Syncopating the Mass Ornament: Race and Girlkultur

Supposing truth to be a woman—how? is the suspicion not well founded that all philosophers, as far as they have been dogmatists, have had a poor understanding of women?
—Friedrich Nietzsche (1886)

Nietzsche’s homology between truth and woman raises more than the question of (male) desire and the production of knowledge. His provocative assertion also turns on the incongruous grammatical gendering of “truth” (Wahrheit) and a pejorative term for “woman” (Weib) in the German language. While Wahrheit is figured through the feminine definite article die, Nietzsche’s woman, das Weib, at least grammatically speaking, is no woman at all. She is, rather, a sexless neutrum. To Nietzsche, this contradiction between truth (Wahrheit) and woman (Weib) is indicative of much more than “some play on words, a grammatical seduction.” To him, this faulty logic reveals the falsity of philosophical knowledge itself, asking us to move away from the idealist construction of truth as embodied in some otherworldly ideal and instead to concentrate on a multiplicity of truths. Nietzsche’s configuration of women, truth, and philosophy, of course, also begins to unravel the complex interweaving of women and modernity in German culture. For in spite of Nietzsche’s warning, male Weimar theorists will see in woman, in particular the “New Woman” (Neue Frau) the origin and essence of modern life.

As Rita Felski argues, the history and theorization of the modern is overdetermined through narrative oppositions of the feminine and masculine. Felski’s analysis of philosophical, sociological, and literary texts suggests not one but multiple configurations of the modern and the feminine. In the Weimar Republic, this relationship expressed itself to a large degree through a conflation of the feminine with the mass, be it through the feminization of the masses as irrational or through the ideal of an undifferentiated, monolithic, feminine
mass culture. Succinctly summarizing the Weimar modality of mass/feminine, Andreas Huyssen writes: “The fear of the masses in this age of declining liberalism is always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass.” To this conflation of the feminine with the mass belonged the discussion of the cultural significance of the New Woman as a unique creation of modernity. In literature, theater, film, and music, the image of a liberated and independent New Woman littered the cultural landscape of the 1920s. Like her American counterpart, the “flapper,” Germany’s New Woman epitomized the liberation, economically, politically, and sexually, of women from nineteenth century society. Of course, as Atina Grossmann and others have pointed out, the reality for these “new” women was not so new at all and most languished under the double burden of housework and professional work.

Within the culturally constructed image of the New Woman, as Lynne Frame has argued, the abstract idea could be further divided into three ideal types: Gretchen, Girl, and Garçonne. Essential here is that all three simultaneously signify racial, gender, and national identities of Germany, the United States, and France, respectively. Of all three, the idea of the American Girl represented a most foreign and threatening variation on the theme of the New Woman. This was because she was structured as a synthesis of the two other forms. She lacked the saturnine intellect of the French Garçonne, yet could still rival the latter in her androgynous play with the masculine and feminine. With the German Gretchen type, the Girl shared an innocence, in this case a residuum of America’s supposedly pubescent culture from which she derived, but also distinguished herself through corporeal and sexual rationalization.

During the Weimar Republic, there was no more quintessential expression of the Girl than the Tiller Girl. Tiller Girls, the most recognized formation of female dance troupes at the time, performed widely on the popular revue stages of Berlin. Though originally founded by British businessman John Tiller, the Girls themselves were viewed as archetypally American. The cultural impact of the Tiller Girls derived from the precision and athleticism of their dancing. Unlike the highly sexualized female dance numbers of the prewar period, the athleticism of the Tiller Girls seemed to portend, or rather to index, the rationalization of entertainment and society. Further, the Tiller Girls were imagined as an active and, for that very reason, threatening form of femininity. Ideologically positioned as modernized popular culture for a modern republic, the Tiller Girls and the revue stage they occupied became primary sites through which the gender of modernity was imagined in Weimar Germany.

It is here, however, that Nietzsche’s suspicion regarding philosophers can
be of aid. For all too often, a focus on rationality unwittingly leads to the essentialization of the Girl as a young, healthy, white woman (figure 11). The hypostatized legs of the Tiller Girls depicted in so many commentaries of the time and in contemporary scholarship have themselves come to act as a synecdoche of the Weimar vision of the Girl. In other words, they end up obstructing our ability to get at the multiple truths of this discourse. In the following, I want to suggest that the Tiller Girls and Weimar Girlkultur more generally were not nearly as antiseptic as such images would lead one to believe and argue that Weimar Girlkultur should be seen as emerging out of the heterogeneous space of the theatrical revue that was populated with Black and white, male and female, German, American, and many other nationalized bodies.

**Girlkultur: Visions in Black and White**

Figure 11 derives from industrial psychologist Fritz Giese’s 1925 work *Girlkultur: Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rhythmus- und Lebensgefühl* (Girlkultur: Comparisons of the American and European Sense of Rhythm and Life). A foundational text of Weimar’s Girlkultur discourse, Giese’s work contains over fifty such illustrations, taken from both
popular and scholarly sources and for which he provided original captions. Introducing his object of study, the first illustration is of the Tiller Girls—legs extended in the air, frozen in uniform majesty, and described by Giese as the “classical form of the American group dance.” As they will later be for Siegfried Kracauer, these icons of Weimar modernity are Giese’s starting point, the surface phenomenon upon which he will build his argument. Turning the page, however, one discovers two images captioned as “Models of primitive ritual dance (Kulttänze) / The ancestors of Girl-culture.” These two images depict dancing Black figures who are neither American nor European but nondistinct “‘primitives’” (in fact, at least one image is of the Aranda people from Australia) intended to suggest a universalized age of primitive Blackness. With the next two illustrations, Giese leaves this eternal-primitive for the world of the metropolis, not of Tiller Girls, but of African Americans, jazz bands, and Black revues, specifically the Chocolate Kiddies—one photograph shows performers from the Chocolate Kiddies revue, while another features a caricatured image of a Black jazz band with the words “USA Made in Germany” visible in the background. The ultimate connection between these images and the Tiller Girls begins to emerge in the series’ final image. Displayed on the next page is the end product of Giese’s visual history of Girlkultur: two photographs of the young, white Girls, one simply identified as the “Ideal of Youth,” while the other, an image of Alaska Liederman, is captioned as “An American Venus.” What this visual narrative suggests and what this work as a whole argues is that, for Giese, Girlkultur is both mediated through and directly influenced by non-Europeans and Blackness.

Such mediation is reflected within the very notion of Giese’s Girlkultur. At least since the late eighteenth century, there existed in German cultural-political discourse an opposition between the supposedly profound, organic, often German Kultur and a superficial and materialist Zivilisation, usually French or American. In this context, the combination of the American Girl with German Kultur (and not Zivilisation) is counterintuitive. It acts to unite the “superficial” and modern Girl with the very traditional, natural idea of Kultur. The “contradictory” nature of the concept was remarked upon by at least one commentator, Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck. Neatly encapsulating the German distinction between Kultur and Zivilisation, Huelsenbeck wrote in his review: “Even the title of the book, Girlkultur, demonstrates . . . an extreme misunderstanding. The work can really only be about Girl-Civilizations in that the word culture implies a duration, consciousness (Besinnung), and valuation of natural ties which are entirely foreign to American progress.” To the contrary, I would suggest that Giese did not misunderstand the import of his title.
Instead, in this provocative title, he consciously plays off this central opposition of the German discourse on modernity. Instead of constructing America and Europe according to a binary logic of opposition, his concept of Girlkultur begins to point towards the ways in which America and Germany are growing closer rather than farther apart. Put differently, Giese’s text can be seen as an attempt at mediation between what was for him the false opposition of Europe and America in the Weimar Republic. To return to the question of race within Girlkultur, one might argue that although Giese’s placement of the African American at the center of his discussion must necessarily be interrogated, it is equally important that one not dismiss it outright. For in it is displayed the same type of cultural mediation that he endeavored to enunciate through his combination of Girl and Kultur.

Adhering to sociology of the surface, Giese constructs a “pathology” of the modern through analysis of its superficial manifestations—Girlkultur as embodied in the Tiller Girls. “Every case has its prehistory,” he writes to open his analysis, adding: “The doctor must learn from its anamnesis, if he wishes to test the results or heal the sickness. Even our ‘case’ is in need of recollection of the conditions which led to its fashionable behavior (Gebarung)” (GK 9).

Here, as elsewhere, Giese’s text hovers between phenomenological and normative modes of argumentation, between merely wanting to diagnose and wanting to cure modern culture. In this, he parallels Georg Simmel, for whom modern culture, though assumed to be deleterious to individual subjectivity, was to be diagnosed, not morally judged. Giese’s text oscillates between a fatalistic conceptualization of Girlkultur, i.e., as objective culture in control of and destined to determine the future of humanity, and as an ambiguous marker of transition between past and future. Thus at times, he argues, “The metropolis has us, technology has us, the economy has us: not we them!” (GK, 27), while at others he notes: “At the same time we want to be clear that Americanism as a fashionable interest should be overcome. America has its advantages and its serious dark side. What fascinates us here as a model are only the things we lack, not those that we also or even more fully possess (noch besser besitzen)” (GK, 141).

Giese’s anamnesis of Girlkultur proceeds along ten different axes of interest. Each section presents an alternate version, or vision, of Girlkultur: aesthetically, philosophically, economically, politically, sexually, and racially. Following the visual narrative of the illustrations discussed above, Giese concentrates in the first section, labeled “Time Movement and Rhythm,” on the position of African Americans in American society. As was argued in chapter 2, the performance of the Chocolate Kiddies marks both a quantitative and
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qualitative break within Weimar jazz culture. Written in the same year, 1925, Giese’s text’s references to this group and their inclusion in the text’s initial visual narrative provide yet further substantiation of this argument. Unlike conservative rants against a soulless, calculating American modernity, Giese’s America is a brutally and racially divided society that has been formatively influenced by slavery and its colonial past. According to him, contemporary American culture, society, and identity result from the complex triadic relationship between European male settlers, African slaves, and European women.

America was long seen in Europe as a “feminine” state, perhaps beginning with the earliest representations of the Americas after Columbus’ “discovery,” but certainly continuing in the belief that women in America possessed inordinate power. The variant of this argument found in Giese is based on the idea that colonial settlements would have been largely male, making the few European women especially prized. With the introduction of slaves from Africa, however, the issue shifts from a question of pure scarcity, to one of fear. He writes: “The Negro and the white woman, this becomes a matter of prestige!” (GK 64). Giese postulates that while the Euro-American male viewed relationships between himself and African women as unproblematic, contact between white women and Black men was construed from the beginning as taboo. For Giese, the relative scarcity of white women in colonial America, when combined with an emerging ideology of “racial purity,” granted white woman a disproportionate amount of power in American society. Using Giese’s terminology, this situation led to the dissolution of the masculine state (Männerstaat) of early colonialism and to the creation of a female state (Frauenstaat), in which women overpowered men because of their racial value. Of the early colonial era of the United States, Giese summarizes that “in this masculine state woman was scarce. She was so scarce as today the white woman in Africa or in the colonies, as today still often scarce in areas of new oil sources or gold mines. She was a jewel, an object worthy of fierce battle” (GK 105).

At this point, the colonial past of the United States becomes not just an explanation of American GIRLKULTUR but a direct corollary to the German present. With the occupation of the Rhineland by French colonial troops from Africa, the specter of interracial relationships between Black men and white women was certainly on the minds of many Germans and, as we have seen in previous chapters, an important element of German jazz discussions. Giese, as well, draws upon the similarity between this homegrown example and America’s racially divided history and present. “The Negro Question and the problem of the ‘Black Horror,’” he writes, invoking both German and American vocabularies of race as a problem or question, “they are related” (GK 64–65). As
modern nations existing in an era of colonialism, the United States and Germany share fundamental similarities concerning the relationship between Black and white. “We know from the south,” he continues, “know from the colonies, that the relationship of the black man to the white woman is something entirely different than that of the white man to the black woman” (GK 65). Again, Giese’s German audience would have been familiar with his discussion of race and the role of women in (colonial) European society. Specifically, Lora Wildenthal argues that the racialized colonialist space became a site for the articulation of German women’s political aspirations at home, a space in which “self-defined colonialist women used ideas of race and gender in the context of formal empire both to gain new freedoms as women and to assert German superiority over ‘backward’ societies.”

Around the issue of “race mixing” in the colonies, divisions within and outside of Germany grew between those asserting the “right” of German colonialists to sexual relations with colonial subjects and others who saw in any such relations a dissolution of national and racial boundaries.

Yet if it appears as if for Giese the descendants of slaves were but psychological projections through which an American national identity could be formulated, he complicates this situation by ascribing to African Americans various forms of cultural agency. In parallel to the mediation of “Girl” and “Kultur” in the title, Giese’s reading vacillates in its description of African Americans between the concepts of Kulturvölker (“cultured peoples”) and Naturvölker (“natural peoples”). Giese states: “The Negro discovered and was the first to artistically form the new rhythm of the metropolis” (GK 29). He adds: “Not the primitive Negroes of Africa. At least not directly these, the first generation. The natural people of the black portion of the world and other foreign primitive peoples stand too close to the primal rhythm of nature” (GK 29). Placing the African American into a line of development from nature to culture, Giese positions them as existing between these two poles. Within the metropolis of the new world, the “natural people” of Africa became the “grown cultural child (erwachsenes Kulturkind)” of America (GK 32). Indeed, as many others had since around 1900, Giese mentions both W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington as examples of African American intellectual achievement (GK 31). Implicit within such proclamations of advancement was quite often a paternalistic attitude that such progress was predicated upon the help of Europeans. In this, his reading of African American culture shares a degree of similarity with other writers of the period, most notably with Arthur Rundt, whose translations of African American modernist poets like Langston Hughes are discussed in chapter 6.
Here, however, Giese unexpectedly argues that such progress carries with it the possibility of critique, even revolt. He sees in jazz a form of critique produced out of interaction with the dominant white society and also, and equally, a musical translation of modernity. Put differently, jazz functions as a musical translation of the cacophony of modernity and the modern metropolis. The African American, writes Giese, “was the first person to completely, intuitively sense this rhythm of the metropolis, technology, the economic, and circulation (Verkehr)” (GK 31–32). With this first moment, Giese falls neatly into European theories of the mimetic capacities of “primitive” peoples, with African Americans appearing as children in a world of adults, blank slates through which the modern environment could be seamlessly translated. Yet in jazz, there also exists a critical impulse against white America and the figuring of African Americans as “second-class civilized human beings” (GK 66). More than a reflection of American modernity, jazz for Giese originates not only in the mimetic recreation of modernity, but in its peculiarity and satire:

Peculiarity (Kuriosität) of the music as it is delivered (herausgeholt) by high-spirited students on pianos, on whose resonance boards are laid newspapers and cigarette butts and a round of beer poured on top. Satire, revenge, and irony are practiced by the Negro on this world of the whites . . . , which ostracizes, separates, and doesn’t consider him a full human being and yet needs him. He imitates the acoustics of the metropolis and mimics in this way the people and their rhythm. This is the first hidden, let us say provincial bar beginning (Vorstädtkasinoanfang) of the jazz band. (GK 33)

The jazz band for Giese is a satire of the metropolis, an ironic enactment of the sounds through which modernity excludes and persecutes African Americans and yet ideologically (and economically) needs them. It is an expression of the repressed, repressive, and, as he suggests, “hidden,” elements of modernization. The naïve mimesis with which he had described African American interaction with white culture is gone here, or at least supplemented by his ascription of a critical agency to African Americans. Jazz is not only to be conceived of as the mechanical reproduction of the sounds of city streets but as an ironic and satirical commentary on white metropolitan culture. In this reading of jazz as, amongst other things, an African American satire of white modernity, Giese combines the reading of jazz as satire with racial critique. Jazz transforms through innovative application and material mistreatment, in the case of the piano, the very normative framework of acceptable and unacceptable sound.
Instead, as in the passage from Giese cited in chapter 2, listening to jazz music recalls for him experiences of the disruptive, fragmentary, and terrorizing side of modernity. Disjointed and discomfiting, it is brought forth via the marginalized figure of the African American. In emphasizing the underside of modernity, while at the same time refusing to seek refuge in an imagined pastoral past, jazz articulates an alternate discourse of progress and modernization. It registers both the inescapability of modernity and the danger it represents to the individual.

Yet while Giese rhapsodized on the revolutionary parody of jazz music, he was only imperfectly able to integrate it with his wider discussion of Girlkultur and the Tiller Girls. The uncomfortable proximity of Black man and white woman implied by his argument was perhaps too much. Towards the end of his discussion, Giese suggests that jazz has meanwhile undergone a process of “acculturation” and appropriation by imitative white bandleaders, and he specifically names the London Sonora Band, which had visited Berlin in late 1924 (GK 33). In order to place jazz within the rationalized world of the Girl, to emphasize the discipline of her rhythm over the raucous parody of the jazz band, Giese must gradually strip jazz’s rhythm of syncopation.

The relatively belated entrance of African American jazz and African American revues, however, complicates this move. In other words, he needs to reconcile the fact that African American revues like the Chocolate Kiddies arrive in Germany only after the Tiller Girls, while according to his developmental narrative, they should have appeared first. Of the appearance of African Americans on the revue stage, he writes:

There were operetta troupes of colored peoples and one of their best performances was the Chocolate Kiddies, who toured Berlin, London, and the continent even after the first appearance of the American Girls. These musically, rhythmically, and theatrically talented, outstanding Negro troupes closed the ring of development and only served to make clear how America in itself came to this novel phenomenon of the Girl troupe—amongst other things. (GK 35)

In the end, though Giese is able to explore the relationship between white women and African American males at the conceptual level, the actual encounter with African Americans in the contemporary disrupts his analysis, forcing him to close “the ring of development.” It is here that one comes up against the limitations of Giese’s analysis, as well as a further example of how African, Afro-German, and African American performers in Weimar could resist Euro-
pean exoticism and primitivism and disrupt German representations of American modernity as ultramodern and ultraprimitive.

**Girls and Saxophones, or Blackness and the Weimar Revue Stage**

As I want to suggest, the origins of Giese’s resistance are to be located on the Weimar revue stage. Through the performances of African American stars like Josephine Baker, Louis Douglas, and many others, this space quickly became a racial “contact zone” in the middle of Weimar Berlin, to use this term from Mary Louise Pratt. Epitomized by the productions of theater directors Hermann Haller at the Theater im Admiralspalast, Erik Charell at the Grosses Schauspielhaus, and James Klein at the Apollo-Theater, the revue was an especially important form of popular culture during the mid-1920s and acted, on- and off-stage, as a site of the enactment and theorization of modernity and modernism. Reflecting the move towards visuality and surface culture, the revue distinguished itself from earlier theatrical modes through a fragmentary narrative and emphasis on Schau, or show, over content. At the same time, it is important to remember that the revue was not merely a show to be seen but also a performance to be heard and jazz and syncopated popular music its perpetual accompaniment. Theodor Lücke commented at the time: “A revue without syncopation appears almost unthinkable today.” Or as Alfred Polgar wrote: “Syncopation is the salt and pepper of the up-to-date dance music. And not only dance music. Syncopation is a symbol of our unruly times, the symbol of a world that has come out of time.” Here, I am less interested in quantifying the actual extent of syncopation within German revues and their jazz symphony orchestras, than in the framing of the revue under this term. Simply stated, my argument here is that Lücke’s and Polgar’s use of the term “syncopation” reveals as much about Girlkultur as the more common tropes of machine-like precision and/or its relation to Fordist production in relation to Weimar women. Instead, like Giese’s racially hybrid genealogy of the Girl, the following will attempt to sketch a counter narrative of the revue around the question of race and gender, to listen for the syncopation of the jazz band, even while seeing synchronized Tiller Girls.

In order to do so, it is first necessary to consider African American, Afro-German, and other performers of African descent as essential, rather than as ancillary to Weimar revue culture. Black performers were present within the capital (and elsewhere) throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, both individu-
ally and as part of larger all-Black casts. Most notable in this regard is the series of three “Negro revues” that appeared in the capital between 1925 and 1926: Chocolate Kiddies in May 1925; La Revue nègre in January 1926, famously starring Josephine Baker, Louis Douglas, and the jazz band of Claude Hopkins; and finally, the production Black People in July 1926, choreographed and authored by the African American Louis Douglas. Though these three shows are fairly well-known, they were by no means the last. In 1928, Sam Wooding returned to Berlin with his Die schwarze Revue (The Black Revue), which premiered in Berlin’s Ufa-Palast in June. Unlike the Chocolate Kiddies, this show remained but a few days in Berlin. It featured Sam Wooding’s jazz band performing symphonic pieces like Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue alongside jazz standards such as “Tiger Rag.” According to the program, it was choreographed in part by Louis Douglas, a figure who represents one of the most important lines of continuity within this period for African American performers on the Berlin revue stage. Performers listed in the program and in advertisements include Johnny Hudgins, Greenlee and Drayton, U. S. Thompson, Edith Wilson, Hilda Rogers, and Benise Dant. Finally, Louis Douglas and Marion Cook starred in their revue Louisiana, which played in Berlin July 1931. Alongside jazz music by the “Louisiana-Jazz-Band,” the show included the African American performer Rose Poindexter, who was also featured in the German film Der brave Sünder (The Good Sinner, dir. Fritz Kortner, 1931).

Even later still, a unique theatrical space for Black performers was created at the Biguine, an entertainment establishment named after the dance of the same name, which had been popularized in 1931 through the Paris colonial exhibition and the activities of musicians like the Martinican Alexandre Stellio. The Berlin bar, which advertised for itself as “Germany’s first Negro-Bar,” opened in February 1932 under the direction of Viktor Skutezky, a film producer involved, for example, in E. A. Dupont’s Variete. If this late date meant that the Biguine would enjoy an existence of less than one year, it was frequented on two occasions by modernist Max Hermann-Neisse and was referenced in the Zeitschrift für Musik and the satirical Munich-based periodical Fliegende Blätter. More specifically, Biguine featured jazz and other performances of African Americans, such as Elisabeth Welch and Louis Douglas, as well as other Black performers like Dinah from Montparnasse, Berthe Vitalien, and others. That in 1932 Skutezky opened a bar featuring Black performers, music, and staff serves as an important reminder that Black performers were present throughout the Weimar Republic.

Beyond such large-scale examples lay further, individual cases, in particular of former German colonials and African migrants, who, often because of
scarce employment opportunities elsewhere, took positions within the popular variety theaters (*Scala* and *Wintergarten*), the film industry, and in the circus acts of Hagenbeck and Sarassani, as well as in jazz bands. For some members of the Afro-German and African migrant community, the entertainment industry offered a modicum of economic stability when other work was difficult to find. Similar to the situation Tobias Nagl describes for Black actors in Weimar cinema and for jazz bands in early Weimar, the names of these performers rarely surface in contemporary reviews and, because of their great mobility within the European performance circuits, appear and disappear in official registers. In addition, determination of their identity can be complicated by the fact that such performers regularly took on Anglicized names such as “Jonny,” “Jimmy,” “King Charles,” “Louis,” or “Tom.” Still, one might mention here the case of François Benga, better known in the period as Féral Benga, a Senegalese dancer who had worked in Paris with Josephine Baker at the *Folies Bergère* and whose signature act at the time was a parody of Baker. During late 1920s and early 1930s, Benga also worked in Berlin at *Wintergarten*, at the *Atrium-Beba-Palast*, and the *Alhambra*, the latter two being primarily movie houses. While working at the revue, such performers of African descent could also encounter African American performers who found themselves in one of the many revue theaters. Rarely stars in the German press, African American performers like Ralph Grayson, Fernandes “Sonny” Jones, Marion Cook, Sadie Hopkins, Ruth Walker, Ruth Bayton, and Nina McKinney performed in a variety of shows and venues and, in the case of Bayton, were seemingly able to profit greatly.

If this often meant the adoption of roles that fit with the mix of exoticism, eroticism, and internationalism so typical of the revue, these representations need to be interrogated as much for what they reveal about German images of Blackness as what they conceal about them. On the Weimar stage, racial stereotyping tended to work via the types of roles offered Black performers: they were often, though not always, employed as dancers or as background figures to indicate an exotic milieu. Yet as a result, the German revue became a space of interracial encounter in which Black and white regularly came into contact, often staging the very same racialized identity formation between Black man and white woman analyzed by Giese. In the following, special attention will be paid to instances of contact between Black performers and white Girls via jazz and the saxophone. Though as discussed in chapter 1, such examples hardly constitute the first or the only examples of Black and white performers on the Weimar stage, their unique status, situated between discourses of gender, race, sexuality, and music, position them as jazz effect.
Before proceeding, I want to take a moment to explain my focus on images containing the saxophone, an instrument that by 1926 had become an important icon of jazz. In each of the jazz novels analyzed in the previous chapter, the figure most representative of jazz possesses a saxophone (Lord Henry, John van Maray, and Makua-Taka). As such, it functions as much more than synecdoche for jazz *writ large*; those who possess the saxophone also symbolically possess jazz. Given the racialized construction of jazz within Weimar, Black performers were regularly depicted holding saxophones, regardless of whether they played the instrument, to signify their authentic relationship to jazz and jazz’s relationship to Blackness. The example of Ernst Krenek’s Jonny from *Jonny spielt auf* (*Jonny Strikes Up*) is again a paradigmatic example of this use. Though Jonny is a jazz fiddler (the entire opera revolves around his theft of a violin) and also plays the banjo, he is introduced carrying a saxophone. While he will blow a few notes on this instrument in this opening scene, the saxophone has no significance for the remainder of the plot. Of course, in promotional material, Jonny was regularly depicted blowing on this saxophone in order to index his jazz bona fides. A mobile icon of the jazz republic, the saxophone proved particularly useful as a signifier of jazz legitimacy.

Given this context, it is significant that the saxophone and its attendant associations also came to play a conspicuous role within the representation of the Girl and New Woman. On the one hand, saxophone-playing Black men were regularly depicted alongside white women in both avant-garde and more popular representations. If in many cases the saxophone remained within the hands of a Black performer, there exist numerous examples that depict not African Americans, but New Women playing, i.e., possessing, the saxophone. As Michael Cowan has shown, the phenomenon of the “Saxophonbläserin” (female saxophone player) was widespread within Weimar culture, existing in film (*Saxophon Susi*, dir. Carl Lamač, 1928), popular song (*Die Susi bläst das Saxophon / Susi Blows on the Saxophone*) and the revue, marking the “female saxophonist as the pinnacle of a new autonomous and career-oriented womanhood.” Indeed, images of saxophone-playing women are extremely common, such as actress Brigitte Helm in publicity stills for *Metropolis*, cabaret performer Rosa Valetti posing in a shot for the magazine *Uhu*, actress Hertha Schroeter in a photograph by Yva, a shot of the dancer Trude Hesterberg from a revue, or even in the painting “The Female Saxophone Player” by the British artist Laura Knight that accompanied Vicki Baum’s serialized novel *Feme (Secret Sentence)* in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. These saxophone-playing New Women can be said to appropriate jazz’s status as a cultural marker of
empowerment, as had the male jazz protagonists in Janowitz’s and Schickele’s jazz novels. More than this, I would also argue that these solo performances articulate the New Woman’s possession of jazz at the same time as they displace the threat of Black masculinity. At once exorcizing and appropriating jazz’s Blackness, such representations are powerful reminders of race’s presence within Weimar jazz culture, even when seemingly absent.

While the latter two image types, Black saxophone player with white woman and solo white female saxophone player, are the predominant modes of representation, there is one further modality. This form, which includes all three elements, the Girl, the saxophone, and a Black man, also existed in representations of the Weimar revue stage. The first example (figure 12) comes from the Haller revue, *Wann und Wo (When and Where)*, which premiered in Berlin’s *Admiralspalast* on September 2, 1927. Haller’s fourth great revue of the decade, the program was written by director Haller himself, along with Rideamus (pseudonym for Fritz Oliven) and Willi Wolf, featuring the music of composer Walter Kollo. Though none of the contemporary reviews mention this fact, *When and Where* was also a revue featuring Black male and white female performers sharing the same stage.

At the same time, there is also something unique and uniquely significant to this scene’s placement of a Black performer alongside the omnipresent Girls. This becomes clear when compared to standard representations of the Tiller Girls. In images like those from Giese, the Girls are depicted in a linear fashion, often encompassing the entire breadth of the image, and are presented so that the individuality of the performers becomes overpowered by their sartorial and physical uniformity. Further, the Girls typically are presented with exposed legs, preferably performing some sort of recognizable motion which functions to reference the synchronized movements for which they were best known. Frozen and desiring of reanimation by the viewer’s imagination, the Girls are abstracted from the original context of performance. By contrast, in the image from *When and Where*, the Girls appear almost miniaturized in comparison to the overpowering scenery. Indeed, the set design plays a role equal in symbolic power to the action on the stage. While images of naked women were by no means exceptional on the Weimar stage, the scenery’s combination of the nude woman with a saxophone is important as a further iteration of the solo saxophone-playing Girl. In addition, her slick, short hair, large bracelets, round hips, and faux banana skirt should be seen as in conversation with images of Josephine Baker and other Black performers circulating during this time. Moving down from the scenery to the Girls themselves, one immediately notices their asymmetrical grouping on either side of the saxophone’s bell. In
relation to the Black performer in the middle, the Girls are not only disrupted by his presence, they are also displaced. Temporarily removed from the logic of rationalization, the line formed by their bodies appears less refined than in other images, despite this image’s obvious staging.

The fundamental importance of this image, however, is contained within the relationship between the two central figures standing in the midst of the girls. Positioned around the opening of the saxophone’s bell, an instrumentless Black man stands facing a Girl holding a prop saxophone. The two performers here are likely to have been Marcelle Rahna, the revue’s French star, and the African American dancer Fernandes “Sonny” Jones.53 Jones was the long-time partner of Louis Douglas, and he had first come to Europe and Germany in the pre-war era as part of “Belle Davis and her Piccaninnies.”54 In 1917, he had also performed as a dancer in drummer Louis Mitchell’s Seven Spades, an important example of early African American bands in Europe during World War I. Jones’ presence in this jazz-age production is thus a further reminder of how Weimar jazz culture is marked as much by rupture as by con-
tinuity in terms of the Black presence. Turning again to the image, while Jones’ location vis-à-vis the oversized saxophone suggests his connection to the instrument, his physically present partner draws away from him, holding her palm up to him. What the image depicts, then, is a battle over representation, of jazz and the Girl. Though creating proximity and, indeed, contact between Black and white performers, the staging also suggests the attempt to control this.

As the foregoing has argued, the more the Girl and New Woman came to approximate her American counterpart, to not only dance to, but also perform jazz via the saxophone, the more her identity threatened to “darken.” Specifically, the revue performer Jenny Steiner developed an act that centered around a parody of Josephine Baker in performances between 1926 and 1929. If, following Patrice Petro, one sees in the New Woman and Girl “as much a racialized as a gendered ideal,” encounters like that staged in *When and Where?* play off (and into) the German public’s concern over the racial health and purity of white German women, the fear, for example, that these women were “becoming less motherly, both quantitatively and qualitatively.” Yet pushing Petro’s argument a bit, one can suggest second that this racialization occurred not only along the axis of German racial purity in opposition to Blackness, but that the image of the New Woman itself bordered on a racially hybridized identity between Black and white.

**Recuperating Jazz’s Whiteness and the Rejection of the Black Revue**

Towards the end of the 1920s, the revue underwent a period of crisis that ultimately resulted in the end of the era of the grand revues. The live, theatrical revue was gradually replaced, on the one hand, by the much more mobile and potentially more profitable sound film and, on the other, by the less modern but potentially less offensive operetta. For example, Charell quit the revue business, eventually directing the grand film *Der Kongress tanzt (The Congress Dances)* in 1931. Haller himself put on his last revue in 1928, *Schön und schick (Pretty and Fashionable)* and the *Admiralpalast* would likewise turn to operetta in the early 1930s. In the midst of this period of transition, Josephine Baker returned to Berlin to star in the revue *Bitte einsteigen! (All Aboard!)* at the *Theater des Westens*. The music for this production was composed by Friedrich Hollaender, author of amongst many other things, the unforgettable jazzy music featured in von Sternberg’s *Der Blaue Engel (The Blue Angel)* from 1931.
Despite the combination of these two figures, the revue was an unmitigated financial flop. As Alan Lareau argues, the show’s failure was due both to the small size of the theater, the general crisis in the revue and its Blackness. He argues that the show’s failure indicates that the interest in Baker had been primarily a fad and that by 1928, “the discourse of the ‘primitive modernity’ of blacks and jazz had already run dry.” Lareau is certainly correct to note that this period witnessed a significant number of attacks on jazz and Blackness, which can be seen across a wide range of issues—in the waning enthusiasm over Wooding, the negation of the jazz symphony in Weimar literature, and now in the apparent rejection of Baker. For me, however, the critiques of the late 1920s reveal less the superficial nature of the investment than their opposite, namely insecurity over the depth of connection between jazz and Weimar culture. In other words, in Baker’s less than triumphal return to Berlin, one witnesses not the death knell of jazz’s or Baker’s relevance for Germany but a reinterpretation of the relationship.

At the same time, the turn “away” from jazz did impact the ways in which the connection between the New Woman, the Girl, Blackness, and jazz was framed. The period between 1929 and 1933 witnesses multiple voices within the German jazz discussion, who figure Black jazz and its popularity as an historical moment to be relegated to the background, an ephemeral fling with modernity, despite the ongoing presence in Berlin of African American and Black performers in revues such as Douglas’ Louisiana or at the Biguine. Just as Giese tried to explain away the coexistence of Sam Wooding’s Black jazz and the white Tiller Girls by suggesting the former closed the ring of development, such writers and artists push against the ongoing presence of Black performers. The 1931 film Die große Attraktion (The Great Attraction, dir. Max Reichmann) represents a case in point of this tonal shift. Ostensibly a vehicle for the tremendously popular singer Richard Tauber, the thin plot revolves around the love life of the fictional tremendously popular singer Ricardo, played by Tauber. It features numerous performances by variety show artists, acrobats, strongmen, and tango dancers (one of which is played by the famous Weimar-era actress Margo Lion). In fact, given that the film’s second act takes place in Berlin’s Wintergarten, it is likely that these represent actual performers of the period. The Great Attraction is thus as much filmic representation as rare document of Berlin popular culture in the early 1930s.

The manner by which Blackness and jazz are thematized within the film reveals how their relation to the Girl and New Woman were reframed for this period of crisis. Specifically, we see this in the narrative arc of the main female protagonist Kitty, played by the 21-year-old dancer Marianne Winkel-
stern, who had performed as a soloist for Charell at the *Grosses Schauspielhaus* during the latter half of the 1920s. During this period she performed alongside Black revue performers, for example, in Charell’s 1927 production of *Madame Pompadour*, which starred Fritzi Massary and Walter Jankuhn, but also featured, in addition to Winkelstern, the African American Ruth Walker and “Snowball,” whose real name was Charles Harris, an African American youth who had appeared with Paul Whiteman in New York. Winkelstern’s dance and revue background is put to use in the first scene of the film, which takes place at a Parisian music hall. After a series of establishing shots that overlay Parisian streets, the Eifel Tower, and blinking advertisements for Ricardo’s performance at the *Casino de Paris*, the initial scene opens unexpectedly onto a shot of a blackfaced Winkelstern carrying a saxophone in her hand in a manner reminiscent of Krenek’s Jonny. Wearing an Afro-wig that will soon carry symbolic importance for the film, she performs on the instrument while the background fills with a large troupe of dancing girls, later to be revealed as the Jackson Girls, one of many Tiller Girl clones of the period. The editing crosscuts images of Kitty’s racialized, sexualized jazz performance with the chorus-line kicks of the Girls. In other words, this presentation telescopes the two aforementioned image modalities: the blackfaced Kitty is both the Black man playing a saxophone for white women and a New Woman playing a saxophone solo. Further, it is significant to note that her name “Kitty,” both infantilizes her as well as resonates with the description of Blacks as “chocolate kiddies” following on the revue of 1925. Indeed, Rose Poindexter portrayed the Black dancer “Kiddy” in the previously mentioned film *The Good Sinner*, also from 1931.

At the same time, in *The Great Attraction*, this intensification of Blackness vis-à-vis the white New Woman serves a primarily negative function in the plot. After finishing her performance, the blackfaced Kitty runs offstage, only to come to an abrupt halt as she sights members of Ricardo’s entourage. Through shot-countershot editing, the viewer watches Kitty watch as she waits for Ricardo. After entering the scene, Ricardo pauses for a moment before looking directly in Kitty’s smiling direction. Though the viewer registers through his pause that he has caught a glimpse of her, Ricardo does not stop and merely continues on his way. At this point, Kitty looks to her right and left and comes to see for herself what Ricardo (and the viewer) has already realized: two bare-chested Black Africans are standing next to her (figure 13). These two figures are in the far background when Kitty stops mid-run to look for Ricardo and then suddenly appear, like a trick-shot effect from cinematic history, the moment Ricardo’s gaze meets hers. Turning towards first one and
then the other Black male, she looks down at her own cosmetically darkened skin and breaks out in laughter. Now realizing that Ricardo had ignored her because he had taken her for Black, after a quick rub of her similarly black-faced cheek, she takes off her wig, revealing the white skin around her hairline.

In an inversion of the well-known scene at the end of American film *The Jazz Singer* (1927) in which Jack Robin (Al Jolson) applies blackface make-up in front of a dressing-room mirror, Kitty, now seated in front of a mirror, removes her blackface makeup for the audience. As Kitty continues to remove her Blackness and reveal her whiteness, we witness, through a series of cross-cuts, the first performance by Ricardo. Significantly, Ricardo is seen with a modern dance band, which includes, amongst other instruments, a saxophone. In this way, Ricardo himself can be considered part of Weimar jazz culture, a culture that, while still foreign, has become Europeanized or, rather, whitened. So if Kitty’s initial performance represents the dangers of Blackness and Americanized femininity, Ricardo can be said to represent its overcoming through white male masculinity. In other words, through the opposition between the “Black” jazz Kitty and the white jazz Ricardo, *The Great Attraction* stages the whitening of jazz via the prism of gender.

The interweaving of these elements continues as the plot progresses with Ricardo heading to Berlin and Kitty, leaving the Jackson Girls behind, following him. When she next approaches Ricardo on the train, she has transformed herself from the foreign, Black New Woman of Paris into a more suitable white German woman. Nonetheless, Ricardo still resists her, at this point professional, advances. Her contractual obligations play a pivotal role here and even though she will impress him in Berlin through an impromptu saxophone performance (this time without blackface), he forbids her from officially joining
his troupe until she is released from her contract by Jackson. Given that the film will end the heterosexual union of Kitty and Ricardo, the preexisting contract functions both as economic and marriage contract, with possession of Kitty transferring from one white male to the next.

It is important here to consider how jazz and its Blackness, or rather whiteness, inform Kitty’s transformation. During the early 1930s in particular, numerous authors sought to account for what they viewed as a disconnect between what European jazz musicians performed and the images and sounds evoked by the word “jazz,” namely Black dancing and music, especially within the right-wing and fascist politics. Here, it is useful to recall that in April 1930 in Thuringia, the Nazi culture minister Wilhelm Frick issued a “Decree Against Negro Culture.” This decree was largely viewed as directed against jazz and one of the ways jazz’s defenders came to its aid was to distance the music from the “Negro culture” being attacked by the Nazis and others. Though as we will see in the next chapter, this type of argument does not arise in the 1930s, it does solidify during this period and, to no small degree, is due to the threat of state intervention against jazz. In one such article published in 1932, the mathematician A. Sacher-Woenckhaus sought to “defend” jazz and its associated dances by arguing “our modern dances are not nigger-dances anymore.” Indeed, this statement echoes that given by “Bruno Weil,” potentially Kurt Weill, in response to the April 1930 ban on jazz referred to above: “The claim that jazz music, as it is exclusively practiced today, is Negro music, demonstrates a degree of ignorance that calls into question Mr. Frick’s qualifications to carry the title ‘minister of culture.’” Sacher-Woenckhaus goes further, however, arguing for the progressive whitening of jazz, so that if it started out as Black, its true value lies today in the hands of white European composers. He suggests: “There are no Black Hindemiths, Honeggers, Weills, Stravinskys and others, who have shown how to master jazz, to make it into a source of unheard of tonal appeal . . .” Sacher-Woenckhaus’ broader point here is that the European dominance of jazz has reached the point at which the name jazz is no longer useful to describe such works; while they have been influenced by jazz and African Americans, their current form is due primarily to Europeans, and just as one today accepts previously foreign cultural artifacts like tobacco or potatoes as European, so too should Germans accept this new jazz.

Ricardo’s character and his music fall broadly into line with the argument of Sacher-Woenckhaus and others: while Ricardo’s music is influenced by African American culture, it is presented in a deracinated, universal, and nonthreatening form. Significantly, Ricardo’s current status hides an earlier traumatic encounter with dangerous female sexuality. As the viewer learns, Ricardo’s initial resistance
to Kitty’s advances was rooted within the trauma of his ex-wife’s decision to leave him to pursue an illicit affair with another man and a career in America. It is only after Ricardo himself confronts this, his own jazz past, that his masculinity can be fully recuperated. In a scene occurring towards the end of the film, Ricardo’s wife’s ex-lover appears in a bar where Ricardo, Kitty, and other members of the troupe are dining. In Ricardo’s rage at seeing him, he grabs the man by his coat and drags him outside of the restaurant. After the tussle, the two men leave and go to another establishment, with an appropriate text appearing on its window: “Restauration.” In the following scene, the former lover hands Ricardo a picture of his ex-wife, revealed in a close-up to be a young cigarette smoking New Woman. After contemplating the image, Ricardo tosses the photograph back to him, signaling his complete break with her. Having finally overcome the trauma inflicted by the New Woman, Ricardo is now ready to return to normalcy and to do so with the equally transformed Kitty.68 The film’s final scene features a joint performance by Ricardo and Kitty of the song “Du warst mir ein Roman” (“You were a Novel to Me”).69 Yet when Kitty emerges from the back of the music hall to accompany his singing on her saxophone, the Blackness ascribed to her, to the saxophone, to the New Woman and jazz, has all but been erased.

In the early 1930s, the ideas surrounding the whiteness of jazz and female sexuality served to disperse the threat of Blackness and the New Woman that had been central to Giese’s Girlkultur from 1925. Across a variety of cultural works, this shift can be seen as an important index of a conservative turn in German culture, something accelerated, though by no means initiated, by the Great Depression in 1929 or by governmental actions taken against jazz by the National Socialists beginning in 1930. Nonetheless, this shift had important ramifications for the German engagement with jazz in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which will be discussed in the following chapter in greater detail. Still, as should also be clear, the revue stage played a central role in the contestation and construction of both jazz and the New Woman. From Josephine Baker to Louis Douglas, Fernandes “Sonny” Jones and beyond, the African American and Black presence on the stage did not merely exist alongside, but lay at the very heart of the debate over Girlkultur, with the whiteness of the Girl, like that of Kitty, emerging at their points of intersection.

Rereading Kracauer and the Mass Ornament

One question arising out of the foregoing analysis is whether (and how) the connection between Blackness and the Girl entered the work of surely the most
famous commentator on the subject, Siegfried Kracauer. Or, as James Donald suggestively asks: What if Kracauer met Josephine Baker? Certainly, given the prevalent use of Black performers in Weimar revues, it is unlikely that Kracauer did not have opportunity to meet any number of Black performers, and so it is less a question of counter-factual history than whether he chose to document these encounters in his writings. As Hans Pehl notes, Kracauer did in fact review the performance of the African American dancers “Myron and Pearl” in late 1928, yet he did so without mentioning that they were Black. Given this and other examples of Kracauer’s response to Black performances discussed below, the more relevant question to ask is why Kracauer’s work, in particular that on the revue, generally elided discussion of race.

Before proceeding to address this question directly, it is first necessary to look at Kracauer’s perspective on the revue and the Tiller Girls. Kracauer’s texts on revue culture and the Tiller Girls act, as in Giese, as an object of analysis through which to model his unique methodology for analyzing seemingly insignificant cultural ephemera like the Tiller Girls. In his 1927 “Mass Ornament,” the Tiller Girls come to stand for an entire era, one struggling to comprehend the radical changes resulting from a totalizing and rationalizing capitalist system. Of course, as Miriam Hansen has recently argued, what makes Kracauer’s essay so valuable is not the comparison between the legs of the Tiller Girls and hands of the workers on Ford’s assembly lines, each standard trope of Weimar-era discourse on Girlkultur. Instead, she argues that “in contrast with either enthusiastic or lapsarian accounts, Kracauer’s essay assumes a more dialectical stance towards the phenomenon, reading it as an index of an ambivalent historical development.” For Hansen, the Tiller Girls in Kracauer’s theory are “heuristic and symptomatic”: they both suggest the extent to which capitalist rationality has inserted itself into the natural world (here, the human body) as well as point towards what is missing, namely conscious understanding on the part of the audience, i.e., more enlightenment. As Kracauer once wrote, capitalism’s shortcoming is not that “it rationalizes too much but rather too little.” At the same time, it is precisely this functionalization of the Tiller Girls within his broader theory of modernity that lends itself to the antiseptic portrayal one often finds in Kracauer: they are synchronous, rather than syncopated, abstracted rather than contextualized on the Weimar stage, geometry machines rather than the imperfect human bodies we see in the image from When and Where? Closer inspection of Kracauer’s texts from the period reveals a series of questions relating to racial contact that are nonetheless present within his work. While in his texts on the revue and Tiller
Girls these tend to exist as traces, other texts of his, in particular those on jazz performances and Blacks in Paris, push their presence to the foreground.\textsuperscript{76}

Generally, and much in tune with his discussion of gender, racial difference functions primarily as an absence with Kracauer’s thought. Just as the Tiller Girls cease to be feminine individuals within the mass ornament and instead serve primarily to “point [. . . ] to the locus of the erotic,” Africans and African Americans, as well as cultural expressions like jazz, cease to be “Black” in his work.\textsuperscript{77} They point instead to the function of race as a sign of ideologically constructed difference. One intention behind this negation of difference is to show the global reach of capitalist rationality. With this argument, one imagines, he hopes to convince his European readers to forego the exoticist escapism of the revue or travel films and to instead focus on becoming conscious of the inner workings of their world’s reality.

Kracauer’s method here is to simultaneously point towards the banality of things treated as radically different by mainstream culture, while highlighting the exoticness and strangeness of mainstream, middle-class German culture. In this, he invokes the idea of a dialectics of identity in difference and difference in identity, a procedure that simultaneously serves to familiarize the foreign and defamiliarize the self in an act of enlightenment. A particularly striking example of this tactic occurs within the initial framing of his 1930 study of white-collar workers, \textit{Die Angestellten (The Salaried Masses)}. As Kracauer implies, the white-collar worker, at least according to a Marxist theory of development, should have been in steady decline. Yet during the Weimar Republic, their ranks swelled as much as their politics appeared to veer to the right. Yet another non-synchronous moment of capitalism, their existence is to him an example of the “exoticism of a commonplace existence.”\textsuperscript{78} Turning the tables on the white-collar workers, Kracauer writes that their daily life is “more unknown than that of the primitive tribes at whose habits those same employees marvel in films.”\textsuperscript{79} Indeed, Kracauer sees himself as a Kurtz of sorts, journeying into the heart of darkness that is the modern metropolis, suggesting that his exploration of the salaried masses’ culture is “perhaps more of an adventure than any film trip into Africa.”\textsuperscript{80} This satirical and self-deprecatory gesture indicates the extent to which Kracauer’s use of tropes relating to Blackness was a highly self-reflexive one, simultaneously eliding and invoking a crude dialectic of primitivism and modernity.

The most explicit example of Kracauer’s ironic deployment of this vocabulary is the 1928 article “Negerball in Paris” (“Negro Ball in Paris”).\textsuperscript{81} The mise-en-scene of Kracauer’s short vignette is a small, inconspicuous Parisian
locale for Black Parisians in the *Quartier de Grenelle*. He uses this setting to hint at the distinction between the Black inhabitants of Paris and Black entertainers and performers, like Josephine Baker, to whom visitors flock in order to experience “exoticism.” Yet, as he suggests, even these rather uninteresting Blacks of the suburbs are hunted by white tourists as entertainment game, having had to repeatedly change gathering locations in order to avoid what Kracauer calls “white curiosity.” For Kracauer, this is but a “futile game of hide-and-seek, as the foreigners always follow again on their heels.” This inversion of foreign and foreigners is central to his argument. Blacks are identified not through their difference but through their identity with their fellow Parisians. Meanwhile, the foreigners are the white (German?) visitors seeking to find their vision of Blackness reinforced through “real” experience. Throughout the text, Kracauer plays with the primitivist imagination of his readership. For example, he writes of the scene inside as being marked by the “impenetrable darkness of the haircuts, the red, green, and yellow vestments glisten like tropical flowers towards the heavens.” His language here mirrors the organic metaphors typically used to describe Black subjectivity. However, he inverts their normal meaning when he corrects himself, stating: “This is no Negro ball, this is a Parisian provincial ball, which just happens to be put on by blacks.” In a word, these Blacks are “indigenous products,” with little other than their skin color to differentiate them from other Parisians. As the Tiller Girls point towards the erotic, these figures point towards the exotic, and in revealing their ideological function within the capitalist entertainment system, Kracauer seeks to disrupt the myth of Blackness within Europe and Germany. Having de-luded his reader into imagining the people of the hall forming an organic forest of “Black savages,” he instead proceeds to unmask the European public’s image of Blackness as an artificial, white projection.

Kracauer concludes his short discussion by considering the symptomatic meaning of the scene. For him, these Blacks’ non-difference signals not merely the interrelation and ultimate similarity of different groups but is a “sign of the exoticism of the Parisian population, that true exoticism that cannot be derived from geography.” We have already encountered this double move of familiarizing the “exotic” and “exoticizing” the familiar before, namely in his better-known studies of the white-collar workers and the Tiller Girls. Yet here, Kracauer also, even surprisingly, suggests the existence of actual, rather than merely ideologically, produced difference. Kracauer’s own “exotic” is neither defined by nor reducible to race; instead, his exotic is something metropolitan, modern: “Paris takes Africa into itself too. For this reason it can become a
harbor for the Negroes.” As Theodore Rippey suggests, Kracauer potentially has in mind “Paris as exotic zone a vision of a necessarily urban, modern space, in which different groups experience continuous, multifocal [contact], and where equal cultural footing guarantees each group the freedom to appropriate any other’s ways on its own terms.” To be sure, such a situation was hardly common, and one might counter that Kracauer’s optimistic vision of the equality experienced by Africans in Paris is overstated. At the same time, both this text as well as the ethnographic framing in *The Salaried Masses* point to the important role Blackness and Black cultural expression could play in his work. Working with the same methodology employed to decipher the mass ornament, i.e., working “through the center of the mass ornament, not away from it,” Kracauer decipheres the meaning of Black performance for white European audiences. While validating its desire for the exotic, for difference in the undifferentiated mass metropolis, he wants to redirect such energies by debunking the associated natural-organic vocabulary and by gesturing towards a conceptualization of modern identity that would welcome, rather than extinguish or ideologically exploit, such difference.

Still, as Kracauer would have been aware, this ideal was all but impossible given the economic, social, and cultural position of Africans, Afro-Europeans, and African Americans in Europe. Indeed, in a short review article written a few months before “Negro Ball in Paris,” Kracauer himself struggles with his own fascination with Blackness, the revue, and jazz. Not coincidentally, it is a review of a 1928 performance of Sam Wooding, who was this time performing in Frankfurt’s *Schumann Theater*. Though he devotes but a paragraph to their contribution to the show (which also featured Russian, French, and Chinese performers), the dancing girls, step dances, and singers do not fail to leave an impression on him. Of the music, he writes: “It rustles as if from jungles, derisive laughter brays into the sweet pianissimo and the desire wallowing in the darkness is disenchanted by loud tumult.” An aural analogue to match his own unique methodology, Sam Wooding’s jazz sets out from the audience’s primitivist inclinations only to break with them. And just as he was wont to place himself alongside the pleasure-seeking white-collar workers, here too he finds himself enthralled by the music. In a passage similar to Lion’s later account of his first experience of Wooding or the discussion of the fictional jazz concert in America by Makua-Taka, Kracauer notes: “It’s a hard lot to only be allowed to look; the music drives into your legs and they want do dance along at any price.” Of course, Kracauer doesn’t dance, doesn’t take part, both because of the setting and, one suspects, because he didn’t allow himself to. To
have danced, with the girls, to jazz, would have been to collapse what he viewed as a necessary critical distance, no matter how slight, so that he could point the way out from within.

Yet if Kracauer ultimately resists the temptation to create jazz, rather than merely enjoy it from a distance, a unique experiment in jazz was already underway in Frankfurt, little more than a mile away from where Kracauer was sitting in the Schumann Theater. In January 1928, the local music conservatory, Dr. Hoch’s, began teaching American jazz to its German students, developing an entire program of study devoted to the music under the direction of a 22-year-old Hungarian composer Mátyás Seiber. Bringing the bar, revue, and street into its esteemed institution, the creation of the Jazzklasse unleashed a debate about jazz and its role in Weimar society that has few parallels.