

# Visual Music: Jazz, Synaesthesia and the History of the Senses in the Weimar Republic\*

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In 1926, Henry Ernst published the short memoir ‘My Hunt for the “Tschetzpend”’ (*Meine Jagd nach der “Tschetzpend”*) in the German entertainment musician’s journal *Artist*. A unique document, it provides a rare account of a Weimar musician’s encounter with, and education in, early jazz. Ernst first heard the word ‘jazz’, he claimed, at the end of an engagement in Switzerland, when a hotel manager asked him to play ‘Tschetzpend’ (‘jazz band’) when he returned the following season. The word and its meaning were enigmatic, Ernst explained, since ‘scarcely a musician in Germany knew what a jazz band or a Shimmy actually was’ in 1920. Much of the rest of the story narrates his frustrating pursuit of the music and the wrong characterizations he received from many different sources. Finally, prepared to hand in his resignation, he discovered some sheet music in a local bookstore that included a photograph of a London jazz band. The moment was an epiphany, he asserted; his now well-established jazz band was based on this discovery. Strangely, the most informative aspect of the sheet music was the not the musical notes but the photograph. ‘No Egyptologist had ever taken into his hand more lovingly, and studied more intensely, a newly discovered piece of papyrus than I did this Jazzband-photograph’, he claimed.<sup>1</sup>

But how could an image inform music so decisively? How could a photograph dictate the perception of sound? Ernst’s sensory border-crossing creates cognitive dissonance: for Ernst, this translation seemed so evident that he didn’t see the need to explain it; for us, it remains mysterious.

Ernst’s presupposition does not just seem counterintuitive; it also contradicts a recent narrative of the modern senses. A number of scholars have argued that a key component in the modern understanding of perception is the *separation* of the senses.<sup>2</sup> By the 1840s, philosophers and physiologists had broken up the classically unified sensorium into component parts, reimagining hearing, seeing, smelling, touching and tasting as individual senses. According to this narrative, the new mass media of the nineteenth century were themselves an extension of this new understanding—and the consequent development of the sciences—of the senses. Sound (telegraphy, the telephone and sound recording) and image (the phanakistiscope, stereograph and photograph) reproduction technologies were the outcomes of a sensory ‘regime’ which made hearing and vision subjective, singular objects of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Single sensory media such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Ernst, ‘Meine Jagd nach der “Tschetzpend”’, *Artist*, 44, 2134 (1926), pp. 4–5.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 67–96; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, 2003), pp. 31–85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

photograph, which only captured the visual field, or a sound recording, which detached aurality from the thing which enunciated it, were the appropriate products of this form of dominant knowledge, which isolated and studied the senses as distinct phenomena.

But, once constituted as such, did the senses remain separate? Ernst's story shows that this was not always the case. Nor was it an isolated event. Ernst's ability to draw sound out of the jazz band portrait was, in fact, part of a much larger sensory phenomenon during the Weimar Republic. Reading and seeing Weimar jazz were not simple, straightforward perceptual acts; they realized the synaesthetic possibilities within early mass commercial culture, the modern senses and the media revolutions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This phenomenon was not limited to photographs or words; the synaesthetic qualities of jazz extended beyond the page and appeared within its sound as well. Listening to jazz, like seeing it, could appeal to multiple senses at once and blur the lines between sound and vision.

The majority of Weimar encounters with jazz were like Ernst's first meeting with the music. As this article will demonstrate, most Germans during the 1920s consumed jazz through their eyes and not their ears. In terms of the population as whole, it was read, seen and thought more than listened to or heard. If we think of jazz only as sound—and not as a commercial and aesthetic object that could address many different senses—we miss fundamental parts of the way Germans encountered it historically. During its first decade in Europe, it was available for most Germans through textual and visual sources rather than through the gramophone or radio. Jazz's appearance as text and image did not necessarily remain strictly optical for its subjects, however, but could also provoke auditory elements.

Studying Weimar jazz as a synaesthetic object adds an important dimension to the history of the senses in the modern period. Studies of the senses have mimicked their subject and largely focused on individual forms of perception.<sup>4</sup> Over the last twenty years, a large body of work has developed that interrogates vision and visibility.<sup>5</sup> Many studies have shown that the modern period was clearly marked by powerful new visual media such as photography and films, and the picture we now have of Europe and the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveals that it was a moment of particular visual intensity.<sup>6</sup> Attention to cultures of the modern eye has followed and reinforced the long ascendant argument for the 'hegemony of vision' within modernity. Many have contended that, since the Renaissance, vision has been a privileged source of knowledge and an essential conduit of power. In a by now classic formulation, Martin Jay argued that 'it is difficult to deny that the visual has been dominant in modern Western culture in a variety of ways. Whether we focus on the "mirror

<sup>4</sup>The *American Historical Review* forum on the 'Senses in History', for example, reflects this and is divided into individual essays on listening, smelling, visibility, taste and touch. 'AHR Forum: The Senses in History', *American Historical Review*, 116 (2011), pp. 307–400.

<sup>5</sup>The literature on visual culture is vast. For an overview of visual culture, see Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London, 1998); Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (eds), *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford, 2001); and Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (eds), *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader* (London, 2004). For a rich discussion on visual culture and German History, see the H-German forum 'German History after the Visual Turn': [http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/visual/visual\\_index.htm#note2](http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/visual/visual_index.htm#note2).

<sup>6</sup>Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley, 1998); Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, 1995).

of nature” of Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault, or bemoan the society of the spectacle of Guy Debord, we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era.<sup>7</sup>

During the last decade, however, this argument has increasingly come under scrutiny and attack. Recent scholarship on acoustic culture has made it clear that sound and listening were important parts of modern perception.<sup>8</sup> In the most comprehensive and impressive study on the role of listening in modernity, Jonathan Sterne has argued that ‘as there was an Enlightenment, so too was there an “Ensoniment”’. Claiming that ‘it is fallacious to think that sight alone or in its supposed difference from hearing explains modernity’, his book ‘tells a story where sound, hearing, and listening are foundational to modern modes of knowledge, culture, and social organization’.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Judith Coffin makes clear that ‘turning to the auditory . . . has enabled cultural historians to explore rather new dimensions of the history of modernism as an intellectual movement as well as what have proved to be enduringly important aspects of modern culture’.<sup>10</sup>

This sea change in the historiography of the senses has begun to bring attention to an important avenue of experience and knowledge. For observers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is still striking, however, how pervasive media of visuality *were* during this period and it should not necessarily be assumed that, because it has been neglected, listening was, in fact, dominant or in equal standing with vision during this period. In one of his most insightful observations, Sterne contends that the senses are not a zero-sum game and thus studies of the aural ‘urge us to rethink exactly what we mean by the *privilege* of vision and images’.<sup>11</sup>

This article attempts to do some of that rethinking. It argues that the substantial increase in visual and textual material during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—when joined with the, by comparison, small availability of commercial sound culture—could overturn the traditional ways that cultural objects were encountered. Music could be primarily for the eyes. This predominance of visuality and textuality, however, could also undermine and contradict the modern separation of the senses. This imbalance promoted a different type of sensorium and form of aural/visual experience. The mechanical reproduction of sound and vision may have stemmed from the separation of the senses and helped discipline the body to inscribe this division within it, but in a situation where one overpowered the other, these senses did not always remain singular. Jazz during the Weimar Republic exemplified such a situation and, as a complex sensory phenomenon, could provoke such perceptual mixing.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Jay, ‘The Scopic Regimes of Modernity’, in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, 1988), pp. 3. For similar arguments, see David Michael Levin (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, 1993) and Donald M. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago, 1983).

<sup>8</sup>Michael Bull and Les Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2003); Mark Smith (ed.), *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens, GA, 2004); Alejandra Bronfman, ‘Tales Full of Sound, Signifying Something’, *Social History*, 35, 2 (2010), pp. 193–9; Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York, 2010); Jonathan Sterne (ed.), *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York, 2012).

<sup>9</sup>Sterne, *Audible Past*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>10</sup>Judith G. Coffin, ‘Menie Gregoire’s Archive: Radio, Intimacy, and Modern Interiority’ (forthcoming article).

<sup>11</sup>Sterne, *Audible Past*, p. 3.

Jazz in Germany was primarily listened to by a middle- and upper-class audience during the late 1910s and 1920s. Its performance—whether live or in mechanically reproduced form—was located in spaces and apparatuses that were predominantly populated and owned by Germans with privilege. In its first decade, jazz was associated with the dance craze that swept Germany in the immediate postwar years and the contemporary transformation of entertainment music (*Unterhaltungsmusik*) and light music (*leichte Musik*) from older forms of society dance music and operetta to modern pop music (*Schlager*).<sup>12</sup> Appearing in print at least as early as 1919, jazz was first associated with and considered part of a series of fashionable American dances and dance musics enthusiastically taken up by Germans in the immediate postwar period: the foxtrot, one-step, castlwalk and shimmy.<sup>13</sup> During its first decade in Germany, it was played by self-titled ‘jazz bands’, dance orchestras and salon orchestras which also played modern dance music (*Kombinationskapellen*).<sup>14</sup> Although entertainment musicians played in a wide variety of public venues, the groups which played jazz primarily played at the higher end of dance locales: expensive hotels, casinos, theatres, wine bars, dance cafes, dance salons, coffee houses and afternoon teas. Erich Borchard, for example, the leader of perhaps the most recognized jazz band in Germany in the first half of the 1920s, played at the upscale *Scala-Casino* and the premier *Mercedes-Palast*, a ‘film palace’, while the Fred Ross Jazz Band played at the *Palais Heinroth*, an elite nightclub.<sup>15</sup> Visiting American performers also played in large, expensive venues. Sam Wooding and his all-African-American band performed in the *Admiralspalast*, a ‘temple of pleasure’ (*Vergnügungstempel*) at the centre of Weimar’s cabaret culture that housed a café, cinema, ice rink and spa. Paul Whiteman set up in 1926 in Hans Poelzig’s expressionist *Grosses Schauspielhaus*, a theatre that also housed Max Reinhardt’s experimental productions. The advertisements that jazz bands and orchestras put out in the trade magazine *Artist* frequently specified that they only played in ‘first class houses’.<sup>16</sup>

In a decade bookended by radical inflation and mass unemployment, most workers could not afford to visit these venues; even at Weimar’s economic peak, ‘the poor general state of the economy ensured that real living standards [for workers] were little better than they had been before the war’.<sup>17</sup> This did not escape contemporary commentators. In 1922, Heinz Pollack noted that dance salons and dance cafes were no

<sup>12</sup>Christian Schär, *Der Schlager und seine Tänze im Deutschland der 20er Jahre: Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte zum Wandel in der Musik- und Tanzkultur während der Weimarer Republik* (Zürich, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>Heinz Pollack, *Die Revolution des Gesellschaftstanzes* (Dresden, 1921), p. 10; Heribert Schröder, *Tanz- und Unterhaltungsmusik in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 258–64.

<sup>14</sup>Schröder, *Tanz-*, pp. 40–70.

<sup>15</sup>Horst H. Lange, *Jazz in Deutschland: Die Deutsche Jazz-Chronik bis 1960* (Hildesheim, 1996), pp. 17–19.

<sup>16</sup>See the many advertisements reprinted in Schröder, *Tanz-*. The 1924 ad for the Original Amerikanische Jazz-Band and the 1923 ad for the William Kettel Original Jazz Band, for example, both declared that they only took ‘offers from first-class houses (*Offerten von nur ersten Häusern*)’. Similarly, the 1927 ad for the Oskar Doesch-Dobee Wiener Virtuosen- und Jazzsymphonieorchester specified that the orchestra ‘is suitable for every first class operation’. Schröder, *Tanz-*, pp. 273, 293, 306.

<sup>17</sup>Harold James, ‘The Weimar Economy’, in Anthony McElligott (ed.) *Weimar Germany* (Oxford, 2009), p. 110; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (London, 1991), p. 124.

longer frequented only by the upper class (*‘Oberen Zehntausend’*, literally the ‘top 10,000’). He still emphasized the exclusive character of such events, however, writing that ‘today things are a little bit different. Dance is at least a thing of the lower hundred thousand, but still not the lower millions!’<sup>18</sup> More than a decade later, in what he hoped would be its obituary, Theodor Adorno characterized jazz as the ‘the *Gebrauchsmusik* [music for use, as opposed to autonomous concert music] of the *haute bourgeoisie* of the postwar period’.<sup>19</sup>

Class should not be reified, however, and it should not be assumed that those outside the middle classes were categorically excluded from hearing the new music. Some dance venues had a cross-class character and some urban workers, especially single young men, probably had auditory contact with jazz or modern dance music at working-class fairgrounds (*Rummelplätze*), dance halls, balls or at the Sportpalast in Berlin.<sup>20</sup> It is not entirely clear what kind of music appeared at some of these venues, however. Reporting on jazz in Germany to an American audience in 1926, Paul Bernhard observed that the ‘new aristocracy of young workers’ who visited dance venues in the postwar period were entertained by salon orchestras in the Parisian style: piano, two violins, cello and a flute. These groups, he claimed, ‘availed [themselves] of national airs’, even if the music ‘had no connection with the old-fashioned styles’.<sup>21</sup> Music played for working-class dancing groups in the streets and courtyards of Berlin probably also relied on older music; the scenes of such groups depicted by Friedrich Zille show dancers congregated around organ grinders.<sup>22</sup>

In general, popular music venues associated with the working classes in Britain and the United States attracted a different demographic in Germany. In Munich, for example, cabarets, variety shows and music halls—‘small stages’ where jazz bands might also play—were frequented by a predominantly middle-class audience; in Berlin, these venues seem to have had a similar class character.<sup>23</sup> From the first half of the nineteenth century, ‘entertainment music established itself as a distinct genre and expression of the social needs of a great part of the middle-class strata of the population’.<sup>24</sup> Organized workers’ musical activity revolved around the Singers Associations (*Sängerbunde*), which performed a repertoire of classical chorale pieces and worker’s songs (*Arbeiterlieder*).<sup>25</sup> Beyond this, workers associated with the SPD or KPD spent much of their leisure

<sup>18</sup>Pollack, *Revolution*, pp. 108–9.

<sup>19</sup>Theodor Adorno, ‘Farewell to Jazz’ in Richard Leppert (ed.), *Essays on Music* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 497.

<sup>20</sup>Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia, S.C., 1997), pp. 30–31; Schär, *Der Schlager*, pp. 129–130, 133.

<sup>21</sup>For Bernhard, jazz as a widespread phenomenon seems to still be in the future. He argues that ‘in our larger towns the tendency will soon be toward a compromise . . . in the form of an American variation known as the jazz band. Through it, Germany will understand the character of the new popular dances in their full vehemence’. Paul Bernhard, ‘The German Side of Jazz’ *The Living Age*, 330 (11 Sept. 1926), p. 581. Bernhard reprinted and added to these passages in German in *Jazz: Eine Musikalische Zeitfrage* (München, 1927), pp. 25–6.

<sup>22</sup>Schär, pp. 129, 156.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Eben Sackett, *Popular Entertainment, Class, and Politics in Munich, 1900–1923* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 12; Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

<sup>24</sup>Sabine Giesbrecht-Schutte, ‘Zum Stand der Unterhaltungsmusik um 1900’, in Wolfgang Kaschuba and Kaspar Maase (eds), *Schund und Schönheit: Populäre Kultur um 1900* (Cologne, 2001), p. 114.

<sup>25</sup>W.L. Guttmann, *Workers’ Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment* (New York, 1990), pp. 154–76.

time outside the home playing sports or in the workers' theatre.<sup>26</sup> Most working-class young people spent whatever free time they had at home with their families or reading.<sup>27</sup> Dance venues were completely absent from the countryside and villages.<sup>28</sup> Thus, despite the presence of some workers at dances and in front of jazz groups, audiences for modern dance music in the Weimar Republic were predominantly drawn from fashionable society.<sup>29</sup> The historian Eric Hobsbawm, a jazz enthusiast who lived in Berlin in the early 1930s, observed this social character in jazz's continental European listenership. 'The strong popular and demotic component in the [interwar] British jazz public', he claimed, 'distinguished it from the continental jazz publics, which were overwhelmingly composed of members of the established middle classes or the college-going classes'.<sup>30</sup>

A recent study confirms that only a minority of Germans participated in the by now mythical explosion of mass culture and avant-garde experimentation of Weimar. This was true not only during the worst moments of economic duress during the 1920s, but also during the 'stable' middle period of the decade as well. Access to commercial theatres, opera, revues, dance salons, shellac records and radio was not feasible for most, for 'cultural consumption [was] luxury consumption'.<sup>31</sup> Hit by the helter-skelter effects of war, inflation and the depression, such 'luxury consumption could only develop to a modest extent' during the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Workers were the least able to consume: 'an extremely tight household budget tended to exclude even the families of average wage earners from cultural activities'.<sup>33</sup> Even the entertainment and nightlife of Berlin—the most cosmopolitan and vibrant site of the Republic and the primary source of so much of the Weimar's cultural reputation—remained the culture of a small minority. Studies of leisure activities and theatre and cinema attendance rates during the Weimar period reveal that 'the majority of working-class and white-collar employee families in Berlin during the 1920s usually remained at home in the evening and, at best, read in the newspapers about the legendary cultural life of the Weimar Republic'.<sup>34</sup>

Weimar citizens who did not hear jazz in public were not likely to hear it at home either. Radio and gramophones, the two revolutionary mass mediums of jazz and entertainment music, were, like live performance, financially out of reach for the vast majority of workers. In 1925, only 196,000 gramophones were sold in Germany and, even at its decade peak, record player sales remained well below half a million.<sup>35</sup> The

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134–53, 207–32.

<sup>27</sup> Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Jugend Zwischen Krieg und Krise: Lebenswelten von Arbeiterjungen in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1987), pp. 198–201, 211.

<sup>28</sup> Schär, *Der Schlager*, p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5.

<sup>30</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Jazz Comes to Europe', in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (New York, 1998), p. 271.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Christian Führer, 'High Brow and Low Brow Culture', in Anthony McElligott (ed.) *Weimar Germany* (Oxford, 2009), p. 278.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Kaspar Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen: Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850–1970* (Frankfurt/Main, 1997), p. 300.

price of gramophones and records ensured class-based ownership. In 1929, the most basic turntable cost 50 RM, while the average industrial worker's weekly salary was just below 39 RM. In sum, 'recorded music was therefore not the "mass medium" that contemporary enthusiasts and historical accounts have sometimes taken it to be' and it 'seems clear that the middle classes comprised the bulk of owners during this period [1900 until the end of the 1920s]'.<sup>36</sup>

Radio was similarly stratified. In the mid-1920s, ownership was quite limited: in 1924, 548,749 registered radios existed in Germany. Numbers did grow consistently over the course of the decade: by 1930, there were still only 3,509,509 receivers, which, for a total population of 65.1 million, could only offer a minority of Germans access to the airwaves, even taking into account collective listening by households and workers' groups such as the *Arbeiter-Radio-Bund*.<sup>37</sup> For most, a set was financially out of reach. Sets with the greatest receptive power cost 300 RM in the mid-1920s, a month's salary for a skilled worker or white-collar clerk. Other, cheaper options did exist, but they had their own limitations. *Detektor* sets only cost 15–40 RM in 1925, but they had only two headsets and could only pick up radio transmissions if the machine was extremely close to a radio station.<sup>38</sup> Rather primitive technically, they could only amplify ground waves, which could be received in only 1.4% of the entire territory of Germany. Only 31% of the population lived within these areas and radio listenership remained, throughout the 1920s, an almost entirely urban phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> In general, there remained a significant gap between those living in cities and those in rural areas in terms of access to mass culture.<sup>40</sup> Within this primarily urban listening space, class division permeated the ether: in 1928, workers constituted only 22.5% of subscribers. As such statistics make evident, 'the middle classes clearly dominated Weimar radio audiences'.<sup>41</sup>

## II

All Weimar Germans could, however, encounter jazz in their newspapers and magazines. Indeed, jazz was more widely available as text and image than as an item of sound. Although a precise estimate of the number of articles and their corresponding circulation is not possible, it is clear that jazz appeared in print often and extensively during the Republic's lifetime. Considering it a 'problem of the age' (*Zeitfrage*), Weimar Germans wrote a great deal about jazz, which appeared as a subject in both prominent national newspapers (the *Vossische Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Kölnische Zeitung*) and local rags (*Münchener Post*), sophisticated classical musical

<sup>36</sup> Corey Ross, 'Entertainment, Technology, and Tradition: The Rise of Recorded Music from the Empire to the Third Reich', in Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (eds), *Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York, 2006), pp. 28–9. See also Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film, and the Death of Weimar Culture* (Berkeley, 2006), p. 64.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Christian Führer, 'A Medium of Modernity? Broadcasting in Weimar Germany, 1923–1932', *The Journal of Modern History*, 69, 4 (1997), p. 731.

<sup>38</sup> Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2008), p. 136.

<sup>39</sup> Führer, 'A Medium', pp. 735–7.

<sup>40</sup> Kaspar Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen*, p. 116.

<sup>41</sup> Führer, 'A Medium', p. 738.

journals (*Melos* and *Anbruch*) and smaller, regional culture papers (the *Rheinische Musik- und Theater-Zeitung*).<sup>42</sup> Individual illustrated magazines—the printed medium with the widest circulation—published on jazz many times over the course of the decade: the *Bild Illustrierte Zeitung* published eighteen pieces on jazz between 1921 and 1932 and sixteen appeared in *Die Woche* during the years 1922, 1925, 1927 and 1929.<sup>43</sup> Advertisements in illustrated magazines also utilized jazz imagery or evoked dance music in their attempts to catch readers' attention.<sup>44</sup> Part of a massive print culture, jazz appeared in hundreds of articles in tens and hundreds of thousands of copies, a large number of which passed through many hands within families and housing buildings.<sup>45</sup>

By 1914, Germans were awash with daily print. The year that saw the outbreak of the First World War also witnessed the publication of 4,200 newspapers and 6,500 journals in Germany. This density of reading material was the product of the birth of a mass commercial press and audience in Germany during the years between 1870 and 1900. On average, newspapers circulated around 8,600 copies and by the turn of the century, some already printed more than 100,000. In Berlin alone, tabloids and dailies both had a readership of around one million at the end of the 1920s. Over the course of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, mass circulation dailies and illustrated magazines substantially shifted the content and purpose of print culture, challenging the hegemony of the agenda of the educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*)—education and edification—by catering to popular pleasure and entertainment. Unlike radio and the gramophone, print had a genuinely 'mass audience' by the 1920s. This is clearly visible in the press's fragmentation—specific papers addressed specific local social and confessional milieus—but it was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the emergence of the *Generalanzeiger*, a format that attempted to reach the widest possible audience by downplaying politics and elevating entertainment.<sup>46</sup> Reading the paper was something of an addiction for Germans of this period. A textual opiate, it altered its users' consciousness and provoked its own sort of dream world. The press mediated urbanites' experience of the city's boulevards and byways, its character and its events. It formed a 'word city' which organized and constructed the material city's flux and transience.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup>A few examples of articles on jazz and dance music in this range of sources are Adolf Weissmann, 'Der Foxtrott: Eine musikalische Zeitbetrachtung', *Vossische Zeitung* (25 Dec. 1925); Paul Bernhard, 'Soziologie des "Jazz"', *Frankfurter Zeitung* (6 June 1926); Sandor Aspad, 'Der Jazz', *Berliner Tageblatt* (9 June 1926); Georg Barthelme, 'Jazz', *Kölnische Zeitung* (5 June 1919); 'Jazz am Konservatorium: Zum Protest des Tonkünstlervereins', *Münchener Post* (1 Dec. 1927); Alfred Baresel, 'Kunst-Jazz', *Melos*, 7 (1928), pp. 354–7; 'Jazz Sonderheft', *Anbruch*, 7 (1925); Alfred Pellegrini, 'Jazz-Unfug', *Rheinische Musik- und Theater-Zeitung*, 29 (1928), pp. 317–18.

<sup>43</sup>Reinhard Falk, *Die Missachtete Botschaft: Publizistische Aspekte des Jazz im soziokulturellen Wandel* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 207–8.

<sup>44</sup>See the example from the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* below or the image of women mimicking a Tiller-Girl style line dance in the advertisement for Forma bathing suits in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1 (1926), p. 25.

<sup>45</sup>For a sense of the size of the literature published in newspapers and magazines in the Weimar republic, see the bibliographies of Schröder, Bernd Hoffmann, 'Aspekte zur Jazzreflexion in Deutschland: Afro-amerikanische Musik im Spiegel der Musikpresse 1900–1945', *Jazzforschung/Jazz Research*, 35 (2003), pp. 193–202; Susan Cook, 'Jazz as Deliverance: The Reception and Institution of American Jazz during the Weimar Republic', *American Music*, 7, 1 (1989), pp. 30–47; and Jonathan Wipplinger, 'The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany' (Dissertation, Ann Arbor, 2006).

<sup>46</sup>Ross, *Media*, pp. 20–33, 142–50; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996). See especially the introduction and Chs 1 and 2.

<sup>47</sup>Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*.

Yet newspapers were only one part of Weimar's culture of visuality and textuality. During the Republic, emphases on image and vision exploded across multiple urban mediums, from architecture to the female body.<sup>48</sup> As a visual and textual phenomenon, jazz also appeared in other forms. The 1920s hosted a virtual cult of advertising and those who did not meet jazz within a newspaper or journal might encounter it on the street in display windows or on display boxes and self-lit advertising columns (*Litfasssäulen*).<sup>49</sup> In order to hype major concerts, promoters often spread text and image through city streets. A 1931 photograph, for example, shows a poster illustrated with the laughing faces of one of the quintessential German jazz and *Schlager* groups, the Comedian Harmonists, on a Kassel *Litfass*.<sup>50</sup> As images of the saxophonist and bandleader Billy Bartholomew demonstrate, cafes, variety theatres and hotels advertised gigs with standing billboards on the streets, posters on windows and texts and images pasted onto their marquees and the walls above the venues' entrances.<sup>51</sup> Touring artists could receive even more exposure. Jonathan Wipplinger notes that the advertising for the concerts of the two major American jazz artists to appear in Germany during the 1920s was extensive. Judging 'from photographs the [Sam Wooding] band took of themselves while in Berlin', he claims, 'there is . . . evidence to suggest that scattered through the city were posters on kiosks and elsewhere announcing the troupe's arrival'. Similarly, he points out, 'if one is to believe Albert Henschel, who reviewed [Paul] Whiteman in *Das Tagebuch*, Berlin had been barraged with publicity in anticipation of Whiteman's [1926] arrival: "Placards screamed for weeks: King of Jazz! Jazz Symphony Orchestra!"'<sup>52</sup> Advertisements employing jazz could appear in less obvious places as well. An image of Louis Douglas, an African American dancer who appeared both with Josephine Baker's *Revue Nègre* and in his own revues in Germany, was used on cards distributed in packs of Eckstein cigarettes.<sup>53</sup> In sum, considerably more Germans will have seen these leaflets and ads than attended the concerts.

### III

But what does it mean for music to be primarily communicated through optical media? Does it simply become like any other thing in a newspaper? It seems overly hasty to assume so. It is remarkable that the press largely omitted talking about jazz in terms of music and treated it as a vessel for other concerns, whether as a symbol of the rationalization of modern life or as a descriptive decal in a story about an event in the life of an actress.<sup>54</sup> Despite this, jazz was never able to discard sound or auralty completely. Visual and textual communication of jazz was diverse; a drawing of a jazz

<sup>48</sup> Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, 2001). For representations of jazz in Weimar visual culture in general, see Jürgen Wilhelm Walter Heinrichs, "'Blackness in Weimar": 1920s German Art Practice and American Jazz and Dance' (Dissertation, New Haven, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, pp. 92–101.

<sup>50</sup> Brian Currid, *A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis, 2006), pp. 92.

<sup>51</sup> H.J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz, *Billy Bartholomew: Bio-Discography* (Menden, 1985), pp. 57, 62–6.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Wipplinger, 'The Jazz Republic', pp. 170, 187; Albert K. Henschel, 'Paul Whiteman', *Die Weltbühne* (13 July 1926), p. 74, as cited by Wipplinger, 'Jazz Republic', p. 187. For a photo of two members of Wooding's band in front of a *Litfass* advertisement, see Heinrichs, 'Blackness in Weimar', Fig. 1.12.

<sup>53</sup> Rainer E. Lotz, *Black People: Entertainers of African Descent in Europe and Germany* (Bonn, 1997), pp. 332.

<sup>54</sup> Falk, *Missachtete*, p. 214.

band worked differently from a musicological essay. Both, however, are representations of sound events or index music. The understanding that jazz was linked to music and sound—despite its silence—could not but have persisted; it remained a phantom presence behind the perceptual limitations of such visualizations. During its first decade in Germany, jazz was a synaesthetic object—it appealed to the senses in a way that was exclusive neither visually nor acoustically but somewhere in between.<sup>55</sup> It seems possible, indeed, that Weimar Germans could have read newspaper articles—many people's main or only source for jazz—as a type of visual music. This is not to say that all, or even most, Weimar Germans saw sound on the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, but that a public increasingly in contact and formed by a mass media which was predominantly visual could read with perceptual slippage.

Don Ihde has argued that the phenomenology of listening includes what he calls the 'auditory imagination': fantasized sounds created in the mind of a subject.<sup>56</sup> Using this concept, we might ask which sounds Germans imagined in response to textual stimuli. What would a reader hear, for example, in the Alice Gerstel's 1921 article '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 façade of a bank building. The Negro, half slave driver, half juggler, holds two sticks in his hands. He beats them on the blocks. Sometimes it sounds like he is pounding nails into a coffin, then again as if his knife slipped while he was slicing salami. His thick lips press on the mouth of the trumpet; in his eyes he holds a sly and melancholy smile, meanwhile there is a drum roll, a blow on the tambourine, a stroke on the bell. Next to him a pale adventurer strums chords on a Balalaika—the sound as monotonous as a debate in Parliament—and the violinist, the third in the devilish trio, occupies no fixed place but skips, fiddle under his chin, among the skipping couples, and plays sweet cantilenas for the ladies and rakish trills under their skirts. The dancing couples are under the spell of these rhythms, these colours 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 gyrations over the polished floor with a precision that suggests ultimately nothing other than a well-oiled automaton.<sup>57</sup>

Or in this paragraph from Kurt Tucholsky's piece 'The New Troubadours'?

Therefore it is not right that the excellent jazz band which just visited Berlin draped themselves in Tünnes costumes. The people should work in plainclothes. They work: what they make is the starkest opposite of Romanticism. They accompany the everyday . . . Their music clatters in the same beat as the typewriters which the audience left behind two hours before, its song is the scream of the boss, made rhythmical, and its dance is around the golden calf. The jazz band is the extension of business by other means.<sup>58</sup>

The texts touch on a number of discursively rich subjects: black bodies and black rhythm, drums, slavery, death, Dada, democratic debate, wild dancing, primitivity, automatons, factories and offices. There was a near-obsessive quality to Weimar discussions on these topics—especially on blackness and industrial civilization—and material

<sup>55</sup>For more on music and synaesthesia, see Kathleen Marie Higgins, 'Visual Music and Synesthesia', in Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Music and Philosophy* (New York, 2011).

<sup>56</sup>Don Ihde, 'Auditory Imagination', in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>57</sup>Alice Gerstel, 'Jazzband', *Die Aktion*, 12, 4–5 (4 Feb. 1922), pp. 90–1, reprinted as 'Jazz Band' in Edward Dimendberg, Anton Kaes and Martin Jay (eds), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 554–5.

<sup>58</sup>Peter Panter, 'Die Neuen Troubadoure', *Die Weltbühne* (24 March 1921), pp. 342–3.

surrounding them abounded.<sup>59</sup> For those viewing such articles without an acoustic reference, the texts themselves might speak or effect sound in the heads of their readers. Weimar German audiences could conjure up a range of associations from the rich web of meanings surrounding these articles to imagine sound: African drumming, exotic music, the noise of machinery, the cacophony of city life, ‘primitive’ cries and so on. Moreover, this type of reading or hearing could even be encouraged by certain elements of text itself—the counterpoint of black text on white paper, the melodic contours of the rise and fall of words, the rhythm and timbre of the reader’s inner voice.

What would readers of the illustrated magazine *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (*BIZ*) hear when they saw its 1923 photographic ‘parody of a jazz band’? (see [Figure 1](#)).<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 1:** Parody of a jazz band.

*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 24 (17 June 1923), p. 468.

<sup>59</sup>The literature exploring these extensive discourses on blackness is rich and well-established. During the late nineteenth century, German citizenship became increasingly racialized after Germany colonized Africa and with the rise of biological racism and Social Darwinism. Within colonial and scientific racist discourse, Europeans and Africans, whites and blacks, were constructed as inherently different. Europeans were identified as naturally superior, more intellectually gifted and bearers of civilization; Africans and their descendants, on the other hand, were characterized as primitive, intellectually stunted and uncivilized. The occupation of the Rhineland by French colonial troops in 1919 and the subsequent media campaign against the *Schwarze Schmach* exacerbated fears of racial mixing and dispersed prewar tropes of racial difference widely throughout the German public. See especially Fatima El-Tayeb, ‘Dangerous Liaisons: Race, Nation, and German Identity’ and Tina Campt, ‘Converging Specters of an Other Within: Race and Gender in pre-1945 Afro-German History’, in Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver (eds), *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890–2000* (Rochester, 2005). For more work on discourses of blackness during the pre-Weimar period and their connection to the visual mass media, see Volker Langbehn (ed.), *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory* (New York, 2010). For work on the widespread connection between jazz, blackness and mechanical civilization in Weimar, see Jonathan Wipplinger, ‘Jazz Republic’; Susan Cook, ‘Jazz as Deliverance’; Jed Rasula, ‘Jazz as Decal for the European Avant-garde’ in Heike Raphael-Hernandez (ed.), *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York, 2004); Marc Weiner, ‘Urwaldmusik and the Borders of German Identity: Jazz in Literature of the Weimar’, *The German Quarterly*, 64, 4 (1991), pp.475–87; and Theodor F. Rippey, ‘Rationalisation, Race, and the Weimar Response to Jazz’, *German Life and Letters*, 60, 1 (2007), pp. 75–97.

<sup>60</sup>*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 24 (17 June 1923), p. 468.

The group portrayed in the photo—which appears to be a clay model of a drummer and two banjo players—is highly racialized and clearly meant to embody something radically foreign to its German viewers. The members grin widely with gapped teeth and their eyes look alternately naïve, wild and sinister. They are dressed outlandishly: tuxedo tops, wide-legged trousers and oversized, clownish shoes. They all have off-coloured patches surrounding their mouths and the banjoists' ears are rounded and without lobes, visually linking them and their music to chimpanzees.

The images of the musicians, above all, utilize the visual language of American minstrelsy. Minstrel images attempted fundamentally to denigrate African Americans and justify a white supremacist cultural-political-legal order. Repeatedly portrayed as unsophisticated, foolish, dangerous and happily content with—or, later, nostalgic for—the North American slave system, African Americans became images of drastic alterity to an idealized whiteness and what Anglo-Americans believed to be their own attributes—rationality, culture, sophistication and civilization.<sup>61</sup>

Such imagery would have been familiar to most Germans, for they had been extraordinarily common in German product advertising since the late nineteenth century. German advertisers had used colonial images of 'primitive' Africans to sell a variety of products—from tobacco to soap—for more than half a century, forming a 'consumer imaginary' which helped create a hegemonic vision of racial difference.<sup>62</sup> In the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, starkly racialized representations 'spread to become a broader, almost codified strategy of depiction throughout German consumer visuality'.<sup>63</sup> These racialized elements borrowed extensively from the American minstrel show and blackface iconography: oversized white lips, aberrant noses and banjos. Such images were then transferred to depictions of German colonial subjects, tightly drawing together Africans and African Americans in their 'savagery' and 'primitivity'.<sup>64</sup>

This 'consumer imaginary' provided an extensive supply of meanings, associations and supplemental images for *BIZ* readers. When viewing the photo of the three jazz musicians, they could use this primitivist storehouse—along with the larger discourse on blackness and mechanical civilization—to imagine accompanying sounds: the rustle of jungle vegetation, the growling or barking of animals, the thump of drum playing, the distorted plucking of an unfamiliar stringed instrument or any number of other exotic or foreign sounds.

This process was probably quite individualized and subjective. Specific images could prompt unique sounds for each viewer and, moreover, images and sounds could suggest other image-sounds according to personal logic or memory. Images could lead to memories and memories to images and sounds, cascading into long, individual concatenations. This *BIZ* photo, although it stands alone thematically, is positioned next to an article on Upton Sinclair and three photos: a stage shot of two performers from a Leipzig performance of Georg Kaiser's play *Jungfrau von Orleans*, the profile of Sinclair and a portrait of the conductor Otto Klemperer. Other press items on jazz, however, might themselves

<sup>61</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 2007), pp. 115–31; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), pp. 20–1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213–58.

use photographs, drawings and text. In both these cases, each component could issue its own chain of associations and sounds and combine into a rich polyphony of synaesthesia.

The picture, above all, prompts noise. Noise, according to Jacques Attali, is the acoustic Other, sound which lies outside our sonic order. This sonic order—constituted especially by music—also simultaneously reflects and creates a larger social, political, economic and cultural order.<sup>65</sup> Attempting visually to depict figures far beyond the cultural pale, the *BIZ* photo asks for sounds outside the viewer's normal system of musical meaning. It invites figures which would not make sense in the German musical soundscape: noises antithetical to chorale music, church music, the street organ, worker songs, art music and folk songs. What a reader might hear would thus be an aural imagining of non-meaning.

A number of articles make such cacophony-creation explicit.<sup>66</sup> The opening sentence to the 1921 *BIZ* article 'Yazz-band und Jimmy' (Jazz band and Shimmy) declares that the 'esprit of the yazz-group is the execution of deafening noise'.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, while describing the ensemble composition of a jazz band in his piece 'Jazz-band' for the *Weltbühne*, Hans Siemsen noted that 'there is a piano, there is certainly also a violin, there perhaps also a bass, but there is above all bassoon and clarinet and cymbals and triangle and drums, or banjo and harmonica and a whole series of nameless, highly fantastic instruments which all are capable not of making music but more so a type of musical noise'.<sup>68</sup> Paul Bernhard called jazz musicians 'noise specialists' and argued that the 'jazz band received its un-European, grotesque and noisy character through the introduction of the saxophone'.<sup>69</sup>

#### IV

For the minority who could listen to it or play it, the sound of jazz itself moved towards the visual. Jazz-as-sound had its own elements of synaesthesia. Early German jazz bands—groups which dedicated themselves more or less exclusively to a 'jazz' repertoire—performed a music deeply shaped by an effort to translate visuality and text into sound and to evoke visuality in their listeners' heads.

The instrumentation and music of German jazz bands shifted over the course of the Republic. The initial stage of German jazz, roughly 1918 to 1923, was characterized by intense flights of fancy and a primitivist obsession with excessive rhythm. The music of this period, which Bernd Hoffmann has called the 'grotesque jazz-band phase', drew its effect from the drummer, who was often portrayed as buffoonish. Such ridiculousness extended to the percussionist's arsenal, which could reach outlandish extremes: not just drums, but also bells, alarm pistols (*Schreckschusspistolen*), tin cans and wooden blocks.<sup>70</sup> Departing from a tradition which emphasized a different hierarchy of beat

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> For a larger discussion of jazz and noise during Weimar, see Wipplinger, 'The Aural Shock of Modernity: Weimar's Experience of Jazz', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 82, 4 (2007), pp. 299–320.

<sup>67</sup> 'Yazz-band und Jimmy', *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 (27 Feb. 1921), p. 116.

<sup>68</sup> Hans Siemsen, 'Jazz-band', *Die Weltbühne* (10 March 1921), p. 287.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Bernhard, 'The German Side of Jazz', pp. 582, 583.

<sup>70</sup> Bernd Hoffmann, 'Alpftaum der Freiheit oder: Die Zeitfrage "Jazz"', in Helmut Rösing (ed.) *'Es liegt in der Luft was Idiotisches . . .': Populäre Musik der Zeit Weimarer Republik* (Baden-Baden, 1995).

and sense of musical time, these musicians ‘compensated for their lack of inner feeling for a secure pulse with excessive noise, mistaking the drum set for the preeminent jazz tool and loudly expressed *Rhythmus* for its quintessence’. Identifying jazz as noise prompted many to believe that the drum set itself ‘was a jazz’.<sup>71</sup>

This focus on the drums is clear in an account of the ‘dance craze’ in the 1921 compendium *Jazz und Shimmy*. Recounting the first few years of its reception, F.W. Koebner recalled that American syncopated music did not initially catch hold of the German public. Germans only began to take up the dance with enthusiasm after a great number of foreigners showed excitement for the music. German Café-Orchestras quickly attempted to adapt and take advantage of the fad: they added ‘a cigar box, a beater [*Klopper*] and two pot lids and called themselves a “jazz band”’.<sup>72</sup> In a later chapter of the book, entitled ‘Jazz Band’, a photograph clownishly depicts a drummer: he is adorned with a monocle and feathered moustache, but is nevertheless identified as ‘the most important person in the jazz band’.<sup>73</sup>

German jazz musicians of this period were not simply lackadaisical or flippant. Live and recorded sources for their craft were practically unavailable until after the end of the hyperinflation in late 1923. The musicians who famously planted the seeds of Europe’s fascination with jazz in the late teens and early twenties—namely James Reese Europe, Sidney Bechet, Mitchell’s Jazz Kings and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band—avoided Germany for two reasons: not only its adversarial position during the war, but also its precarious financial condition following it. The London recording of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first jazz band to put its music to wax and the origin of the concurrent American jazz craze, could not be bought in Germany until after 1923, and recordings pressed in the U.S. were not available until the German-American matrix-exchange programme began in 1926.<sup>74</sup>

This is not to say that the Weimar interpretation of jazz was entirely a product of its musicians’ imagination. Printed versions of ragtime pieces, ‘coon’ songs and cakewalks were available before the outbreak of the First World War and probably informed the techniques of postwar players.<sup>75</sup> This does not, however, explain the German equation of ‘jazz’ with drums and percussive noise. Drums did not record well before electrical sound reproduction (before 1925) and were absent in both American and German recordings of ragtime, cakewalks and early jazz. Furthermore, sheet music for dance tunes in the early 1920s was written for the piano; arrangements for the drums, along with all the other instruments, were absent.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>72</sup>Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy: Brevier der neuesten Tänze* (Berlin, 1921), pp. 3–4.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>74</sup>Frank Tirro, ‘Jazz Leaves Home: The Dissemination of “Hot” Music to Central Europe’, in Michael J. Budds (ed.), *Jazz and the Germans: Essays on the Influence of ‘Hot’ American Idioms on Twentieth-Century German Music* (Hildesdale, 2002), pp. 77–8. J. Bradford Robinson, ‘Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure’, in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 116.

<sup>75</sup>Fred Ritzel ‘Synkopen-Tänze: Über importierte populäre Musik aus Amerika in der Zeit vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg’, in Wolfgang Kaschuba and Kaspar Maase (eds), *Schund und Schönheit: Populäre Kultur um 1900* (Cologne, 2001). Astrid Kusser also shows that the cakewalk was deeply embedded in turn-of-the-century travel and colonial visual culture and prominently portrayed in postcards. Astrid Kusser, ‘Cakewalking the Anarchy of Empire around 1900’, in Volker M. Langbehn (ed.), *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory* (New York, 2010).

<sup>76</sup>Robinson, ‘Jazz Reception’, p. 120.

It is more likely that cultural notions of race provided the most significant jumping off point for jazz practice. Drawing on an expansive background of colonial literature, advertising, racialist anthropology, ethnographic exhibitions and the primitivism of Expressionism, German musicians acted out what they believed to be the musical embodiment of blackness: frenetic drumming.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, the sounds produced by the earliest German jazz musicians were also primarily textual and visual in origin. They attempted to give sonic meaning to a type of difference that began with the eyes: skin colour. Thus, the sound of jazz was also meant to have a visual component; it synaesthetically channelled and communicated racial pigmentation.

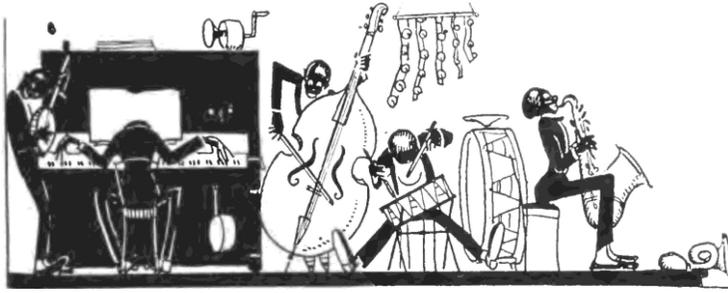
Two drawings in *Jazz und Shimmy* illustrate this connection. Both images are in the chapter which seeks to describe and define 'jazz' (see Figures 2 and 3).<sup>78</sup> The first, placed above the chapter's title, depicts an all-black jazz band: a quintet with drums, banjo, saxophone, bowed bass and piano. The figures sprawl across the page, apparently uninterested in or inattentive to each other, seeming unprofessional and undisciplined. The saxophonist sits and stares away from the other musicians, the drummer gazes downward with his legs spread wide and a banjoist slinks in the corner by the pianist. All around them are *ad hoc* instruments to make percussion and noise: a clown horn, a pot, a crank siren and five strings of sleigh bells.

Like the *BLZ* photo of the jazz trio, the images of the musicians are dependent on the denigrating iconography of minstrelsy. The three visible faces all have broad, white lips; the bassist has an apish, primitive look, while the banjo player squints in a semi-sinister manner. The saxophonist looks like a clown, with wide eyes, a protruding, round nose and an exaggerated backside (it isn't entirely clear if it is due to his own body or to the tails of his coat).

The second drawing shows the German 'Scala jazz band', presumably the house band at the *Scala-Casino* in Berlin. Placed nine pages away from the drawing of the black band, it clearly channels and feeds off the first image yet resituates it in a German, modernist setting. Stylistically, it resembles Futurist paintings and drawings and emphasizes movement through fragmented, overlapping objects and dynamic, angular lines. It is clearly meant to show an elite venue. Men in formal attire dance with women with bobbed haircuts and fur and a champagne bottle shoots its cork across the floor. A violinist stands on a single leg, a banjoist sits cross-legged on the piano and, as in the first image, the pianist hunches over the keys. To the right, but at the centre of the action of the entire scene, is the drummer. He attacks his drums with wild abandon, beating one

<sup>77</sup> Cf. E.M. von Hornbostel, 'African Negro Music', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 1, 1 (1928). Von Hornbostel, one of the founders of Comparative Musicology, argued that 'African rhythm is ultimately founded on drumming . . . what really matters is the act of beating; and only from this point can African rhythms be understood . . . This implies an essential contrast between our rhythmic conception and the Africans; we proceed from hearing, they from motion'. Hornbostel, 'African Negro Music', pp. 52–3. Hornbostel, however, did not see jazz as purely African, but a hybrid of different African and European racial musical traits. See Wipplinger, 'Jazz Republic', Ch. 1. Similarly, the Austrian music critic Richard Wallaschek associated drums and percussion with primitivism, arguing that 'the drum is the most important and widely spread instrument of the savage races'. Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (London, 1893), pp. 108. Florian Carl notes that some of the most influential sources for German discourse on African music, late nineteenth century travel writers, mentioned Africans' 'drum language' time and time again. Florian Carl, *Was bedeutet uns Afrika: Zur Darstellung afrikanischer Musik im deutschsprachigen Diskurs des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Münster, 2004), p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy*, pp. 7, 16.



**Figure 2:** Title illustration for the ‘Jazz’ chapter of *Jazz und Shimmy*.

Franz Wolfgang Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy: Brevier der Neuesten Tänze* (Berlin, 1921), p. 7.

floor tom rapidly with his shoe and the other with his drumstick. His left stick, held high in the air, resembles a baton, as if he is conducting the band with his percussive license. His companions all have obscured visages; with an open mouth, slanted eyebrows and moustache, he literally bears the face of the band.

The relationship between the drawings mimicked and helped construct the relationship between perceived notions of blackness and early Weimar jazz performance. In both relationships, the second is dependent on, and attempts to translate, the first. The extreme attack and noise of German drummers was an attempt synaesthetically to formulate and communicate contemporary notions of blackness through sound. The image of ‘primitive’ African Americans gives sustenance to the picture of the Scala band; it is the German band’s indelible background. In the same manner, patrons of a hotel or nightclub in Berlin or Hamburg were meant to imagine a similar image—that is, envision blackness—when they listened to a German jazz band assault its percussion.

The *BIZ* article ‘Yazz-band und Jimmy’ also thematizes this connection. The ‘deafening noise’ which it argues to be the essence of the jazz band is clearly identified as percussive. As in so many other contemporary depictions, the ‘yazz’ band’s drummer had a range of objects to hit and ring: ‘a large kettle drum, military drums, tambourines, cow bells, a wooden box, huge brass cymbals and various tuned bells and shells’. Like the Scala image’s visual description, the text characterizes the percussionist’s performance as a symphony of loud, indiscriminate thrashing: his drumsticks ‘rage in an insane fury over the drums and tambourines and wooden box and cow bells and brass cymbals’.<sup>79</sup>

One of the three images which accompany this *BIZ* text helps flesh out the meaning of such a performance and the assumptions which lay behind it (see Figure 4).<sup>80</sup> At first glance it only seems loosely related to the subject of the text. It shows a troupe of men and women dressed in grass skirts, headdresses and blackface; none of them carry

<sup>79</sup>Paul Bernhard also describes such ‘wild’ drumming as a central part of a jazz band’s performance. The drummer ‘unleashed a continual clatter, or our ears were greeted with rhythmical hammer-beats from a single iron bar’. Conditioned by the noise of city life, he claims, ‘people were apt to insist that the bass drummer, during his realistic reproduction of pantry noises, should at least stand on his head now and then, and that the snare drummer, as a true artist, should throw his sticks in the air, hit the bass kettledrum with his foot and triangle with his head or hip, and ring a bunch of cowbells, all within a hundredth of a second, while he still kept up a continual roll with his drum sticks’. Bernhard, ‘The German Side of Jazz’, p. 582.

<sup>80</sup>‘Yazzband und Jimmy’, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 (27 Feb. 1921), p. 116.



**Figure 3:** A representation of the jazz band at the Scala theatre in Berlin from *Jazz und Shimmy*.

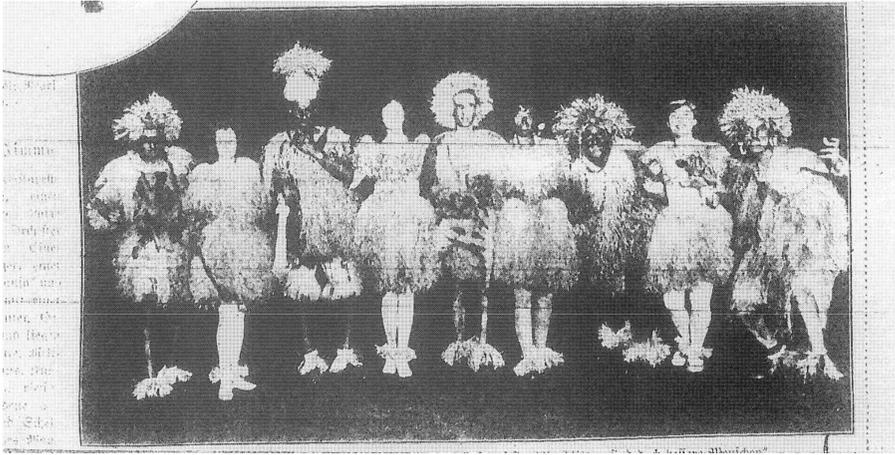
Franz Wolfgang Koebner, *Jazz und Shimmy: Brevier der Neuesten Tänze* (Berlin, 1921), p. 16.

instruments or dance. Taken at a festival entitled ‘Superior People are like Savages’, the costumed group acts out what they imagine to be black savagery, raising their arms and scowling.<sup>81</sup> The inclusion of the photo, however, draws a parallel between jazz performance and blackface impersonations of indigenous Africans. Both were part of a larger culture of primitivism and both involved white affectation of blackness. Wildly playing drums was meant to have the same effect as donning burnt cork.

The connection between jazz performance and blackface is even more clearly presented in an ad in *BIZ* a few years later. An advertisement for Electrola records, it offered ‘the newest dance hits’ played by ‘the most famous dance orchestras in the world: Marek Weber, Jack Hylton and Paul Whiteman’ (see Figure 5).<sup>82</sup> The bands were national representatives of a newly forming international mainstream—Weber was German, Hylton English and Whiteman American—and their orchestras were exclusively white. The ad reminds the viewer that, despite the groups’ whiteness, the pleasures of the music were still deeply intertwined in its supposed blackness and the groups’ imitation and representation of blackness. Above the text, two busts lean against one another. Their faces peer out in blackface and they look towards the viewer with googly eyes and crooked, white lips. Their checkered two-tone jackets, joining the two figures in a single body, are

<sup>81</sup> It is poignant that the representations taken up in the photo are distinctly gendered. It is only the men who wear blackface and act ‘savagely’. The women in the photo, although they wear similar costumes to the men, smile and remain ‘white’.

<sup>82</sup> *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 45 (4 Nov. 1928), p. 1926.



**Figure 4:** A photograph of the festival ‘Superior People are like Savages’ included in the article ‘Yazz-band und Jimmy’. ‘Yazz-band und Jimmy’, *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 9 (27 Feb. 1921), pp. 116.

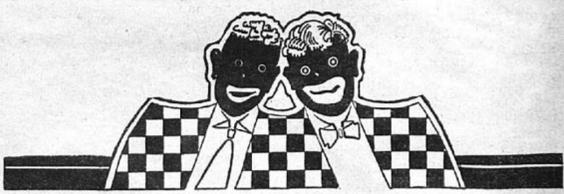
projections of the coexistence of the musicians’ ‘white’ racial identity and ‘black’ racial performance.

Finally, there was another important source of sensory accompaniment to jazz listening: the performance environment. The way the band looked and acted could communicate information to supplement and inform listening. Advertising and souvenir photos of bands from the 1920s shows that groups often, if not exclusively, wore tuxedos and often reminded their listeners of the ‘blackness’ of their music by painting pictures of African Americans on the front of their bass drum.<sup>83</sup> The material background to a performance—whether it be the decorated set of Josephine Baker’s *La Revue Nègre* or the elaborate ornament surrounding a hotel stage—offered its own implications and provocations. Moreover, some listeners would also be quite cognizant of a more intimate and close form of sensation: touch. Dancers would be aware of the feel of another’s hand and back or shoulder, other bodies bumping against oneself and/or the movement of one’s own legs and torso with the sound of the music. Dancing bodies, indeed, involved their own form of listening.

## V

The arrival of American musicians from late 1923 initiated a break in German jazz form and ensemble composition. Entertainment musicians stopped playing with the rhythmic extremes that characterized the ‘grotesque’ phase and moved towards a more refined style that emphasized recognizable ‘European’ elements. This change could be seen in the transformation of the *Stehgeiger* (Café violinist, literally ‘standing violinist’) and leader of the salon orchestra into a ‘jazz band violinist’ or saxophonist. German groups began to imitate the string-heavy orchestration of Paul Whiteman’s American

<sup>83</sup> See the photographs of Weimar jazz bands in Rainer Lotz, *Hot Dance Bands in Germany: A Photo Album*, Vol. 2: *The 1920s* (Menden, 1982), pp. 8, 14.



**Neueste Tanzschlager**  
**SPIELEN DIE WELTBERÜHMTESTEN**  
**TANZORCHESTER: MAREK WEBER**  
**JACK HYLTON, PAUL WHITEMAN**  
**DURCH**  
**»ELECTROLA«**  
**ZWEI TÄNZE NUR MK. 3,75**  
**VORSPIEL OHNE KAUFZWANG!**  
**ELECTROLA GES. M. B. H. BERLIN**  
**W. 8 LEIPZIGERSTR. 23 + W. 15 KURFÜRSTENDAMM 35**  
**FRANKFURT <sup>1/4</sup>M. GOETHESTR. 3 + KÖLN <sup>1/4</sup>RH. HOHESTR. 103**  
**AUTORISIERTE »ELECTROLA« VERKAUFSSTELLEN IN JEDER STADT**

**Figure 5:** 'The Newest Dance Hits': An advertisement for Electrola records.

*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 45 (4 Nov. 1928), pp. 1926.

band and, as their instrumentation changed, the timbral dominance of the 'African' drums became less important and the 'European' violin and saxophone became central. Whiteman's influence did not go unnoticed by contemporaries—between 1925 and 1930, all German jazz authors named Whiteman's extended ensemble as the standard for German groups. Moreover, after Whiteman's June 1926 'Symphonie Jazz' concert in Berlin, German bandleaders quickly changed their names to include this more sophisticated description. Bernhard Ette's '*Jazz-Symphonie-Orchester*', for example, had thirty-four musicians, Hans Schindler's twenty-eight and Arthur Guttman's '*UFA-Symphonie und Jazz-Orchester*' thirty-six.<sup>84</sup>

This period exhibits a shift in the sensory source of jazz. The wellspring of jazz *production* (though not consumption) was no longer textual and visual, but aural. Sound became the predominant model for making sound. The presence of American musicians factored into this; so did jazz records by Americans, which became available for the first time during the mid-1920s. After German and American companies concluded an agreement for the exchange of matrixes, American 78s began to be imported.

<sup>84</sup>Hoffmann, 'Alptraum', pp. 71–73.

German companies, however, also recorded touring and resident musicians such as Sam Wooding or Mike Danzi. Recordings by Americans could now provide instruction and guidance. Matyas Seiber, the head of the controversial jazz programme at the Frankfurt Hoch Conservatory, for example, realized this potential and employed records as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. Sound, not notes or photographs, became the ultimate standard. After repeated practice of specific musical figures and rhythm, Seiber would gather his pupils around a gramophone to verify what the students had played.<sup>85</sup>

Race—and the visual component of race—did not disappear. German jazz bands simply shifted their music's racial signifier from black to white. For some listeners, however, blackness remained essential to the music. The presence of American musicians in Germany provoked the creation of a new aesthetic and moral category within German criticism: 'jazz authenticity'. Many of those who commented on Sam Wooding's performance with the *Chocolate Kiddies* revue were deeply impressed by the band's originality, forcing them to rethink their understanding of this new mass music. Klaus Pringsheim, for example, exclaimed: 'We believed we knew their rhythm—no European has it. From jazz bands in cabarets and variety, we didn't know it'.<sup>86</sup> Wooding and Paul Whiteman's performances gave rise to a new critical discourse that differentiated authentic from inauthentic jazz by reference to race. Wooding's impressive appearance contrasted sharply with Whiteman's disappointing performance; many critics responded by pegging the integrity of the music to the blackness of its performers.<sup>87</sup> As the 1928 Electrola ad shows, however, this shift towards authenticity may have been occurring in critical discourse but it was not necessarily registering in other, less elite sources. Electrola still tried to sell Whiteman's music by implying its blackness.

## VI

The visual music of Weimar jazz was in continuity with, and a product of, a larger transformation of music during the fifty or so years preceding it. Many scholars have recognized the last three decades of the nineteenth century as a period in which the nature of music, sound and listening shifted fundamentally. This radical reshaping is usually attributed to the advent of sound reproduction: Edison's phonograph began a process which altered the ontological status of sound and music and revolutionized its relationship with time and space. Sound, something previously experienced as intangible and fleeting, suddenly became a material object that could be collected, transported, stockpiled and sold.<sup>88</sup> It became, in the words of Pierre Schafer, 'acousmatic'—sound was separated from its original source and moment of enunciation, creating 'a distance, both physical and psychic, between performer and audience that simply never existed before'.<sup>89</sup> These new qualities of phonography had a dramatic influence on subjectivity and the sensorium; it

<sup>85</sup> Wipplinger, 'Jazz Republic', p. 303.

<sup>86</sup> Klaus Pringsheim, 'Chocolate Kiddies', *Das Tagebuch*, 6 (May 1925), p. 805. [*Ihren Rhythmus—kein Europäer hat ihn—glaubten wir zu kennen: von Jazzkappellen, aus Kabarets und Varietes; wir kannten ihn nicht.*] German quoted in Wipplinger, 'Jazz Republic', p. 183 note 69.

<sup>87</sup> Wipplinger, 'Jazz Republic', pp. 155–207.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London, 1995), pp. 6–7.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 18.

effectively produced ‘a new status for hearing’ and, since sound ‘was removed from the body’, it became ‘a way to hear one’s own voice outside the confines of presence’.<sup>90</sup>

Jonathan Sterne has challenged the technocentric cause-and-effect logic of this story and insisted that, rather than fundamentally effecting change in listening and sound, audio recording was itself the effect of a much larger cultural shift. Sound recording, Sterne argues, was the consequence and fulfilment of nineteenth-century practices and discourses: physiology, otology, telegraphy and mediate auscultation. Even so, Sterne recognizes the importance of sound reproduction and suggests that phonographs and gramophones disseminated these techniques of listening much more widely.<sup>91</sup>

This remaking of sound and music is an incredibly important one. At the same time, the focus on audile technique and ‘schizophonia’ has obscured another radical transformation which music underwent during the nineteenth century.<sup>92</sup> Students of the late nineteenth century have recognized that the explosive dissemination of print and visual culture dramatically shifted the nature of visual perception; scholars of visuality and sound have not, however, observed the profound impact it also had on the perceptual status of music.

Music has traditionally been privileged as essentially an object of sound, but if treated as a historical perceptual phenomenon, it becomes clear that it is the site of shifting sensory balancing, competition and collaboration. Richard Leppert has argued that ‘the sight of music has always been central to music’s social meanings and functions’.<sup>93</sup> For those not visually handicapped, music has never been severed from visuality—as the bodies of the musicians and the surroundings of the performance attest—and it has been a textual and visual subject at least as long as there has been written material on music, plastic arts which depicted it and musical notation.<sup>94</sup> Analysing music as a sensory event and cultural object that encompasses more than just sound and listening allows us to examine the way that the different perceptual elements of music related over time.

Music’s appearance as text and image was thus not new in the modern period. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, this phenomenon radically increased as the number of music journals grew larger, photography and lithography expanded the quantity and placement of visual representation and, especially, as mass newspapers reached larger audiences beyond the educated middle classes.<sup>95</sup> Weimar jazz was a

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), pp. 7–8.

<sup>91</sup> Sterne, *Audible Past*, pp. 98–9.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of schizophonia, see R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, N.Y., 1994), pp. 90–1.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Leppert and Steven Zank, ‘The Concert and the Virtuoso’, in James Parakilas (ed.), *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano* (New Haven, 1999), pp. 255.

<sup>94</sup> For the pioneering work on music and visual representation, see Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1988) and *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley, 1993).

<sup>95</sup> Although journals which specialized in music had appeared in northern German cities since 1722, German musical publications ‘developed in fits and starts’ during the eighteenth century. It was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* expanded the tiny readership of these papers to a larger literary public. For examples of the explosive growth of music in print during the second half of the nineteenth century, see Leon Botstein, ‘Music and its Public: Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism in Vienna, 1870–1914’ (Dissertation, Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 863; and Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 4.

heightened continuation of this larger cultural-sensory process; the predominance of jazz as a visual-textual entity was one of the apexes of the increasing appearance of musical text and image and its growing independence from musical sound.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the advent of African American music in Europe coincided with its intensification: the Fisk Jubilee Singers arrived on the scene in Europe in the 1870s just as the appearance of visual and textual music was undergoing rapid expansion and multiplication. From the outset, African American music appeared independently of its performers on postcards, mass circulation newspaper reviews, photographs and films, although, as a study of the music press shows, its frequency in print increased substantially with jazz.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, African American music was racialized and its ‘otherness’ was tied to its connection to the biological, visible body.

At the same time, African American music was fashioned as a sonic-visual break, as something removed from the contemporary European musical landscape. Synaesthetic encounters with classical music were certainly just as possible in the late nineteenth century as they were later with jazz in the 1920s, but the imagination of sound which might occur with printed descriptions of a Brahms symphony would still place it in a familiar ‘Western’ soundscape. By the end of the nineteenth century, classical music was particularly central to German national self-identification and the experience of being German.<sup>98</sup> This did not mean that Germans wholly identified with some sort of monolithic Germanness within classical music: recitals and orchestral concerts were central to middle-class self-identity and class associations could surely be read into such performances. Even so, they were still understood as racially and culturally familiar, as connected to, and part of a recognizable field of European sound and thus sonically similar to workers’ choirs, church music or military bands. Reading about Beethoven or Schumann would conjure up familiar sonic-musical events. African American music, on the other hand, was commonly imagined as something outside of the European domain and removed from the sonic-textual-visual network that connected the different strands of German and European music. Thus, while African American music and jazz were consonant with the larger manifestation of an independent music-as-a-visual-textual-phenomenon in Europe, German visual-sonic fantasies of cakewalks, ragtime and jazz were still constructed as something quite different.

### Abstract

Jazz’s sensational appearance in Europe during the interwar period was a major event in European sound culture. The tours and residencies of American bands and musicians—such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band or Sam Wooding—fundamentally disrupted and transformed the sonic aesthetics of European popular culture. Focusing on jazz as sound culture, however, can obscure the larger character of jazz and the nature of its production and perception. This article argues that jazz, in fact, was primarily a visual and

<sup>96</sup>As I have argued, this independence in appearance did not necessarily mean that music stayed limited to one sense in reception.

<sup>97</sup>For examples of press and visual material on pre-jazz African American music, see the chapters on the Bohee Brothers, Belle Davis and the Black Troubadours in Lotz, *Black People*. See also Kusser, ‘Cakewalking’. For the increased frequency of African American music in the German music press with jazz, see the graphs in Hoffmann, ‘Aspekte’, pp. 217–21.

<sup>98</sup>Applegate, *Bach*; Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (eds), *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago, 2002).

textual phenomenon in Germany during 1920s. Most Germans, it shows, did not have access to live performances of jazz or radio and gramophones. Instead, they encountered it in newspapers and visual culture. This article explores what it meant for jazz to be visual and textual in the Weimar Republic. It also uses jazz as a window onto the larger history of the senses. A number of scholars have argued that the human senses were separated within modernity. This study argues that, within a growing media society such as early twentieth century Germany, the senses did not necessarily remain singular or divided. As this history of Weimar jazz suggests, modern media culture often promoted synaesthesia and perceptual mixing.

**Keywords:** jazz, Germany, the Weimar Republic, synaesthesia, the history of the senses, race, popular music

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