for the rest of the Republic. The German audience evidently resisted the monotonization of culture that Zweig perceived. German film production was clearly up to the challenge. By 1927, German production ranked third in the world with 241 films, compared to American (743) and Japanese (407).⁵² However even the German productions built upon American filmic convention for their popularity.⁵³ What results for the analyst is typical -- a complex matrix of absorption and resistance in which the resilience of German culture was never in question.

The second contributing factor to the cultural weight of *Amerikanismus* was the heightened interest in the American economy as a potential model for German industrial modernization, suffering as it was from catastrophic inflation during the early 1920s. While

⁵¹Costigliola, 176; Sabine Hake, The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933 (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 110. Hake puts the figure at a more modest 40 percent. Whatever the discrepancy, an average of 50 percent is still profound.

⁵²Heidi Fehrenbach, Cinema in Democratizing Germany (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 27; Saunders finds that in 1923, the ratio of German to American feature films was 253-102. Only in the years 1925-26 did German production fall behind American film imports. Saunders, 54.

⁵³Joseph Garnarz, "Hollywood in Germany: Die Rolle des amerikanischen Films in Deutschland: 1925-1990" [Hollywood in Germany: The Role of American Films in Germany: 1925-1990] in Der Deutschen Film: Aspekte seiner Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart [The German Film: Aspects of its History from the Beginning to the Present] Uli Jung, ed. (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1993), 167-214. One particular genre of film, the slapstick short comedy, would be of almost exclusively American production (see below).

the fundamental differences between the two economies of America and Germany have been adequately described, the role of the debate over this difference and/or similarity formed the crux of economic Americanism.⁵⁴ The principal product of this debate was an intensification of the German image of America as a land of consumption dominated by a spirit of pragmatism and materialism, and a rational attitude toward production, but also toward leisure and the home.⁵⁵

Thirdly, the rapid development of the news media within Germany provided an excellent lab for the germination of new discourses, as well as a receptive public for *Amerikanismus*. The crucial corollary to this trend was the rapid rise of concentrated urban areas in Germany. In this period, the rise of a new, white-collar population in Germany and its concentration in Berlin and a few other major cities of Germany was quite profound. By 1925, Berlin, for example, with its population of four million, contained 31 percent of the German white-collar population.⁵⁶ One of the cultural demands of this new social group was a richly textured, if somewhat superficial, popular media. Frank Becker writes in his study of sport culture in Weimar, 'Amerikanisch' was the character of this metropolitan culture industry, ... a leisure culture was beginning to be built, one indifferent to class or education. The revues, dance palaces, jazz bars and cinema, which took over

⁵⁴Mary Nolan cites at least 50 books published on the American economic *Wirtschaftswunder* during the 1920s, over and above the vast number of editorials, scholarly articles and lectures devoted to the subject. Nolan, 4. See also Sigmund Skard, *American Studies in Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958).

⁵⁵*Ibid.*; see also Charles S. Maier, "Between Taylorism and Technocracy," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (1970): 27-61.

⁵⁶Kaes, "Mass Culture and Modernity," 326-27; Peukert, 181.

the center of the city after the war...supplanted traditional culture.”⁵⁷ A resulting explosion occurred in the development of the news media. During the 1920s, Berlin alone had as many as forty-five morning, fourteen evening, and two midday newspapers. During the same period Germany as a whole tallied approximately four thousand periodical titles.⁵⁸

One observation by the Viennese critic Anton Kuh astutely surveys this new medium, “Vienna Without Newspapers.” Kuh writes:

[Vienna Without Newspapers] That is, Vienna without Vienna. Since the newspaper is Vienna, Vienna is a newspaper. The city lives only when it reads itself in print....All reality has only the function of a mirror. What is the conquest of the moon without headlines?...Phantoms, secondary matters. But the letter is the world.⁵⁹

One thinks back to Hoffmansthal’s description of the shift from the word to the image in the process of public perception - this is the meaning behind Kuh’s statement. Kuh’s words accurately describe the process of iconographical meaning construction in which “image” is a dialogic outcome of the intersection of image creation and image reception. This process is crucial for an understanding of Sloterdijk’s theory. He writes:

Seen psychohistorically, the urbanization and informatization of our consciousness in the media complex probably represents the aspect of modernity that cuts deepest into life. And only in such a world can the modern cynical syndrome -- diffuse, omnipresent cynicism -- unfold in the

⁵⁷Frank Becker, Amerikanismus in Weimar: Sportsymbole und politische Kultur, 1918-1933 [Americanism in Weimar: Sports Symbols and Political Culture] (Gabler: Deutscher Universitäts Verlag, 1993), 116.

⁵⁸WRS, 641; Wolfgang Gersch, Chaplin in Berlin (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1989), 128. Official numbers for the number of German newspapers: 1919-20: 3,689; 1932: 4,703. These figures should be qualified, given that the majority of these papers had relatively small circulations and that many were simply carbon copies of the 593 news agencies operating in Germany by 1932. Eksteins, 74-76.

⁵⁹Anton Kuh, “Wien ohne Zeitung,” [Vienna Without Newspapers] in The Vienna Coffeehouse Wits: 1890-1938, ed. Harold B. Segel (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1993), 306.

way we experience it today.⁶⁰

The predominance of the media had become so pervasive as to inform a metropolitan existence as one in which the individual could participate only insofar as he or she accepted a vernacular reified daily through this media, the “image” as described by Hoffmannsthal. The readers of this iconography, both part and symptom of “modernity,” thus digested the language of *Amerikanismus* in the course of their daily lives.

All elements of these new media contributed a surprisingly high percentage of their output to coverage of American news items and to addressing the phenomenon of *Amerikanismus*. Topics of this coverage ranged from the profound to the trivial. Essays concerning Lindbergh or the Sacco and Vanzetti Trial frequently shared column space with speculation on the daily habits of Al Capone or the esthetics of American football. From the period of 1922 on, the German university system rapidly developed a wide variety of *Amerikastudien* programs on its campuses.⁶¹ Popular and scholarly essays addressing the question of *Amerikanismus* were so common that they constituted a subgenre of journalism. The characteristic plasticity of *Amerikanismus* is readily apparent from a reading of just a few of these essays. Adolf Halfeld, for example, in his reactionary polemic, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus* (1929), blamed *Amerikanismus* for the pains of recovery from the postwar inflationary crisis:

The culture of Europe, in particular of Germany, developed by tradition, is threatened by America with its concentration on materialism and the mechanization of life. Rationalization on the American example is trump, regardless of whether it kills the human in mankind.⁶²

⁶⁰Sloterdijk, 308. See also Erhard Schütz, “Berlin in Weimar Literary Journalism,” in eds. Brockmann and Kniesche, 119-26.

⁶¹See Skard, 1: 232-77.

⁶²Quoted in Beck, 161.

At the other end of the spectrum, Felix Stössinger, editor of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, warned of "The Anglicization of Germany" :

Filled with the spirit of Anglo-Saxonism, the press and public opinion proudly and boastfully fancy to themselves and all the world that Germany is the most "American" of the European countries....And, as if seeking confirmation of this affirmation, the public grabs greedily and lustily at every scrap of Americanism it can have; it decorates itself with all kinds of linguistic thingamajigs, with the tinsel, fads, and absurdities of the Anglo-Saxon habitat,....⁶³

Both Halfeld and Stössinger, regardless of their political orientations, clearly addressed problems of existence in the industrial society. Halfeld steered away from any embrace of modernity. Stössinger on the other hand seemed to offer no critique of modernization as such, but rather a caveat about the terms on which Germany should adopt it. Hannes Meyer similarly cautioned that,

the standardization of our needs is manifest: the derby hat, the bobbed hairdo, the tango, jazz, co-op products,....The typecasting of intellectual fare is illustrated by our rush to Harold Lloyd, Douglas Fairbanks, and Jackie Coogan. Charlot [a popular term for Chaplin], Grock and the Three Fratellinis forged the masses -- beyond distinctions of class and race -- into a community of fate.⁶⁴

This community of fate implied a pronounced change in the information audience which appeared to be ironically uniting the German nation by limiting its options for entertainment.

Finally, *Amerikanismus* struck a particularly powerful responsive chord in the "high" arts of the Weimar Republic. The stabilizing effects of the economic resurgence after 1924, as well as a relaxation of political violence and a general prosperity during the mid-twenties, gave rise to a new mood in Germany, roughly akin to President Harding's

⁶³Felix Stössinger, "Die Anglisierung Deutschlands" [The Anglicization of Germany], *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 35 (August 1929), in *WRS*, 409. See also Otto Bauer, "Rationalization and the Social Order," in *Kapitalismus und Sozialismus nach dem Weltkrieg* [Capitalism and Socialism After the World War] (Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1931) in *Ibid.*, 410-11.

⁶⁴Meyer, "The New World", 447.

call for a return to normalcy in the United States. In the arts, this meant a departure from the frantic and fluid hope and chaos of Expressionism and Dada to a more sober and realistic form of expression. That style became known as the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, and fostered expressions of rationality, of sobriety, and a withdrawal from the styles of the early (1918-24) republic. It also bears a strong connection to *Amerikanismus*. *Neue Sachlichkeit* affected the production of all forms of artistic expression. Examples fitting the style include the Zeitoper, a mix of jazz and traditional operatic form; Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg (1924); and G.W. Pabst's film Der Liebe der Jeanne Ney (1927). The style of reportage in which so much of the *Amerikanismus* debate raged was itself a product of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

The German discourse on America clearly favored a structure of dichotomies drawn between the two nations. Typical examples included *Geist* versus materialism, *Kultur* versus consumption, *Gemeinschaft* (community) versus *Gesellschaft* (society), and so forth. Peter Mennicken in his 1924 polemic against American economic rationalization, Anti-Ford, goes so far as to describe a difference of species from one side of the ocean to the other, distinguishing between the European *homo sapiens* as upholder of traditional cultural norms and the Taylorized *homo faber*, man the maker, of the new world. The latter in his view had lost all sense of history and tended to interpret technological achievements as cultural progress.⁶⁵ In 1925, Franz Roh published a comparison of Expressionism and what he referred to as "post-Expressionism," summing up the way many perceived the differences between the two phases of society.⁶⁶ Within his frame of distinction, Chaplin and Baker in different ways stood out perpendicularly to the categories

⁶⁵Peter Mennicken, Anti-Ford--Oder von der Würde der Menschheit. [Anti-Ford, or On the Dignity of Humanity] (Aachen: Die Kuppel, 1924), 15.

⁶⁶Roh's categories have been reprinted as appendix B.

Roh envisaged as “post-Expressionist,” yet were not directly representative of the categories of “Expressionism” either. Again, their identities emerged as something beyond a facile black-and-white classification of the question of change, and accordingly, of “America.” As historian Detlev Peukert phrased it:

The historical achievement of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was to come to terms with the new reality of the express train, the stink of petrol and the stock-exchange wizard, and to draw up a new aesthetic that did not consist merely of cries of despair or escapist evocations of rose petals.⁶⁷

While Peukert’s evaluation begs an equation of the two trends, such equivalence did not exist. *Neue Sachlichkeit* cannot be equated with *Amerikanismus*, but can be viewed in the same sense as this paper discusses “modernism” in that it served those who openly embraced technology as an ultimate rationalization of the irrational, as well as those who discredited this process of modernization. Therefore it seems wiser to proceed to an examination of Chaplin and Baker as representatives of the latter, coexisting with and incorporating some of the sentiment also expressed within the former. In simple terms then, they represented both a step forward and a step back, elements indicative of the modernization of German culture yet on a specific, non-rational and in Sloterdijk’s terms, a *kynetic* path. But before embarking on this examination, a brief case study of *Amerikanismus* is provided.

⁶⁷Peukert, 168.

CHAPTER III

THE AMERICAN AVIATOR

The Role of Flight in Germany

A fascination with flight is a recurring characteristic of Western culture. For the greater part of the history of this culture, this fascination has been largely limited to pseudo-scientific speculation and mythology. By the early years of the twentieth-century, however, dirigibles, gliders and the early mechanized flights of the Wright Brothers and Jacques Blériot had avenged the fall of Icarus, making flight an immediate possibility for large segments of Europe.⁶⁸ Germany's active fascination with aviation in the practical sense began in the 1890s when Otto Lilienthal first initiated his experiments with gliders. This fascination heightened with the immensely popular figure of Graf Zeppelin and his efforts to propagate a fleet of airships after the turn of the century. Historian Peter Fritzsche notes that the fascination with this early period of German aviation involved a direct embrace of modernity and a conscious feeling of victory of *Kultur* over Nature. As an affirmation of the modernization which had proved so troublesome for many Germans during the fin-de-siècle, flight served as an effective barometer of national sentiment, revealing an immense need for a symbology of confidence and positive "progress" rather than anxieties over stagnation and decadence.⁶⁹ It is advantageous to remember the nexus

⁶⁸Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1994. See also the introduction to Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1-9.

⁶⁹Fritzsche, 24.

between the invention of mechanized flight, the increasing urbanization of German society and the creation of the new media of film and dance as suggested by Anton Kaes -- the confluence is crucial as it is this moment in German history where the discourse of *Amerikanismus* began to take shape. As it grew, this discourse enmeshed itself within these developments and became inseparable from them.

World War One, however, brought the airplane to the fore in the popular imagination like nothing else. The image of the ace was the vanguard of this development. Flying alone, above the miasma of death and tedium of trench warfare, the ace presented a striking symbol in the mythology of the war. A combination of a revived medieval knight and a technically gifted and steely-nerved machine operator, the ace encouraged the individual to soar (literally and figuratively) over society. The iconography of the World War One ace as presented in the popular media is crucial for the purposes of a discussion of aviation in Germany as these images formed a base from which the Weimar notion of the aviator could develop. The themes introduced during the war were a sense of the heightened importance of physical and mental self-discipline; a general ease with machines; and a middle-class background enabling popular identification.⁷⁰

Following German defeat in the war, the Versailles settlement prohibited, among other practices, the construction of motorized aircraft within Germany, thus severely limiting the possibilities for the flight culture to develop. This ban was eased slightly in 1922, but not removed until 1926. During this period, necessity dictated that the glider substitute for the motorized aircraft as the allegory of German national revival.⁷¹ Massive glider rallies drew large crowds of spectators, typically numbering in the thousands. The

⁷⁰Ibid., 97.

⁷¹University of South Dakota History Home Page. "Versailles Treaty," Article 202. <http://ac.acusd.edu/History/text/versaillestreaty/all440.html>. (May 1996); Ibid., 103-7.

glider culture reveals many similarities with the wide variety of hiking clubs and *Natur* organizations of Weimar, providing for many a positive sense of community directly connected with the roots of German nationalism, modern in and of itself, yet in opposition to the young Republic.⁷²

Following the easing of restrictions on aircraft construction, air rallies and press coverage continued this trend, presenting the airplane and the aviator as symbols of the new postwar world which Germany was just beginning to join, as well as distinct markers of German national progress within the 1920s. As such, the reception of Chamberlin and Levine in June of 1927 provides an excellent case study of a discourse which exclaimed a profound technical progress, both in terms of technological advancement and the individual's ability to master it. This technical prowess was linked to the development of the moral strength of the individual, who underwent a transformation into what was essentially perceived at the time as a new person. A further element shown in this discourse is the political malleability and utility of "America." These factors combined to form a fluid discursive field capable both of voicing pleasure and concern with the modernization of Germany, of advocating a "modernity," but one which was qualified within or in opposition to the positive tradition of German *Kultur*.⁷³ This modernity also exhibited the characteristics of Sloterdijk's cynical model.

The Flight - June 1927

⁷²Ibid., 130.

⁷³A sampling of the literary output during the Weimar Republic on this theme includes: Gustav Renker, *Der Flieger, Roman* [The Flyer, A Novel] (Leipzig: L. Staackmann, 1928); Hermann Rossmann, *Flieger* [The Flyer] (Berlin: Oesterheld, 1932); Walter Erich Schafer, *Flieger auf dem Atlantik, ein Drama in drei Akten* [Pilots over the Atlantic, a Drama in Three Acts] (Berlin: Chronos-Verlag, 1929); and Peter Supf and Heinz Orlovius, *Die Welt der Flieger* [The World of the Pilot] (Berlin: R. Hobbing, 1932).

Rise! Rise!
 Here is the Apparatus! Here is the Apparatus!
 The man Europe awaits!
 Fame beckons you!⁷⁴

With these words, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht welcomed the young American pilot Charles Lindbergh to Europe in 1927. This celebration of the apparatus, of Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* in this case, of the great machine of modernity writ large, is indicative of the overall climate of industrial Americanism in Germany. As has been shown, the shift toward an interpretation, either positive or negative, of America as industrial superstate, cultural antithesis to Europe, and as potential model for German society became a major discourse in Germany during the Weimar period. The reception accorded Lindbergh, but particularly Clarence Chamberlin and Charles Levine, in their flights to Europe in 1927 affords an enlightening perspective into the dynamic of *Amerikanismus* and serves to illuminate the cynical apparatus of modern culture as envisioned by Peter Sloterdijk.

In the mid 1920s, Clarence Chamberlin (b. 1894) entered into the race to cross the Atlantic in record-breaking ways. The Atlantic had been flown many times since 1919, when John Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown made the trip from Newfoundland to Europe. The German zeppelin ZR III (the *Los Angeles*) had landed in the United States in 1924.⁷⁵ At that time, the French pilots Nungesser and Coli were attempting the task from West to East, Richard Byrd was making a flight to the North Pole and Lindbergh was preparing to cross the Atlantic alone. Nungesser and Coli disappeared without a trace in their attempt. With backing from the Bellanca corporation and the financial resources of the amateur pilot Charles Levine, Chamberlin was well prepared to attempt an Atlantic crossing

⁷⁴Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, Der Lindberghflug [The Lindbergh Flight] (Leipzig: Universal-Edition AG, 1930), 1.

⁷⁵Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 248.

as early as April of 1927, with the hope of achieving a new distance record. However, a variety of weather problems and economic disputes delayed his attempt until after Lindbergh had completed his flight in May. While reports indicated that his destination was unknown even on departure, Chamberlin's own account clearly states the target as Berlin. The decision to fly to Germany was partially motivated by Lindbergh's unexpected failure to visit Germany -- the assumption was (correct) that Germans would be eager to host a similar event.⁷⁶ Germany was well prepared to receive them.

Chamberlin and Levine set out from New York on June 4, 1927 in their monoplane, the "Columbia." The German press tracked them from the start, following their progress with a flurry of speculative and often contradictory reports presented in frequent extra editions.⁷⁷ The scope of coverage from the start of their flight is immense, rivaled up to this point in German history only perhaps by the tensions of the Crisis Summer of 1914. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, for example, ran three extra editions on the 4th, over and above the regular morning and evening runs.

On June 6, after running out of fuel about 110 miles southwest of Berlin, Chamberlin and Levine landed in a wheat field in the village of Bischofsrode near Eisleben. After purchasing a supply of gas from a local farmer, they continued on until they once again ran out of fuel before reaching Berlin, this time making a rough landing in a field near Kottbus, snapping their plane's propeller and delaying their eventual arrival in the capital until the 7th. Meanwhile, crowds besieged the airport and the Wilhelmplatz area around the U.S. Embassy in expectation of glimpsing the pilots so touted in the press. The crowd

⁷⁶New York Times, 4 June 1927, 1; Clarence D. Chamberlin, *Record Flights/Give 'Em Hell* (New York: Beechwood Press, 1942), 85. Chamberlin cites a clandestine deal to leave Rome "open" for a future flight by the owner of Bellanca, who also wished to fly to Europe.

⁷⁷Varying column widths and text sizes amongst the various Berlin newspapers prevent any accurate comparison of column-inches.

gathered at Tempelhof airport was estimated at as high as 150,000.⁷⁸ (figure 1)

The Reception

As Sloterdijk suggests, a belief in the rational progress of mind and the will to know are hallmarks of cynical reason. The figure of the aviator in Weimar was a manifestation of progress, of technology, and thus ultimately of enlightenment rationalism. The tropes expressed in the reception of Chamberlin and Levine exemplify this. The aviator corresponds to Sloterdijk's notion of the *hero* in the specific area of *military cynicism*.⁷⁹ The most readily discernable trope is technical progress.

The cult of *Technik* surrounded the two pilots, as it did Lindbergh before them. This phenomenon was distinguished by a nearly fetishistic devotion to the quantitative. Data was distributed in a variety of permutations, the most common being figures of distance, speed and time. Reportage typically ensconced within the narrative the minutiae of scheduling and distance figures, often accompanied by graphic depictions.⁸⁰ (figure 2) These detailed attentions represent a faith in progress writ small, based upon the paradigmatic ideal of America. As the reflections of one contemporary commentator appeared in the satirical journal, *Uhu*:

⁷⁸*Vörrwärts* estimated 100,000 to "several hundred thousand." *Vörrwärts*, 6, 7 June 1927, 1; *Berliner Tageblatt*, 6 June 1927, 1; *New York Times*, 6, 8 June 1927; 1. See also *Aviation* 22-24 (13 June-27 June, 1927).

⁷⁹"An unambiguous hierarchy of values is established at whose summit the hero stands; everyone *should* be basically like him. Heroism is internalized as a model by the males in a combatative civilization." Sloterdijk, 220; see also Klaus Theleweit, *Male Phantasies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987-89).

⁸⁰The most often cited figure is the distance record set by Chamberlin: 3905 miles, breaking Lindbergh's mark by 295 miles. See for example *Berliner Tageblatt* 7 June 1927, 1; *Vörrwärts* 7 June 1927, 1; *Völkischer Beobachter*, 8 June 1927, 1.



Figure 1. Chamberlin and Levine after landing at
Templehof airport in Berlin, June 6, 1927. Cover of
Der Welt Spiegel insert to Berliner Tageblatt, June
19, 1927, 1.

Durch die Luft über Meere und Kontinente

Zusammengestellt von Ing. B. v. Nömer

Auf den beiden folgenden Seiten finden unsere Leser eine Übersicht über die einzelnen Etappen in der Entwicklung des Luftverkehrs durch das Flugzeug, die nach einer beispiellos kurzen und glänzenden Reise Lindberghs Transoceanflug ihren vorläufigen Höhepunkt erreicht hat.

Die Schiffe

1. Transoceanflüge

Nr.	Datum	Führer (Nationalität)	Flugzeug- bzw. Luftschiffstyp	Motoren	Flugstrecke	Entfernung km	Bemerkungen
1	16. Mai bis 19. Mai 19	A. G. Read (Amerika)	Euriff- Flugboot NC4 (Doppeldecker)	4 × 400 P.S. Liberty	Newport - Neufundland - Azoren - Lissabon - Plymouth	ca. 5600	Neufundland - Azoren ohne Landung 2250 km
2	14. bis 15. Juni 19	Alcock u. Brown (England)	Widder „Vimy“ Landflugzeug (Doppeldecker)	2 × 450 P.S. Napier	Neufundland - Irland	ca. 3750	Neufundland - Irland ohne Landung
3	2. bis 13. Juli 19	Scott (England)	Engl. Luftschiff R 34 (Zeppelin)	5 × 250 P.S. Gundlach	East - Fortune (Engl.), Long Island - Norfolk (Engl.)	ca. 11200	1. Flug eines Luftschiffes über Ozean nach Amerika und zurück
4	17. März bis 8. Sept. 24	Amerif. Welt- flieger Schmitt und Neilson	Douglas DT 11 Land- u. Wasser- Doppeldecker	400 P.S. Liberty	Santa Monica (Kaliforn.) ab. Japan, Indien, Europa, Island, Grönland, Newport- Kalifornien	ca. 40000	Weitflug von amerif. Welt- fliegern in einzelnen Etappen durch den Ozean
5	12. bis 15. Okt. 24	Edener (Deutschland)	Zeppelin- Luftschiff LZ 126 - ZR III	5 × 400 P.S. Maybach	Friedrichshafen - Capehart (Amerika)	ca. 8750	Überführung des Reparatur- schiffes von seiner Baustelle nach Amerika
6	22. Jan. bis 10. Febr. 26	Francis (Spanien)	Dornier-Wal- Flugboot	2 × 400 P.S. Napier	Palos (Spanien) - Buenos Aires	ca. 10150	Deutsches Dornier-Wal-Flug- boot 35 Std. reine Flugzeit
7	8. Febr. bis 2. März 27	De Pineda (Italien)	Savoia- Marchetti S 55 Flugboot	2 × 500 P.S. Isotta Fraschini	Cabo Maggiore - San Anto- nio (Brasilien) - Paraguay	ca. 12000	
8	2. März bis 20. März 27	Sarmiento de Vitoria (Portugal)	Dornier-Wal- Flugboot	2 × 450 P.S. Lorraine- Dietrich	Lissabon - Natal (Brasilien) - Pernambuco	ca. 7000	
9	20. Mai bis 21. Mai 27	Lindbergh (Amerika)	Hughes-Hedder Landflugzeug	Luftschiffb.- Sternmotor	Newport - Paris (Rekordflug)	ca. 6000	Newport - Paris ohne Landung in 33 ^{1/2} Std. Rekor- dflug im Streckenflug

2. Europa - Afrika

10	18. Nov. 25 bis 13. März 26	Cobham (England)	De Havilland DH 50 Wasser- Doppeldecker	400 P.S. Gibbeley „Jaguar“	London - Kapstadt - London	ca. 27400	
11	12. Okt. 26 bis 14. Jan. 27	Dougault und Bernard (Frankreich)	Clare & Oliver Type 194 (Flugboot)	420 P.S. Gnome- Rhône „Aquila“	Verre (Frankreich) - Madagascar - Paris	ca. 29600	
12	7. Dez. 26 bis 21. Febr. 27	W. Mittelholzer (Schweiz)	Dornier „Mer- kur“ (Zwei- Schwimmer- Verkehrsflug)	600 P.S. H. M. W. (Bavaria- motor)	Zürich - Kapstadt	ca. 20000	Forschungsflug durch den Ozean

3. Europa - Asien und Australien

13	28. Okt. bis 11. Nov. 26	Costes und Noulet (Frankreich)	Breguet 19 (Land-Doppel- decker)	450 P.S. Hispano- Sulzer	Le Bourget - Dschid- Kaschi - Kalkutta - Paris	18200	Le Bourget - Dschid 5650 Zwischenlandung in Dschid
14	30. Juni bis 1. Okt. 26	Cobham (England)	De Havilland DH 50 Wasser- Doppeldecker	400 P.S. Gibbeley „Jaguar“	London - Sydney - London	45000	
15	13. Aug. bis Okt. 26	Dobl. Schneider (Deutschland)	2 Flugzeuge Junkers G 24 (Verkehrs-Flin- decker)	3 × 230 P.S. Junkers L 12	Berlin - Peking - Berlin	17000	Asien-Expedition der Dobl. Banja mit 2 Dreimotoren- Großflugzeugen
16	11. bis 18. Juni 26	Pelletier-Dossy und Carol (Frankreich)	Breguet 19 (Land-Doppel- decker)	450 P.S. Lorraine- Dietrich	Paris - Warschau - Peking	9500	
17	25. Juli bis 24. Okt. 26	Abé und Kawachi (Japan)	Breguet 19 (Land-Doppel- decker)	450 P.S. Hispano- Sulzer	Tokio - Moskau - Berlin - Paris - London - Rom	15400	Ein Besuch japanischer in Europa

4. Nordpol-Flüge

18	21. Mai bis 15. Juni 25	Nielsen-Larsen, Dirichsen und Amundsen	2 Dornier-Wal- Flugboote	2 × 360 P.S. Rohr-Rover	Rönigsdal (Spitzbergen) - Nordpolgebiet - Spitz- bergen	1800	Der Pol wurde nicht erreicht, 1. Flugzeug mußte landen
19	10. April bis 15. Mai 26	Amundsen, Robbie (Italien)	Ital. Luftschiff „Rorke“	3 × 240 P.S. Maybach	Rom - Nordpol - Veller in Alaska	13000	Der Nordpol wurde erreicht, 1. Forschungsflug mit einem Luftschiff
20	10. Mai 26	Nord und Bennett	Fokker F VII (Land-Ver- kehrsflugzeug)	3 × 200 P.S. Wright- Whitcomb	Spitzbergen (Rönigsdal) - Nordpol - Spitzbergen	2500	1. Überfliegung des Nordpols in einem Flugzeug

Figure 2. "Through the air over seas and continents."
Flight chart printed during 1927. Reclams
Universum, 37 (June 9, 1927), 1.

Our objective era searches for and finds the technical expression and the objective explanation for everything until it comes upon a point where, for the time being, it can go no further. That point is called atom, radio wave, sex appeal.⁸¹

The nomenclature she described allowed for the shared perception of mastery -- the "Apparatus" Brecht and Weill described found blatant expression in the substantive estimations of Chamberlin's flight.⁸² Another fitting example is found in the words of President Hindenburg in a congratulatory telegram sent to President Coolidge:

I express to you, Mr. President, and to the American nation, my sincere congratulations for the daring flight of the two ocean flyers, Chamberlin and Levine, who, *heroically overcoming time and space* have bridged the ocean and thus brought nearer together our two countries.⁸³

Such language was the norm as Germany's press organs clamored over each other in evoking imagery of technical progress. A welcome message from the German government by Dr. Curtius thanks Chamberlin and Levine for helping humanity in its progression toward a better life (and also for doing it on German soil!).⁸⁴ The publishing industry soon followed -- the occasion of the flight was also surrounded by articles elaborating on

⁸¹Anita [?], "Sex Appeal: Ein neues Schlagwort für ein alte Sache," ["Sex Appeal: A New Catchword for an Old Thing"] Uhu 5 (October 1928): 72-77, in WRS, 668.

⁸²The coverage of the flight regarded Chamberlin as the often sole figure of note. When Levine is mentioned, it is often as merely Chamberlin's *Begleiter*, or, as will be explained later, as a foil for the purpose of constructing Chamberlin's image.

⁸³Berliner Tageblatt, 7 June 1927, 1; Völkischer Beobachter, 8 June 1927, 1; New York Times, 7 June 1927, 3. Such imagery of the conquest of time and space was not only counted to the good. The communist *Rote Fahne* for example, noted that "Time and space are being eliminated in ever increasing spurts in the development of technology...[in a class society] All technological progress is not progress for the greater good, but rather progress for the ruling class...The airplane is the sign of the next imperialist war." Rote Fahne, 22 May 1927, 1.

⁸⁴Berliner Tageblatt, 8 June 1927, 1.

technologies attendant to the flight -- radio, navigation, transportation and so on.⁸⁵ (figure 3) One ad in the Social Democratic *Vörrwärts* used Chamberlin to announce a new “delightful, technical children’s book” which contained “all elements of interest from the airship to radar, from the diesel engine to the wireless telephone.”⁸⁶ (figure 4) Running behind this exultation of technology was the identity of its carriers, predominantly Chamberlin, whom the *Berliner Tageblatt* dubbed, with a nod to his American past, the “Destroyer of Frontiers.”⁸⁷

The attention to the persons of Chamberlin and Levine reveals the second element of concern: a representation of the belief that a fundamental transformation in human nature was then in progress as part of the overall process of modernization. Running through the discourse of America both in the circles of elite culture and scholarly writing, as well as through the streets, this transformation saw the individual, the American, as becoming further and further rationalized in his or her person, as succumbing psychically to the physically rapid pace of life in the industrial age, becoming what conservative critic Adolf Halfeld referred to as “der Rah-Rah Boy,” an individual wound very tightly, one who is obsessed in mind and spirit with the fast tempo of “modern” life. Arthur Feiler noted a common perception in his economic treatise on America, “Americans do not know what leisure is; they want to be on the go all the time.” Irene Witte, a theorist of scientific management, spoke out against the introduction of Ford’s theories into Germany, writing

⁷⁹See for example, “Luftfahrt und Funktechnik” in *Berliner Tageblatt*, 17 June 1927, 1; *Vörrwärts*, 5 June 1927, 1.

⁸⁶*Vörrwärts*, 11 June 1927, 10.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 7 June 1927, 1. *Vörrwärts* chose the slightly more amusing and ominous, “Der Führer des Flugzeugs.” *Vörrwärts*, 21 May 1927, Abendausgabe B, 1.



Figure 3. *The Frontiers of Technology*. Cartoon [author unknown]. "Did you make the reception for Chamberlain at Templehof Field?" "Oh, but I'm from North Berlin. You'd think that if one can fly from New York to Germany in 50 hours, that I could get to Templehof on the Berlin streetcars in the same amount of time!" *Vöwärts*, June 8, 1927, 8.

Chamberlin

... hat in die Tat umgesetzt, was in
„Fliegen und Funken“

dem köstlichen, technischen
 Jugendbuch von E. Krafft voraus-
 gesagt wurde. Ein wahres Buch
 „von Technik, Tat und Traum“,
 enthält „Fliegen und Funken“
 alles Interessante vom Luftballon
 bis zum Detektor, vom Diesel-
 motor bis zur drahtlosen Telefontie.

**Kein Junge
 ohne „Fliegen und Funken“**

Preis Ganzleinen nur 3,50 M. Be-
 suchen Sie unsere Verkaufsräume!

**Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nach!., Abteilung
 SW., Lindenstr. 2 Sortiment**

Beachten Sie unsere Schaufenster!

Figure 4. "Flying and Broadcasting." Advertisement featuring Chamberlin for children's book. Vorwärts, June 11, 1927, 8.

that a “Ford psychosis” was at hand.⁸⁸ Many cautiously referred to the “breathlessness” of American life and how this spirit was wending its way across the Atlantic. Editor and pacifist Edlef Köppen criticized one manifestation of this transformation in Germany, the magazine:

The mark of our age is haste, hurry, nervousness. People have no time, indeed they flee the calm of contemplation....The rhythm of life pounds short and hard: further -- further! The consequence is in many cases superficiality....The father of the idea is America and England....They [magazines] are spreading like pestilence....The magazine has become a concentrated sign of our times.⁸⁹

Transatlantic flights seemed to offer the perfect structural moment for discussion and critique of this process. The *Berliner Tageblatt* commented, “Those grandiose ideas, deductions and thoughts floating in the airstream from America to Europe are only too clear.”⁹⁰ For many, a “new person” with an accordingly new morality had entered into German society, and Clarence Chamberlin and the commotion surrounding his visit to Germany symbolized this new man. Witness the language used by *Vörrwärts* to describe the scene of Berlin at Chamberlin’s arrival: “New mass mobilization, the streets black with people, snarls of auto traffic. High tension. Everything seemed ‘last minute.’”⁹¹

However, the treatment of Chamberlin himself reveals an idyllic figure, through which many writers seemed able to locate a positive corollary to the “new person.” Such a

⁸⁸Halfeld, 202; Arthur Feiler, *America as Seen Through German Eyes*, trans. Margaret Leland Goldsmith, (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1928), 259. Feiler contrasts this with what he considers the German spirit in which “the strength of the heart is the decisive factor...To a German returning from America, Germany seems like an idyll.” Feiler, 283; Irene Witte quoted in Nolan, 31.

⁸⁹Köppen, Edlef, “The Magazine as a Sign of the Times,” [“Das Magazin als Zeichen der Zeit”] in *Der Hellweg* 5, no. 24 (17 June 1925): 457 in *WRS*, 644-45.

⁹⁰R.W. Schultze, “Die psycho-physische Hochleistung Lindberghs,” [“The Psychosomatic Achievement of Lindbergh”] *Berliner Tageblatt*, 25 May 1927, 5.

⁹¹*Vörrwärts*, 7 June 1927, 1.

task demanded a corresponding morality. The exact nature of this new morality shifted as the words and images of the American pilots' identities were shuffled back and forth across the political spectrum. The physical descriptions of Chamberlin himself are revealing, as they stress the strength of his character. Newspaper reports consistently favored his youth, health, vigor and unprepossessing nature. Sloterdijk reminds us that the typical conception of the hero of military cynicism rests upon an acknowledgement of glory and success, "This apotheosis of the victor, the cult of success" is a vital component in this discourse. The words of Brecht and Weill resonate with this apotheosis in parody,

'Never,' wrote one paper, 'has someone...been so lucky.
When the storm struck over the sea, luck turned it back.
When the motor doesn't hold, the man does, and when the man doesn't hold,
then luck does!
And so we believe in Success.'⁹²

The *Berliner Tageblatt* noted of Chamberlin on his arrival: "Chamberlin, thirty-five years of age, left an intelligent and sympathetic impression standing there, with his swept black hair and his blue eyes, as the American sportsman who is capable of achieving such a feat." In the imagery of the Weimar republic, the aviator appeared as something apart -- "His narrow nose cut sharply and had that little crook of all born leaders. The eyes...fixed themselves like blue darts of flame to the objects of the outside world, and the small, somewhat pointed ears seemed able to hear even the crystallization of atoms."⁹³ (figure 5) The iconography of the pilot served as a high traffic role model during this period of transformation.

Furthermore, fears of a damaged new psychological state on par with the fragmented

⁹²Brecht, 8.

⁹³Hugo Wolfgang Philipp, "Der Rekordbrecher," *Ikarus* 2 (Sept. 1926), 31; quoted in Fritzsche, 158; Sloterdijk describes the traditional image: "Pictorially, heroes are almost always represented as youths; the misfortune of heroes is that they die young." Sloterdijk, 221.

Sonntag, 12 Juni 1927



Ozeanbezwinger Lindbergh

„Trotzdem er in der Nacht vor seinem Abflug nur zwei Stunden geschlafen hatte, wies er den ihm angebotenen Kaffee zurück, um zu vermeiden, daß er durch nervenaufpeitschende Mittel vor der Zeit die volle Beherrschung über sich und seinen Apparat verlieren könnte. Welches Maß von Beherrschung und Nervenarbeit der Flug erforderte, geht daraus hervor, daß Lindbergh ganz allein flog.“ (Pressebericht aus Le Bourget)

**Aber Herr Lindbergh,
Sie hätten doch ruhig den
unschädlichen coffeinfreien
Kaffee Hag trinken können!**

Figure 5. *Lindbergh the Ocean Conqueror*. Advertisement featuring Lindbergh. Reprints a press release relating how Lindbergh only slept two hours prior to his flight, yet refrained from drinking coffee because he felt that it might disturb his nerves. "But Mr. Lindbergh, you had the calm of the mild, caffeine-free Kaffee Hag to drink!" *Berliner Tageblatt*, June 12, 1927, 9.

status of modern society were palliated by the notion of the pilot, a "*Sportsmann*," as possessing a tenacious psychological profile. One estimation of a German psychiatrist, Tadeshon, described Chamberlin as "very resilient. His is very similar to the character of Lindbergh. Blond, blue eyes, a sportsman."⁹⁴ The model pilot also possessed great powers of self-control and inner determination. Another German psychiatrist wrote that what was necessary for this new person was "a strong constitution and bodily health, abstinence from excess excitement and pleasures."⁹⁵ Much was made of both Chamberlin's and Lindbergh's reserved social and dietary habits. The discourse of *Amerikanismus* surrounding the two lacked much of the physicality and the body-for-the-body's-sake that will be seen to have marked the reception of Chaplin and Baker.

Chamberlin's identity was closely tied to that of his airplane, the "Columbia" (as Lindbergh's had been to the "Spirit of St. Louis"). The novelist later identified with National Socialism, Ernst Jünger, wrote of his generation as "the first to begin to reconcile itself to the machine," to view it as an extension of the body, designed to function after the body is no longer capable.⁹⁶ Sloterdijk emphasizes the importance in the Weimar mentality of the notion of the warrior as a "coolly functioning engineer," with a close bond to his weapon. He writes:

Those who survive must have learned to regard themselves, their bodies, their morality, their will, as things. The soldier's physical condition and moral attitudes provide only aspects of armament and battle equipment. In this point, war gave all moral philosophies a drastic, graphic lesson: Morality is called the psychic factor of the war machine.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Berliner Tageblatt, 7 June 1927, 1.

⁹⁵Schultze.

⁹⁶Quoted in Theleweit, 2:197.

⁹⁷Sloterdijk, 435-36.

This implied connection between the pilot and his craft is discernable in much of the reportage from early June. Chamberlin's representation of a positive industrial modernity was tied to depictions both of his mastery of the Apparatus, but also his connection to and care for the Apparatus itself, as is shown in the various evocations of the American "*Wundervogel*," the "Columbia."⁹⁸

Therefore this new person emerged as an individual steeled against the negative rush of modernity, developed partially out of the tradition of anti-modernity represented by the glider movement, yet also a master technician capable of conquering the machine and bending its admittedly potentially negative qualities towards the fulfillment of the mission of "Progress." In the words of one doctor Lewald, the President of the German Committee for Physical Exercise, Chamberlin was simply "the consummate incarnation of the sporting spirit."⁹⁹ The iconography of the American pilots did conform in certain respects to the "battle-machine" model envisioned by Jünger, with emphasis on the passion of the warrior combined with a cold rationality inspired by the machine. So the *Völkischer Beobachter* described Lindbergh: "So he stands, a symbol of power and incomparable daring, who is beyond reason and who had withstood all danger."¹⁰⁰ This inscription of a new morality and the *neue Mensch* clearly stands apart from Sloterdijk's cynical model of reconciliation between the mind and the body.

The treatment of Chamberlin's financier and co-pilot, Charles Levine, deserves closer attention at this juncture in their narrative. Levine's identity as a wealthy, urban American Jew and his debatable flying skills provided the extreme nationalistic press with a easy mark, and they took full advantage of the situation. The National Socialist *Völkischer*

⁹⁸See Fritzsche, 153-62.

⁹⁹*Berliner Tageblatt*, 4 June 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁰*Völkischer Beobachter*, 24 May 1927, 1.

Beobachter launched a concerted attack upon the larger media, calling the excitement over the arrival of the American pilots a “nervous tickle” and bemoaning the “derailment of the nervous system” wrought upon the masses.¹⁰¹ While the majority of liberal coverage seems rather to ignore Levine or include him as a polite afterthought to Chamberlin, papers such the *Völkischer Beobachter* and *Der Angriff* employed Levine as a foil to deflate the excitement of the “Asphalt” press and warn of the danger in this “commotion” to the German nation:

Middle and western Europe seems like a sick patient lying in agony, treated by a quack with a strong shot of morphine that not only has taken away the agony, but also gone straight to his head causing all sorts of mischief and nonsense.

What’s happened? Two young men have flown across the Atlantic and set a new distance record....At a stroke they’ve become the most famous men in the world,....America wills it and Europe must obey!¹⁰²

General critiques of the Americanization of Germany thus became mixed with anti-Semitic attacks upon Levine himself, the “Modern Icarus” and a “three times over businessman...a real hero only when it comes to advertising.” *Der Angriff* argued that Levine had used his wealth to control Chamberlin and that “he views any flyer connected with him as if he were a coolie.”¹⁰³ The *Völkischer Beobachter* painted an even more offensive picture in a poem entitled, “The ‘Pilot’ Levine,”

He [Chamberlin] flew here over the sea
A hero, bold and audacious,
And another, named Levine,
...
He didn’t do much as a passenger
Flying only with blinders on
While sitting with dignity and honor.

¹⁰¹*Völkischer Beobachter*, 4 June 1927, 1.

¹⁰²B.U. Hampel, “Amerikanische Sport-Champion-Psychose,” [“American Sport Hero Psychosis”] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 24 June 1927, 5.

¹⁰³*Völkischer Beobachter*, 20 June 1927, 3; *Der Angriff*, 1 August 1927, 4.

A monkey in his chair
 Could have done the same
 But he would also have had hair.
 ...¹⁰⁴

The Communist press at the opposite end of the spectrum were equally ferocious, finding fault not with Chamberlin but with the Apparatus on which he rode, attacking Levine as the personification of capital, and providing an indictment of the bourgeois press on par with the far right. "While the bourgeois press praises the 'heroes,'...I believe rather that the great proletarian masses should not be so pleased with the flyers."¹⁰⁵ The message behind the presentation of Chamberlin sought to create an greater awareness of the dangers the technological advancements of the time posed to the worker. Such reportage strongly stressed the military implications of Chamberlin's voyage. "The quick development of flight creates a myriad of possibilities in the interest of imperialism. Today it's no longer impossible for gas bombs to be dropped on Europe by America. The airplane is the sign of the next imperialist war."¹⁰⁶ With typical style, the *Rote Fahne* warned of this, by focusing an article based on a remark by Chamberlin, "The next plane should be able to carry more weight. This weight may consist of gas bombs."¹⁰⁷

These statements from the fringes of the German political stage resonate strongly with a larger geopolitical concern of the spread of direct American control over German affairs, the third principal feature revealed by the *Amerikanismus* of the American aviator. Naturally, the international character of this event was not lost upon the mainstream either.

¹⁰⁴Levine was balding. Christian Meyer, "Der 'Flieger' Levine," *Völkischer Beobachter*, 15 June 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁵*Rote Fahne*, 9 June 1927, 3.

¹⁰⁶*Rote Fahne*, 22 May 1927, 1.

¹⁰⁷*Rote Fahne*, 10 June 1927. 3.

The majority of the liberal “bourgeois” papers presented a general feeling of international goodwill, in part with the purpose of reifying the nascent German republic. Most ran verbatim a panoply of government speakers, from Reichschancellor Marx, President Hindenburg, and Foreign Minister Stresemann to name a few. For example, Stresemann offered these remarks during one welcoming celebration:

I like to see your visit to Germany as a symbol of the relationship between our lands and peoples. You are of a relatively young people and we are of a relatively young nation. You are the greatest, and we are the youngest Republic in the world. Our developments are similar.

Referring to the flight, another commentator lauded the “bridge of aether” as a “bridge of goodwill between our peoples.” Even the major organ of the SPD had hopeful if not utopian opinions of the significance of Chamberlin.¹⁰⁸

Many newspapers and thinkers of the Left and Right, however, questioned the development of aviation technology and the role of the United States in it, as it applied to the status of the German state. The Communist *Rote Fahne* rejected what it called the “new German imperialism,” present because Chamberlin allowed the “ruling classes of Germany” a “nudge for their nationalistic interests.”¹⁰⁹ Nationalists from all segments of society used the opportunity to expound upon the German character of aviation. The simplest means to do so was a comparison between the flight of Charles Lindbergh, overwhelmingly determined as a *French* phenomenon. In the post-war period, the rancor between France and Germany needs no explanation. The harsh settlement of Versailles and

¹⁰⁸*Vörrwärts*, 10 June 1927, 4; Dr. Karl Eugen Müller, “Die Brücke im Aether,” [“The Bridge of Ether”] *Berliner Tageblatt*, 8 June 1927, 1. On June 4, *Vörrwärts* printed an editorial exclaiming the pacifistic implications of Chamberlin’s flight, “No nation can live without friends.” The editorial called for a new rapprochement between Germany and the United States as a result of the goodwill generated by the flight. *Vörrwärts*, 4 June 1927, 2.

¹⁰⁹*Rote Fahne*, 18 June 1927, 14.

the French occupation of the Rhineland fed the longburning fires of anti-French sentiment. A comparison of the coverage of the two flights reveals a large disparity of both volume and attitude in favor of Chamberlin and Levine, suggesting the pro-German sentiment surrounding their flight was absent from Lindbergh's. By asserting the "heroes" of Chamberlin and Levine over Lindbergh, even while reproducing many of the same tropes involved in Lindbergh's reception, the German press could affirm a feeling of cultural predominance over France. Witness the treatment of the *Berliner Tageblatt* :

Levine is no pilot, and can therefore give Chamberlin no technical assistance, so this undertaking is undoubtedly as great as the flight by the ocean conqueror Lindbergh.¹¹⁰

In other words, Germany employed a new reincarnation of "the West," America, to secure its position over its former embodiment, France.

Those of the far right also employed the iconography of the American pilot to pay homage to the German military tradition. A lengthy editorial from the *Völkischer Beobachter* admitted the achievement of *Sportgeist*, but also spoke out against the ban on the construction of the large aircraft capable of such a journey in Germany. The piece also allowed the author, one Captain von Mücke, to speak out against the various aspects of *Amerikanismus* he found disagreeable, by way of warning Chamberlin about what not to see while in Germany: the cinema, the Reichstag, the cafe-houses, and "niggerbands." While celebrating the bravery of Chamberlin, von Mücke reminds the reader not to forget "the fresh graves of the World War" and to remember the "silent heroism" of the "millions of front-line soldiers who proved their heroism fighting for the idea of Germany."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰"It's expected that the greeting of Chamberlin will not take second place to Lindbergh's arrival in Paris." *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5 June 1927, 1.

¹¹¹Captain von Mücke, "Kapitän von Mücke an den Amerikaner Chamberlin," ["Captain von Mücke on the American Chamberlin"] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 19 June 1927, 3; Wilhelm Weiß, "Sinn und Widersinn im Ozeanflug," ["Sense and Nonsense in the Ocean Flight"] *Völkischer Beobachter*, 10 June 1927, 1.

The combination of the tropes of technological development, a new modern individual and the implications for geopolitics, reveal both the dynamic of *Amerikanismus* in a relatively uncomplicated study, as well as the functional state of cynicism as defined by Sloterdijk. We may see that the case of Chamberlin and Levine allowed for the creation of a wide variety of shifting meanings around the pilots, making a space in which questions central to the German *mentalite* of the Weimar Republic were explored. There is quite obviously disagreement among many of the contemporary analysts of the American pilots - however, this disagreement should be distinguished with force from the ambivalence which will be seen to mark the reception of Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker. While the receptive discourse of Chamberlin and Levine (as well as Lindbergh) allowed for disagreement and dissent from the elements of a fragmented society, the overriding nature of this discourse always stayed within the bounds of a sphere of acceptability, in what Sloterdijk calls "enlightened false consciousness." The elements of this discourse as we have seen bespeak the dominant theme of progress and development, even if this telos is one of uncertainty and unease. The solution to this quandary, rather than rejection, is to obtain some means of existence within the world such as it has become.

Sloterdijk assures that the World War had provided the impetus as the "mass politicizer" of society, of having turned the populace of Germany into highly sensitive voyeurs, trained in the digestion of information produced within the media chronicles of the war.¹¹² He goes on to state that nausea about political matters portrayed in this fashion was one of the defining characteristics of the era. As we have seen, the discourse of *Amerikanismus* was one method employed during this period to circumvent this disgust with the overt politicization of public discourse through the encoding of popular cultural icons with polyvalent meaning. The American aviator was one such icon. Chaplin and

¹¹²Sloterdijk, 470.

Baker provide a more intriguing case as their iconography in Weimar was tinged with shadows of decay and a decided uncertainty and refusal about their, and by extension, about Germany's relationship with "modernity."

CHAPTER IV

CHAPLIN: *GEIST* IN THE MACHINEThe Early Reception - American Film in Germany

As in the other principal western industrialized nations, cinema in Germany began in 1895. The Brothers Skladanowsky first displayed their "Bioskop" at the Wintergarten theater in Berlin that year, and the first "Kino" opened on the Unter den Linden in May of the following year. The principal means of film distribution in the first few years were the so-called *Wanderkinos*, those temporary theaters that travelled from town to town as part of a larger carnival. Over the next few years, cinema slowly developed an urban public, as the small, backroom theaters and the cheap *Ladenkinos* (nickelodeons) gave way to larger urban cinema palaces capable of seating upwards of two thousand people.¹¹³ The character of this early cinema strongly resembled that of the variety theater: melodrama, fast comedy and an overall emphasis on accelerated movement. Many commentators began to hail the new medium as representative of its age, equating these characteristics with the perceived rapid pace of German social modernization, similar to the equation then drawn between the modern existence and American influences.¹¹⁴ However, the confluence of the two trends of modernity, cinema and America, did not occur until after the First World

¹¹³Fehrenbach, 15; Rudolf Schweigert, "Der Film in der Weimarer Republik," in Kunstant Kreuzberg, *Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1977), 438-39.

¹¹⁴"First of all, it is short, at the same time coded, and it does not stop for anything. There is something concise, precise, military about it. That is quite fitting for our time, which is a time of abridgements." Egon Fridell, "Prolog vor dem Film," (1912) quoted in Kaes, 13.

War.¹¹⁵

Prior to the war, the German film industry counted largely on film imports to satisfy its audiences. The hegemony of Hollywood was by no means clear at this point in time -- American film exports still lagged behind the French. Following the outbreak of the war, however, the German industry quickly developed its production capabilities now that its former suppliers had become the enemy. This transition, coupled with the rapid decline of the French film industry, saw Germany gain European dominance in film production. While western Europe utilized the film products of an isolated Hollywood during the war, Germany remained insulated. Even after the war, film imports were banned until 1921, widening the gulf with America. Between 1921 and 1923, American films began to trickle into German theaters, inspiring a critical debate as to the identity of German film industry. American films, at first the *Sensationsfilme* serials and comic shorts, were the focal point around which industry members and camp followers battled. An ironic outcome of the tremendous German inflation of the early 1920s was its insulating effect on the German film economy; exports to Germany simply were not profitable in the short term. With the implementation of the Dawes Plan of 1924 and the resulting economic resurgence, however, this changed dramatically, and the United States began to flood the German market in that year.¹¹⁶ With this dramatic rise in product, a new phase of anti-American dialogue emerged from film journals and cultural critics in the mainstream press, allowing for the confluence of America and cinema as exemplars (both positive and negative) of modernity.

¹¹⁵Miriam Bratu Hansen, "America, Paris and the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity," in Leo Cherney, Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Thomas Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5.

¹¹⁶Saunders, 84-116.

Charlie Chaplin was introduced into the German market on September 2, 1921, with the premiere of *The Rink*.¹¹⁷ By this time the rest of western Europe had been exposed to his films since the early teens and already succumbed to the so-called “cult” of Chaplin (*The Rink*, for example, had premiered in Britain as early as 1916). Even if Germans were not yet able to view his films, Chaplin had made an impression through the words of those who had seen these films abroad and witnessed the reception given them there. According to the journalist Walter Mehring, in 1919, the artist Georg Grosz opened the critical debate on the significance of Chaplin.¹¹⁸ Literary odes to Chaplin soon followed. Ivan Goll, a poet and foreign correspondent for the Berlin press in Paris, published “Die Chapliniade: Eine Kinodichtung” [The Chapliniade: A Cinema-Poem] in 1920. In early 1921, Wladimir Majakowski penned another such poem, “Der geflügelte Charlie” [Charlie with Wings].¹¹⁹

This early reception was divided. Some attacked Chaplin as merely another minor facet of *Amerikanismus*, while others defended his achievement in the young medium of cinema. Majakowski, for example, wrote quite critically of the cultural implications of Chaplin.¹²⁰ The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* expressed similar sentiments: “This slapstick-sentimental mixture is alien to us. It lacks any logic, and German film is

¹¹⁷Michael Hanisch, “The Chaplin Reception in Germany” in Adolphe Nysenholc, ed. *Charlie Chaplin: His Reflection in Modern Times* (New York: Montrode Gruyter, 1991), 27-41. See also Jan-Christopher Horak, “Rin Tin Tin in Berlin or American Cinema in Weimar,” *Film History* 5 (1993): 49-62, for a discussion of the economic relations between United States and German film companies during this period.

¹¹⁸Walter Mehring, “Das Chaplin-Buch” [The Chaplin Book], *Berliner Tageblatt*, 9 February 1928.

¹¹⁹Joe Hembus, *Charlie Chaplin und seine Filme: Eine Dokumentation* [Charlie Chaplin and his Films: A Documentation] (München: Wilhelm Heyne, 1972), 22-24.

¹²⁰Majakowski’s poem has been reprinted as appendix C.

inconceivable without logic.”¹²¹ To generalize, his early detractors simply did not find Chaplin amusing, alien as he (and modernity) was to their perspective of the world. Reportage stressed the un-German nature of American film, slapstick comedy in particular. One wrote in the journal, *Der Kritiker*, in 1922, that Chaplin:

remains a splendid joker in a mediocre field...it does not especially move me. I speak German, not American. I'm not a child on the potty with a thick cigar. Much may seem very humorous -- I'm not fond of jokes based on mechanical things, on machines and objects.¹²²

Not all of the initial reception was negative. The satirist Kurt Tucholsky wrote “The Most Famous Man in the World” in 1922, in which he extolled the international goodwill inherent in Chaplin’s use of the cinema. In a review of *Gewehr Über* [*Shoulder Arms*], Chaplin’s comic assault on the nightmare scenarios of the First World War, Tucholsky would later entreat Chaplin: “Cross the Rhine, Charlie, cross the Rhine!”¹²³ Herbert Ihering, writing for the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* also approved of Chaplin’s art in his reviews of *The Cure* and *The Kid* in 1922 and 1923.¹²⁴ In 1922, Hans Siemssen referred to Chaplin as “The national hero of the world.” “That,” he added, “is one of the main reasons why there is no longer an understanding between Germany and the rest of the world.” This hero figure was a true revolutionary, not for his political orientation, but rather for his very lack of one. He, as social outcast, exposed and exploded the hollow

¹²¹*Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* reprinted in *Die Weltbühne*, 6 December 1923.

¹²²Quoted in Saunders, 174-75.

¹²³Kurt Tucholsky, *What If? The Satirical Writings of Kurt Tucholsky*, trans. by Karl F. Ross and Harry Zohn (New York: Minerva Press, 1967), 105-6; Hanisch, 28. Film critic Bela Belazs expressed a similar wish in 1927: “But do you know what will happen when you come to Europe? An eminently historical event: it will be the first time in world history that America gives us a great artist as we have never had before....Please, Mr. Chaplin, come to Europe!” Quoted in Sabine Hake, “Chaplin Reception in Weimar Germany,” *New German Critique* 49 (Winter 1990): 87.

¹²⁴Hembus, 80, 89-91.

social values of the mainstream.¹²⁵ Tucholsky was one of the first critics to address the social commentary within Chaplin's cinema and slapstick comedy in general.¹²⁶ In this period, both Chaplin's followers and detractors began to recognize his critical, and one might add, kynical, potential.

However, much of the early commentary on Chaplin stresses the mechanistic, industrial pace of movement in his films, perceiving him as a hallmark of rationalization and echoing the reception of Chamberlin and Levine. This much was a common treatment of the medium in Weimar. Claire Goll lamented the separation of theater and film and the emergence of the latter as distinctly *low art*. She described the dynamic of American cinema as "a breathless rhythm." As many did during the early 1920s, she hailed Chaplin as its chief figure:

The genius above all is Charlot, the Moliere of this century....His eccentric, mathematically constructed movements, psychological and physical, belie a tragic comedy....The irresistibility of Charlot lies not only in his explosive musical rhythms, but above all in his face, which reveals twenty nuances a second.¹²⁷

Fernard Leger's Cubist line drawing of Chaplin, executed as artwork for Ivan Goll's poem, (figure 6) displays with geometric precision this belief in progress and rationalization. Charlie raising his bowler evokes the perceived fragmentation of the

¹²⁵Hake, *Third Machine*, 128-29; Hans Siemsen, "Chaplin - Der Politiker," *Weltbühne*, 18 (1922), 415-16, summarized in Saunders, 178.

¹²⁶"He only has to make an appearance...and all his surroundings are suddenly wrong and he is right and the whole world has become ridiculous...And he shows how ludicrous it is to be a grown-up man who takes himself seriously." Tucholsky, 105.

¹²⁷Claire Goll, "Amerikanisches Kino," [American Cinema] in *Der gläserne Garten: Prosa, 1917-1939* [The Glass Garden: Prose, 1917-1939] (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1989), 67-69. Maria Prigge-Kruhöffner wrote simply "Chaplin is a technical. He is a man of the machine age." "Die Chaplin-Legende" (1927) in Klaus Kreimeier, ed. *Zeitgenosse Chaplin. [Contemporaries on Chaplin]* (Berlin: Oberbaum Verlag, 1978), 40.



Figure 6. Fernand Léger, illustration from Ivan Goll's poem "Die Chapliniade: Eine Kinodichtung." (1920) As reproduced in John Willett, Art and Politics of the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917-1933. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 33.

individual in the early 1920s, twenty nuances at a stroke. Similarly, stills from the Leger film *Ballet mécanique* (1923-24) also illustrate the idea of Chaplin as somehow representative of the process of modernity itself.¹²⁸ (figure 7) He had yet to develop a more impudent meaning. This mechanistic attitude would give way in the course of the 1920s as many writers began to perceive and utilize the imagery of Chaplin in a distinctly counterrational, countermodern fashion.

In addition to early reviews, there were a great number of books written on Chaplin during the early 1920s in Germany, among which were Gerhard Ausleger's brief monograph *Charlie Chaplin* (1924), Hans Siemssen's collection of essays *Charlie Chaplin* (1924), and Melchior Vischer's play *Chaplin: Tragigroteske in Sechs Bildern* (1924).

Most negatively appraised modern, Americanized cinema but declared Chaplin a positive exception. Chaplin was the catalyst which infused something of life into this dynamic.

Ausleger wrote after this fashion:

What a state of affairs! It makes one vomit! Today cinema is: speculation, non-artistic, kitsch....One *should* not visit the cinema in Germany, except when Charlie Chaplin acts his playful harlequin upon the screen....Here is the special art of the cinema....this Charlie Chaplin exists all of a sudden in the consciousness of the whole world.¹²⁹

Ausleger referred to the ability of Chaplin to "shake up" the existence of the *Mittelstand*:

"This Charlie Chaplin is a movement in this musty world of I-want-to-be-bourgeois,"

someone who was capable of introducing something "dynamic, conscious and

frightening."¹³⁰ In his play, Vischer made a Chaplin character the central figure in a

¹²⁸For an excellent study of the iconography of the bowler hat itself vis-a-vis modern society, see Fred Robinson's *The Man in the Bowler Hat: His History and Iconography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). As Robinson writes, "Weimar...wore a bowler hat." Robinson, 96.

¹²⁹ Gerhard Ausleger, *Charlie Chaplin* (Hamburg: Pfadweiser Verlag, 1924), 9-10.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 24.

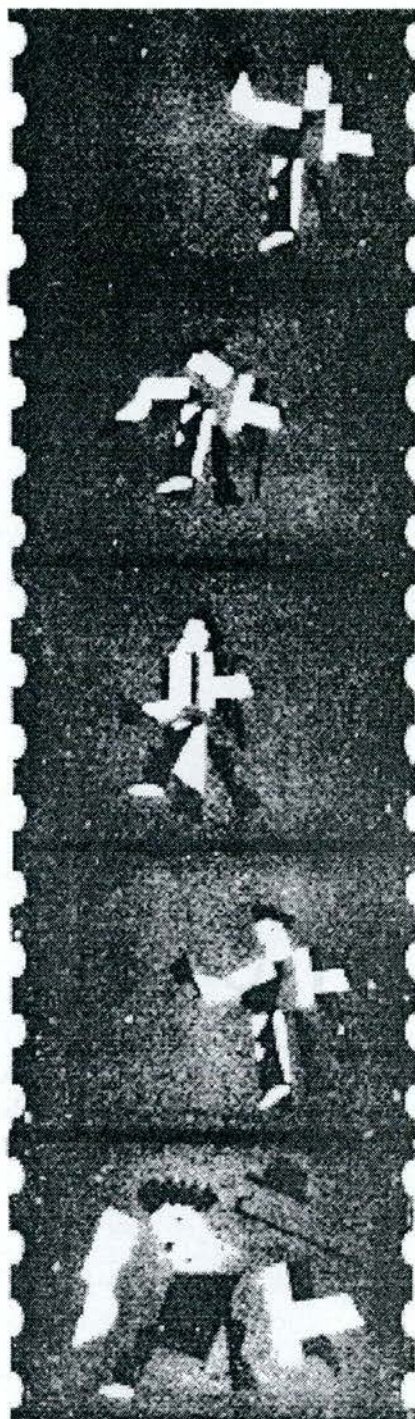


Figure 7. Fernand Léger, series of stills from the film collaboration with Dudley Murphy, *Ballet mécanique* (1923-24). As reproduced in Willett, 144.

menagerie replete with diverse elements of American iconography: Chaplin is also a talented boxer; some scenes occur on a highway outside of Chicago, in a “niggerbar” and in a film society. The story focused on Chaplin, who in it expressed the desire to play a more serious role in society in which “no one should laugh at me.”¹³¹ Nevertheless, the mechanical qualities attributed to Chaplin also find expression. Elsewhere in the story Vischer’s Chaplin character elaborated on his “yearning”: “to be an engineer. New screws to discover and turn, to play football with steam! That’s what I want! I can make more money that way.”¹³² Hans Siemssen was the most laudatory, hailing Chaplin as “the national hero of the whole world.”¹³³ These writers and others laid the foundations of Chaplin’s exceptionalism, giving meaning to his popularity, and paving the way for further construction of sentiment upon his presence.

Additionally, his presence was adapted in the work of many Weimar artists. In 1919, George Grosz titled a painting of the chaos of modern society, *Self-Portrait (for Charlie Chaplin)*. (Figure 8) Like Leger’s drawing, Grosz’s work builds around the theme of fragmentation in modern society, as he paints himself into a corner, trapped by the geometric dissonance of the metropolis replete with other icons of America: the boxer, emancipated sexuality, urban landscape. Significantly, Chaplin became a popular theme among artists of Weimar, many of whom would incorporate him into similar self-portraits. (Figure 9) These self-portraits are interesting if one considers that by identifying themselves not only with, but *as*, Chaplin, the artists made more direct identification with

¹³¹Melchior Vischer, *Chaplin: Tragigroteske in Sechs Bildern [Chaplin: A Slapstick in Six Acts]* (Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1924), 37.

¹³²*Ibid.*

¹³³Hans Siemssen, *Charlie Chaplin* (Leipzig: Im Feuer Verlag, 1924), 23.



Figure 8. George Grosz, *Self-Portrait for Charlie Chaplin*, (1919). As reproduced in Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings, and Photographs by George Grosz and his Contemporaries, 1915-1933*. Cambridge: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990, 69.



Figure 9. T. Lux Feininger, *Self-Portrait as Charlie Chaplin*, (1928-29). As reproduced in Tower, 71.

Chaplin's ability to embody ideals and emotions regarding America and modernity.¹³⁴

Another glance at the qualities Franz Roh envisioned as Expressionistic and Post-Expressionistic seems to call for Chaplin's inclusion in the former category. Yet writers characterized him with many adjectives noting his perseverance *within* the context of the latter, therefore ascribing to him a new path, in one sense distinctively ambivalent, but also highly explosive. In other words, Chaplin gave these artists a method of circumventing a thorough embrace of modernity by allowing them a malleable iconography with which to construct their own path to modernity.

During this period, the genre of slapstick comedy (*Groteske*) was highly popular in Germany and is crucial to the iconography of Chaplin. The slapstick short occupied a unique position in Weimar cinema, in that by mid-decade, it was almost exclusively of American production.¹³⁵ The direct bond between Chaplin and America was thus strengthened immeasurably. German commentators also noticed the significance of this confluence. Siegfried Kracauer noted the emancipatory potential of slapstick:

One has to hand it to the Americans: with slapstick films they have created a form that offers a counterweight to their reality. If in that reality they subject the world to an often unbearable discipline, the film in turn dismantles their self-imposed order quite forcefully.¹³⁶

As the cornerstone of this style, Chaplin was hailed by many as alleviating a culture grown dependent on the atmosphere of rationality. This national monopoly naturally enhanced the

¹³⁴Hake, *Third Machine*, 169.

¹³⁵Comedy shorts were exempt from import restrictions of 1916-21, effectively eliminating domestic production. Saunders finds that the ratio of German to American production of "Shorts," including slapstick comedies, was 94 to 149 in 1923. The disparity rose to 3 to 394 in 1927 and 8 to 422 in 1928. Saunders, 54.

¹³⁶Raca [Siegfried Kracauer] "Artistisches und Amerikanisches," ["Artistic and American"] *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 29 January 1926, quoted in Hansen, 373.

availability of Chaplin as icon.¹³⁷

The discussion of Chaplin in Weimar may be categorized into the following categories: [a pronounced individualism, a resistance to technology and “progress,” and anti-mechanistic imagery. In each of these themes, writers and artists, following an early flirtation with his iconography as an embrace of modernity, came to interpret Chaplin as a means to transcend the rationalized world. Thus Chaplin’s identity displayed both cynical and kynical components.] These patterns formed in the reception of the early to mid-twenties, although they would be fully realized with the transformation of German society after the economic and political downturn of 1929.

In the fall of 1929, the visible decline of the Weimar Republic began in earnest. With the global economy in free-fall, the illusion of stability which had dominated Weimar between 1924 and 1928 was shattered. Political violence became rampant as the republican system faltered. By September of 1930, the Brüning government ruled by decree without the Reichstag under the infamous Article 48 of the Weimar constitution. During this period, the unemployment rate in Berlin had risen from 8.5 percent in 1929 to 14 percent in 1930 and would climb as high as 21.9 percent by 1931.¹³⁸ This turn transformed the German concepts of *Amerikanismus* and also those of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

If the period of stabilization and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (1924-28) set the stage and in some sense codified Chaplin as a discursive element, then the crisis of the last four years of the republic solidified this development and infused it with its kynical nature. As the cynical processes of society continued on, blending the ideology of stability with an ever-increasing crisis, what was hinted at earlier came to the fore: Chaplin as a redemptive

¹³⁷Thomas Saunders, “Comedy as Redemption: American Slapstick in Weimar Culture,” *Journal of European Studies* 17 (1987), 253-277.

¹³⁸Peukert, 252.

figure, who embodied the certain qualities which provided his critics a way of transcending the brackets of the politics of stabilization. He allowed them to enter the world of rationality, while at the same time, allowing them to create a field of discourse around the troublesome question of what path the German nation was on. In other words, it was a means to argue with the philosopher in his own language. The argument would come to a head when Chaplin paid a visit to Berlin in March of 1931.

Chaplin in Berlin -- March 1931

On January 31, 1931, Chaplin embarked from New York City for London, the first stop on a world tour to promote his new film, *City Lights* [*Lichter der Großstadt*]. He moved on to Berlin on Monday, March 9 to a hero's welcome.¹³⁹ The German press had been announcing his impending arrival throughout the first week of March.¹⁴⁰ His visit would last through March 15. While in Berlin he would, among others things, visit a prison and the Old City, attend several theater productions, call on Albert Einstein, and simultaneously infuriate the nationalists while unwittingly providing the Communists with a hero.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹In 1921, Chaplin had visited Berlin briefly to a quite different welcome. Given the relatively late introduction of Chaplin's movies to the German audiences, he went virtually unrecognized, save at first by a former German prisoner of war who had seen his films while held captive in France during World War One. For more information on this earlier visit, see David Robinson, *Chaplin: The Mirror of Opinion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 58; David Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (London: Collins, 1985); Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1964); Charles Chaplin, *My Wonderful Visit* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1922).

¹⁴⁰I am indebted to the work of Wolfgang Gersch, who has published a collection of excerpts from many of the smaller periodicals which were unavailable for research purposes. See Gersch, *Chaplin in Berlin*.

¹⁴¹Gersch; Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 429-431.

The sheer volume of reportage on Chaplin in Berlin was astounding. The *New York Times* covered his arrival, commenting that "The [German] newspapers are devoting more space to Charlie Chaplin than to politics, which is most unusual."¹⁴² The *Berliner Tageblatt*, for example, devoted six articles to Chaplin on the first day of his visit alone. Josef Goebbels' National Socialist party paper *Der Angriff* was one of the most prolific commentators, but also one of the most critical voices in opposition to the disappearance, or rather the submergence, of "news" within the discussion of Chaplin.

Journalists are completely out of their minds. They dash into their editorial departments, make phone calls, grab their pencils, clean their camera equipment. Reporters are flowing through the streets, besieging the hotels, and generally agitating themselves....He is here! And everything else is forgotten! Emergency, misery, the Reichstag, the cruiser controversy, pain, referendums, and of course, the Nazis....The headlines blaze, the reporters rave...from the communist to the nationalist press. While yesterday they struggled on behalf of the cold and the forgotten, able-bodied unemployed, while yesterday they fought for world peace, while yesterday they held a flourish against Marxism and advocated the desires of the Volk, today they conduct transparent business with Chaplin....¹⁴³

The Gauleiter's comments introduce the degree of politicization of Chaplin within Germany. It was not so much, as the *Times* had suggested, the replacement of politics in the German press by Chaplin, but rather the incorporation of Chaplin *into* the politics of the German press.

A crucial component of the Tramp's importance in Weimar political culture was the ease with which one could inscribe a particular viewpoint upon him. This of course accounts for much of the literary violence done via such inscription of his iconography.

¹⁴²"Chaplin in Berlin: Gets Wild Welcome," *New York Times*, 10 March 1931, 1. Erich Burger, reporter for the *Berliner Tageblatt* and author of a 1928 monograph on Chaplin, remarked with some wisdom that "It is becoming superfluous to examine the significance of Charlie Chaplin" in his own contribution to this discussion. Erich Burger, *Charlie Chaplin: Bericht Seines Lebens* [Charlie Chaplin: A Report of His Life] (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse Buchverlag, 1929).

¹⁴³"Hurra, er ist da!" [Hurrah, He's Here!], *Der Angriff*, 10 March 1931, 1.

Both *Der Angriff* and the official National Socialist paper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, for example, clearly used Chaplin as a means to project the party line of the international conspiracy to subjugate Germany, represented by “the Jewish film comic”, an agent of “the Jewish editors of the Communist press.”¹⁴⁴

On the other side of the political fence, writers made equal use of Chaplin. He had been a longstanding figure in Socialist and Communist thought in Germany, lionized as a champion of an oppressed working class.¹⁴⁵ The cover of the illustrated Communist weekly, *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, in November 1929, featured a photograph of Chaplin, Upton Sinclair, “the novelist of the proletariat” and the Communist author Egon Edwin Kisch, visually uniting him with these figures of international workers’ movements. (figure 10) The *Rote Fahne*, which had, in February of 1926, referred to Chaplin as the “friend of the working class,” declared that while “Chaplin is not a party man...we know that he stands behind the struggling proletariat.”¹⁴⁶ (figure 11) An essay published in April, 1931, following Chaplin’s departure, called him “an angel of the proletariat.”¹⁴⁷ Articles such as these tended to emphasize the social criticism inherent in Chaplin’s films, placing him in

¹⁴⁴“Der widerliche Rummel um den Kriegsbeßer Chaplin” [The Revolting Commotion Over Chaplin], *Der Angriff*, 11 March 1931, 3; “Wie urteilen Sie über Chaplin?” [How do we judge Chaplin?], *Der Angriff*, 13 March 1931, 3; “Chaplinkult statt Proletkult” [Cult of Chaplin Instead of Cult of Proletarian], *Der Angriff*, 13 March 1931, 3; “Klammauk um Chaplin” [The fuss over Chaplin], *Der Angriff*, 19 March 1931, 5; Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 429-30.

¹⁴⁵See Hake, “Chaplin Reception in Weimar Germany,” for an excellent discussion of the appeal of Chaplin to the left-wing intellectuals of Weimar. As early as 1922, Hans Siemsen had expounded this aspect of Chaplin: “He teaches complete, radical disrespect. God bless him! He is a revolutionary.” Hans Siemsen, “Chaplin - Der Politiker,” quoted in Saunders, 186.

¹⁴⁶*Die Rote Fahne*, 21 February 1926, 2; 15 March 1931, 1.

¹⁴⁷Mersus, “St. Charlie oder eine Chaplin Film” [St. Charlie or a Chaplin Film], in *Zeitgenosse Chaplin*, 91-93.

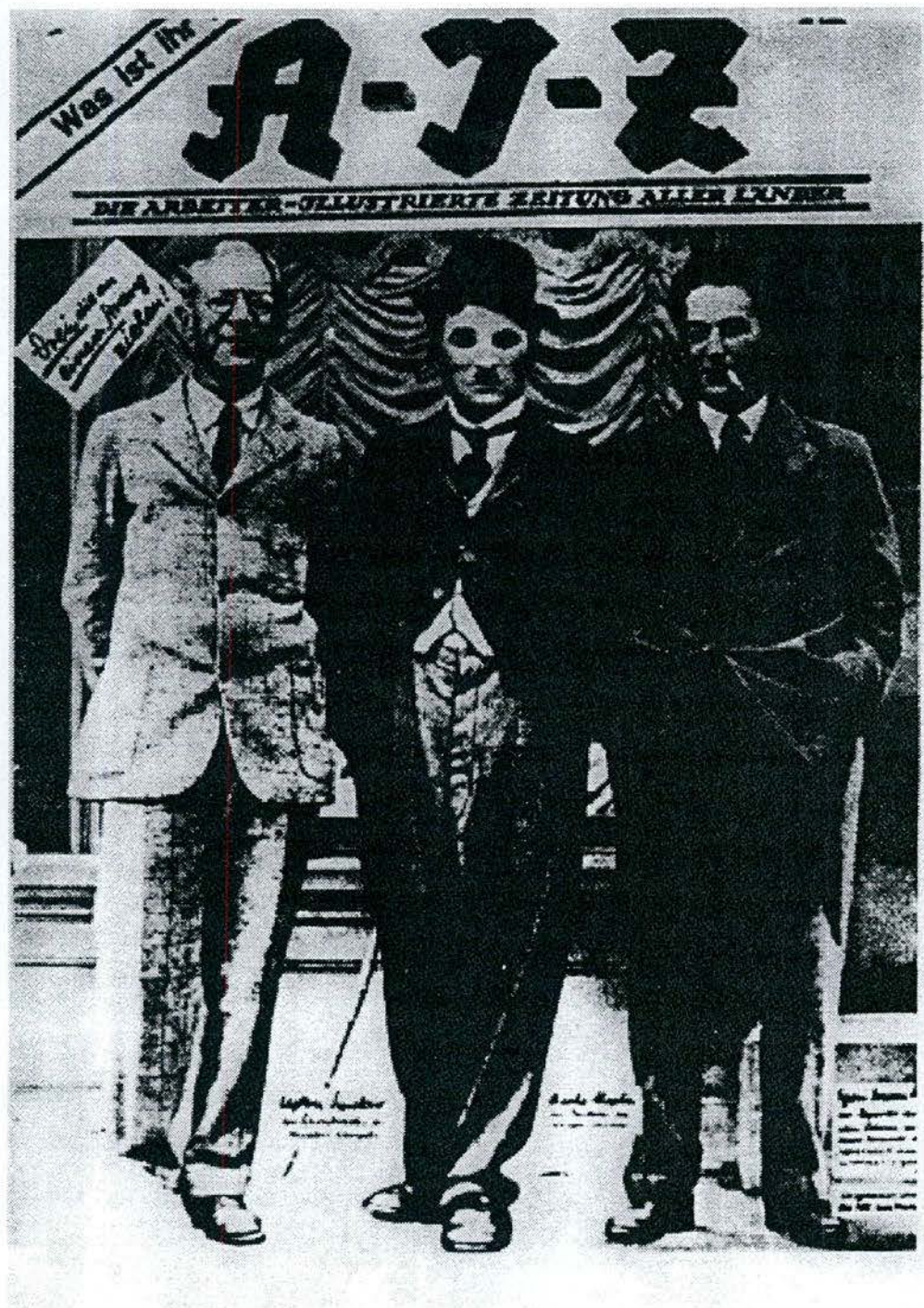


Figure 10. "Three who pull together." Upton Sinclair, Charlie Chaplin, and Egon Edwin Kisch on the cover of the Communist weekly, Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung, November 9, 1929.

Kummer 60 3. Beilage

Die Rote Fahne

Donnerstag, 12. März 1931



CHARLIE! THE FILM-PROLETARIANS DEDICATE THIS PAGE TO YOU!

(Charlie, die Filmproleten widmen dir diese ganze Seite!)

Figure 11. "Hunger, Wage Slavery, Fascism." Special section of the Communist newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*, dedicated to Chaplin on his visit to Berlin. March 12, 1931, *Beilage* 3, 1.

opposition to the rhetoric of the rest of the Weimar press, in particular that of the nationalists. (figure 12)

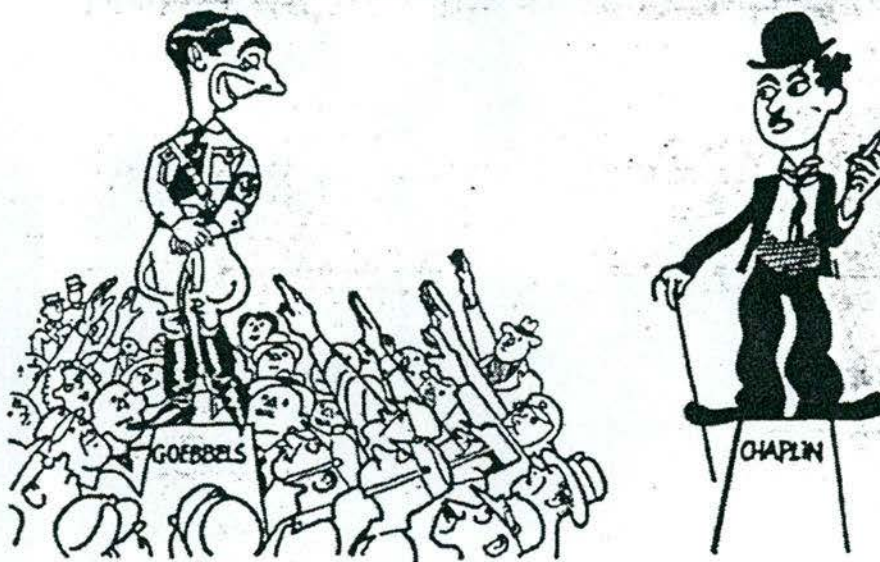
The politicization of Chaplin in Berlin is best illustrated by the events following an telephone interview he gave to several reporters from the workers' press on Friday, March 13. The published accounts indicate Chaplin's remarks from this brief meeting accentuated the already ubiquitous politicization of his image. Published first in the Communist press, the interview painted Chaplin as espousing concern and sympathy for the plight of Communist German youth. The *Rote Fahne* quoted him as saying, "Yes, capitalism, that is the enemy! That is the enemy, really."¹⁴⁸ The nationalist press responded with vehement denunciations and further commentary about the degrading effects of Chaplin on German *Kultur*. What was actually said at that interview remains in question, as the other parties present, including Chaplin's secretary Carlyle Robinson, made no mention of it. Chaplin himself downplayed the scenario shortly thereafter, and both American and German papers printed his denial ("Das Dementi") of the extremity of his alleged comments.¹⁴⁹

Beyond the political posturing by the various elements of the German press, it is important now to examine the aforementioned categories of interpretations and their implications in regards to the discussion of *Amerikanismus* and modernity. Clearly the primary theme which emerged was that Chaplin was a transcendent figure, the indefatigable individual against whom the whole world seemed to be set, yet who was somehow able to

¹⁴⁸*Rote Fahne*, 15 March 1931, 1.

¹⁴⁹"Charles Chaplin, quoted this morning in a small Communist newspaper as having extended greetings of sympathy to the Communist youth of Germany in a telephone interview..., issued a denial this afternoon in which he declared he was an artist and as such unacquainted with the political situation...." "Chaplin Disclaims Greeting to Reds," *New York Times*, 15 March 1931, 2.

Das unnachahmliche Goebbels-Lächeln.



Chaplin imponiert uns Berlinern nicht. — Wir sind ganz andere
Grotesk-Komiker gewöhnt!

Figure 12. "Das unnachahmliche Goebbels-Lächeln." ["The inimitable laughter of Goebbels."] "Chaplin doesn't impress us Berliners - We've got another slapstick comic living here already!" Cartoon. Artist unknown. Vorwärts, March 10, 1931, 3.

thumb his nose at the modern world, and yet survive and even thrive. A critic for the *Berliner Tageblatt* wrote of him: "Charlie is one of us. All national borders are open to him, to all peoples, to all classes he brings luck."¹⁵⁰ The *Vossische Zeitung* praised a victory of "spirit over authority."¹⁵¹ Such language was typical. Repeated use of the opposition of "man" and "fate" is found throughout much of this material. Kracauer commented later that "the most impressive trait of the Tramp is a truly unquenchable capacity for survival in the face of the Goliaths of the world." The Tramp stood for many as a powerful symbol of resistance, a perfect example of the notion of *Freiheit*, who paradoxically, was also continually reifying his redemptive qualities in a continual cycle of repression; qualities which were, in Kracauer's words, "as vulnerable as they [qualities] are indestructible."¹⁵² With this iconography constructed about him, the politicization of Chaplin symbolized not so much the progress of Germany and various attitudes toward it, but rather certain fears and anxieties, as well as hopes, of the implications of this progress.

Upon his arrival, *Der Vorstoß* reported that his presence in reality was quite unlike that which had become familiar in "thousands of meters of film." The simple fact of Chaplin's physical presence in Berlin threw many of these properties into immediate question. The *Berliner Morgenzeitung* described the new presence as follows: "It is not Charlie, over whom we sometimes laughed until we cried, but it is a smaller, more delicate-looking gentleman with striking grey hair." The reviewer continued: "the sight of the older man makes me think, that his Tramp, a young character, is slowly passing away." The *Illustrierte Zeitung* couched this concern in a one-page photo spread, detailing

¹⁵⁰"Charlie in London," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 8 March 1931, 1.

¹⁵¹*Vossische Zeitung*, 15 June 1929, 7.

¹⁵²Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 281.

Chaplin's visit to Berlin. The final picture, however, is highly significant. It is a still from *City Lights* with the caption: "The authentic Chaplin. As we know him on the screen -- with a moustache and a bowler...."¹⁵³ Chaplin is thus ultimately understood through image as image, his personal, non-diegetic identity notwithstanding. The *Berliner Tageblatt* summed this faith best when it remarked: "Charlie is still Charlie -- even in civilization."¹⁵⁴

On a slightly more intellectual note, Kracauer rationalized the physical presence of Chaplin:

I have seen thousands of photographs of him, and nevertheless I see him in this moment for the first time. He laughs with an open mouth, and this image that I thought would never fade gave me a "moment of clarity"; the real Chaplin agrees totally with the Vagabond of film. It is the laughter,...,the distraught laughter of the helpless, against the rule of strife.¹⁵⁵

Such "distraught laughter" and helplessness facilitated the imposition of meaning onto his character.

Kracauer had referred to Chaplin similarly in 1926 as a man "without ego," a "hole into which everything falls." The inversion of Chaplin as transcendent individual also held true - he was nothing in the face of everything. Chaplin thus qualifies in Sloterdijk's cosmology as a kynical individual, one who puts "an end to the pose of the self-sufficient creative artist," one who lets himself be driven along by what is given."¹⁵⁶ Kracauer elaborated on this:

The human being that Chaplin embodies or, rather, lets go of, is a hole... He has no will; in the place of the drive for self-preservation or the hunger for power there is nothing inside him but a void, which is as blank as the snow fields of Alaska.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³Der Vorstoß, 15 March 1931, quoted in Gersch, 27; Berliner Morgenzeitung, 10 March 1931, quoted in Gersch, 36; Illustrierte Zeitung, 19 March 1931, 2.

¹⁵⁴Berliner Tageblatt, 9 March 1931, 1.

¹⁵⁵Siegfried Kracauer, in Frankfurter Zeitung, 9 March 1931, 5.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 394.

¹⁵⁷Quoted in Hake, "Chaplin Reception," 93; Hansen, 373.

These very qualities were also those which facilitated the political use of Chaplin, yet as a whole empowered his iconography with its crucial subversive quality. The complexities of the reality of *Amerikanismus* becomes clearer as one sees that Chaplin served both as a model of individuality as well as a submergence of this same individuality in the face of the spectatorial apparatus of cinema, which, like jazz dance and the medium of newsprint in which these discourses largely functioned, interpellate a reception which is clearly collective in nature.

Chaplin as pariah was a theme, within the larger concept of him as "individual," intrinsically bound with the conception of his perceived helplessness as one of the downtrodden, regardless of his obvious wealth and fame. This coloring of his character in this way is highly significant -- Sloterdijk argues that the modern mentalite no longer possesses a connection with the self, no sense of grounding in a system of constantly shifting meanings and allegiances. This results in the drive to dominate and conquer, the will to know and to maintain some form of stability, that dominates the project of modernity and produces a condition in which the individual functions on several levels of allegiance and identity at once, as if that split condition were the norm. Chaplin was often depicted as the antithesis of this, becoming for many the will to un-know. Chaplin thus served as a point of acute identification for the individual, in Sloterdijk's words "the vagabond in existence," offering a potential grounding in exchange for participating in the discourse.¹⁵⁸ This grounding occurred in part through Chaplin's emanation of sadness in Weimar. His imagery was often colored with shades of tragedy and deep suffering, allowing the typical German spectator the opportunity for identification. Waldo Frank thus wrote of the "sad eyes" of Chaplin which "regard the bitterness of the world with compassion. They are veiled; and while the man moves irresistibly through the world, his

¹⁵⁸Sloterdijk, 538.

eyes remain embittered in their loneliness. For it's never easy for Chaplin's eyes to laugh." This sentiment is echoed in a poem by correspondent Victor Wittner, which concludes with the poignant line, "One must be very sad to be able to laugh so much." Kurt von Stutterheim, writing for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, placed Chaplin in the Cockney tradition, alluding to his origins in the slums of London (Stutterheim was one of the few Germans who bothered to address Chaplin's nationality as British rather than American). He wrote,

The Cockney is a person, who is never going anywhere and who is never going to do anything good. But the Cockney is also the person, who has a knowing humor regarding his own unavoidable fate. The unsuccessful struggle to come from behind via jokes and melancholy is coming into its own. In Charlie Chaplin, the London Cockney has found its Apotheosis....in his heart, Chaplin remains a Cockney.¹⁵⁹

An additional factor was Chaplin's perceived Jewishness. While certainly only a minor component of his overall persona, for some critics (not least the nationalists) it weighed quite heavily.¹⁶⁰ There was of course a considerable focus on Chaplin's race from the various nationalist press.¹⁶¹ Organs such as *Der Angriff* were quick to capitalize on this element: "One is thunderstruck...But this Chaplin case is a symptom of our time, Jews in

¹⁵⁹Waldo Frank, "Der weiche und der harte Charlie Chaplin," ["The soft and the hard Charlie Chaplin"] *Querschnitt*, 11 April 1933, 233-37; Victor Wittner, "Chaplin," *Vossische Zeitung*, 10 March 1931, 10; Kurt Stutterheim, "Charlie With the Cockneys," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 28 February 1931, 8.

¹⁶⁰Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah" quoted in Clare Cavanagh, "Rereading the Poets' Ending: Mendelstam, Chaplin and Stalin," *PMLA* 109 (January 1994): 77. Hannah Arendt would later comment on this, "The type which Chaplin represents is always fundamentally suspect,...Because he is suspect, he is called upon to bear the brunt of much that he has not done. Yet at the same time, beyond the pale, unhampered by the trammels of society, he is able to get away with a great deal." Arendt, 79.

¹⁶¹The question of Chaplin's Jewish identity was disputed for quite some time. In his biography of Chaplin, David Robinson, through an exhaustive study of Chaplin's genealogy, has conclusively proven that Chaplin was not Jewish. Certain comments he made during the course of his career did serve to convey the impression that he was, however. In 1922 he commented, "No, I am not Jewish...but I am sure there must be some [Jewish blood] somewhere in me. I hope so." Quoted in Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 290.

the international film and press were clever enough to make Chaplin - that block-headed helpless idiot -- the hero of the world." Chaplin's transcendent character was subverted, thus becoming "the anti-type of the dignified man -- who does not object to being ridden over and being treated like a sissy."¹⁶² Strident conservative responses such as these, quite similar to that of the Communists, reveal the subversive appeal of cynicism to political fringe groups -- Chaplin here emerges as the original Diogenes: "an outsider to the bourgeois society, a bum,....His laugh, the laugh of the derided, is a mockery, ridicule, a taunting of the world."¹⁶³ As Sloterdijk confirms, "When the cynic smiles melancholically-contemptuously, ..., It is characteristic for the cynic to laugh so loudly and unabashedly that refined people shake their heads."¹⁶⁴ The discourse which developed Chaplin into such an emancipatory creature, allowed its critical creators to possess some degree of this mockery themselves, regardless of their agenda.

A second element in the reception of Chaplin was the adaptation of his iconography in the resistance to technology in general. A debate had been in progress as to the aesthetic qualities of the sound film since its introduction, roughly at the same time as the inception of the economic crisis. The first German sound film, *Melodie des Herzens* [Melody of the Heart], premiered in 1929.¹⁶⁵ Ironically, the introduction of American sound films marked the beginning of the end of the hegemony of Hollywood in Germany. Sound films

¹⁶²Der Angriff, 11 March 1931, 1.

¹⁶³Rote Fahne, 10 March 1931, 1.

¹⁶⁴Sloterdijk, 143.

¹⁶⁵Hake, Third Machine, 111. Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* (1927) also circulated in Germany beginning in October of 1928. Another American sound film, *Wings*, appeared in January, 1929. It was not until June of 1929 when Al Jolson's second film, *The Singing Fool*, appeared that sound film became an "event" worthy of critical debate, the result of this being a resounding denial of the cultural "worthiness" of the new technology. Saunders, 221-29.

necessitated spoken dialogue, creating a language barrier which had been relatively easily remedied in the silent film with the translation of a few intertitles. Translating and overdubbing or subtitling an entire feature film proved much more difficult and costly. By the close of the Weimar era, Hollywood had ceased to be the overwhelmingly dominant partner in the cultural exchange between Germany and the United States.¹⁶⁶ This did of course require a reshuffling of the public ideas of *Amerikanismus*. Within this changing relationship, the identity of the Tramp character, who did not speak on film, became a focal point around which the discussion of sound, and therefore technology and modernity as a whole, could develop. In one of his discursive guises, Chaplin thus represented the attraction of a “modernity” that did not necessarily need technology.

Chaplin’s physical presence of course presented the simple problem that, even if while not on the screen as the Tramp, the actor himself did *speak*. Chaplin’s arrival had been presaged by much discussion of the Tramp’s voice. The main question was whether he would speak in his next film, *City Lights*.¹⁶⁷ During the press session after his arrival at the Adlon Hotel on the Unten der Linden, Chaplin (via his interpreter) was barraged with questions concerning the voice of the Tramp. The *8-Uhr Abendblatt* reported “What was most striking, a paradox -- his voice. This voice, that Chaplin had withheld from the world. Chaplin speaks with a light melodic voice, in which there is the sound of a

¹⁶⁶There were of course other considerations as well, such as the forming of the Parufamet corporation in 1927 between the premiere German studio, UFA, and Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn in Hollywood, which solidified a U.S. to German film distribution ratio that insured American presence in the German film market.

¹⁶⁷Chaplin himself said that he would “never appear in a sound film.” In his autobiography, he would comment that “Some people suggested that the Tramp might talk. This was unthinkable, for the first word he uttered would transform him into another person. Besides, the matrix out of which he was born was as mute as the rags he wore.” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 10 March 1931, 5; Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 395.

conqueror.”¹⁶⁸ Significantly most reviewers clearly upheld the silence of the Tramp. The *Berliner Tageblatt* published a cartoon, “Silence in the Forest,” depicting the Tramp, looking bewildered and lost, walking through a forest in which all the trees were bedecked with loudspeakers. (figure 13) Arnold Höllriegel in his review of *City Lights* at the London premiere, called it “the great anti-sound film. [It] begins differently: as a sound film. It is rather a parody of the sound film in which no one says a word....It is the powerful humor of Chaplin. How good, not to speak a word; I thought between two fits of laughter.”¹⁶⁹

Critics humanized Chaplin’s silence, making it a demonstration against the negative effects of rationalization. The poet Hugo Hoffmannsthal wrote on the nature of silence in cinema:

One further attraction of these pictures is that they are silent; they are silent like dreams. And deep down without knowing it, these people fear language; in language they fear the instrument of society....there’s too much algebra in this language...every letter covers yet a further number.¹⁷⁰

The *8-Uhr Abendblatt* printed this assertion: “He has, before the talking cinema, found a language intelligible to all men; that of humanity.” Critic Willy Haas argued for his discovery of a “universal language” via his silence. Similarly, a film critic of the *Vossische Zeitung* called *City Lights* “a film of struggle” in which Chaplin “wishes to prove that his silent films are more powerful than the talkies.” For these critics, spoken dialogue was useless and in fact destructive to the power of Chaplin, both as a cinematic performer, and

¹⁶⁸ *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, 10 March 1931, quoted in Gersch, 38.

¹⁶⁹ *City Lights*’ opening scene features the Tramp asleep beneath a tarpaulin covering a soon-to-be debuted national sculpture. In the opening moments, the audience is witness to a series of fast-paced and garbled speeches from various ostentatious administrators, following which the Tramp proceeds with an elaborate pantomime while extracting himself from the situation. The only voices of the film are thus mocked and nullified.

Chaplin’s voice, incidentally, was first captured on film while in Vienna, where a newsreel shows him being lifted above a crowd of admirers, while saying, “Gute Tage, gute Tag.” [sic] Robinson, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, 431.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Kaes, “The Debate About Cinema,” 26.

Das Schweigen im Walde

Zeichnung von Arthur Stadler



Figure 13. Arthur Stadler, "Das Schweigen im Walde." ["Silence in the Forest."] Berliner Tageblatt, March 5, 1931, 5.

more importantly, as a proponent of an alternate, humanized modernity. In addition to sound, the chief aspect of the Tramp that these critics employed was the significance of motion. The critic for the *Vossische Zeitung* concluded: "The word is nothing, motion is everything."¹⁷¹

Discussion of movement provided the frame for the third element of Chaplin's reception in the Weimar *Amerikanismus*: his antimechanistic imagery. Quite naturally, film criticism dealt at length with the portrayal of motion. Analysis of the movements of the Tramp typically employed terminology emphasizing his "musicality," "rhythmical obsession," yet also describing him as "waddling," "clumsy," "foolish," and so forth. For example, in a review, significantly, of Josephine Baker's first Berlin performance of 1928, one critic uses Chaplin as a means of assessing the quality of one of the dancers, Hal Sherman.¹⁷²

Hailed for his ability to inspire laughter in the face of the *Menschenoekonomie*, Chaplin became the uplifting champion of the proletarian, the office worker, and the intellectual. His oppositional negotiation of much of the machinery of the modern factory, office, or waterfront won favor with much of German society, high and low. The Right saw Chaplin unequivocally through the derogation of these terms. For men like Goebbels and Halfeld, Chaplin's antics were simply trivial, yet their impact in terms of social commentary became potentially dangerous. Such conflicting imagery may be seen as yet another indication of both the ambiguities surrounding both *Amerikanismus* and Chaplin as

¹⁷¹"Das Schweigen im Walde" [Silence in the Forest], *Berliner Tageblatt*, 5 March 1931, 5; 8-Uhr Abendblatt, 10 March 1931, 2, quoted in Gersch, 16; Arnold Höllriegel, "Charlie Chaplins Apotheose", *Berliner Tageblatt*, 28 February 1931, 2; Willy Haas, "Unser Kronzeuge," *Film-Kurier* 63 (1926) quoted in Saunders, "Comedy as Redemption", 271; Heinz Pol, "Gruß an Charlie Chaplin" [Greetings to Charlie Chaplin], *Vossische Zeitung*, 10 March 1931, 1.

¹⁷²"Sherman, der Chaplin des Tanzes" [Sherman, the Chaplin of Dancers], *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, 1 November 1928, 8.

its representative. By the end of the Weimar Republic, Chaplin was seen as being incongruous with the machine, both literal and metaphorical. What was made of this dissonance depended on one's relationship to that apparatus.

German film critic Bela Balazs would later comment on Chaplin:

The deeper meaning of Charlie's 'clumsiness' lies in the fact that his struggle with objects not only reveals their demoniac personality, but turns them into equal, even superior opponents. They defeat Chaplin because he, in his *unobjectivized humanity*, cannot adapt himself to their mechanical nature.¹⁷³

The mimetic quality ascribed to Charlie Chaplin in Weimar helped to create a mood in which the objects of one's everyday world and the pace they enforce upon the individual could be effectively put at arm's length, a kynetic standing of the notion of *Geworfenheit* on its head; instead of being "thrown" by the conditions of modern existence, Chaplin's kynical image allowed for the rejection of meaninglessness through his misadventures with that very lack of meaning.

America may have meant Henry Ford's factory, New York skyscrapers and Al Capone, but for some it also entailed irrational humor, the inevitable triumph of the underdog, and a special humanized approach to life in the modern capitalist society. Similar (re)inventions of the meanings of America may be seen in the reception accorded another American personality, Josephine Baker.

¹⁷³Bela Balazs, Theory of the Film (London: Dobson, 1952), 28. Italics mine.

CHAPTER V

JOSEPHINE BAKER: BANANAS AND *ZIVILISATION*America, Jazz and Primitivism

Attitudes toward jazz and primitivism conditioned the German reception of Josephine Baker. The composition of German perspectives rested on Blackness and jazz as racial characteristics. Clearly one of the significant factors which contributed to this perception during the early Weimar period (1919-23) was the use of colonial troops by the French army after January 1919 to occupy certain areas of western Germany.¹⁷⁴ Naturally the presence of foreign soldiers on German soil generated much animosity, some of which played upon traditional German methods of cultural identity, including what has been called "negative integration," that is, the construction of a "self" only in relation to an "Other."

German reaction to the racial composition of the occupying soldiers was mixed.¹⁷⁵ While the occupied Rhenish were for the most part tolerant and chaffed little in regard to the *racial* composition of the French army, major urban centers in the unoccupied zone such as

¹⁷⁴Sally Marks, "Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience," *European Studies Review* 13 (1983): 297-334. See also Rosemarie K. Lester, "Blacks in Germany and German Blacks: A Little-Known Aspect of Black History," in *Blacks and German Culture* eds. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 113-34; Earl R. Beck, "German Views of Negro Life in The United States, 1919-1933," *Journal of Negro History* 48 (January 1967): 22-32.

¹⁷⁵A portion of the French occupying force, numbering approximately 35,000 out of a larger force of 250,000, was 'colonial', although only a small percentage of these were actually considered "black" (Senegalese) as opposed to "colored" (Tunisian, Berber). Marks, 300.

Munich and Berlin raised a large volume of protest. Several organizations disseminated a wide variety of propaganda, denouncing the abuses (generally fictional) attributed to the colonial troops, the most emphasis being placed upon accusations of rape. For example, the Fichte-Bund issued a postcard entitled "Die Schwarze Schmach" [The Black Shame] depicting a gorilla ravaging a white woman. A series of decorative stamps was also issued, including titles such as "Der Negerbestialität" and "Der Negerpest."¹⁷⁶ (figures 14-16)

Sexual licentiousness, specifically toward white German women, was a common theme. Such images would linger as powerful cultural determinants throughout the interwar period, accentuating the preexisting stereotypes of Blacks, which had been established during the course of German colonialism.

German chancellor Otto von Bismarck launched his nation into the colonial power rivalry in 1884. Quite naturally, cultural repercussions of this move emerged almost immediately, reflecting the encounter of Europeans with the indigenous populations of Africa and Oceania.¹⁷⁷ The traditional German colonial novel typically employed the African as a means to define German culture by virtue of what it was not (as Wilhelm Raabe did in his Abu Telfan oder Die Heimkehr von Mondgebirge (1868) and Stopfkuchen (1891)). Much of this literature espoused a model of European expansionism which necessitated a cleansing of native populations due to the presumptions of superiority on the

¹⁷⁶Marks, 313-4. *Translation note:* I have chosen to substitute "Negro" for the German "Neger" so as to approximate contemporary English usages. When "Nigger" appears in this text, it is due to direct usage as such in the original.

¹⁷⁷Gordon A. Craig, Germany, 1866-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 116-24.

Die schwarze Befassung

Zeichnung von H. Heubach



Eine Schmach für die weiße Rasse — aber es geschieht in Deutschland.

Plate 3. Black Occupation, cover from *Simplicissimus* 11 (21 May 1920). A disgrace for the white race—but it is happening in Germany.

Figure 14. "Die schwarze Befassung." ["Black Occupation."] Cover from *Simplicissimus* 11 (May 21, 1920). As reproduced in Rosemarie K. Lester, "Blacks in Germany and German Blacks," in Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds. *Blacks and German Culture*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 117.



Figure 15. "Jumbo." A poster produced to depict the occupation of the Rhineland by Black French soldiers. (1918) As reproduced in May Optiz, Katharina Oguntotoye and Dagmar Schultz, eds. Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out. Translated by Anne V. Adams. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, 46.

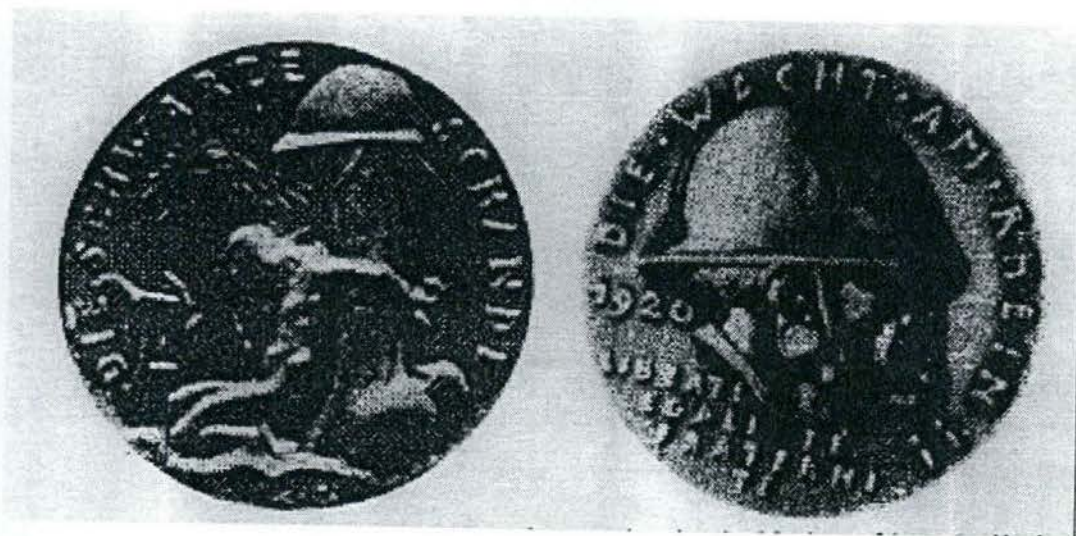


Figure 16. A medal from the Bavarian mint designed by Karl Gotz (1920). One side depicts a woman chained to a gigantic, helmeted penis, intended to represent a Black soldier, beneath the caption, "Die Schwarze Schande." ["The Black Infamy"] The reverse exaggerates the foreign facial features of these soldiers. As reproduced in Opitz, 47.

part of the German colonial adventurers.¹⁷⁸ This discourse of alienation would become part of the Weimar attitude toward both Africans and African-Americans. *Der Angriff*, for example, would build upon this tradition in 1928 when it ran a caricature of a black soldier in a French uniform, holding a picture of a German pacifist berating a German soldier, implying that the weakness of the German military was due to a combination of domestic traitors and foreign occupiers.¹⁷⁹ Historian Willfried Feuser has commented on the Nazi cooptation of these images as a "literature of colonial nostalgia."¹⁸⁰

As the 1920s wore on, fascination with blackness in Weimar did not abate. Articles, opinion pieces, and travel reports concerning the identity and characteristics of the American black experience were common.¹⁸¹ Additionally, print advertisers made use of

¹⁷⁸Sander L. Gilman, *On Blackness Without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston: G.K. Hall and co., 1982), 119-28; Bodo Rollka, "Anmerkungen zur stereotypen Rezeption der schwarzen Minorität Amerikas in der Alten und Neuen Welt" [Comments on the Stereotypical Reception of the Black American Minority in the Old and New World] *Amerika studien* 31, no. 4 (1986): 413-24.

¹⁷⁹*Der Angriff*, 27 November 1928, 3.

¹⁸⁰Gilman, 126. One of the first consequence of the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935, was the forced sterilization of the so-called Rhineland Bastards, biracial children whose fathers were dark-skinned colonial soldiers who had served in the occupying French forces after the First World War. Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

¹⁸¹For example, Egon Edwin Kisch, "Harlem: Fegefeuer der Neger" [Harlem: Purgatory of the Negro] in *Paradies Amerika* (Berlin: Universum Bucherei Für Alle, 1930), 56-61; Joseph Chapiro, "Die amerikanische Neger-Hauptstadt" [The American Negro Metropolis], *Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 March 1929, 7; "In der Negerstadt" [In the Negro City], *Reclams Universum*, 9 March 1931, 6; "Siedlungshaus für Neger" [Housing for Negroes], *Vossische Zeitung*, 23 May 1929, 6; Scott Neurig, "Schwarze Amerikaner" [Black Americans], *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, 21 November 1928, 3; Siegfried Kracauer, "Negerball in Paris" [Negro Ball in Paris], *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 2 November 1928, 4; Arnold Hollniegl, "Die Ankunft der Neger: Schwarze Kunst auf dem Broadway" [The Arrival of the Negro: Black Art on Broadway], *Berliner Tageblatt*, 8 April 1928, 7; Hermann Kesser, "Die Neger Blues" [Negro Blues], *Berliner Tageblatt*, 4 December 1928, 5.

this stereotypical imagery, particularly for products or productions connected in some fashion to these stereotypes; for example, for radios or gramophone records. (figure 17)

A related component in the German perception of Baker and other Black performers is found in the vogue for African and Oceanic art which had been sparked in the early years of the twentieth century by such artists as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and the German Expressionists. Their work highlighted a fascination with the form of the primitive and the exotic, importing images taken from traditional cultures into a European context, the *art nègre*; thus opening the doors for the emergence of "Blackness" onto the European cultural stage to a degree never before seen.¹⁸² At this stage, this awareness consisted of a strictly *African* identity. It would take a further element to cement the connection in the Weimar consciousness between Blackness and America. That element was jazz.

Jazz, America, Blackness: these concepts became synonymous in Germany during the course of the late twenties and early thirties. To black American jazz, as to Chaplin, the first exposure for the German spectator came largely from literature and reportage discussing the phenomenon from abroad, rather than any wide experience of live performance. This distance was arguably a crucial factor for the later popularity of Chaplin and Baker, in that it allowed for an initial degree of freedom for the critics, writers and politicians to create and alter the images of the two as they saw fit. Geographic isolation proved the *sine qua non* for the metastasizing phenomenon of *Amerikanismus*.

Jazz music in this context should be understood as a *social* construction rather than in specifically *musical* terms.¹⁸³ Germany itself had yet to experience on a wide scale the

¹⁸²Susan Carol Cook, "Opera during the Weimar Republic" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1985). See also Jost Hermand, "Artificial Atavism: German Expressionism and Blacks," in Grimm and Hermand, 65-86.

¹⁸³J. Bradford Robinson, "Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: in Search of a Shimmy Figure" in *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107-34.

Compl. Radio-Anlagen
 2-6 Röhren im Lautsprecher • 1a Fabrikate
 für **3** Mark wöchentl.
 Teilz.
 Vertreterbes. u.
 Vorführung
 unverd.



Sherlock-G.m.b.H. Berlin
 Hackescher Markt 2-3. Tel. Nord. 4791-93

**Sprech-, Foto-Apparate, Opel-Fahrräd.,
 Fern-, Operngläser, Standuhren
 3 Mark wöchentlich.**

Figure 17. Advertisement for radio equipment, graphically illustrating the connection in the Weimar mindset between the primitive and popular music, specifically jazz. Berliner Tageblatt, November 3, 1928, 12.

form of jazz as originated and played in the United States. Weimar jazz was thus a curious amalgam of cultural stereotype and imitation. At this stage of Weimar cultural history, "jazz" was a vastly inclusive phenomenon fueled primarily by German, not American, bands. Bands such as Weintraub's Syncopators performed what was, in a strictly musical sense, not really jazz at all.¹⁸⁴ As the Critical Theorist and archenemy of jazz Theodor Adorno commented, black musicians upon their arrival contributed the "coloristic effect of their skin" to what in Germany was essentially a white art.¹⁸⁵ Composer Ernst Kr  nek's comments provide a succinct summary of what jazz meant to the artists of the 1920s: "Real jazz was unknown in Europe. We gave the name jazz to anything that came out of America."¹⁸⁶

One of the first commentaries was Alice Gerstel's 1922 piece in the expressionist magazine *Die Aktion*, "Jazz Band."

A Negro sits behind the mystical instrument. It is a drum with trumpets, tambourines, bells, blocks and straps attached like small but essential ornaments on the facade of a bank building. The Negro, half slave-driver, half juggler, holds two sticks in his hands. He beats them on the blocks....His thick lips press on the mouth of the trumpet....The dancing couples are under the spell of these rhythms, these colors and sounds, to which an English or German text can be nothing but a makeshift substitute for some sort of Dadaist, exotic howl and stammer. They slip in the wildest of gyrations over the polished floor with a precision that suggests

¹⁸⁴German jazz, according to Robinson, was just that -- German. While it had developed concurrently with American jazz, it diverged significantly in musical terms. One example of this divergence is the German insistence on playing from sheet music, while American jazz emphasized 'live' spontaneity. Robinson, 112-14. See also Kater and Cornelius Partsch, "Hannibal ante Portas: Jazz in Weimar," in Kniesche and Brockmann, 105-17. For an extended cultural history of jazz in Germany, see Reinhard Fark, *Die Mi  achtete Botschaft [The Ignored Message]* (Berlin: Verlag Volker Spiess, 1971). ||

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 116.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 113.

ultimately nothing other than a well-oiled automaton.¹⁸⁷

Her remarks contained the central stereotypical elements which were to become the standard from which all interpretations of jazz would be drawn during the period of post-Dawes recovery: a combination of the primitive (*Urwaldmusik*, *Urwaldleute*), and the foreign with an element of mechanistic imagery. These elements were captured by much of the art of the period, employing this imagery, both “ultramodern” and “ultraprimitive” to express the ambiguities surrounding the problems of modernity.¹⁸⁸ These images of blackness were blended with the conventional form and figure of “America.” (figures 18-19) Therefore jazz and its association with the primitive was in one sense nothing more than a diversionary tactic of the *cynical* false consciousness, finding a means to carry on through incorporating a touch of the exotic to season the stultification of an otherwise standardized form of entertainment. Josephine Baker will be seen to display these traits and others, which place her, like Chaplin, in the realm somewhere between *cynicism* and *kynicism*, flirting with the tropes of impudence while greasing the wheels of progress.

Live jazz was introduced to Germany on a large scale in 1924. In the previous year a national radio network was created, making what recorded jazz there was available to a hugely expanded audience. Both developments encouraged the cultural migration of “jazz.” Erik Charell adopted jazz as the central theme of his 1924 revue “An Alle!” [For Everyone!]. During this period, black American musicians and dancers became a common uncommonality on the streets of major German cities. The “Nigger-Jazz-Band” performed

¹⁸⁷Alice Gerstel, “Jazz Band” *Die Aktion* 12 (February 4, 1922), 90-91 in *WRS*, 554. For an examination of the presence of black musicians in Europe prior to the First World War, see Rainer Lotz, “The ‘Louisiana Troupes’ in Europe” *The Black Perspective in Music* 11 (Fall 1983), 133-42.

¹⁸⁸For an excellent treatment of the imaging of blackness in relation to jazz and America in German art, see Beeke Sell Tower, *Envisioning America: Prints, Drawings and Photographs by George Grosz and his Contemporaries, 1915-1933* (Cambridge: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, 1990).



Original Jazzband. Kaffern mit ihren Trommeln (Südafrika)

Photo Hakonyi

Figure 18. "Original Jazzband. Kaffern mit ihren Trommeln" ["Kaffirs with their drums."] Querschnitt, February 2, 1928. As reproduced in Facsimile Querschnitt durch den Querschnitt. München: Scherz Verlag, 1968, 54.



Figure 19. Franz Masereel, *Dance Scene* (1925). As reproduced in Tower, 89.

that year in Berlin, followed in 1925 by the more successful "Chocolate Kiddies Revue," an all-black orchestra under the direction of Sam Wooding and featuring the music of Duke Ellington. (figures 20-21) These performers and others were hailed by the critics of the day as an invigorating force, as an infusion of vitality, of the "youthful energy of America" into a society eager to break with nineteenth-century idioms.¹⁸⁹ H. H. Stuckenschmidt, a contemporary composer, remarked in a similar fashion in 1924: "This land America has given the world new dance rhythms. They will provide the solution to the artistic struggle within Europe."¹⁹⁰ They were alternately castigated for the very same reason, as agents of decadence afflicting the European tradition.

In addition to reportage of actual performances, fictional depictions of jazz and its characteristics were prominent factors in the creation of the "jazz" as a construct. Vicki Baum's novel Stud. chem. Helene Willfüer [Helene] (1925) contained typical imagery:

Heavens! What kind of music was this that the black Samson burst into!...everything melted away; the world stood naked, sick with longing, groaning in passion...A black devil, with a dazzling white smile, sat at the piano, propelling his lusting marionettes about the room...and then there was only the Negro rhythm, casting a spell over everything.¹⁹¹

Similarly, Bruno Frank equated the "Otherness" of race and music in his novel, Politische Novelle [The Persians Are Coming] (1928) in which he highlighted the "diabolical rhythms of the Negro band." Frank developed the character of Becky Floyd, a Black foreign dancer who "was nineteen years old" and whose "fame was immense." The Floyd

¹⁸⁹Frank Warschauer, "Zu Whitemans Berliner Konzerten" [Jazz: On Whiteman's Berlin Concerts], Vossische Zeitung, 19 June 1926 in WRS, 571-72.

¹⁹⁰Cook, 169-170.

¹⁹¹Vicki Baum, Helene, trans. by Ida Zeitlin (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc.), 91-92; See also Rene Schickele, Symphonie für Jazz (1929) and Klaus Mann Mephisto, trans. Robin Smyth (New York: Penguin, 1977). For a detailed examination of German literature of this period (1918-1933) in this regard, see Marc A. Weiner, "Urwaldmusik and the Borders of German Identity: Jazz in the Literature of the Weimar Republic," German Quarterly 64, no. 4 (1991): 475-94.



Figure 20. "With America's greatest colored artists!" Two members of the Chocolate Kiddies revue stand next to a street poster for their performance in Berlin, 1925. As reproduced in Tower, 95.



Figure 21. Program from the *Revue Negre* at the Nelson Theater in Berlin. (1926) As reproduced in *Kunstamt Kreuzberg, Weimarer Republik*. Berlin: Elephanten Press, 1977, 827.

character, with her “glorious animal eyes,” backed by “the diabolical rhythms of the Negro band,” seems clearly modeled upon Josephine Baker, who by 1928 was a well-established presence of jazz culture and *Amerikanismus* in Berlin.¹⁹²

The dominant tone within German musical scholarship was condemnatory. The music historian Alfred Einstein referred to jazz as an “invention of a nigger from Chicago” and the “most disgusting treason against all Occidental civilized music.”¹⁹³ His view was typical, if slightly more racist than average. When in 1928, the Frankfurt Conservatory, due to strong popular demand, proposed a course on jazz theory which would have, in the words of its director, Bernard Sekles, introduced a “fresh infusion of Negro blood,” most critics voiced a sharp outcry. A general backlash of negative reaction arose over this perceived assault on a traditional bastion of German culture.¹⁹⁴

Ernst Kr nek produced the *Zeitoper* [contemporary opera] *Jonny Spielt Auf* [Jonny Strikes Up the Band] in 1926 and it serves as a telling example of the constitution of the Weimar perception of jazz and blackness and was, like Baker, a kynical presence in the culture of Weimar. The production enjoyed a huge success throughout Europe during its run from 1926-29, reaching an estimated audience of 500,000 - thereby establishing itself as one of the most popular productions of this period.¹⁹⁵ The main character, Jonny, was a black bandleader who used the mystique of his race, position, and music to seduce white women. He thus reenacted in the process many of the cultural anxieties originally activated

¹⁹²Bruno Frank, *The Persians Are Coming*. trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 43-47.

¹⁹³Kater, 21.

¹⁹⁴“Niggermusik und Frankfurter Konservatorium” [Niggermusik and the Frankfurter Conservatory], *Das Echo* 47 (26 February 1928), 22.

¹⁹⁵Robinson, 112.

during the Rhineland occupation earlier in the decade. Krênek described the character Jonny as a “child of nature, totally free of inhibitions, acting on impulse” in contrast to the “hero” of the story, the conductor, who was representative of a confused Central European intellectual.¹⁹⁶ Krênek’s conception of Blackness clearly involves German stereotypes, but he took them one step further in that he uses them to challenge the very society which spawned them. Jonny provided a “cheeky” retort to the patterns of nineteenth-century culture, but also to the cynical nature of the medium of jazz itself. Hans Siemsen had noted the kynical potential of jazz as early as 1921, when he wrote that one of its principal benefits was that it was “so completely undignified. It knocks down every hint of dignity, correct posture and starched collars. Whoever fears making himself laughable arguably cannot dance it.”¹⁹⁷ Equally telling were the shouts of “Deutschland erwache!” and “Pfui Jonny” at the frequent protests of nationalistic groups against the show.¹⁹⁸

In this climate, the revue emerged as the most popular form of “live” entertainment of the time. Generally a topical production, the revue typically contained a juxtaposition of songs, dances, and skits, accompanied by an onstage band or orchestra.¹⁹⁹ The revue was produced on a larger scale than the average cabaret-style performance. The Scala revue, for example, seated easily 3,000 people for one show and the combined revues of Berlin

¹⁹⁶Rose, 126.

¹⁹⁷Quoted in Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 170.

¹⁹⁸For example, see “Ausschreitungen in Operntheater gegen ‘Jonny spielt auf’” [“Violent Protests in the Opera against ‘Jonny Strikes Up the Band’”] *Neue Frei Presse*, 28 January 1928, 7.

¹⁹⁹Such “topics” were often blatantly sexual and exploitative, some examples being: *Berlin Ohne Hemd* (Berlin Without a Blouse), *Zieh dich aus* (Take it off), *Donnerwetter - 1000 Frauen!* (Goddam! -- A Thousand Women), *Tausend Nackte Frauen* (A Thousand Naked Women). These titles were gleaned from a selective reading of the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Vossische Zeitung* during the period 1925-1931. See also Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

averaged 11,000 spectators per evening during the 1926-27 season in which Baker made her Berlin debut. The music of such shows was dominated by forms of foxtrot, tango, and jazz.²⁰⁰ In his commentary on Paul Whiteman's concerts, a critic for the *Vossische Zeitung* offered an interpretation of the meaning of these performances for Germans:

Jazz: the most entertaining and vital phenomenon in contemporary music. Moreover, the only *musical mass movement*....Whatever is current and vital just now often defines a new category. The old standards are not adequate to assess it. Thus it is with film and also with jazz (it is no accident that they have to be mentioned together). The figures primarily responsible for both the origins of jazz and the boldest departures within it...are the American Negroes.²⁰¹

The American black experience remained a common trope of the revue. A critic writing for the *Weltbühne*, Wolf Zucker, commented that by 1928, "one would be hard-pressed to watch a revue that didn't contain one scene titled something like 'Evening on a South Carolina Plantation' or 'Dixi Sweetheart [sic].'" Zucker was also careful to elucidate the self-reflexive German concern with a foreign identity, echoing in the process the "new method": "Perhaps what the darkeys reveal best is the true state of *Negerkitsch*:

Europakitsch with an Afro." [*Europakitsch kraushaarig frisiert*].²⁰²

The revue, specifically the girl troupe, had become a model and expression of *Amerikanismus*. While the German audience certainly construed Black entertainers as aberrant in some fashion, the revue culture itself was actually seen as quite a standardized phenomenon. The Empire Girls had been joined by a host of other groups, each expressing the same modalities. The dominant theme within the revue was a heightened sense of

²⁰⁰Peter Jelavich, "Modernity, Civic Identity, and Metropolitan Entertainment: Vaudeville, Cabaret, and Revue in Berlin: 1900-1933" in *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 106; Jelavich, "Girls and Crisis."

²⁰¹Warschauer, 571.

²⁰²Wolf Zucker, "Negerkitsch," *Die Weltbühne*, 27 March 1928, 45.

precision and unity in motion, echoed again and again in the press as “mechanistic.” Hans Fischer, one of the principal advocates of the nudist culture in Weimar, wrote that: “The idea, a line of young girls, moving in precise uniformity, is the true American mechanization of the dance....”²⁰³ Neologism continued to run rampant throughout the *Blätter* of Weimar as commentators struggled to outdo each other’s impressions of modernity: *Präzisionsmaschine* [Precision machine], *Girlmaschine*; *Bewegungmaschine* [Motion machine].²⁰⁴ The Austrian critic Anton Kuh penned a love letter to a member of one of these troupes, which he referred to as “the captivating nude-machinery-girls.” His letter was addressed to “the Second on the Right.”²⁰⁵

The combination of plurality and precision became elementary to the definition of the revue. As with the films of Chaplin and mass coverage of Chamberlin’s flight, revues were perceived by a passive spectator; one whose individuality, both in his/her act of viewing the event (the films, the dance, the landing) as well as in the participation within the iconographical construction of the event, secludes him/her within a collective body. One result of the aforementioned turn from word to image is the pluralizing of the audience. Alfred Polgar wrote of the phenomenon in his native Vienna:

Girls are a so-called “plurale tantum.” That is, the concept occurs linguistically only in the plural.... There is no such thing as a “girl” any more than there is, for example, a salt.... “Girl” placed next to “girl”....doesn’t make “girls” by any stretch of the imagination. That can be accomplished only by the final addition, the amalgamation of the individuals into the collective.

In his view, a “‘girl’-less revue, hence a vegetarian revue, has absolutely no nutritional

²⁰³Hans W. Fischer, *Körperschönheit und Körperkultur* [The Body Beautiful and the Culture of the Body] (Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1928), 207.

²⁰⁴Jelavich, “Girls and Crisis,” 229.

²⁰⁵Anton Kuh, “The Second on the Right,” quoted in Segel, 343-44.

value.”²⁰⁶ The emphasis clearly lay upon the realization of the technical rationality expressed in the kickline; the “meat” being, in other words, a substantive, quantifiable expression of progress *qua* the charts and maps used to trace Atlantic flights. (figure 22) This is not to say that this progress was without its problems. Fritz Giese referred to the Tiller Girls as “a band of dancers...dancing bodies drilled and trained in certain simple techniques, *mobile machines*.” The problem as Giese adequately summed, was that “they made a very striking impression, but they also gave considerable pause for thought. They were the product of an American mentality.”²⁰⁷ Again there emerged the paradoxical character of *Amerikanismus*.

The connotations of “jazz” were inseparable from the discourse of the revue. Contemporary Germans linked both to the overall mechanization of society. One writer noted in the intellectuals’ journal, *Querschnitt*: “Man became mechanical, rigorously ruled by a strict, rhythmically syncopating present, which calls itself the jazz band.”²⁰⁸ Furthermore, the voices of the critical discourse tied blackness to the reception of jazz, and thus to the revue, typically equating the decay of modern society with the influx of jazz into German culture. Witness the remarks of Foreign Minister Stresemann at the League of Nations in 1927: “I regret that Negro rhythm has triumphed over Germany. We must protect our nerves from this drumfire.”²⁰⁹ Lines of distinction between blackness and jazz had blurred rapidly.

Siegfried Kracauer referred to the kicklines as “products of American distraction

²⁰⁶Alfred Polgar, “Girls,” quoted in Segel, 270-71.

²⁰⁷Peukert, 180. *Italics mine*. See also Fritz Giese, “Das tanzende Amerika” [Dancing America], *Verladung und Klasungs Monatshefte*, July 1927, 544-48.

²⁰⁸Quoted in Costigliola, 179.

²⁰⁹*New York Times*, 12 June 1927, 19.

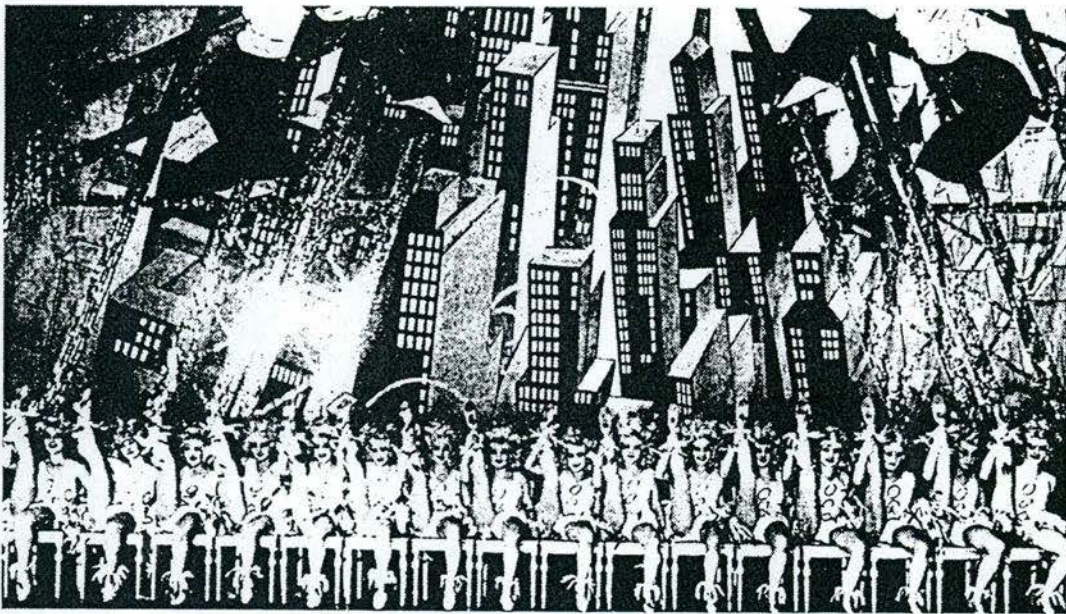


Figure 22. The Tiller Girls in the Haller Revue. As reproduced in Wolfgang Jansen, Glanzrevuen der zwanziger Jahre. Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1987, 50.

factories...[They are] no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics." He linked the position of the individual dancer within the "Girldmaschine" to the victimized worker of the modern, industrialized society, "the legs of the Tiller Girls correspond to the hands in the factories."²¹⁰ In a review of the Alfred Jackson Girls he commented further: "It is not really sixteen girls that the troupe consists of...; rather every girl's leg is one-thirty-second of a marvelously precise apparatus."²¹¹ Kracauer's observations provide an interpretation of the phenomenon of the revue line previewing the economic and political downturns which had spelled the effective end of the illusion of the stability of the mid-1920s and its manifestation, the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The faith in prosperity and the illusions of security which the revue had helped to maintain would wither away, revealed, in Kracauer's words, as a (cynical) "phantom."

Their smiles are those of a mask; their confidence a left-over from better days; their precision a mockery of the difficulties in which the very powers they call to mind now find themselves...the crisis to which so many factories have fallen victim has also silently liquidated the machinery of the girls.²¹²

These few observances resonate with a lack of identity for the individual within the larger, rationalized kickline, and no less, within the discourse amongst the largely male critical population and their constructed reality of the "New Woman."²¹³ Jazz and the revue were wedded, including their primitive aspects, to the interpretative matrix of the *Neue*

²¹⁰Siegfried Kracauer, "Das Ornament der Masse" [The Mass Ornament], *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 9 June 1927, in *WRS*, 405.

²¹¹Siegfried Kracauer, "Girls and Crisis," in *Ibid.*, 565.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 565-66.

²¹³See Atina Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany" in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review, 1983), 157-171.

Sachlichkeit. Part of this matrix included the desexualization of the revue girls, as critics praised the short hair and athleticism of the dancers. As Alfred Polgar commented at the time, "In revues the primacy of the male reveals itself still unshaken. There is nothing there for women."²¹⁴ The iconography of jazz and the revue thus slipped into a cynical mire of apathy.

The Baker Reception: "Pagan Virtuosity" or "Die schwarze Pest ist im Land!"²¹⁵

Within this environment, Josephine Baker represented a strong kynical force. Risen from abject poverty in St. Louis, she had enjoyed considerable success with a series of shows in Philadelphia and New York in the early 1920s. Having left New York in 1925 to take up residence in the revues of Paris, *La Bakair* had become the darling of Parisian nightlife. As her fame spread throughout Europe, offers from other cities began to pour in. One of the first came from Berlin. Baker first arrived in Germany on New Year's Eve, 1925, to perform in *La Revue Negre* at the Nelson Theater in Berlin. Her performances during this tour were essentially identical to her shows in the Theater des Champs Elysses in Paris, a succession of different "numbers" including her renowned "Fatou" and the infamous banana skirt dance against backdrops replete with stereotypical iconography, jazz clubs, giant watermelons and the like (figure 23). The show fully corresponded to the iconography of jazz in Germany -- the seven sets were titled: *Mississippi Steam Boat Race*, *New York Skyscraper*, *Louisiana Camp Meeting*, *Les Strutting Babies*, *Darkey*

²¹⁴Quoted in Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 177-78.

²¹⁵"Gegen die schwarze Gefahr!" ["Against the Black Danger!"] *Rote Fahne*, 10 November 1928, 7.

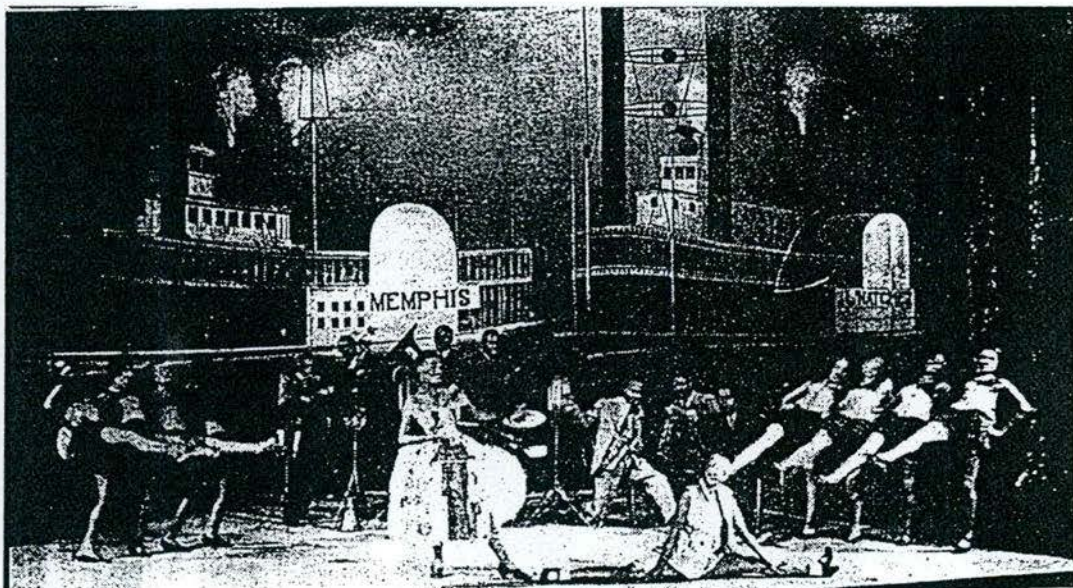


Figure 23. The *Revue Negre* in Paris in 1925. The stage set is the same as was used in Berlin in 1926. As reproduced in Jansen, 54.

*Impressions, Les pieds qui parlent, and Charleston Cabaret.*²¹⁶

Baker's identity was problematic for the German audiences from the very start. As Hans Heinsheimer put it, "Berlin's women were never the same."²¹⁷ Neither was Berlin. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* commented, "Unnoticed, without advertising, a Negro troupe has slipped like a shadow into the Nelson Theater on the Kurfürstendamm - coming with the beginning of the new year, they will help sweep out the old." The show itself and the commentary about it emphasized the ingredients of *Amerikanismus*, as viewed through German eyes:

...the sought-after beautiful bodies and the grace of the dancers....In the corner of the small stage, entrenched behind the great drum...is the Jazz Band: an undergrowth of instruments and sound that we cannot understand....There is a backdrop: a New York skyscraper reaching diagonally into the sky...Sidney Bechet enters...and blows his saxophone. It's jazz music, but like nothing you've ever heard; a melody, a tune but a tune of tomorrow!

Significantly though, the critic did not know what to make of Baker, whose form of dance troubled him: "She tosses her body above the stage and rolls herself through the air. Is one to laugh at this dance? It's not clear what should be done."²¹⁸ Baker's reception would be marked by this convergence of attributes and indecision on the part of its observers, as Count Harry Kessler recorded in his diary, "They are a cross between primeval forests and skyscrapers; likewise their music, jazz, in its colors and rhythms. Ultramodern and ultraprimitive."²¹⁹

²¹⁶Ottomar Starke, "Revue Negre," *Querschnitt* 6 (February 1926): 118-20.

²¹⁷Cook, 134.

²¹⁸*Frankfurter Zeitung*, 14 January 1926, 3.

²¹⁹Count Harry Kessler, *Tagebucher: 1918-1937* [*Diaries: 1918-1937*] (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), 458.

Baker's first tour of Germany ended with the run of *La Revue Negre* in February, 1926. She resumed an active presence again in her iconography in the reportage of her European tour which began in Vienna on February 1, 1928.²²⁰ General reaction to her among the Viennese public was hostile and a police guard was placed around the theater in which she was to perform. Several student groups openly protested her presence. The Catholic Church allied itself with the different groups, mostly nationalist and right-wing, who joined the students in protest. The bells of St. Paul's Church were rung at the moment of her arrival in the city so as to warn the citizenry of the impending immorality (other churches were said to have joined in this, ironically creating a festive atmosphere in many parts of the city). St. Paul's also announced that it would hold three days of services "in atonement for outrages on morality committed by Josephine Baker."²²¹ Baker remarked on this episode in her autobiography: "The capital was flooded with leaflets denouncing me as the 'black devil.'"²²²

The Viennese press, still fueling the reaction to the performance of *Jonny Spielt Auf* earlier that year, had mixed reviews, but the response was also generally hostile. *Der Tage* urged that "It would have been a better idea to have put into the review a homage to Jezebel. After all, Jezebel has more in common with Baker than Baker has with Franz Schubert." The National Socialists spread flyers about the city, similar to the ones posted during the performance of *Jonny Spielt Auf*, marked with accusations of "jewish-nigger" attempts to besmirch traditional art forms. Several Nazis hurled stink-bombs into the

²²⁰ "Guard Josephine Baker," *New York Times*, 2 February 1928, 11; "Vienna Bars Negro Dancer," *New York Times*, 4 February 1928, 7; "Eine parlamentarische Aktion gegen Josefine Baker," *Neue Frei Presse*, 4 February 1928, Abendblatt, 3.

²²¹ Rose, 128-29; *Wiener Zeitung und Amtsblatt*, 5 February 1928, 5.

²²² Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine*, trans. Mariana Fitzpatrick (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 74.

Strauss theater where she performed. The German press also commented on Baker's arrival in Vienna. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* described the reaction of the Viennese as a "witch-hunt" and pondered the possibility of the forced expulsion of all blacks from Vienna in such an atmosphere.²²³

Baker's experiences in Vienna were typical of the rest of her European tour which would, in the space of two years, bring her to twenty-four different countries. Some found her the embodiment of a potential, and much hoped for, revivification of European culture. Oscar Bie wrote in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* in regards to the perceived influence of Baker and other black entertainers:

They have brought us our culture. Humanity has returned to its origins in the niggersteps, in the shaking and loosened bodies. Only that can help us,...It is the deepest expression of our innermost longing.²²⁴

In 1926, the poet Ivan Goll published an essay in a different vein, "The Negroes are Conquering Europe," directly addressing the question of the effect of Black culture upon Germany.²²⁵ Goll wrote:

The Negroes are conquering Berlin. They have already filled the whole continent with their howls, with their laughter....The Revue Negre, which is rousing the tired public...to thrills and madness as otherwise only a boxing-match can do, is symbolic....The Revue is an unmitigated challenge to moral Europe...at their head, the star, Josephine Baker....They dance a dance one might expect in a lunatic asylum...the leading role belongs to Negro blood. Its drops are slowly falling over Europe, a long-since dried-up land that can scarcely breathe.

Goll closed with: "The Negro question is pressing for our entire civilization. It runs like

²²³Hammond, 80; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 2 February 1928, 4; "Gegen der Auftreten der Josephine Baker," ["Against the Appearance of Josephine Baker"], *Wiener Zeitung*, 5 February 1928, 10. "There is no need for such depictions."

²²⁴Quoted in Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 171.

²²⁵Goll's article appeared to help promote his wife's novel of the same name, which dealt with interracial relationships and crosscultural fantasies in European society.

this: Do the Negroes need us? Or are we not sooner in need of them?"²²⁶

His comments indicate a culture in crisis and an inquiry as to whether this encounter could be resolved using an American model. This culture found use for the presence of figures which could offer several layers of other-directed identification within the new method of *Amerikanismus*. Three tropes emerged in the discussion of Baker: primitivism, irrational and impudent sexuality, and defiance of the collective paradigm of the revue. These elements all share a pronounced *kynical* resonance within the discourse of *Amerikanismus* pertaining to Baker; standing apart and in opposition to the "mask" of the characteristic *cynicism* of the *Girlkultur*. While the *kynical* aspect of Baker's iconography is clear, one must nevertheless not forget that many of those who maintained this iconography were highly enamored of the "ultramodern" capacity of Baker.²²⁷ The polyvalency of Baker's iconography (as with Chaplin's) is thus its defining characteristic.

The reportage discussing Baker was universally concerned with her race. This racial identity served as the foundation upon which a primitivist persona was constructed. No printed piece mentioning her failed to underscore in some fashion the attractiveness/repulsiveness of her distinguishing racial features. Critical voices during the Weimar Republic universally equated Blackness/primitivism with a certain barbarism -- the only question remained, what kind of barbarism? The reportage concerning this facet of her identity varied according to the author's disposition towards the "barbaric." The

²²⁶Ivan Goll, "Die Neger erobern Europa" [The Negroes are Conquering Europe], *Die literarische Welt* (15 January 1926), 34 in *WRS*, 559-60. See also Katherine Rathaus, "Jede Zeit hat den Tanz, den sie verdient," ["Charleston: Every Age Has the Dance It Deserves"] *Uhu* 3 (1926), 120-21, in *Ibid.*, 558-59.

²²⁷For example, Hans Wesemann lauded the worldliness and sophistication of Josephine Baker, "naturally a woman of the world," who possessed a sharpened business acumen and a facility with languages. "Josephine Baker erteilt Audienz!" ["Josephine Baker Grants an Audience!"] *Die Welt am Montag*, 8 October 1928, 6.

Berliner Tageblatt, for example, commented that "In her survives the untamed wildness of her forebears who were transplanted from the Congo basin to the Mississippi."²²⁸ As mentioned earlier, student groups staged protests in Vienna in opposition to the performances of Blacks. Others clamored to support the redemptive powers of this "barbarism." At certain points the intoxication with the "primitive" and the "exotic" proved so forceful as to make only a sufficiently "black" performer acceptable. For example, in November of 1928, while Josephine Baker played elsewhere in Berlin, Bessie de Saussure, a relatively light-skinned black performer, was booed from the stage of the Haus Vaterland simply because she was not "exotic" enough. She was shouted down with cries of "We want a *black* American!"²²⁹ As the work of Marianna Torgovnick and Sander Gilman inform this discussion, flirtation with a racial Other certainly engendered a high volume of opposition, while all along, this Other needed to be foreign enough to ensure a safe distance from the heart of *Kultur*.²³⁰ Exotic needed to remain exotic.

Conservative reaction to Baker's primitivism remained generally within the concern for national, *volkisch* integrity. Typical commentary decried the presence of blacks,

²²⁸Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase, *Josephine: The Hungry Heart* (New York: Random House, 1993), 126-27.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 161.

²³⁰Sander Gilman describes this relationship: "Because there is no real line between self and the Other, a line must be drawn and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled this line is so dynamic in its ability to alter itself, as is the self...we can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. Thus stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid." *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 18; Marianna Torgovnick calls attention to the source of primitivism in the West's "own crises of identity, with its own needs to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe." *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); quoted in bell hooks, *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 22.

sometimes couched in protests over the loss of wages for German dancers, or references to the Rhineland occupation. In Munich, the *Vereinigten Vaterlandischen Verbände Bayerns* [United Bavarian Association of the Fatherland] had been organized since the first word of Baker's tour to lobby the Bavarian authorities to control her presence. Dresden citizens were horrified during Baker's visit in the spring of 1929, to see, in their eyes, German traditional dances being mocked by the "coloured girl." Josef Goebbels' *Der Angriff* in a polemic entitled "Dancing Misery," lamented the revue, the "opera of the metropolis," as a vehicle for the exploitation of German dancers at the hands of "Jewish directors" who would force these "poor Magdalenes" to work for one mark a night, while the "stars" were allowed to walk away with between "1200-1500" marks per evening. Paul Schultze-Naumberg, an artistic nationalist and future director of the *Kunsthochschule*, in *Art and Race* protested the "nearly perverse ogling of alien races and their behavior" as a direct affront to the leadership of the Nordic race. Lea Seidl, a white German dancer who played a supporting role in "Bitte einsteigen," commented after one of the first shows in Berlin, "It was already the beginning of the Nazis..." describing the noisy disturbances they created during the show. "You know after the first night one of the Nazi critics wrote, 'How dare they put our beautiful blonde Lea Seidl on stage with a negress?'" The outcry was so strong in Vienna that a special session of the Austrian parliament met on how to resolve the question of Baker, or the "Congo savage" as she was referred to on the streets.²³¹

More moderate reviewers fixated on race as well. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* put

²³¹"Josephine Baker Banned by Police", *Berliner Tageblatt*, 18 February 1929, 3; Jean-Claude Baker, 161; *Der Angriff*, "Tanzendes Elend" [Dancing Misery], 9 September 1928, 2; Paul Schultze-Naumberg, *Kunst und Rasse* [Art and Race], selection in *WRS*, 498; Hammond, 81-82; William Wiser, *The Great Good Place: American Expatriate Women in Paris* (New York: Norton, 1991), 265; "Eine parlamentarische Aktion gegen Josephine Baker" ["Parliamentary Action Against Josephine Baker"], *Neue Freie Presse*, 4 February 1928, *Abendsblatt*, 3.

out a piece entitled, "Die dunkle Dame," which highlighted the "Negro's" natural talents which Baker possessed as a birthright, "the eyes, the arms, the legs, the fingers, the bottom." The review went on to speculate about the possible continuation of this fascination with the primitive, postulating a sense of excitement for the arrival of the first Eskimo dance troupe in Berlin.²³²

Racial imagery also resonated in the voices of the Left. Max Reinhardt praised Baker's rhythm and "bright, emotional colors," her racial gifts, as "American treasures."²³³ Erich Maria Remarque, author of All's Quiet on the Western Front, said Baker "brought a whiff of jungle air and elemental strength and beauty to the tired showplace of Western Civilization." Alfred Polgar, writing for the *Weltbühne*, used the racial issue to argue against the corruption of the traditional high art of the theater. He asked "have we become whitewashed by the savagery of Africa?" The satirist Kurt Tucholsky addressed the harsh racial criticisms brought upon Baker by the conservative elements of the press in his poem, "Apage, Josephine, apage -!":

...

When a black dancer displays skill
and has the body of a Venus (and is quite obviously un-Saxon)
and dances with a rhythm so luscious,
and when an entire theater is swept into this spirit,
and when a colorful life comes to this country;

that is a disgrace.

But when Christ, who has said 'Thou shalt not kill'
on his cross must say, while his country turns a bloody red,
and when the ecclesiastical cannons and airplanes

²³²"Die dunkle Dame: Josephine Baker dances in the Revue, 'Bitte Einsteigen.'" Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 11 November 1928, 2.

²³³Phyllis Rose, Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker In Her Time (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 85; see also "Max Reinhardt Presents the Negro's Dramatic Horoscope" in Jeffrey Stewart, The Critical Temper of Alain Locke (New York: Garland, 1983), 77-79.

genuflect and pray in the fields of the Lord,
 that it will rain blood;
 And when the proxy God of this world drives the
 soldiers on to be slaughtered, and when the bells
 ring "Murder!" and the choir rings out 'You must
 bring your enemy to his knees!'
 And when someone has thus betrayed the Son of God -
 That is religion."²³⁴

The trope of race thus functioned *kynically* through its exultation of the sensual in the realm of the mechanical, a body in the face of metallic imagery.

Baker's profound sexuality was an inseparable component of her Weimar iconography. Without question, a large part of the reception of the revue was concerned with the presentation of sexuality. Conservative reaction to this image was not long in coming. Hans Pfitzer published a reactionary polemic later that year, citing internationalism and bolshevism as forces weakening the integrity of Germany. For him, "Jazz is the musical expression of *Amerikanismus*, this danger for Europe"; it is primitive, bewildering, technical. He referred directly to "this soulless American mechanistics" as part of the "anti-German" element eating away at German *Kultur*.²³⁵ Baker swiftly became a major icon of this new sexuality. Another member of the 'Bitte einsteigen' revue, Louise Brooks, placed Baker thus:

Sex was the business of the town....Collective lust roared unashamed at the theater. When Josephine Baker appeared naked except for a girdle of bananas, it was precisely...as Wedekind described: "They rage there as in a

²³⁴Quoted in Donald Bogle, *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America's Black Superstars* (New York: Marman, 1980), 48; Alfred Polgar, "Baker Revue," *Die Weltbühne*, 13 November 1928, 403; Theobald Tiger [Kurt Tucholsky], "Apage, Josephine, -- apage!" *Die Weltbühne*, 27 March 1928, 124.

²³⁵Hans Pfitzer, "Die neue Ästhetik der musikalischen Impotenz" [The New Aesthetic of Musical Impotence]; quoted in Marc A. Weiner "Urwaldmusik and the Borders of German Identity: Jazz in the Literature of the Weimar Republic" in *German Quarterly* 64 (1991), 476-77.

menagerie when the meat appears at the cage.”²³⁶ (figure 24)

She was, however, much more than simple sexuality. Again, Baker’s presence needs to be fully understood as a manifestation of an Other. In this sense, the perception of Baker’s sexuality went hand-in-hand with her identity as primitive. Her sexual identity was alien in comparison with the rationalized sexuality of the (white) kickline which allowed for a great deal of flirtation with immorality without ever jeopardizing the societal status quo. Her identity rested rather upon a foundation of *Natürlichkeit*, of a purely natural sexuality, unhindered by the conceptions and constrictions of the motions of the kick-line, and therefore, of modernizing industrial Germany. She may have put it best when she herself said, “I’m not immoral. I’m just natural.”²³⁷ (figure 25) This naturalness contrasted sharply both with the passive nude shows of James Klein and other revue producers, but also with the *Praezisionsmaschine* recognized by Kracauer et al.

Bruno Frank’s characterization of Baker in Becky Floyd emphasized this equation of sexuality and primitiveness, and further, drew a thick line toward the fragmentation of the female form. As bell hooks writes of the black female entertainer in white culture, “She is there to entertain guests with the image of Otherness. They are not to look at her as a whole human being. They are to notice only certain parts.”²³⁸ Without carrying the colonial metaphor too far, it is clear that Baker’s iconography entailed a partitioning of her sexuality into separate, and importantly, manageable, areas. Ivan Goll’s discussion of the “Negro conquest” of Europe supports this assertion: “Negroes dance with their senses (While Europeans dance with their minds). They dance with their legs, breasts and

²³⁶Hammond, 81.

²³⁷Wiser, 265.

²³⁸hooks, 62.

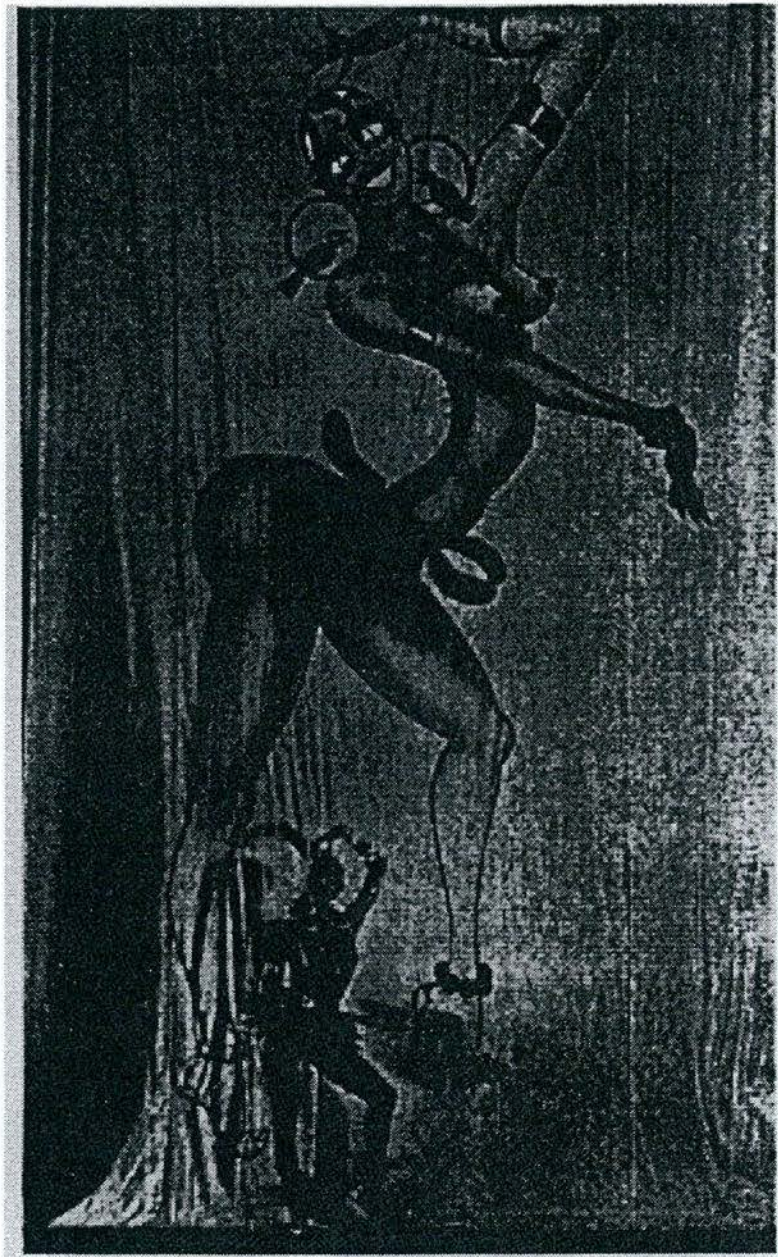


Figure 24. Josephine Baker performing on stage in her infamous banana skirt in the "Bitte Einsteigen" revue at the Theater des Westens in Berlin, 1928. As reproduced in Peter Jelavich, Berlin Cabaret. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, 173.



Figure 25. "Josephine Baker in the Revue Negre at the Nelson Theater." Berlin, January 1926. Querschnitt 16, February 1926, 138.

bellies.” Another essayist committed the following wit to paper, “With all due respect, her ass is like a jiggling chocolate custard, and she should be proud of this gift of Nature.”²³⁹

Coverage within the newspapers was similar. For example, *Vörrwärts*, the organ of the Social Democrats, called attention to Baker’s “explosive art of the body.”²⁴⁰

While the traditional revue certainly contributed to this new sexuality, the process was different. Alfred Polgar wrote of the “sensuous annex of breasts, belly and legs” in describing the kick-line, emphasizing the collective aspect. He continues: “in the revue-religion, nudity and sensuous appeal are closely related concepts. If I apply one, the other will be achieved, think the ‘girl’-industrialists.” Sexuality was a given in any form of revue. However, in the kickline it was most often a rationalized sexuality, seen as devoid of any connection to emotion or nature. The rationalized sexuality was chiefly achieved via a structured positioning and motion of the dancers. In 1924, the theater critic Herbert Ihering described the sexuality of the traditional revue as “Beauty on stage not through nudity but through motion.” Polgar also wrote: “So nudity prevails - that’s always taken for granted...The more it strikes the eye as surprise, as apparent gift of chance, as booty, the stronger the sensuous appeal.”²⁴¹ It was in this realm of chance that the excessive dance and primitive sexuality of Baker and other performers such as Louis Douglas and Valeska Gert would find their fullest cultural appeal. The *Berliner Tageblatt* explained Baker as an “ebony Venus,” extolling her primitive sexual prowess:

Long-legged and heavenly...The combed back, blue-black hair, the undulating hips, and the blazing white set of teeth from which the clear,

²³⁹Goll, 559; Starke, 119.

²⁴⁰Frank, 51; *Vörrwärts*, 5 November 1928, 4.

²⁴¹Alfred Polgar, “Girls,” quoted in Segel, 270-72; Jelavich, “Girls and Crisis, 226.

merry, guttural voice of pleasure tumbles, expresses the entire meaning of a new word which sailed across the ocean from America to Berlin: sex-appeal.²⁴²

The dangers of this form of sexuality were also made clear. On the day following Baker's arrival in Berlin in 1928, a piece of short fiction entitled, "A Woman Dances" appeared in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*. Essentially a morality play, the story describes a lone woman dancing on a table in a gloomy bar, surrounded by a group of forty men and accompanied on a mandolin by a deformed beggar. There are long descriptions of the desire the crowd feels for her. Into this scene enters a man who introduces himself as the woman's husband, come to collect her to retrieve their dead child, who had fallen out of a high window because there was no one to watch him. The crowd of men, initially hostile to the intrusion, see the error of their immoralities and accompany the grieving couple to witness the objective results of their collective sin.²⁴³

Within the trope of sexuality, Baker's identity was predominantly *kynical*. While she participated within the borders of the *cynical* "girl" industry, hers was an identity certainly extramural. Her open command of the *kynical* potential of her sexuality impressed a pronounced *Frechheit* upon her iconography. The spectator of this iconography was thus forcefully reminded of his/her typical participation as a "cothinking cog in the machinery" in the words of Sloterdijk.²⁴⁴ Baker's biographer, Phyllis Rose, noted this potential when she described the physicality of her subject:

²⁴²Cook, 133.

²⁴³Wilhemine Baltinester, "Eine Frau tanzt" [A Woman Dances], Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 2 November 1928, 8.

²⁴⁴Sloterdijk, 470.

She handled it as though it were an instrument, a rattle, something apart from herself that she could shake. One can hardly overemphasize the importance of the rear end. Baker herself had declared that people had been hiding their asses too long. 'The rear end exists. I see no reason to ashamed of it.'²⁴⁵

Sloterdijk reminds us that such unabashed revelation of the body is akin to the onanism of Diogenes in the face of the philosophers: "When someone comes who wants to dissuade human beings from their animal foundations, the kynic must demonstrate to his opponent how short the distance is from the hand to the organ."²⁴⁶ In other words, when subjected to a rationalized and (falsely) idealized life pattern, the kynic considers the proper first response to be physical.

The final element which identified Baker with *Amerikanismus* in Weimar society can best be seen in a study of her role as a "star," buoyed far beyond the traditional collective form of the revue. To be sure, stars were not a new phenomenon in this form of entertainment, but Baker flew particularly in the face of the new model of rationalized motion typified by the Tiller Girls et al. The initial reaction to Baker and to the revues in general concentrated, beyond the blatantly sexual content of the show, upon a discussion of motion in relation to modern society. Herbert Ihering wrote in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* in 1924, echoing the language used to receive Chamberlin in 1927:

The revue accords with the needs of the modern metropolis...For the audience reacts to *movement, to tempo*. The applause for comedians is often weak, but for the Empire Girls [a lesser-known revue] it thunders...*The rhythm, the lightness, the exactness are electrifying*. The American girls are a

²⁴⁵Rose, 24.

²⁴⁶Sloterdijk, 253. See also Wendy Martin, "Remembering the Jungle: Josephine Baker and Modernist Parody," in *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism* eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 310-25.

sight worth seeing and a standard to follow.²⁴⁷

The language of his commentary recalled the neologism common to the period, of terms such as *Menschenoekonomie* [rationalization] and *Produktionsfaktor Mensch* [Production factor man] in that the esthetics of beauty are purely a product of the rationalized, mechanized, and militarized quality of the revue.²⁴⁸ Baker's sexuality and her status as solo performer were intrinsically linked.²⁴⁹ By individualizing the sexuality of dance, Baker and other solo performers were able to bridge the gulf of complacency and force their audiences to confront the dangerous element which had been previously marginalized in the rationalized revue. Again, Baker's iconography confirms a *kynical* assault on the comfortably excited, adding the touch of irrationality, of what must be uncomfortableness for the German spectator, yet complete comfort in the world of *kynical* freedom.

Baker's reviewers observed this pattern. For example, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger's* review of "Bitte einsteigen!" noted that:

In the past Madame Baker was a suitable member of a not unusual Negro troupe, although today she romps about, a failed star in a revue of white performers. A pitiful attempt by the white members of the revue did nothing to patch up this airy bit of nonsense.

In departing from the conventions of beauty as defined through rationalized motion (kickline), Baker created a figure of active, vibrant sexuality which showed in sharp relief

²⁴⁷Jelavich, "Girls and Crisis," 226. See also Alfred Polgar, "Girls," quoted in Segel, 270-272. Italics added.

²⁴⁸Grossman, 164.

²⁴⁹The term "solo" should be qualified here as a relative term. Her performance in the 1928 production, "Bitte Einsteigen!" was not simply Baker on stage by herself. The show was primarily a vehicle to display the talents (and capitalize on the fame) of Baker and to a lesser extent, her co-star, Louis Douglas. Her 1926 performance was a part of the *Revue Negre* and was much less of a "showcase" of her talent alone. She was, though, set apart from the traditional kickline by both her featured position in these productions, as well as by the characteristics referred to above.

against a standardized background of the kickline and the typical nude show.²⁵⁰ In this sense, she violated the conception of “arousing” sexuality. The reviewer continued: “The agile Negro is quite boring. Simply a joke -- she’s not arousing....A group of domestic actors had to carry the weight for the aforementioned jewel.” Fred Hildebrandt, writing for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, commented similarly, calling such deviation from the norm “a proof that bourgeois dance is not an expression of dance-like rhythm, but rhythmic nonsense.”²⁵¹ Exactly the nonsense lying in the wake of Diogenes.

Acknowledgement of this aspect of Baker was not all negative. Max Reinhardt expressed his admiration for “the expressive control of the whole body, the spontaneity of motion.” A review in *Vörrwärts* noted the significance as follows: “There is another type of revue, one that is less intellectual; a genre somewhere between cabaret and opera; defined more than these by spirit.” The reviewer went on to address the different contributions of those involved in the production, although “the rest of the revue [acted] only a frame in which Josephine Baker has the opportunity to achieve success.”²⁵²

Janet Flanner, the *New York Times* correspondent living in Paris, with her own mixture of cynical observation and racialism, once described Josephine Baker as a cross between “a kangaroo, a bicyclist and a machine gun.”²⁵³ The clash of nature and

²⁵⁰Jelavich, “Girls and Crisis,” 227. Jelavich provides a good discussion of the contrasts between revue and the typical nude show. The chief element in this difference was legal - a woman could be fully nude on stage only so long as she remained immobile. Therefore the nude show was characterized by an air of passivity and submission in contrast to the revue, which aestheticized sexuality *as motion*.

²⁵¹*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, 4 November 1928; quoted in Jelavich, “Girls and Crisis,” 235.

²⁵²Rose, 85; *Vörrwärts*, 5 November 1928, 6.

²⁵³Rose, 19.

civilization as seen in her offered several means of approaching the modernization of Germany in the larger discussion of America. As another reviewer wrote, "Her dance is instinct against civilization, it is uproar of the senses. She reveals the unconscious which overthrows our whole world view."²⁵⁴ Through the combination of her irrational sexuality and her primitivist affectations with her defiance of the accepted collective paradigm of the revue, Baker gave Germany an Other figure of great inscriptive potential.

²⁵⁴Quoted in Tower, 48.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION -- "CHICAGO AN DER SPREE"?

Harry Haller, the protagonist in Hermann Hesse's Steppenwolf, remarked:

Just as the gramophone contaminated the aesthetic and intellectual atmosphere of my study and just as the American dances broke in as strangers and disturbers, yes, and destroyers...so, too, from all sides there broke in new and dreaded and disintegrating influences upon my life that, till now, had been so sharply marked off and so deeply secluded.²⁵⁵

These words capture broadly the iconography of America in the Weimar Republic. Here is the perception that these elements, of jazz, primitivism, rationalization and so forth, were "breaking in" upon a secluded, but proud and rich, cultural heritage, "disturbing" and "destroying" the equilibrium supposedly developed over scores of generations. Here is a perception which was also largely illusory. While without a doubt "Amerika" was forced upon Germany to some degree through economic predominance, post-war diplomacy and consumer capitalist exports, crucially, "Amerika" had been a part of German, and European, culture, since the fifteenth century. Hesse was correct in putting these divisive terms in Haller's mouth -- Haller's consternation should be read as an attempt to set Germany apart from surrounding modernities. Therefore, the discourse of *Amerikanismus* resonated more with the need to maintain German exceptionalism, than to dissect or demonize "Amerika."

During the Weimar Republic, *Amerikanismus*, including the reception of Clarence Chamberlin, Charlie Chaplin and Josephine Baker, was not so much concerned with either jazz records or the Charleston, but rather the transformation of society behind such

²⁵⁵Hermann Hesse, Steppenwolf, trans. Basil Creighton (New York: Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1957), 128.

superficial manifestations of change. It is this simple change that Sloterdijk describes when he writes:

The procedure of enlightenment accordingly has two aspects: the acceptance of the better position and the discarding of the previous opinion. This gives rise to an ambivalence of feelings: a gain and a pain.²⁵⁶

The industrialization and corresponding cultural modernization of Germany created these emotional ambivalences amongst the German population in the phenomenon Sloterdijk referred to as enlightened false consciousness. In the increasingly fragmentary culture of Weimar, distinction between stability and crisis began to collapse, heightening cultural tensions brewing since the fin-de-siècle. Inevitably though, “progress” proceeds at the expense of the individual, who must find the means to cope. “Progress” itself, through an internalized idealism, has enabled, but not empowered, this individual to carry on. This “carrying on” however entails a price, which reveals itself in the “gains” and “pains” in the iconography of *Amerikanismus*. The telltale ripples cast by the idealist stone are these kynetic pains. Sloterdijk describes the relationship between the march of cynical progress and kynical reaction as follows: “For, wherever there is so much sacredness, a large profane shadow arises, and the more saints are honored, the more comical saints can be found among them.”²⁵⁷

Amerikanismus must be qualified as a crucial component of the German encounter with modernity in that it provided massively diverse branches of German society certain figures and themes around which to process the pains of this encounter. Rather than simply existing as a broad field of diverse meanings, *Amerikanismus* was a complex discourse with specific sets of meanings, varied as they were. Both Chaplin and Baker, as “comical saints,” functioned in this scheme to express channels of both this incorporation

²⁵⁶Sloterdijk, 13.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 305.

and its simultaneous rejection, hence its frequent and paradoxical ambiguities, as well as its sheer popularity as discourse. Brecht's comments in his review of Chaplin's film *Gold Rush*, do seem applicable to both artists: "I believe that there is nowhere, neither in theater, nor in variety shows, nor in film, that Charlie Chaplin is not. This artist is a *document*, who creates historical events."²⁵⁸

Within a fragmented system of consciousness and political/personal allegiances, there is arguably a tendency for matters to be viewed increasingly in terms of preambivalent parameters -- good/bad, right/wrong, all/nothing, and so forth. Sloterdijk describes such circumstances of intensifying moral oversimplification when he writes "Tense situations no longer call for diffusion so much as for things to be blown to smithereens."²⁵⁹ He implies that the late Weimar period was just such a system, descending a slippery slope toward a true barbarity (but one that was also a true modernity -- Nazism). The discourse around Chaplin and Baker in some sense distracted and diffused the individual's fears during this situation, enabling the average German to continue to participate, but it also created and supported feelings of sensual pleasure and release in the larger environment of "matter-of-factness," thus becoming something truly oppositional, something impudent, in a word, something cynical. But, Sloterdijk cautions, "in the laughter of this decade, gaiety has to step over dead bodies." He argues that laughter, pleasure, during Weimar was a dark phenomenon, mirth on the borders of sanity and madness.²⁶⁰ Thus the "reflected negation" of these American icons was truly oppositional and emancipatory, providing a form of happiness in uncertainty, a mockery of the reality of one's own position, while

²⁵⁸Bertolt Brecht, review of *Goldrausch*, quoted in Hembus, 99.

²⁵⁹Sloterdijk, 306.

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 529.

nevertheless being a crucial component of the Weimar “crisis of classical modernity.”

The ability of Chaplin and Baker to inspire a critical discourse of historical significance was not lost upon the National Socialists after they attained power in January of 1933. Sloterdijk writes, “An essential aspect of power is that it only likes to laugh at its own jokes.” The *Gleichschaltungen* claimed this discourse for its own, building upon limitations put in place in the last days of the Republic.²⁶¹ Chaplin’s last film to appear in Germany until 1945 was shown in March of 1933. During that same year, nudity of any sort was banned from the stage in Germany, effectively eliminating Baker. The two fell victim, like so many others, to the National Socialist fears of “*Amerikanisierung*, *Verniggerung*, and *Verjudung*” [Americanization, niggerization, and judification], expressions of the hegemonic system of cynical idealism “disguised as outrage and that, in the most extreme case, can go as far as extermination.”²⁶² Chaplin and Baker were exiled beyond the sphere of discourse, becoming, as they would be referred to in the Degenerate Art and Music Exhibits staged by the Nazis during the late 1930s, “unpersons.”²⁶³ (figure 26)

²⁶¹In 1931, the Emergency Press Decree (*Presseverordnung*) was enacted, allowing for the confiscation of printed materials by the government, as well as summary cessation for those publications deemed unsuitable. Peukert, 262-72; *A History of German Literature*, eds. Wolfgang Beutin, Klaus Ehlert, Wolfgang Emmerich, et al, 4th ed., trans. Clare Krojzl (New York: Routledge, 1993), 445.

²⁶²Sloterdijk, 103; Tower, 102.

²⁶³Sloterdijk, 103; Hanisch, 30. For example, a two-meter portrait of Chaplin was displayed, bearing the caption, “Is he English? No, he’s Jewish!” See also Gersch, 187-90.

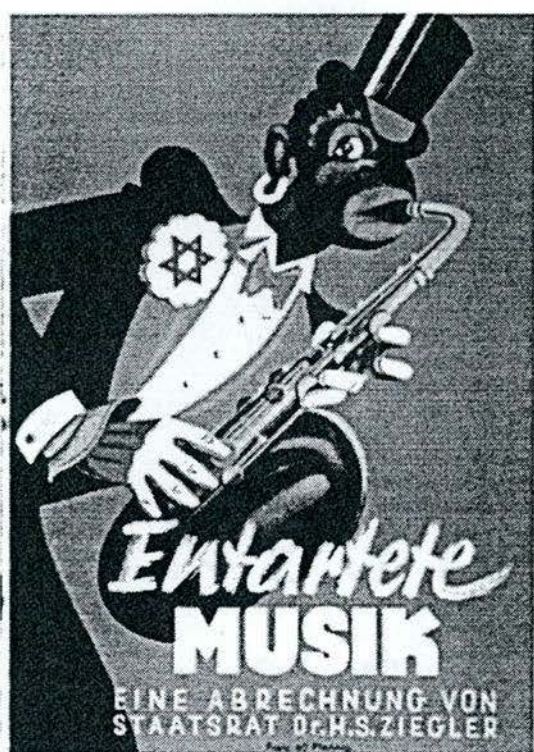


Figure 26. Ludwig Tesch, "Degenerate Music." Cover for the Degenerate Art Exhibit brochure in Munich, 1938, 138.

APPENDIX A

THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE GERMAN PRESS DURING
THE WEIMAR REPUBLICPERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NUMBER OF NEWSPAPERS²⁶⁴

	1917	1926	1928	1930	1932
Right-wing (NSDAP, DNVP, DVP, Economic Party)	16.8%	23.6%	27.3%	22.5%	26.7%
Centre Party (and BVP)	13.8%	12.8%	10.8%	12.9%	12.9%
Left Liberal	16.9%	5.5%	4.1%	3%	2.9%
SPD/KPD	2.7%	5.7%	5.1%	5.5%	4.8%
Non-partisan	49.8%	52.4%	52.7%	55.3%	52.3%

²⁶⁴Table taken from Handbuch der Weltpresse: Eine Darstellung des Zeitungswesens aller Länder [Handbook of the World Press: An Account of the Nature of Newspapers of Other Lands, ed. Deutsches Institut für Zeitungskunde (Berlin, 1932), 146; quoted in Eksteins, 312.

APPENDIX B

FRANZ ROH, NACH-EXPRESSIONISMUS, MAGISCHER REALISMUS:

PROBLEME DER NEUESTEN EUROPÄISCHEN MALEREI.

LEIPZIG: KLINKHARDT UND BIEMMAN, 1925.

Expressionismus

ecstatic objects
 many religious themes
 the stifled object
 rhythmic
 arousing
 excessive
 dynamic
 loud
 summary
 obvious
 close-range image
 forward moving
 large size
 monumental
 warm
 thick coloration
 roughened
 like uncut stone
 work process preserved
 leaving traces
 expressive deformation of objects
 rich in diagonals
 often acute-angled
 working against the edges of the image
 primitive

Post-Expressionismus

plain objects
 few religious themes
 the explanatory object
 representative
 engrossing
 rather strict, purist
 static
 quiet
 sustained
 obvious and enigmatic
 close- and long-range image
 also flowing backward
 large size and many columned
 miniature
 cool to cold
 thin layer of color
 smoothed, dislodged
 like polished metal
 work process effaced
 pure objectification
 harmonic cleansing of objects
 rectangular to the frame
 parallel
 fixed within edges of image
 civilized

APPENDIX C

WLADIMIR MAJAKOWSKI, EXCERPTS FROM "DER GEFLÜGELTE CHARLIE"

(1921) IN JOE HEMBUS, CHARLIE CHAPLIN UND SEINE FILME: EINE

DOKUMENTATION [CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND HIS FILMS: A

DOCUMENTATION]. MÜNCHEN: WILHELM

HEYNE, 1972: 22-24.

A city in Europe. The eyes of the homes shine.
In these eyes gleam tears of many colors.
Above the masts in a 1000 forms,
Rings Charlie's name, and nothing else.

From Los Angeles to here
Over the Ocean
Comes a small, beaten man.

The masses of Europe, provided they still have lips,
Laugh until they can laugh no more,
Laugh themselves sick.
To hell with this idiotic fellow and his cucumber face ["Gurken-Visage"]
...

Too much noise from the cars
Police sirens.
Join the line and wait.
The cinema screams with a thousand voices.
Silence! Bourgeois Europe full of stupidity and vanity.

Not for you, that's what I believe.
Not for you, there's no doubt.
No, at you, that's why Charlie laughs.

He has a fat belly and a low brow,
This European bourgeois...
Is Charlie's moustache all that remains of Europe's former face?

The cinema is spilling over with laughing people.
Silence,....public!
Europe, silence!....
Now he shoots a film

A worldwide sensation.
Charlie with wings.
The heavenly Charlie.

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Frankfurter Zeitung
Die Gartenlaube (Berlin)
Illustrierte Zeitung (Leipzig)
Kölner Frauen-Zeitung
Kölnische Zeitung
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Reclams Universum (Berlin)
Querschnitt (Berlin)
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Theater Arts Monthly (New York)
Völkischer Beobachter (Munich)
Vorwärts (Berlin)
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