

# Imagining Cool Fashion Bodies and “Exoticism” in the Literature of the Weimar Republic

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Published: May 20, 2020

## Abstract

The era of the Weimar Republic is regarded as a period showing a marked increase in cool fashion presentations. Depictions of coolness as a fashion practice of dressing and style narratives in the literature of the Weimar Republic has this far hardly been discussed in Fashion Studies. In the foreground of the essay are the styling performances of urban flappers, bohemians and jazz boys in novels of the 1920s. With their looks these characters — who can be considered as antecedent hipsters — try to distance themselves from the mainstream. They usually live in metropolises. Mostly this means Berlin, often described as a transcultural area where diverse trends from different countries are blended to the flair of the “Roaring Twenties.” In the German capital a new cosmopolitan scene unfolds that also includes members of the British “bright young things.” Dancing the Charleston, these figures are often presented as wild. Their styles seem as vibrant as their dance steps with which they differentiate themselves from the generation of their bourgeois parents. In this context the essay highlights the question: in what sense is the idea of cool fashion and hipsterism as a statement of otherness often correlated not only with the fashion industry but also with the cool appearance of Afro-American musicians and artists, and in that context with several exoticisms and primitivisms. By showing selected examples the essay points out some problematic dimensions and ambiguities of cool fashion performances from the Weimar Republic till today. This demonstrates that the 1920s were perceived as a short period, as Langston Hughes states, “where the negro was in vogue.” Overall, the essay shows how white writers and artists from their superior perspective of whiteness glorify blackness as a fashionable fetish and an anti-bourgeois statement by combining specific aesthetics and outfits with different mystical stereotypes and desires for nonconformity, closeness to nature and freedom. They formulate a crucial motif of white hipster coolness which is part of the rhetoric of socially critical outsiderism right up until the present day.

**Keywords:** Weimar Republic; Jazz Age; Postcolonial Critique; Fashion History; Queer Style.

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The twenties are regarded as a period showing a marked increase in cool fashion presentations. Particularly, the experiences of the First World War define a horizon of memories serving as a background to the evolution of attitudes of disillusion and nonchalance.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, during this era many "key themes of modern Cool"<sup>2</sup> were distributed by through the rise of the international entertainment industry, the emergence of jazz culture and early pop phenomena<sup>3</sup> in New York, London, Paris or Berlin. There were also crossings between the different cultural contexts, cities and continents.<sup>4</sup> In addition, during this period many authors of the Weimar Republic show in their novels cool looking characters who suggest an aura of autonomy, easiness and an unwillingness to submit. The way that coolness as a fashion practice of dressing is conveyed in the literature of the 1920s has so far hardly been discussed in the literature of Fashion Studies.<sup>5</sup>

In the foreground of this article stands the cool attitude of young hedonists, drifters and flappers in German fictions. These figures could be interpreted as antecedent to modern-day hipsters who also show bohemian qualities. It will be shown that one facet of their coolness is not only constructed as a fashionable deviance that is associated with wildness but also — from a Eurocentric perspective — it is also connotated with exotic<sup>6</sup> or oriental<sup>7</sup> imaginings and partly racist simplifications, which are based on the binary conception of *The West and the Rest*.<sup>8</sup>

The texts examined were chosen as representative examples which unfold an urban flair of the late 1920s in Europe. Numerous writers — such as Vicki Baum, Claire Goll, Ruth Landshoff-Yorck or Klaus Mann — worked as lifestyle journalists for (fashion) magazines and newspapers in Berlin or Paris during this era.<sup>9</sup> Although none of their fictions deal specifically only with fashion or cool behaviors the authors often integrate fashion strategically as a signifier of modernity, gender, social status, sexual openness and especially of a cool nonchalant attitude in their novels.

Evaluating fashion as a practice and representation of aesthetic, social and historical influences, the various texts were studied as literary artworks but also as documents which show the process of writing "style narratives."<sup>10</sup> These style narratives demonstrate vibrant motifs and discourses on the connection between modern dress and the habitus of coolness.

1. Helmut Lethen, *Cool Conduct. The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Catharina Rüß, "Coole Posen in schwarzem Leder. Visualisierungsstrategien von Coolness in Literatur und Kultur der Weimarer Republik," in *Körperbilder — Körperpraktiken. Visualisierung und Vergeschlechtlichung von Körpern in Medienkulturen*, ed. Elke Grittmann and Katharina Lobinger and Irene Nerverla and Monika Pater (Köln: Herbert von Halem, 2018), 140.
2. Dick Pountain and David Robins, *Cool Rules. Anatomy of an Attitude* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 56.
3. Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool. Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) and Maren Lickhardt, *Pop in den 20er Jahren: Leben, Schreiben, Lesen zwischen Fakten und Fiktion* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018).
4. See Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), Klaus Mann's *The Turning Point* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1984); A.B. Christa Schwarz, "New Negro Renaissance — 'Neger Renaissance': Crossovers Between African America and Germany during the Era of the Harlem Renaissance," in *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany*, ed. Maria I. Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 49–74; Jonathan O. Wipplinger, *The Jazz Republic. Music, Race and American Culture in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).
5. On fashion and German literature see Julia Bertschik, *Mode und Moderne. Kleidung als Spiegel des Zeitgeistes in der deutschsprachigen Literatur (1770–1945)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005).
6. Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*, ed. Yaël Rachel Schlick (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2002).
7. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2005).
8. See Stuart Hall: "The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).
9. See Bertschik, 180–273, Thomas Blubacher, *Die vielen Leben der Ruth Landshoff-Yorck* (Berlin: Insel, 2015); Michaela Karl, *Bayerische Amazonen: Zwölf Frauenportraits aus zwei Jahrhunderten* (München: Piper, 2012); 116–131; Uwe Naumann and Michael Töteberg (ed.), *Klaus Mann. Die Neuen Eltern. Aufsätze, Reden, Kritiken 1924–1933* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: rororo 1992); Nicole Nottelmann, *Die Karrieren der Vicki Baum: Eine Biographie* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2007).
10. Carol Tulloch: *The Birth of Cool. Style Narratives of the African Diaspora* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 4–8.

## Concept of Coolness

In contrast to the inflationary usage of the word "cool" as a term for approval or praise, coolness is defined here as a multi-layered concept that is in constant transit and cannot be fixed to only one specific period, country or gender. "Rather, it must be seen through the prism of a flexible, multifarious kaleidoscope of meaning stemming from a variety of international multi-racial influences and contexts."<sup>11</sup> But with regards to the spectrum of contemporary research it can be stated that despite the existence of a variety of different interpretations there is a consensus about what, fundamentally, the term coolness means: coolness communicates an aura of distance and autonomy.<sup>12</sup> Denoting a posture of sovereignty and, to a certain extent, of resistance, the label "cool" first appeared in the United States during the 1920s; the Jamaican-born political activist Marcus Garvey published his poem "Keep Cool" in 1927.<sup>13</sup> Yet it was not popularized in Germany during this time. In the literature of the Weimar Republic, however, some figures present a specific attitude which only can be interpreted as cool.

The range of cool fashion phenomena in the novels examined here extends from military and sporty variants, elegant dandy and diva-like versions all the way to boisterous and hedonistic facets.<sup>14</sup> In this article the emphasis lies on the wild side, often imagined as exotic. Although the term coolness can imply associations around coldness, self-control and restraint, it contains many more meanings. It is also linked to irony, dynamism, urbanity and unconventionality. Coolness does not denote a frosty insensitivity. Rather it implies an "art of practice of everyday life"<sup>15</sup> that oscillates between heat and cold and is characterized by a confident way of acting connected with a confident style. The cool style is often a hybrid collage or bricolage<sup>16</sup> that crosses boundaries in many ways. Cool appearances mostly express an *I-don't-care*-attitude, which suggests a distance to dependencies and mostly an existence distinct from the bourgeois habitus. In equivalence to the speech act coolness in the area of the language of style is articulated by a nonchalant and partially resisting play with stylish vocabulary. Frequently, this play undermines traditional dress codes and mainstream limits of taste by fluctuating between two poles: the pole of *up-dressing* and the pole of *down-dressing*. Cool characters mostly appear either in a style of an accentuated casualness or shabbiness or in a style of extravagance, eccentricity and glamour. Sometimes they seem to undermine middle class conventions and rebel against their social environment by dressing up, sometimes they provoke by dressing down.<sup>17</sup> Besides, it is not only about the possession of fashion artefacts, but also about the cultural practice of styling as a body technique<sup>18</sup> exemplified by confident body poses and suggestions of dignity, distance and autonomy as a whole.

The Charleston, Foxtrott and Shimmy dancing jazz girls and boys in the novels of the 1920s express their cool habitus by presenting themselves wildly and untamed with lanky and jagged movements, unkempt-looking hair and airy attires. Their outfits seem as loose and easy-going as their dance steps with which they differentiate themselves from their bourgeois parents. This distinction is connected with phan-

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11. Catharina Rüß, "Looking Cool in Black Leather," *The Fashion Studies Journal*, n. 4 (August 2017), <http://www.fashionstudiesjournal.org/longform/2017/7/28/cool-poses-with-leather-jackets-bm6ee>.
  12. Urs Sommer, "Coolness. Zur Geschichte der Distanz," *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, vol. 1 (2007): 30–44; Gabriele Menges, "Coolness — Zur Karriere eines Begriffs. Versuch einer historischen und analytischen Annäherung," in *Coolness. Zur Ästhetik einer kulturellen Strategie und Attitüde*, ed. Annette Geiger, Gerald Schröder and Anne Söll (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010), 17–38; Ulla Haselstein, Irmela Hijya-Kirschner, Catrin Gerdorf and Elena Giannoulis (ed.), *The Cultural Career of Coolness in European Antiquity, The United States, and Japan* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).
  13. Ted Vincent, *Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 131.
  14. Catharina Rüß, *Mode und Coolness in Romanen und Essays der Weimarer Republik*. (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2016).
  15. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
  16. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1988).
  17. In the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie propagates a sober and unpretentious style especially for men in distinction to the aristocracy. See Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
  18. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *The Body: A reader*, ed. Mariam Motamedi Fraser (London: Routledge, 2005), 73–8.

tasies about liberation and also an alternative way of living in opposition to many bourgeois values<sup>19</sup> like protestant work ethics<sup>20</sup>, ambition, preservation of property, heteronormativity and marriage.

## Cool Down-Dressing

Many novels of the Weimar Republic contain a bohemian type representing the romantic "myth" of an independent artist as a "different *sort of person* from his fellow human beings"<sup>21</sup> In the 1920s, however, bohemian dress and lifestyle became not only a form of expression for artists but also a trend of urban fashionistas too. Young painters, writers and entertainers wear informal apparels or 'eccentric' colorful fabrics in works such as Klaus Mann's *Der Fromme Tanz* (The Pious Dance) (1925) and *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen* (Rendezvous in Infinity) (1932), in Wilhelm Emanuel Süskind's *Jugend* (Youth) (1929), Hans Janowitz's *Jazz* (1929) as well as in Ruth Landshoff-Yorck's *Die Vielen und der Eine* (1930) and *Roman einer Tänzerin* (1933). Some narratives also include work-shy slackers and adventurers who embody the bohemian lifestyle as a fashion statement, such as Wilhelm Speyer's *Charlotte etwas verrückt* (1927), Vicki Baum's *Hell in Frauensee* (1928) or Claire Goll's *Eine Deutsche in Paris* (1927).

Although many researchers locate the first rise of hipsterism in the 1940s, young bohemians and dandies without aristocratic pretensions already appeared in the 1920s and acted similarly to the hipsters who emerged after the Second World War. Many characters in the novels of the Weimar Republic also confess an affinity with jazz and popular culture.<sup>22</sup> Disillusioned by the ideologies of the older authorities they propagate a restless life on the road and experimentations with drugs. Their vestimentary looks often show their fascination with underdogs and clochards. In addition, their hipsterish down-dressing practice has a long historical continuity which is well documented in portraits of the 1770s or in Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*<sup>23</sup> and is later also mentioned in Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (1940).<sup>24</sup> It found its expression in the *Hobomania* trend of the 1920s, the adoption of the migrant worker's dress.<sup>25</sup> Goll for instance portrays in her novel the bon vivant Jaques as an anarchic rebel in a *down-dressed* outfit. He refuses to have a monogamous relationship or a conventional steady job. In opposition to the sleek and clean appearance of the bourgeois in a dark suit<sup>26</sup> Jaques presents himself with wild, unkempt curly hair<sup>27</sup>, a ragged raincoat and an old sport cap, and he stresses that he would never look like an "idiot with a bourgeois hat."<sup>28</sup>

A group of artists stage themselves in a similar way in Klaus Mann's novel *Der fromme Tanz*. These young people live in subcultural milieus in Berlin, Paris and Munich. Fascinated by the French bohemian scene around Jean Cocteau and the Surrealists, Mann's book was the first openly gay novel in Germany. In this text, the main character Andreas, a queer painter, rebels against his family by traveling

19. See Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hettmann (ed.), *Der bürgerliche Wertebimmel. Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

20. See Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, ed. Dirk Käsler (München: Beck, 2004).

21. Elizabeth Wilson, *Bobemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (London: Tauris Parke, 2009), 3. See also Elizabeth Wilson, "Bohemian Dress and the Heroism of Everyday Life," in *Fashion Theory. The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 2, n. 3 (September 1998): 225–44.

22. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 2017), 48.

23. Daniel James Cole, "Dumpster Chic and Haute Homeless: Placing Brother Sharp in a Fashion Industry Continuum," in *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, vol. 5, n. 1–2 (Bristol: intellect, 2018): 27–8.

24. Walter Benjamin, "Das Passagen-Werk I," in *Gesammelte Schriften. Band V*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1982), 124–5.

25. Rolf Lindner, *Die Entdeckung der Stadtkultur. Soziologie aus der Erfahrung der Reportage* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1990), 174–5. Chaplin's *Tramp* represented the stereotype of the hobo. Many references to this character can be found in novels of the Weimar Republic.

26. See Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (London: Bloomsbury 2016).

27. Claire Goll, "Eine Deutsche in Paris," in *Claire Goll: Romane*, ed. Barbara Glauert-Hesse (Göttingen: Wallstein 2005), 229.

28. Claire Goll, 205–06.

around, consuming cocaine, wearing his hair long at the front, eye make-up, a blue informal uniform with a Russian cut, playing Shimmy songs aggressively on his parent’s piano and reading Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>29</sup> As John Leland stated, Whitman created “the intellectual framework for hip by celebrating the individual and the nonconformist, advocating civil disobedience” and “savoring the homoerotic.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Andreas’ down-dressed Russian apparel and his fascination for jazz music symbolize his alleged otherness and fascination with countercultures.<sup>31</sup> Instead of working in a suit during the day, the young painter embodies the bohemian attitude of a night drifter in informal clothes whose acts are located in the dark.

## Self-Stylization as Exotics

The origin of the word “bohemian” can be traced back to the fifteenth century. It was used as to hint at a gipsy heritage.<sup>32</sup> Later it referred to a messy person with unmoral customs. In the nineteenth century, some European artists promoted it as a self-image in order to perform the role of outlaw, questioning bourgeois restrictions and rules but also western industrialization and capitalism.<sup>33</sup> Therefore they positioned themselves in an imagined wilderness as a person in self-imposed exile from the bourgeoisie order. At the beginning of the twentieth century their lifestyle was adopted also by hedonists and socialites who tried to affect a “rarer form of impoverishment in order to express affinity with the itinerant”, the “gypsy order of society.”<sup>34</sup>

The act of self-staging as bohemian, a declassified community, is interwoven with the concept of dressing differently than the mainstream. In that context being distinctive also means trying to implicate an alliance with the non-western world. Before the First World War many bohemians, like the expressionist poet Else Lasker Schüller<sup>35</sup> for example, tried to display their individuality by collaging indigenous styles and looks of ethnic groups who were often perceived as wild savages or outlaws.<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 1)

Paul Poiret was influenced by these avantgarde artists — *the Expressionists, the Fauves, the Wiener Werkstätte*<sup>37</sup> to name but a few groups — and transformed their aesthetics into luxurious creations for the fashion market.<sup>38</sup> The French word “the fauves” (wild beasts) alluded to an association between bright colors and savagery, while the occurrence of trousers and Asian-styled cuts for women were interpreted as oriental and exotic, equating to an untamed jazziness.<sup>39</sup> Overall, by combining influences of the

29. Klaus Mann, *Der fromme Tanz* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: rororo, 2010), 39–40, 171. Whitman’s lyrics were regarded as a cult book (probably comparable to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* in the 1950s) for many youth- and subcultures at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany. See Walter Grünzweig, “Whitman in the German speaking Countries,” in *Walt Whitman and the World*, ed. Gay Wilson Allen and Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 165–7.

30. John Leland, *Hip: Die History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 40–1.

31. Klaus Mann took an ambiguous stance against this music since the late 1930s. In his autobiography *The Turning Point* he disassociated himself from the jazz enthusiasm in the 1920s. See Cornelius Partsch, *Schräge Töne. Jazz und Unterhaltungsmusik in der Kultur der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2000), 74.

32. Christine Magerski, *Gelebte Ambivalenz. Die Bohème als Prototyp der Moderne* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 121. See also Wolfgang Ruppert, *Künstler! Kreativität zwischen Mythos, Habitus und Profession* (Wien: Böhlau, 2018).

33. Magerski, 121.

34. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, 48.

35. See Lydia Strauß, “‘Ich bin ein Indianer! Bedenken Sie das!’ Else Lasker-Schülers Spiel und Verwandlung im Großstadt-dschungel,” in *City Girls. Bubiköpfe & Blaustrümpfe in den 1920er Jahren* ed. Julia Freytag and Alexandra Tacke (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2011), 71–90.

36. See Gerald Schröder and Christa Threuter (ed.), *Wilde Dinge in Kunst und Design. Aspekte der Alterität seit 1800* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017).

37. Many designers working for Wiener Werkstätte were inspired by Asian arts. In 1910 they exhibited their “brightly patterned, hand printed fabrics that later appeared in Poiret’s designs.” Heather Hess, “The Lure of Vienna: Poiret and the Wiener Werkstätte,” in *Poiret*, ed. Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 39.

38. Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion. A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 230–31.

39. With recourse to these imaginations Poiret performed his spring collection 1911 as an oriental party in order to display his



Figure 1: Else Lasker-Schüler, „Fakir von Theben“ 1912, Else Lasker-Schüler Gesellschaft

Middle East, India and Japan, Poiret had a big impact on the development of the art deco style in the twenties.<sup>40</sup>

In a broader sense, this trend towards exoticism was a manifestation of *otherness* as the *new*, the opposite of the *ordinary*, the contradiction of the *known*. Taking into account Victor Segalen's work on *Aesthetics of Diversity*, exoticism can be divided into three dimensions. The first dimension is a geographic exoticism, in which the other is spatially conceptualized as a cultural and ethnic difference of distance; the second dimension is a temporally imagined distance, in which otherness is placed in a different time — either an idealized past or future. The third dimension appears as a sexual exoticism which can include both images of spatial and temporal distance as deviance in the context of gender. In the art and fashion discourse between the two World Wars these three dimensions of exoticism are intermingled; aspects like sexual impartiality, new technologies like cars and motorbikes or the emancipation of women and homosexuals<sup>41</sup> were interwoven with imaginations of wild nature and ancient cultures but also with science fiction.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the ultra-archaic and ultra-modern were not perceived as dialectical opposites, rather as two sides of one concept of modernity.<sup>43</sup>

In Victor Margueritte's novel *La Garçonne* (1922) these variations of exoticism are embodied by the main character Monique Lherbier. She is not an artist, but personifies the cool bohemian lifestyle by undermining several bourgeois conventions and gender roles. She leaves her husband, has lesbian love affairs, cuts her hair and dyes it red and attracts attention by adopting manly and Asian clothes, dancing in Jazz clubs, cruising around in her car and smoking opium. Monique advanced as a scandalous fashion icon — the trend of wearing masculine suits, pyjamas and short hair was called *à la garçonne* after this novel was published.<sup>44</sup> The main character became a role model for many figures in German literature and cinema.<sup>45</sup>

In this connection it is not surprising that writers like Vicki Baum, Ruth Landshoff-Yorck, Kurt Tucholsky<sup>46</sup> or Wilhelm Speyer showed cool, independent and queer-looking characters wearing exotic outfits. Not only were women now presented in oriental clothes. Landshoff-Yorck and Klaus Mann also pictured young bi- or homosexual new men in silky attires, obviously influenced by the Sheik trend personified by Hollywood star Rudolph Valentino.<sup>47</sup> In Landshoff-Yorck's *Die Vielen und der Eine* a group of young Oxford students provoke the police by balancing on a railing and wearing shiny kimonos.<sup>48</sup> And the writer Sebastian in Klaus Mann's *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen* wears a dressing gown

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*jupe culottes* which were identified as lewd because the erotic and exotic were indissolubly united. "In Vienna the first woman to wear a *jupe culotte* in public [...] had to be whisked away in a car by the police." Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 137–38; and Heather Hess, 39.

40. Adam Gezy, 137. See also Lucy Fischer: *Designing Women. Cinema, Art Deco and the Female Form* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

41. The German painter Walter Spies was one of the famous queer expats who settled in Bali during the 1920s. The tropical islands — regions of the Dutch colonies — were idealized as a paradise where gay men can live freely without fear. On colonial structures in inter-cultural queer intimacies see Eng-Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens. Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: New York University Press 2014).

42. These facets of exoticism are commingled in Fritz Lang's movie *Metropolis* (1926), in which the phenomenon of the New Woman is personified by the character Maria. On the one hand she embodies an archaic goddess and on the other a cyborg. See Florentine Strzelczyk, "Maschinenfrauen Sci-Fi Filme: Reflektionen über *Metropolis* (1926) and *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996)," in *Textmaschinenkörper: Genderorientierte Lektüren des Androiden*, ed. Eva Kormann, Anke Gilleir and Angelika Schlimmer (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2006), 243–4.

43. Bertschik, 49.

44. See also Valerie Steele, "A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk," in *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk*, ed. Valerie Steele (New York: Yale University Press 2013), 24–34.

45. Julia Drost, *La Garçonne. Wandlungen einer literarischen Figur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 181.

46. See the novel by Kurt Tucholsky, *Schloß Gripsholm* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, [1931] 2005), 127.

47. Jon Savage, *Teenage. Die Erfindung der Jugend* (Frankfurt a.M.-New York: Campus, 2008), 219–21. Klaus Mann praised Valentino as a fashion leader. See Klaus Mann, "Heute und Morgen. Zur Situation des jungen, geistigen Europas," in *Klaus Mann. Die Neuen Eltern. Aufsätze, Reden, Kritiken 1924–1933*, ed. Uwe Naumann and Michael Töteberg (Reinbek bei Hamburg: rororo 1992), 138.

48. Ruth Landshoff-Yorck, *Die Vielen und der Eine* (Grambin: Aviva, 2001) 131–2.

while consuming hashish in Morocco.<sup>49</sup>

Young women were often portrayed as wild romping girls, tomboys or tropical maidens with boyish clothes but also Asian dresses as well as indigenous costumes and jewelry. However, in many cases their emancipation was pictured in relation to primitivism and childishness.<sup>50</sup> In Baum's novel *Hell in Frauensee*, for instance, the gamine Puck wears Javanese batik fabrics and her singing voice is compared to the sound of Chinese rowers and children.<sup>51</sup> This was a typical motif of performing coolness as the other. The cool difference as a distance to and critique of western civilization also implied a critique of restrictive adulthood. For one thing, during this era infantility was part of the concept of many avantgarde movements like the Dadaists.<sup>52</sup> Secondly, it was also a crucial element of many racist tropes during the Weimar Republic. Non-western cultures and populations were often codified as uncivilized, childish or base. From the superior Eurocentric perspective, blacks and indigenous people were idealized as countering western capitalism and presented as noble savages.<sup>53</sup>

## Jazz Culture, Queer Hipsterism and "White Negroes"

In the literature of the Weimar Republic many nonchalant characters interpret "popular Negro culture" as an "aesthetics of cool."<sup>54</sup> Like Andreas in Klaus Mann's *Der fromme Tanz*, who suggests his nonconformism by playing jazz songs, the figures suggest a cool habitus by referring to jazz culture. Regarding this phenomenon, Langston Hughes has claimed that the Jazz Age was perceived as a short period, "where the negro was in vogue."<sup>55</sup> In the mid-1920s Josephine Baker and other entertainers like Sam Wooding and the *Chocolate Kiddies* brought Afro-American style, dance and music to European metropolises. They had a tremendous impact on the rise of the jazz euphoria in Berlin, at the same time were promoted in racist notions of ethnicity, animalism and promiscuity. Although Baker challenged the "veracity of primitivist conventions by pushing them into absurdity and exposing their essentially contrived nature,"<sup>56</sup> the mainstream discourse seemed to ignore the cutting edge of her irony.(Fig. 2)

In 1926, the controversial book *Nigger Heaven* by the American dandy Carl van Vechten was published. It is considered an example of the literary glorification of blackness. This text features Harlem as a paradise from which civilization has fallen.<sup>57</sup> For many white hedonists and queers the Afro American district in New York also symbolized a place of libertine lifestyle and free sexuality.<sup>58</sup> Ruth Landshoff-Yorck alluded to that sub-meaning in her novel *Die Vielen und der Eine* by presenting an American bohemian, Hugh, who is engaged in sadomasochistic practices and meets lovers in sailor uniforms in Harlem.

49. Klaus Mann, *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 2007) 266.

50. See also Cornelius Partsch, "Early Jazz Figures in Weimar Germany," in *Jazz in German-language Literature*, ed. Kirsten Krick-Aigner and Mark-Oliver Schuster (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2013), 95–113.

51. Vicki Baum, *Hell in Frauensee* (Berlin, Darmstadt: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1956), 223.

52. In the context of modern art primitivism was conceptualised as a new beginning and renunciation of European traditions. See Alexandra Karentzos, "Wilde Mode. Exotismus und Tropikalismus," in *Wilde Dinge in Kunst und Design. Aspekte der Alterität seit 1800*, ed. Gerald Schröder and Christina Threuter (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), 105.

53. See Claire Goll's novel *Der Neger Jupiter raubt Europa* which was published in 1926. On cinema and exoticism see Tobias Nagl, *Die unheimliche Maschine. Rasse und Repräsentation im Weimarer Kino* (München: edition text + kritik, 2009); Jörg Schöning (ed.), *Triviale Tropen: exotische Reise- und Abenteuerfilme aus Deutschland 1919–1939* (München: Text und Kritik, 1997).

54. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, 48.

55. Langston Hughes, *Autobiography: The Big Sea* (New York: Will and Wang, 1993), 228.

56. Terri Francis, "Embodied Fictions, Melancholy Migrations," in *The Josephine Baker Critical Reader. Selected Writings on the Entertainer and Activist*, ed. Mae G. Henderson and Charlene B. Regester (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017), 134.

57. Michael Jarrett, *Drifting on a Read. Jazz as a Model for Writing* (New York: State University of New York, 1999), 118.

58. Elisa Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire. Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (New York: State University of New York, 2009), 83–106.





Figure 2: Josephine Baker dancing the Charleston, 1926, Walery

In addition, some novels show how jazz music is interlinked with the phantasm of the white negro. It is a crucial aspect of hipster coolness of the twentieth century: the image of white jazz enthusiasts who try to distinct themselves from their social background by appropriating characteristics of blackness as a strategy of self-exotification and idealizing African-American culture as an “exit strategy from social squareness.”<sup>59</sup> This motif was explored in Norman Mailer’s essay *White Negro* (1957). But some nuances of this concept are subtly embedded in narratives of the Weimar Republic, for instance in Wilhelm Speyer’s novel *Charlott etwas verrückt*. The performance of unconventionality is converged here with stereotyped attributes of blackness. For instance, the main character, the glamorous socialite Charlott, is characterized as a car-driving flapper girl who looks like a boisterous goddess with pearls and short black wavy hair. She speaks with a “Negro rhythm” and “Charleston tone”<sup>60</sup> so that the people around her wonder why she is not black. (Fig. 3)

In a similar way Speyer portrays Charlott’s companion, the jazz lover and art trader Holk, who comes from the United States and lives in Berlin. He wears colorful suits with loose cuts, a cowboy hat and “Negro-curly hair”<sup>61</sup> like a lion. Also, his easy-going and sneaky movements provoke connotations associated with wild animals. His nonchalant British friend Stanley is presented in a similar way, with messy hair worn long at the front, grey checked Oxford bags and sports jackets.

While white nonconformists were influenced by jazz culture, some Afro-American jazz musicians were inspired by the dress of white European aristocrats and dandies<sup>62</sup>, as Alphonso D. McClendon shows in his study on *Fashion and Jazz*. Their cool performance “was constructed through the efforts in dress, lifestyle and behavior” in order to counter “a harmful image sustained by segregation and the music’s

59. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, 55.

60. Wilhelm Speyer, *Charlott etwas verrückt* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2008), 18, 140.

61. Wilhelm Speyer, 34.

62. See also Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion. Black Dandyism and the Styling of the Black Diasporic Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 2009).



Figure 3: Charleston by Yva, between 1926 and 1927, Villa Grisebach

inferiority."<sup>63</sup> Bands like *Zach Whyte and the Chocolate Beau Brummells* not only alluded with their names to British aestheticians, they also presented themselves in elegant evening suits. But the *up-dressing* of many jazz musicians, who wore Oxford bags, was banned as "exaggerated jazz clothing" by the members of the *American National Association of Retail Clothiers and Furnishers* in 1926.<sup>64</sup> From 1925, British students around Harold Acton and Brian Howard — the Bright Young People,<sup>65</sup> who were also fascinated with jazz culture — wore extremely wide-legged trousers called Oxford bags.<sup>66</sup> These hedonists were regarded as fashion leaders in the 1920s. Even Prince Edward was influenced by their new silhouette, accordingly the new style found its way in magazines all over the world. Because of their wide cuts, which came close to the airy volume of a skirt, the Oxford bags were associated with femininity and queerness<sup>67</sup> but also with jazz culture. In addition, their androgynous appeal communicated a new ideal of masculinity in contrast to the military stiffness of the preceding decades. Not surprisingly, the new men's fashion of the 1920s arrived in Germany, not least because of exchanges between British and German subcultures. Brian Howard, for example, a friend of Klaus Mann, visited the nightlife scene in Berlin.<sup>68</sup> The nonchalant style of his community entered the literature of the Weimar Republic through jazz hits referencing wearers of Oxford bags like Holk in Wilhelm Speyer's *Charlott etwas verrückt*.

Thomas Mann also noticed the change in the male body image and described it as an exotic phenomenon of his son's generation. In his article *Die Ehe im Übergang* as well as in his short story *Unordnung und frühes Leid*, which both were published in 1925, he stresses that the new styling practices of young women and men tend to blend into a non-binary look. In this gender ambiguity he saw a symptom of youth's sloppiness which has nothing in common with the traditional order of society that is based on gender contrasts, military discipline and chivalry.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, Siegfried Kracauer criticized in his essays not only jazz music but also fashion as expressions of emptiness.<sup>70</sup> Especially the outfits of the jazz enthusiasts, their voluminous trousers combined with sporty belts which replaced the suspenders of the older generation, were interpreted as signifiers of a decline in values.<sup>71</sup>

On the whole, these texts indicate that the white young hedonists in the novels of the Weimar Republic use fashions as statements of empowerment and provoke the older generation with their self-stylizations. But even if they try to change restrictions and widen their scope of action, their attitude is implicitly also shaped by their society's colonial traditions as well as their privileged position which enables them to finance cars, journeys, clothes and nightlife amusements. In this context the figures are barely placed in opposition to the establishment. In his novel *Jazz*, Hans Janowitz gives a striking example of how countercultural performances in the 1920s expose crucial elements of commodification. In his text a manager of the Lord Punch's Band — a group of rowdy boys and dancing girls — pushes these people to cruise with scooters through Paris as a marketing strategy. The businessman also coaches them to wear sporty suits and dresses and produces a short film trailer in order to promote the musicians as new fashion icons in the cinema. Furthermore, Janowitz's novel is an exceptional example of how "raciolog-

63. Alphonso D. McClendon, *Fashion and Jazz. Dress, Identity and Subcultural Improvisation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 131.

64. Alphonso D. McClendon, 61–2.

65. Jon Savage, 259–63. A group of hedonistic snobs, students and socialites of Britain's elite was called Bright Young People or Bright Young Things whose scandalous antics were highlighted in the press.

66. Jon Savage, 260. Probably these wide trousers were predecessors of the zoot suit, the popular fashion garment worn by African Americans and Mexican pachucos during the 1930s and 1940s.

67. Günter Erbe, *Der moderne Dandy* (Köln: Böhlau, 2017), 67–8.

68. See Robert Beachy, *Das andere Berlin* (München: Siedler, 2015).

69. Thomas Mann, "Die Ehe im Übergang," in *Thomas Mann. Essays II, 1914–1926*, ed. Hermann Kurzke (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002), 1026–44; Thomas Mann, *Unordnung und frühes Leid und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1987), 170–214.

70. See Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Reise und der Tanz," in *Siegfried Kracauer. Essays, Feuilletons, Rezensionen. Band 5.2 1924–1927*, ed. Inka Mülder-Bach (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 214–23.

71. Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Hosenträger. Eine historische Studie," in *Siegfried Kracauer. Essays, Feuilletons, Rezensionen. Band 5.2 1924–1927*, ed. Inka Mülder-Bach (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 482–5.

ical explanations and definitions of jazz music" are subverted, because Janowitz refuses "to regurgitate stereotypical images of blacks."<sup>72</sup> The only Afro-American character in his text, Bibi Black, is portrayed as a cool distinguished lady in an elegant dress who suggests that she "acts as a figure who satirized the racist and often racist discourse surrounding black people."<sup>73</sup>

Overall, the style narratives of the Weimar Republic show how coolness is attached to the creation of distance as difference. This difference includes the potential of new fashions linked with imaginations of otherness and associations like freedom, mobility, gender ambiguity, individuality and internationalism. The new is conveyed through a mixture of various elements of exoticism in which the ultra-archaic and the ultra-modern, the jungle and metropolis, the animalism and the mechanical are blended. Moreover, the style narratives also suggest that statements of deviance can become impulses for new mainstream trends. Interestingly, this coolness phenomenon is still commonplace, for instance in how the image of today's hipsters are framed. Cool personalities often appear as fashion forerunners who create possible new forms of conformism.

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72. Jürgen E. Grandt: "The Colors of Jazz in the Weimar Republic: Hans Janowitz's Jazz Takes the Coltrane," *Jazz in German-language Literature*, ed. Kirsten Aigner-Krick and Marc-Oliver Schuster (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2013), 81.

73. Jürgen E. Grandt, *Gettin' Around. Jazz, Script, Transnationalism* (Athens: Georgia Press, 2018), 71.

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