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Author(s): Susan Laikin Funkenstein

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## **A Man's Place in a Woman's World: Otto Dix, Social Dancing, and Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Germany**

Susan Laikin Funkenstein

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Focusing on Otto Dix's 1922 painting *To Beauty*, this article explores how Dix, a German working-class artist, promoted himself in the work as an Americanized, bourgeois, jazz-loving dancer. In so doing, Dix utilized the painting's composition, symbolism, and cultural context to argue for a masculine, multiracial dominance in the female-associated world of dance. By fundamentally questioning gendered divisions within Weimar dance culture, Dix's example demonstrates how men were seminal participants in dance's vitality. This examination reconceptualizes historical gender alignments in cultural spheres, and thus envisions new modes of cultural participation in which masculinity, like femininity, changes over time. (SLF)

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In the German cultural world of the 1920s, artist Otto Dix frequently positioned himself in the spotlight. Born in 1891 to a working-class family in southeastern Germany, Dix served in the trenches during World War I, attended the Academy of Applied Arts in Dresden, and by the mid-1920s became a prominent Berlin portraitist and one of the most recognized realist artists of his time. His rise to fame, orchestrated by his enterprising art dealer, Karl Nierendorf, included two major publicity-garnering scandals in 1923: first, when the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, which had purchased his gruesome anti-war painting *The Trenches* (*Der Schützengraben*, 1923), returned it due to extensive negative attention; and second, an obscenity trial for his painting *Girl before a Mirror* (*Mädchen vor dem Spiegel*, 1921), for which Dix was later acquitted (Schröck-Schmidt 161–64; Strobl 67–79, 88–97). During the same period as his careful career maneuverings, Dix danced. A talented amateur social dancer, Dix favored the shimmy, an African-American jazz dance popular in the early 1920s, as well as the Charleston and the

tango, and his enthusiasm and aptitude were well and widely recognized in his social and artistic circles. Part bad boy, part rising star, and part enigma, Dix appears to have been aware of how he presented himself and how others perceived him.

Dix enhanced this savvy self-promotion through his performances of identity. All identity is performed, but Dix serves as a particularly fine example, because he fluidly, simultaneously, and often overdramatically explored numerous aspects of his multi-faceted self, including masculinity, nationality, class, and race. More specifically, Dix's posings and posturings correspond to Katrin Sieg's concept of "ethnic drag."<sup>1</sup> Due to its historical normativity in Western culture, the white (Christian) body has "universal performability," such that it can readily don the stereotypes of other ethnicities and cultures. This dressed white body might be accepted in drag, but it is not mistaken for non-white, as the viewer is aware of the disconnect between "signifier and signified." This estrangement, Sieg states in paraphrasing Bertolt Brecht, derives from a "misfit of actor and role" (1-32). Ethnic drag is distinct from passing, a theory articulated by Werner Sollors, in which individuals of mixed descent present themselves as belonging to one racial or ethnic group, often of a higher class standing as a way to gain social acceptance, and are believed by the viewer to be biologically of that group (246-84).

Sieg's theorizing of ethnic drag may serve as a framework for Dix's performance of identity, for his biography, art, and reception by others suggest how Dix aligned himself with American culture, normative (bourgeois) masculinity, and blackness, even as viewers in the 1920s clearly would have understood that Dix was a white, German male. Focusing on Dix's 1922 painting *To Beauty (An die Schönheit)*, I will explore how an artist who identified with his German and working-class background, but who was fascinated with American culture, created an image as a way to assume a bourgeois life for himself. Here, the artist's body and his surrogates in the composition serve as sites for a discourse on the Americanization of dance culture of the Weimar Republic (1918-33).<sup>2</sup> The composition, symbolism, and cultural context of *To Beauty* indicate that Dix is more than just a participant in this jazz world; the painting argues for a masculine multiracial presence, even a dominance, in a cultural realm often associated with women.

Women's perceived dominance in the Weimar popular dance world can hardly be overstated. Far greater numbers of women than men performed on stage in popular revues and in expressionist choreographies. Even in social dancing, in which men and women danced together and men led, women often served as the dominant image of dance, most notably in advertising and magazines. For some critics, dance's physical

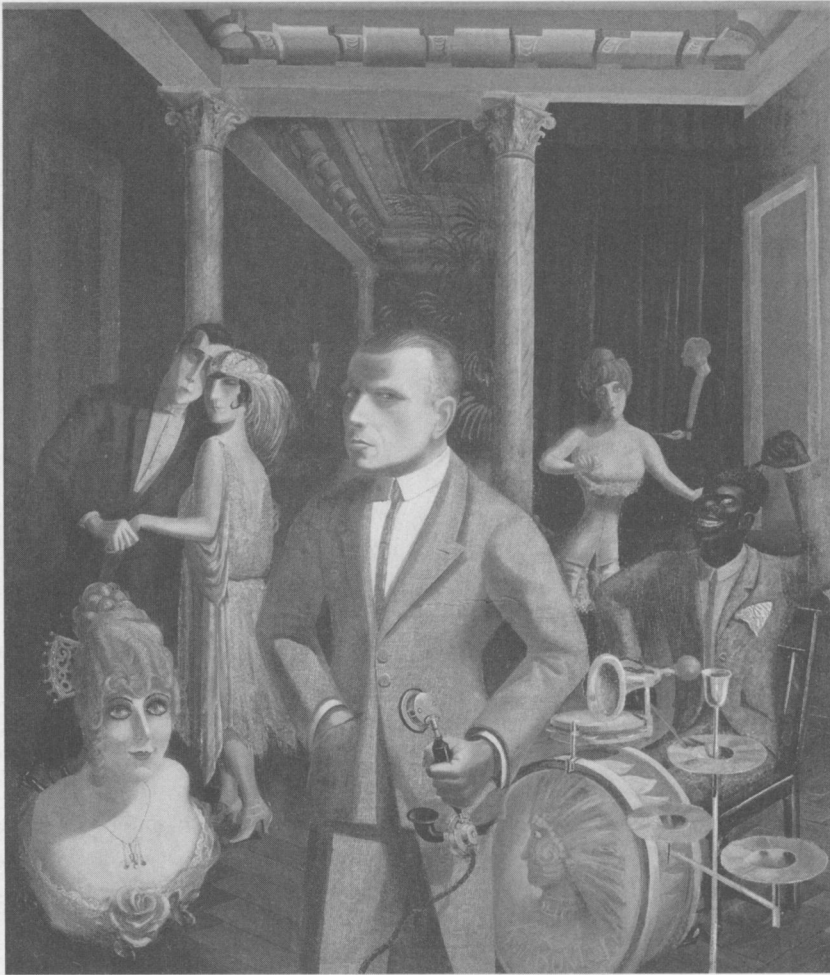


Figure 1: Otto Dix, *To Beauty (An die Schönheit)*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 140 x 122 cm. Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Build-Kunst, Bonn

freedoms seemed to correlate with women's new-found social and political emancipation. With the new Weimar constitution, women voted for the first time in 1919, and women's increased tertiary-sector employment, decreasing childbirth rates, and presence in urban centers seemed to signal a shift in women's roles (Bridenthal and Koonz 33–65). In addition, mass culture and the city were often theorized as female, in contrast to the frequently male-identified modernist and highbrow pursuits in art and literature.<sup>3</sup> Even though fundamental change in women's daily lives often seemed limited, a shift in women's visibility, especially in dance, gave the appearance of a strong female sphere in entertainment.

This role of women in Weimar dance was due in no small part to the changed political climate that fostered the dance industry.<sup>4</sup> Under the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the government outlawed social dancing during World War I and censored nudity on revue stages; immediately after the war, the new democratic government of the Weimar Republic lifted the ban on social dancing and a few years later significantly loosened the laws regarding nudity (Jelavich 154–65). Once officials permitted social dancing, Berlin—like Paris and London before it—became the site of numerous international dance competitions, and an entire industry arose to promote social dancing. Several administrative and oversight groups formed to regulate the logistics of individual dance competitions, the registration of all dance competitors throughout Germany, the sanctioning of social-dance course curricula, and the standardization of dance steps such as the shimmy and the tango (Herzog and Schreiber). Moreover, illustrated magazines such as the weekly mainstream *Berliner Illustrierte [sic] Zeitung* (Berlin Illustrated Newspaper), the women's magazines *Uhu* (The Owl), *Die Dame* (The Lady), and *Elegante Welt* (Elegant World), and the highbrow cultural publications *Der Querschnitt* (The Cross-Section) and *Das Kunstblatt* (The Art Paper), promoted dance as an industry by presenting dance stars, advocating theories in dance, marketing dance dresses and accessories, and describing new dance steps. Indeed, the burgeoning of Weimar dance culture was part of a broader cultural engagement with the body, as evidenced by sports, fashion, and numerous films.

Within these contexts, Dix's self-positioning in *To Beauty* fundamentally questions the gendered divisions many critics envisioned in Weimar society, and in dance culture in particular. Contrary to some theories, practices, and art works of the time, which focused more on women, Dix's example demonstrates how men were seminal participants in dance's vitality—after all, it takes two to tango. Several Weimar women's dance magazines even acknowledged this trend by addressing a

male readership in their pages. Because these mass and highbrow spheres were in fact not as clearly separated or rigidly defined according to gender, my examination allows us to reconceptualize these cultural spheres, and thus to envision new modes of gendered cultural participation in which masculinity, like femininity, changes over time. With relatively equivalent numbers of images of dancing women and men in his Weimar oeuvre, Dix keenly observed how both sexes danced, behaved, and dressed, and in the process employed nuance and stereotype to depict what he envisioned as the distinctions between men and women.

To analyze Dix in such terms is new in Dix scholarship, and opens up possibilities for research not only on the artist but also in gender, dance, and Weimar studies, not to mention interdisciplinary scholarship as a whole. For example, Dix's engagement with dance usually receives only anecdotal mention in a Dix scholarship dominated by war subjects, as if his anti-war politics (read: male) were more important than his negotiations with mass culture (read: female).<sup>5</sup> The burgeoning field of masculinity studies significantly informs my methodological approach, and especially the work of scholars such as Allan Johnson, Michael Kimmel, Gerda Lerner, and George Mosse, who have interpreted masculinity as a social construction. This is not to discount women, but rather to analyze the myriad historical negotiations between men and women that created gender roles and norms and that have affected them both, and to question the very construction of patriarchy itself.<sup>6</sup> In the gendered analyses found in dance and Weimar studies, most scholarship has focused on women, including groundbreaking female choreographers and the Weimar New Woman, but this is also beginning to shift due to the impact of masculinity studies (Manning, von Ankum, Burt, Mackensie). I also envision this article as a counterpoint to my own research on Dix, which has thus far focused on his images of dancing women. To that end, I have purposefully chosen images and texts from the women's magazine *Elegante Welt*, which formed much of the basis of my earlier arguments, to elucidate the overlaps and blurs between male and female spheres in Weimar culture. Certainly, many women in the 1920s sought entry into historically male-dominated politics, society, and culture; but men such as Dix, too, saw possibilities for themselves in the traditionally female-dominated realms of dance, fashion, and popular culture. And, in Dix's case, such engagement with popular dance culture was possible through ethnic drag.

In *To Beauty*, an image of male power in social dance, Dix stands at its very center. Surrounded by symbols of jazz music and dance, the artist sports an American-style suit and slicked-back hair, and his embodiment of modernity is all the more striking as he stands in an elegant dance hall from an earlier age. The defined, high waist of his suit jacket, the sleekness of his hair, and the powder on his face were all associated with American style in the early 1920s, and Dix marshaled these details in order to perform Americanness for the painting's viewer. Holding a telephone, Dix serves as the technological and communication nexus of the composition, and his cold, almost calculating stare reinforces that he controls power and knowledge. An obvious construction, Dix models normative masculinity as he stiffly poses like a fashion model—ironic, considering that he stands in a dance hall. His extremely pale skin reinforces his whiteness—so white, in fact, that it seems applied and performed. If Dix's working-class background had kept him out of such elegant ballrooms in the past, he is now indispensable at the center of *To Beauty*.

Other figures in the composition, oddly unconnected with each other, function as Dix's foils; they enable the artist, clearly a white male, to simultaneously associate with and distance himself from jazz and blackness. The jazz drummer—an African-American man, as signified by the American-flag-styled handkerchief in his suit pocket—is portrayed as an exaggerated stereotype, with a wide grin, red-tinged eyes, and hair and skin so dark (and so lacking in tonal gradation), that he seems to be wearing blackface. The blackface itself alludes to minstrel shows, in which whites wore makeup that would construct physical characteristics coded as black, such as skin color and lip shape. As in those minstrel shows, the jazz drummer's depiction in *To Beauty* is so exaggeratedly stereotypical that his blackness seems overdone and obviously performed. In the painting, this blackface creates a play of ethnic identity: the black man wears blackface in order to look like a white man—a white man who in turn would have performed in a minstrel show in blackface. Although certainly problematic, the blackface in *To Beauty* is not a criticism of the minstrel show's racism, but rather a culturally coded sign of jazz used by the artist to express his enthusiasm for African-American culture. The drum, too, is a conflation of stereotypes of ethnic identity, for the jazz drum, used for African-American music, depicts a Native-American head and headdress. Although different in their sources, these images were often rendered together in Weimar visual culture because both allude to "primitive" or "natural" qualities some Europeans envisioned in American society, such as the untamed landscape, which would require European culture to "civilize"

it, or the Native American or African American as the *sauvage*, an ideal of the Enlightenment, who is untrained and untainted by Western culture.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the drummer is a man of action, other figures in the composition appear physically weak or inert, and serve by their contrast to reinforce Dix's normative masculinity. Depicted as a doll-like marionette, the male dancer on the far left slumps in an awkward pose that implies lethargy, or little control over his body. As the effeminate man, he resembles his female partner in his makeup and facial structures, and their hand-holding seems extremely awkward, as if the pair is uncomfortable touching each other. Despite his pairing with a woman, the male dancer's comportment intimates homosexuality, and is in direct opposition to Dix's rigid body and its sign as virile heterosexuality. His stylish partner, a Weimar New Woman, serves as a media symbol of women's social, cultural, and political emancipation, and together they suggest the androgynization of Weimar culture. The New Woman's reputation for lesbianism adds a further twist to the *To Beauty* couple, as the dancers could serve as beards for one another to "drag" as heterosexual. Yet at a time in German history of women's increasing visibility in urban centers and of contentious debates about their political and social freedoms, this New Woman is not so liberated: she wears the stylish dress but does not seem physically freed by the dance. Instead, she stands utterly still, as if her emancipation has been stopped dead in its tracks. Compared to these superficially fashionable but physically weak dancers, Dix appears to have a strength and solidity associated in Weimar culture with heterosexual masculinity.

In addition, the female mannequins in the lower-left foreground and the right background serve as models of pre-Weimar beauty and style, and reinforce this dance milieu's link to fashion. Placed in store windows to sell style, the mannequins here instead symbolize the outmoded beauty of the New Woman's mother that has been both literally and metaphorically pushed off its pedestal. Although the painting includes women, their gender is compositionally and ideologically marginalized, as is the weakened, feminized man, and although the New Woman's much-touted emergence in the public sphere received much press in the Weimar papers, she hardly garners significant attention in *To Beauty*.

Instead of allowing women to dominate the dance floor, *To Beauty* focuses on Dix as the New Man, whose presence signals a relationship between American dance culture and the masculinity he personifies. As Mosse has articulated, modern masculinity evolved as a normative stereotype beginning in the Enlightenment with the values of courage, honor, self-control, and order. A predominantly middle-class image,



these values were purportedly evident in the physical beauty of the male body itself. In other words, the outward appearance of the body—seen in masculinity in general as well as in Dix's body in *To Beauty*—signifies inner personality qualities and morals (4–9). This model of masculinity was both contested and reinforced in the early twentieth century by the ideal of the New Man. During World War I, the New Man was understood as a spiritual individualist and hoped-for leader of the masses who would transform an otherwise chaotic and hierarchical society into a classless one. A term often used by communists, the New Man was a spiritual, social, and political leader of the Russian Revolution, steeped in Leo Tolstoy's writings, who understood the Russian people's needs. In wartime Germany, many socialists hoped that an anti-war, anti-nationalistic New Man would encourage solidarity among men and form a new kind of humanity committed to ending violence. Although conceived of as antithetical to normative masculinity, in practice the New Man shared with it the traits of discipline, order, and restraint, and reinforced the notion that the body's outward appearance corresponded to an individual's inner values (Mosse 119–27; Kellner).

Following the war, however, the appearance, behavior, and connotations of the New Man shifted. Among Berlin Dadaists of the late 1910s, a group that included Dix, the New Man evolved from a specifically political and moral figure into a general symbol of rebellion against the status quo. The Dadaists' anti-establishment views manifested themselves through the New Man in their bodies and creative works, such as their American-styled fashions and music and their "anti-art" objects (Benson 59–77). By the mid-1920s, modern masculinity as an image and a morality system had become increasingly institutionalized, as magazines addressed men's grooming needs and schools taught young boys how to behave like adults. In both instances, boys and men were trained to fulfill the ideals of masculinity and to correlate physical appearances with character traits (Mosse 133–54).

Still somewhat rebellious, but more closely aligned with normative masculinity than he had been during World War I, the New Man transformed again into a rational and matter-of-fact figure. This was especially evident with artists and intellectuals affiliated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.<sup>8</sup> Known for his style and embodiment of a modern, mechanized, and capitalist society, the New Man of the 1920s was associated with Fordist efficiency, clarity of vision, and precision of movement. Cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer, for example, described the New Man's appearance and attitude as a "cleanly shaven face" with "cool features" and a "conditioned sportsman's body" with "controlled movements."<sup>9</sup> Literary scholar and publisher Rudolf Kayser similarly saw the

New Man's look as "beardless with a sharp profile, a resolute look in the eyes, and a steely, thin body" (395).<sup>10</sup> Both descriptions clearly coincide with Dix's own self-portrait in *To Beauty* and describe a fit body trained to dance. His New Man of 1922 combines the rebelliousness of Dada with the clarity of an emerging *Neue Sachlichkeit* outlook, two groups with which Dix affiliated himself. To viewers versed in the signs of manliness, Dix's physical appearance connoted the values of precision, order, and discipline, thereby implying his command not just of the dance hall in which he firmly stands, but also of masculinity's stronghold in Weimar dance culture. Women may have appeared to make greater social and political gains in the late 1910s and early 1920s, but Dix's New-Man look emphasized the sustained hegemony of masculinity.

More than his physicality or his attitude, the Weimar New Man symbolized the United States, something Dix and his colleagues explored as they performed Americanness by wearing its styles. As a white European man performing a white American man, Dix "drags" by dressing himself in the clothing of another culture. For Raoul Hausmann, who also jazz-danced and whom Dix would have known from their Berlin Dada days, jazz dancing and fashions were used to revolt against social norms. To wear an American suit, for example, was to associate oneself with American economic and cultural traits (such as efficiency, technology, freedom, and youth) as well as to rebel against traditional European style, and thus by extension against European culture, society, and politics. Because the American suit's tailoring accentuated the shape of the body in a manner that "allow[ed] complete freedom of movement," the American suit enabled the physical performance of the New-Man identity, for it facilitated dancing to jazz and strolling in cosmopolitan urban centers (Hausmann 49–50). Hausmann's own suit designs may have looked odd because the extremely billowy legs and oversized jackets often hid the man wearing them, but they freed the body to move naturally with few physical constraints, and symbolized individual freedom from social and cultural traditionalism.<sup>11</sup> Similar to Dix's overblown whiteness in *To Beauty*, Hausmann's suits are so dramatically oversized as to reinforce for a viewer that this is an artifice and a performed identity.

Dix's Berlin Dada and *Neue Sachlichkeit* colleague, George Grosz, likewise dressed in fashionable clothing, recalling both the British dandy and the American businessman. According to Dadaist Wieland Herzfelde,

[Grosz] looked as if he had stepped out of a fashion magazine [...]. His ash blond hair was perfectly cut, his parting as sharp as the creases in the knickerbockers hitched up above his knees. The ruddy face with the sharp profile and blue, skeptical eyes might have been that of a German army officer. And yet [...] the smart grey suit which, devoid of a single speck of dust, hugged his muscular body somewhat too tightly, the silk tie, tightly tied into a small knot on the starched shirt, the blue-black, almost transparent socks stretched over the calves [...] this man obviously loved them all [...]. But what was extraordinary about him was that he did not give the impression of a gigolo or someone mad about fashion [...]. His eyes were those of a marksman taking aim, and his mouth had a bitterness about it that was only slightly softened by the powder on his cleanly shaven, powerful chin. (65–66)

Herzfelde describes a meticulousness of appearance historically reserved for women that is commonly combined with hypermasculinity; his “powerful chin,” after all, is powdered. Bridging gendered attitudes toward fashion, Herzfelde fetishizes Grosz’s musculature, chin, mouth, and eyes, and articulates them as signs not of eroticism or effeminacy, but of decisiveness and machismo.

These fashion choices correlated with Dix’s, Grosz’s, and Hausmann’s specific interests in American culture. In particular, all three loved jazz and chose to perform their Americanness through physical movement, and especially through dance. For example, photographic portraitist August Sander depicted Hausmann as a Charleston dancer who juts his hip to the side as he turns and bends his knee; shirtless in loose-fitting pants, Hausmann’s exposed chest announces that this jazz dancer is demonstrably male. During his Berlin Dada years, Hausmann also performed jazz-inspired works at the soirees; in February and March of 1920, for example, he performed his “Dada-Trot (Sixty-one-step),” which was based on and parodied ragtime and jazz steps (Berlinische Galerie 639–46). Grosz, too, loved African-American music, and reportedly danced to ragtime in his studio with his guests (Lewis 25). Tying movement and masculinity to American popular culture, Grosz’s engagement with physical culture extended into boxing. Known to train daily with a punching bag, Grosz cultivated an athletically trained body—one showcased by his immaculate and tight-fitting suits—that was rationalized like a machine, yet muscular and fit. Moreover, Grosz’s imagery from the early 1920s of the New Man as a boxer, gymnast, and cyclist, each depicted in simplified, nearly robotic forms, further aligns the male body with physical power, efficiency, and rationalization.<sup>12</sup>

Writers in the 1920s on Dix also remarked that he himself used American style to signify his rebellious personality and his affinity for Americanized mass culture. Ilse Fischer, writing on Dix as a Dadaist, described his appearance as American, with the “smoothly combed blond hair of an American” and “the American style [...] in the cut of his suits: exaggeratedly wide, short pants, padded shoulders, [...] and] an unnaturally high waistline” (25).<sup>13</sup> This description of Dix’s suits corresponds to those Hausmann preferred, and for similar stylistic and symbolic reasons; for Dix, his style signaled his break from social norms through outlandishness and eccentricity. Fischer saw Dix’s outrageousness extend into his preferred choice of entertainments, for rather than attend the symphony, the rebellious Dix frequented the movies and dance halls, two venues filled with American stars and African-American-styled dancing (27).<sup>14</sup> Dix’s *New Man* is a leader, but one whose emphasis on physical appearance and style evokes the stereotype of women’s preoccupations with their own beauty.

Dix’s self-image of the *New Man* as American was also a middle-class one. Because the middle class signified hegemony rather than his own working-class roots, Dix’s self-positioning as a white, masculine authority figure could best be accomplished by performing bourgeois. This is not the same as upward mobility, for Dix was extremely poor at the time, his class standing had not fundamentally changed from his childhood, and his reputation in the German art world was that of a working-class artist. Rather, his images, clothing, and behavior demonstrate an aspiration for a change in stature, material wealth, and style. Class is a social construction, but in a Europe with an aristocratic tradition where class was rigidly defined, it was often difficult to move from one class to another. A pivotal exception was the period of extreme hyperinflation in Germany, from the end of World War I to the end of 1923, in which distinctions between the classes dissipated or even inverted, as inheritance or career decreasingly defined people’s identities.<sup>15</sup> This was the period of Dix’s *To Beauty*, and of Dix’s most pronounced performances of identity, for within these economic conditions, presenting oneself as from another class became not only possible but also easy. For a public accustomed to discernible class hierarchies and differences, Dix’s performed inversions—or, to play off of Sieg’s theories, “class drag”—might well have highlighted both the falsity and perceived social gravity of class hierarchies in the first place.

For example, Johanna Ey, Dix’s art dealer from 1921 to 1922, noted that although Dix experienced financial difficulty, needed an atelier, and wore inexpensive trousers, he dressed himself like a dandy:

He came right away with flying capes and a large hat, and he greeted me with a kiss on the hand, which for me at the time was something very unusual. [...] In the mornings he unpacked his "box," out of which appeared patent leather shoes, perfumes, hair cap, everything for beauty care. All of this was so new for me, because the other artists needed the opposite for beauty care.<sup>16</sup>

Ey's surprise at Dix's penchant for fine grooming products suggests the humor of the sight of Dix, a young, poor, rebellious man who looked not like her idea of an artist, but instead bourgeois and well mannered, even if such mannerisms seemed overblown, as if melodramatically performed. At the same time, Dix's class drag as bourgeois was transgressive, for it highlighted how someone with Dix's background could present himself according to the beauty standards promoted by those embodying the hegemonic norm. Dix's strategy in his clothing and in *To Beauty* moves a socially marginalized artist to the center of power. In another example, humorous sketches by Dix of himself and Martha Koch, an upper-bourgeois, well-educated woman whom he married in 1923, also portray Dix using romantic associations to explore class distinctions. As the couple parades around town, he in American-styled suits and she in the latest fashions, Dix carries her purchases as they shop and peer into store windows (Fischer, *Otto Dix* 33–44). Yet the sketches have an ironic twist: the couple personifies bourgeois and American consumerism, but in fact they had little money at the time due to the hyperinflation. Martha's recent divorce from her first husband had left her with little, and her new husband's fledgling art career was less than lucrative. As was true of Ey's description of Dix as a poor artist who affected bourgeois manners, the sketches imply aspirations for, rather than any lived experience of, an affluent lifestyle. Indeed, Dix's performances evoke the myth of the American self-made man, whose masculine identity derives from his affluence, virtuous hard work, and production within the capitalist system (Kimmel 13–42).

The pressure on Dix and other self-styled New Men to perform bourgeois may well have been tremendous, given the mass media's emphasis on image. In particular, the accentuation of the media in the 1920s on men's appearances, seen in an increase in advertising for men's grooming products, suggests how strongly masculinity remained tied to men's physical beauty (Mosse 137). One of the leading dance and social magazines of the day, *Elegante Welt*, geared itself toward an upper-middle-class audience (for women like Martha Dix), with a focus on women's fashions, but spreads featuring men's apparel also appeared

regularly in its pages, illustrating how such magazines addressed male readership. A cover from 1929, for example, is typical of *Elegante Welt* in its brightly colored rendering of wealthy and fashionable individuals, but distinctive in its portrayal of a man reading the magazine. Whereas other covers portrayed men and women in poses that acknowledged their well-known affluent leisure activities, such as holding tennis rackets or golf clubs, sitting behind an expensive car's steering wheel, or sunning at the beach, this cover depicts what many knew but rarely articulated openly: that women's fashion magazines understood the strong presence of—and benefits of cultivating—a male audience. Because the Dixes avidly followed style trends and aspired toward the lifestyle promoted in *Elegante Welt*, Dix was likely aware of the magazine's format and overall content.

Beyond the cover of *Elegante Welt*, many of its articles on men's fashions assume that its readers are men. For example, the article "Gentlemen, Think about Fall!" addresses men in the title and details, down to the preferred suit fabrics, colors, and even number of and distance between the buttons, what *Elegante Welt* recommends for its male readers that season. Other essays describe fashion as a male right; one spread on smoking jackets and loungewear maintains that men have as much claim to relax at home in elegance as women do (Miketta; Alsen). Much like *To Beauty*, which proclaims a male presence in a female-dominated world of dance, so too does the article argue for male equality in fashion and the home, two places traditionally reserved for women. Book excerpts published in *Elegante Welt* suggest that these ideas about masculinity and fashion extended beyond the magazine's pages. One selection describes the preferable cuts of men's jacket sleeves for dancing to jazz, and another explains what the elegant man should pack for a trip. These examples insist that men make their own clothing decisions, and evince that although the mass media seemed to favor women, images of men were vital in marketing dance for a mass audience. The focus in *To Beauty* on the fashions of masculinity, in other words, represents a trend that already existed in full force in the Weimar mass media.

In addition to the words in the articles, the structures of the images in *Elegante Welt* emphasize male roles in dance and fashion, and these two dominant formats remained relatively constant through the 1920s. The male-oriented dance world in *To Beauty* employs both types, which demonstrates how the painting's figures literally "model" the fashions, attitudes, and mores found in the magazines. In one sort of image, seen in an *Elegante Welt* inside cover from 1919 and the androgynous dancing pair in *To Beauty*, men are part of a couple. They lead their



Figure 2: Cover of *Elegant Welt* 18.11 (27 May 1929), by R. Boehmer. Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany © Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

female partners, who show off their dresses; the men stand slightly to their partners' sides, but they also participate equally in the scene. The inside cover, which portrays a man leading a woman at a dance tea within elegant surroundings not unlike the dance hall in *To Beauty*, implies his own importance, for although he surrounds himself with women, which suggests women's predominance in dance culture, he nonetheless leads and occupies center stage. Such formats are also evident in the instructional articles on dance in *Elegante Welt*, in which the men occupy half of the image but position themselves to showcase their female partners' dresses. The couple's placement also accentuates how he leads; by highlighting their hand and arm positions, or moments in which the man dips his partner, the photographs emphasize his strength and command of both the dance and his female partner ("Shimmy"). In a similar vein, the obvious hand-holding of the androgynous couple in *To Beauty*, in which their white gloves and pale skin are set off against the man's dark suit, can be interpreted as instruction on hand placement in social dance. These images, like *To Beauty*, propose that men are as central to the culture of a dance hall as the women are.

In other formats, the man stands alone and motions to his neighboring model. The male body, positioned both naturalistically and awkwardly, and usually at an angle, highlights the suit's cut and styling. In "The High Waistline: A Chapter on Men's Fashion," men stand in a line on a balcony and socialize with each other and with women. Their positioning, however, implies that mingling is secondary to modeling, for the figures are spread out, frieze-like and without overlap, to illustrate the details of their clothes (Clobes). Even in instances in which the figures seem more engaged, they still appear as frozen models. In a drawing from "Gentlemen, think about Fall!" three men face each other in static conversation so that a reader can admire their fashions from three different perspectives, front, back and profile, not unlike female nudes in old master Judgment of Paris scenes.<sup>17</sup> Instead of showcasing their nudity, they model overcoats, hats, and ties and reinforce masculinity's normative tie to culture.<sup>18</sup> The figures in *To Beauty* are arranged in similar ways, with isolated bodies that appear related yet unconnected, and even the Dix figure and the drummer hold their bodies, especially their arms and torsos, in similarly awkward and angular positions, as if they, too, model the latest styles. Indeed, the *To Beauty* male figures suggest a blurring of the boundaries between realms traditionally considered gender-specific, for they expose interrelations between mass culture and painting and propose that dance and fashion are the property of a male-dominated sphere.



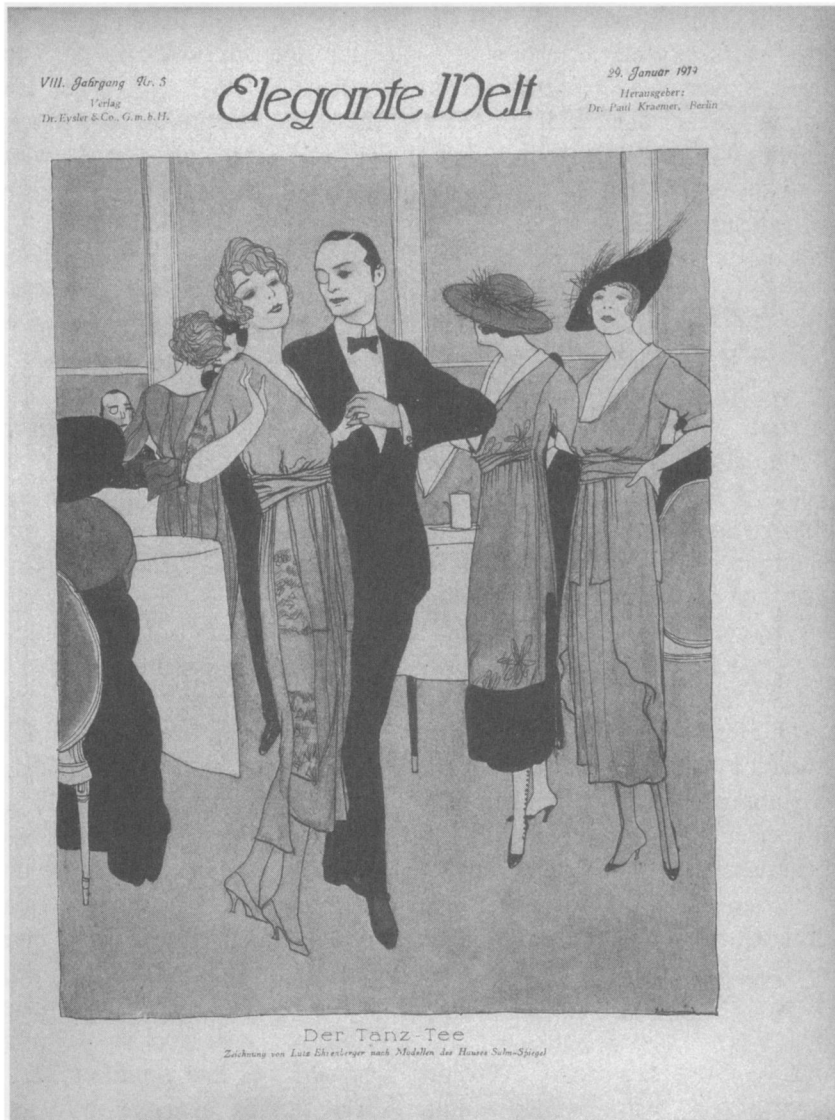


Figure 3: “The Tea Dance” (“Der Tanz-Tee”) by Lutz Ehrenberger, from *Elegante Welt* 8.3 (29 January 1919), inside title page. Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany © Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

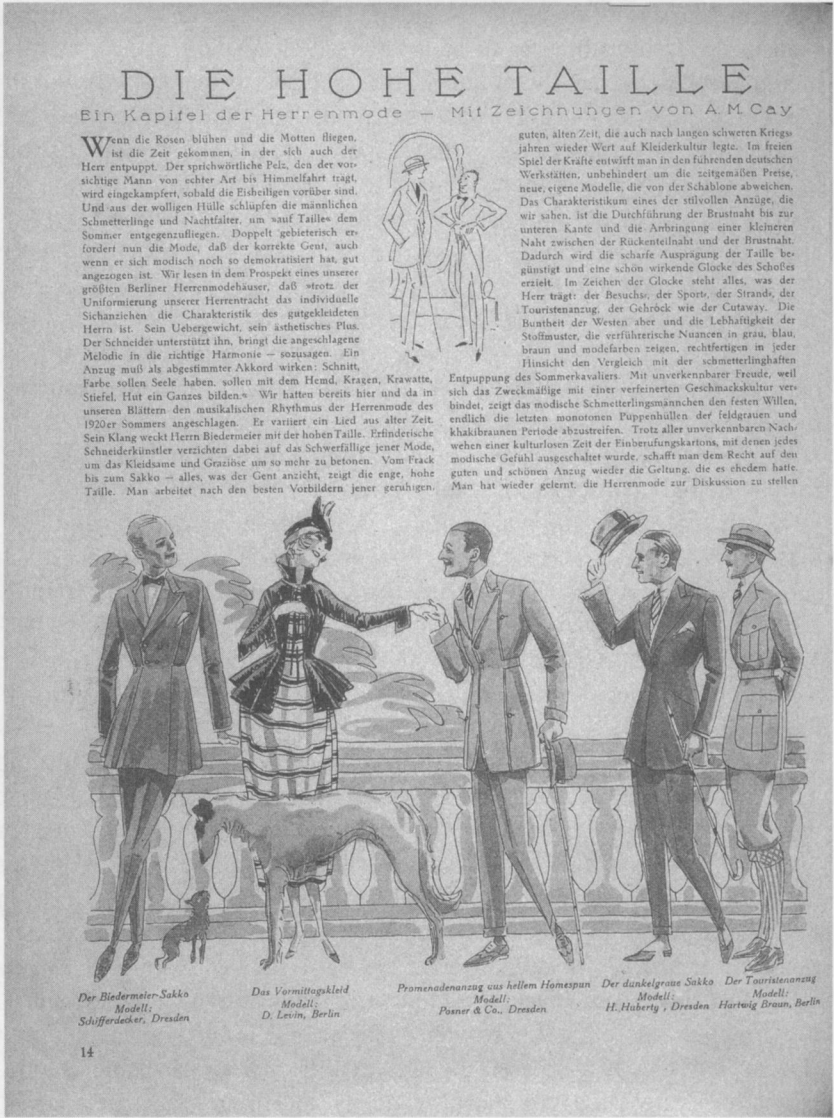


Figure 4: “The High Waist—A Chapter of Men’s Fashion” (“Die Hohe Taille: Ein Kapitel der Herrenmode”); drawings by A.M. Cay. From *Elegante Welt* 9.11 (26 May 1930): 14. Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany © Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

This blurring of gendered boundaries in Weimar culture was further seen in the fashionableness of androgynization. Critics, artists, and the media emphasized how men and women seemed to increasingly resemble one another in appearance and behavior, although the effect seemed greatest on the urban middle- and upper classes. The pressures from magazines such as *Elegante Welt*, not to mention store windows and peers, seemed to have worked on both sexes to modify their appearances. Siegfried Kracauer, in his study of white-collar workers, noted that men concerned themselves with the cuts of their suits and their rosy complexions as women had before them. In order to get ahead in business, as "fashion and business work together,"<sup>19</sup> they must cultivate their professional look. This stress, Kracauer notes, has men resorting to beauty treatments alongside women: "out of fear that they would be withdrawn as second-hand goods, women and men color their hair, and forty-year-olds participate in sports in order to stay thin."<sup>20</sup> Part of the rationalization and Americanization of the German workplace, the German white-collar worker realizes the importance of appearances: "It should be here as it is with the Americans. A man must have a friendly face."<sup>21</sup> This emphasis on "friendliness" correlates business professionalism with the service industry and human interaction, both of which were job sectors and occupational tasks increasingly open to women in the 1920s.

As men's appearances moved more toward androgyny, so too did women's. It is no accident, for example, that the flapper New Woman was referred to as a "Garçonne," a feminization of the French word for "boy." Often associated with mannish lesbianism, the New Woman's uncorseted dress and slicked, bobbed hair suggested her liberation from sexual mores, but in a society bound to more rigid definitions of gender, this lack of clarity caused concern. A Karl Arnold caricature in *Simplificissimus* depicts such a woman standing in front of two bathroom doors, one for men, the other for women, unclear which one she should enter (Lavin 1). Titled "Lotte at the Crossroads," her indecision implies larger questions about her place in society and the role of appearances. Dix's own portrait of the journalist Sylvia von Harden, with her cropped hair and monocle, similarly caricatures the androgynous woman; she wears the latest flapper styles and yet seems uncomfortable and ungainly, implying that her androgyny is not a "natural" fit for women. Despite the freedoms androgyny may have created for particular individuals, the societal ramifications for women and men as outlined by the media seemed far less positive, leading instead to discomfort and confusion.

In addition to Dix's assertions of masculinity through the New Man and of mainstream power through middle-class status, the artist utilized his central positioning in *To Beauty* to both associate and juxtapose himself with jazz and blackness. Unlike many of Sieg's case studies of ethnic drag, in which white individuals costume themselves to look like an ethnic minority, Dix clearly depicts himself as white. And yet, Dix forges a connection to blackness through a shared Americanness; Dix's suit and hair, combined with the jazz drummer's blackface, create an amalgamated image of urban America through entertainment and style. Dix's associations with jazz both contest and solidify white male hegemony. Because of the Weimar vogue for jazz and African art in Germany's urban centers, blackness carried social cachet, and Dix's alliance with the drummer can likewise be understood as a move up a social ladder of trendiness. Dix's life and behavior suggest how he employed ethnic drag in his aspiration for this African-American identity. His reputation as a jazz dancer was well known within his circle, for example, as the Dixes enthusiastically danced in amateur competitions and at private parties in the early 1920s. Moreover, many of his colleagues would notify him of the latest performances by jazz musicians and dancers in Paris and Berlin, including Josephine Baker in *la Revue Nègre*.<sup>22</sup> Most notably, Dix was given the nickname of an African American: his wife and his art dealer, among others, called him "Jim," the commonly used moniker of the African-American shimmy figure found often in jazz operas (Funkenstein). Performed by whites, the shimmy figure itself was the quintessence of ethnic drag in the German jazz era. In other words, Dix's own ethnic drag occurs through the literal performance of jazz dance, the act of naming, and the echoing of larger cultural trends on stage. Despite Dix's affiliation with and enthusiasm for blackness, however, *To Beauty* suggests that whiteness predominates. The drummer's position in the painting, next to but slightly behind the artist, maintains Dix's prominence. As with the American minstrel show, Dix's proximity to the African American, coupled with his clear enthusiasm for American popular culture, allows him to assume certain stereotypes of blackness for himself, such as sexual potency, humor, or musical adeptness, while at the same time maintaining hierarchies of racial difference (Lott 53, 137). This occurred precisely at a time when immediate post-war economic and social instability called all such hierarchies into question. Although two social ladders are represented in *To Beauty*—one the aspiration for a white bourgeois identity, the other for an African-American one—the one reinforcing white authority dominates.

Dix also cultivated an image of himself as Native American in ways similar to his self-construction of blackness. This is evident on the drum in *To Beauty* and in his watercolor *Ich als Indianer* (Myself as an Indian, 1923), in which Dix portrayed himself in a Native-American costume with fringed pants and a huge feather headpiece, holding an ax and a bow, and standing on the flat American plains.<sup>23</sup> The image and title both suggest that the artist temporarily and cognizantly wore the costume and ethnicity of the Native American, but some art critics envisioned the Native-American style as indicative of Dix's deeper behaviors, such as his personality and working methods. For example, architect and critic Hugo Zehder wrote: "He is an Indian, a Sioux chief. Always on the warpath. He swings his paintbrush like an ax and every stroke is a scream of color."<sup>24</sup> Never calm and always bellicose, for Zehder, Dix painted by attacking the canvas as if he were going to war or killing for food. Another critic, Paul Westheim, noticed a similar fascination with Native-American culture in George Grosz, and remarked how he altered his modest studio environment:

You believed you were entering the wigwam of a Sioux chief. Wonderfully boyish. On the walls hung tomahawks, clubs, buffalo-skin shields - whether real or painted, I can't remember. Nor can I recall whether scalps were dangling there as well. [...] We squatted in the middle of this wigwam [...] on low stools [...], drinking not fire water but tea, and we smoked not a pipe of peace but, alas, German war-standard tobacco. (16)

Described as a "boyish" return to childhood, Grosz's studio is believed to be authentically Native American, at the same time as its Germanness (tobacco, tea) reinforces its artifice. A simulacrum, Grosz's studio is a constructed environment that evokes a site lacking an original referent (Sieg 17); and its very slippage between "real" and "unreal" enables Grosz to "drag" through clothing and behavior, for in this setting numerous identities are possible but only one is truly believed. A world for fantasy, play, and projection, Grosz's studio enables the artist to perform as Native American and his guests to "escape" Berlin, while permitting Grosz to shed his bourgeois fashions and hypermasculine posturing in order to reinvent his inner child.

In reifying the stereotype of the Native American, the artists and critic culled the popular image of the American West, a subject of art and literature in Germany since the nineteenth century and made popular by the novels of Karl May, which many in Dix's circle had read as children (Tower, *Envisioning America* 18–21). This stereotype generally suggested a "wild" temperament, but as Mosse has written, the Native

Americans in May's novels act in ways expected of European men. For example, one of May's heroes, Old Shatterhand (a German who gave himself a Native-American name), embodies traditional European notions of morality, for he is physically strong but not aggressive or destructive, and keeps law and order by using the judiciary system rather than violence (138). In other words, the idea of the Native-American male promoted by May and Dix, despite its Otherness, is infused with a traditional notion of European masculinity, the same kind that is the central focus of *To Beauty* in the body of Dix himself. Again, Dix's placement in front of the drums and drummer suggests the prominence of his white masculinity, such that even with his enthusiasm for non-European cultures, whiteness predominates in *To Beauty* in the end.

Due in part to the economic and social volatility of the Weimar era, Dix's example illuminates how identity could be readily performed. In this context, reifying the stereotypes of a white American, or bourgeois, or African American, or Native American, was both possible and relatively easy. Highlighting the instability of such constructions in the first place, *To Beauty* and the dance and mass culture discourse it evokes reveal the instability of gendered stereotypes; roles and spheres ascribed to one gender can—and in the case of *To Beauty*, did—become co-opted by another. At a time when women seemed to be gaining visibility in the public sphere, *To Beauty* portrays a resistance to that change, at the same time as the painting demonstrates a love of the mass culture that the women's sphere represented. For Dix, the way to associate oneself with that women's dance culture was to seize it as his own, namely by dressing the part through drag.

On a larger level, Dix's varied self-images speak to theorizations and expressions of identity in present-day culture. These self-promotions emphasize the blurred relationships between male and female cultural spheres, and thereby elucidate how constructions of masculine identity are relational. Whereas that concept has become a commonplace in discussions about identity formation for women, it is relatively new to understand men's identity as formed by their engagements with those around them.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Dix and his milieu's concerns about male beauty parallel the discourses on male beauty at the turn of the millennium. Epitomized by the reality makeover television show "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," metrosexuals-in-training learn that minding their appearances (such as finishing their look with "tjuzed" hair<sup>26</sup> and sleeves) leads to self-confidence and heterosexual romance. Even the ultimate women's magazine, *O, the Oprah Magazine*, published a "Men's Issue" in June 2005 featuring a profile on Jon Stewart, implying that *O* is for women *and men* who care about men's lifestyles, attitudes,

and feelings. In both examples, heterosexual men serve as role models for other men (and as figures of desire for heterosexual women) of behaviors previously associated with femininity. Dix's example illuminates the relevance of the gender dynamics of the 1920s to contemporary politics of gender, and the possibilities for a broader understanding of male and female appearance, behavior, and spheres beyond a dichotomous divide.

### Notes

This article is a revised and extended version of a paper first presented on the panel "Passing as Self-Portraiture" at the College Art Association Conference in New York City in February 2003. I would like to thank Amy Mooney and Cherise Smith for organizing the panel; the panelists and audience members for their helpful suggestions; and Lisa Meyerowitz for her editorial insights. Unless otherwise identified, all translations are mine.

<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, is one of the first major texts to explore this notion of a performed identity, and it also forms a basis for Katrin Sieg's theorization of ethnic drag.

<sup>2</sup> The Weimar era was a period of cultural growth as well as economic and political upheaval. The Weimar Republic, Germany's first democratically elected government, began with Germany's loss to the Allies in World War I and ended with the rise Third Reich, and in between Germany experienced a period of intense hyperinflation (1919–23) followed by relative stability (1924–29) and then a depression (1929–33). Despite these problems, the Weimar era also witnessed tremendous cultural growth in literature and the visual and performing arts, as well as the mass media. For more on the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the era, see Peukert.

<sup>3</sup> On women's dominance in the theories and practices of mass culture, see Huyssen, Hansen, Petro.

<sup>4</sup> I interpret popular culture as an umbrella term for mainstream entertainment that appeals primarily to the middle and working classes, and mass culture as a subcategory of popular culture. Mass culture is fundamentally a product of industrialization and urbanism, whereas popular culture could be found in urban as well as rural and/or pre-modern communities. For example, film and jazz dance exemplify mass culture because they could exist in Europe only at a point when technology, urbanization, and internationalism enabled their spread and continued existence. In contrast, a *Karneval* parade for German Mardi Gras typifies a popular culture that is not also mass culture, because it stems from centuries-old religious ceremonies. I use

the terms “popular” and “mass” relatively interchangeably in this article because these forms of dance are products of mass culture—and thus, by extension, of popular culture.

<sup>5</sup> Major scholarship on Dix includes the following sources: Conzelmann, Fischer, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart and Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Karcher, Löffler, Schwarz, Schwarz and Schwarz, Strobl, Tatar, Tate Gallery.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Kimmel, Lerner, Mosse. See also Adams and Savran, Connell, Kimmel and Ferber, and the journal *Men and Masculinities*. On masculinity in art and visual culture, see Berger, Dabakis, Weinberg.

<sup>7</sup> Beeke Sell Tower interprets the jazz drummer as Dix’s “lesser alter ego,” and contrasts Dix’s role as “detached” observer with the drummer’s place in popular entertainment. On European views of American culture, see Tower (85–96, esp. 92). On the minstrel show and white male identity, see Lott.

<sup>8</sup> First used as a term by Gustav Hartlaub in 1923 and then in 1925 in connection with his Mannheim art exhibition, *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a cultural attitude more than a style. In works as diverse as garish caricatures, stark realism, and crisp geometric abstraction, *Neue Sachlichkeit* art pointedly criticized social mores and political structures, explored artistic forms and structures, evoked Renaissance ideals in modern painting—and often some combination thereof—but was unified in that much of the art emphasized emotional detachment. The term *Neue Sachlichkeit* has been translated as New Objectivity, New Sobriety, and New Matter-of-Factness, with “sachlich” often meaning “impartial,” “precise,” or “factual.” Critics and curators gave the artistic and cultural movement a variety of names in addition to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, including Post-Expressionism, Neonaturalism, and Magic Realism. For the purposes of this essay, and to recognize the movement’s myriad meanings, I refer to it in the German as *Neue Sachlichkeit*. For further distinctions between these terms, see Crockett (xix, 1–6, 145–58).

<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Detektiv-Roman* (53), quoted and translated in Ward (60).

<sup>10</sup> Other artists, most notably George Grosz, portrayed the New Man as a machine-like athlete. Although Dix’s New Man does not exhibit the automaton tendencies visible in Grosz’s work, Grosz’s *New Man* suggests much of the rationalization and technological tendency seen in the Dix figure.

<sup>11</sup> One of Raoul Hausmann’s suit designs is illustrated in Zücher (317).

<sup>12</sup> On Grosz and the machine, see Mackenzie (158–228). On Grosz and American culture, refer to Lewis (25–39). On the New Man as engineer, architect, and boxer, see Neumeyer (15–31).



<sup>13</sup> "Er hat [...] das glattgebürstete blonde Haar des Amerikaners. [...] Das Amerikanische hat er auch [...] im Schnitt des Anzuges: übertrieben weite, kurze Hosen, gepolsterte Oberärmel, unmotiviert hohe Taille. Im übrigen ist seine Garderobe ein Konglomerat von abgelegten Kleidungsstücken kunstpflegender Bürger oder hilfsbereiter Freunde und ein paar selbsterstandenen Einzelobjekten, die ein Bedürfnis nach extravaganter Eleganz erkennen lassen. Er bewegt sich mit gesunder Selbstverständlichkeit in diesem sonderbaren Gemisch. Sein Schritt ist amerikanisch kurz und bewußt."

<sup>14</sup> "Dabei findet alles Exzentrische in ihm leidenschaftlichen Widerhall. Exzentrische Weiber, exzentrische Tänze, exzentrische Kunst liebt er. Seine ganze Lebensweise ist exzentrisch." "Amerika, das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten, erregt seine bewegliche Phantasie."

<sup>15</sup> On the hyperinflation, see Peukert (61-66); for the broader cultural implications of the economic upheavals, see Widdig.

<sup>16</sup> "Er kam auch bald mit fliegendem Capes, großem Hut und begrüßte mich mit Handkuß, für mich damals etwas sehr Außergewöhnliches. [...] Morgens packte er seinen 'Karton' aus, es kamen zum Vorschein: Lackschuhe, Parfüms, Haarhaube, alles für Schönheitspflege. Es war dies alles so neu für mich, weil die anderen Künstler das Gegenteil brauchen als Schönheitspflege" (Johanna Ey, cited in Klapheck, 28).

<sup>17</sup> In Greek mythology, the Judgment of Paris was when the Trojan Paris was to give a golden apple to the goddess he deemed the fairest. When Aphrodite promised him the most beautiful woman in the world, she received the apple, and she, in turn, introduced him to Helen. His affair with Helen sparked the Trojan War. The contest among the goddesses was frequently depicted in Renaissance and Baroque painting as a beauty contest, with Athena's, Hera's, and Aphrodite's idle bodies positioned in front, back, and profile views for (male) viewers to appreciate.

<sup>18</sup> This format was used frequently in *Elegante Welt*, and is also seen in Ipso (31-32), in which an elegantly dressed man, whose servant helps him off with his coat, converses with two other stylish men.

<sup>19</sup> "Mode und Wirtschaft arbeiten sich in die Hand."

<sup>20</sup> "Aus Angst, als Altware aus dem Gebrauch zurückgezogen zu werden, färben sich Damen *und* Herren die Haare, und Vierziger treiben Sport, um sich schlank zu erhalten" (25).

<sup>21</sup> "Es sollte bei uns wie bei den Amerikanern sein. Der Mann muß ein freundliches Gesicht haben" (24).

<sup>22</sup> "Lieber Jim! Sehr schade, daß Ihr nicht mitgefahren seid. Kühler Wetter, viel interessantes [sic]. War oft [sic] mit J.B.N, Grosz, Beckmann. Alle lassen froh grüssen! Ich denke, daß ich in einigen Monaten (Dezbr. od. Jan) einmal noch hin fahre. Wie sind Porträt Anita? Wird farb.

Litho gemacht? Es gibt fabelhafte Jazz-Musik hier Dir & Mutzli herzliche Grüsse Dein Karl Viele Grüsse George Grüsse von Otto Freundlich" (Nierendorf, 30 July 1925).

"Lieber Jim & Mutzli! Ich vergass Euch zu sagen, daß Ihr die "Chocolate Kiddies" im Neuen Theater am Zoo ansehen müsst. Es soll ganz besonders gut sein, nur Neger, Negerinnen, Mulatten etc spielen mit. Aufführungen sind nachmittags & abends 11 h—Habe telefonisch vor der Abreise angefragt, ob Steuerkarten für abends gibt & kann zwischen Weihnachten & Neujahr welche bekommen du brauchst [also] nur telef. dort unter Bezugnahme auf m. Anruf auf deinen Namen Steuerkarten reservieren zu lassen, das ist ganz billig für die besten Plätze. Viele Grüsse auch von Josef und Euch allen viel Glück & Erfolg & Geld & alles gute 1926 Herzlichst! Karl Die Tel-No des Theaters findest du in der Zeitung, falls nicht im Buch Für Künstler gibts auch bei anderen Theatern Ermäßigung. Du mußt nur tags vordem anrufen & sagen, daß für den Maler Dix" (Nierendorf, 27 December 1925). Nierendorf mistakenly refers to the touring company as the Chocolate Kiddies, but the performance opening at that time was *la Revue Nègre*, starring Josephine Baker.

<sup>23</sup> Dix created the watercolor in a guestbook for his painter friend Arthur Kaufmann (Pfäffle 187).

<sup>24</sup> "Er ist ein Indianer, ein Sioux-Häuptling. Immer auf dem Kriegspfad. Wie eine Axt schwingt er den Pinsel und jeder Hieb ist ein Farbenschrei [...]. Die Welt ist ihm gebärendes Chaos, das prasselnd, lustbeend, wutschnaubend einmalige und schnell wechselnde Erscheinung gebiert. [...] Dix marschiert, läuft, stolpert wacker dem entgegen, was morgen, ohne Zutun der anderen, kommen wird. In den Stunden seiner Marschtage fühlt er die lebensstarken Triebe seines Daseins, hört im Sausen des Blutes den Prozeß ewigen Neuwerdens, beschwichtigt durch buntes Träumen die stets sprungbereiten Kräfte und schreckt, zum Zeitvertreib, den lendenlahmen Kleinbürger aller Berufe und Stände " (Zehder 26-27).

<sup>25</sup> See, in particular, Gilligan.

<sup>26</sup> A term brought into mainstream parlance by *The New York Times*, the "metrosexual" is a heterosexual man with a cosmopolitan (or metropolitan) aesthetic sensibility, one stereotypically ascribed to homosexual men. The metrosexual polish is in the details, namely through final tweaks of his clothing and hair, which in the show "Queer Eye" is termed "tjuzing."

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