

Rationalizing the Revolution: Jazz in Hanns Eisler's *Kampfmusik*

JOHN GABRIEL 

Abstract Hanns Eisler's *Kampfmusik*, his revolutionary music for the working class, is famous for its rhythmic energy. Its steady beat has been understood as a legacy of the military march. I argue that this 'Eisler Bass' was instead 'refunctioned' from interwar German jazz. Using jazz pedagogical manuals to demonstrate how Eisler adapted the steady beat, I position Eisler's writings and music within discourses of rhythm and rationalized factory labour. While this was central to Eisler's political ambitions, it also led to his music participating in a larger practice of erasure of racial difference typical of the German Communist Party.

Hanns Eisler's *Kampfmusik* is famous for its rhythmic energy. The term translates as 'fight music' or 'music for the struggle'; Eisler began composing these mass songs, solo ballads, polyphonic choruses, and theatre and film music in the late 1920s 'to agitate and to educate' the working class and promote the German Communist Party. After the Nazis seized power in 1933, he continued to write *Kampfmusik* in exile for anti-fascist causes, but by the late 1930s, his production of it gradually petered out as he settled into long-term exile in the United States. In its time, Eisler's *Kampfmusik* achieved widespread popularity and won the sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes grudging respect of the period's leading music critics as a radically new approach to modern music that combined modernist techniques with mass appeal. Central to this appeal was the music's contagious rhythmic drive, derived first and foremost from the steady, hammering block chords of the famous 'Eisler Bass', with its evenly accented triads on every beat of the bar.¹

Email: john.gabriel@unimelb.edu.au

¹ The term 'Eisler Bass' comes from later critics, not Eisler himself. These steady block chords appear in the left hand of piano music and generally in the bass voices and percussion of ensemble music. The other defining feature of the Eisler Bass is Eisler's idiosyncratic approach to harmonic motion, which is beyond the scope of this analysis. The block triads most commonly move by thirds, but occasionally by step. See Christian Glanz, 'Funktionale (funktionelle) Musik', in *Österreichische Musiklexikon*, ed. by Rudolf Flotzinger (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), 1, pp. 510–11; Károly Csipák, *Probleme der Volkstümlichkeit bei Hanns Eisler* (Musikverlag Emil Katzibichler, 1975), p. 93. Harmonic motion rarely follows functional tonality but can sometimes be analysed as derived from modal cadential patterns. Reinhold Brinkmann has analysed Eisler's approach as an application of montage aesthetics to harmonic motion; 'Kompositorische Massnahmen Eislers', in *Über Musik und Politik: Neun Beiträge*, ed. by Rudolf Stephan (Schott, 1971), pp. 9–22.

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Unsurprisingly, the rhythm of the Eisler Bass has been overwhelmingly associated with the steady beat of march music. Much of Eisler's *Kampfmusik* references the march in its titles or performance indications. On a practical level, it could accompany marches, parades, picket lines, and other demonstrations, or it could reference such actions when performed in stationary settings like rallies, meetings, or concerts. In his writings from the time, Eisler even spares military music from his broader critique of bourgeois music, as it can be used to organize marching.² Eisler's other writings from the period, however, demonstrate an ambition to fundamentally reconceptualize music's function in society and reshape compositional techniques to fulfil this purpose. Rhythm had a key role to play.

In this article, I reconsider the steady beat of the Eisler Bass, re-reading Eisler's writings alongside Weimar-era sources about rhythm, jazz, labour, and entrainment. A fact that is perhaps surprising to modern readers is that a well-articulated steady beat was considered a defining feature of jazz as dance music in post-World War I Germany, and while this beat was heard as 'march-like', it shared key distinguishing features with the Eisler Bass. I argue that in addition to its association with the march, the steady beat of Eisler's *Kampfmusik* was derived from this Weimar understanding and practice of jazz via a process the composer called 'refunctioning' (*Umfunktionieren*).³ In doing so, I reveal that Eisler's efforts to realize his political ideals in music were more sophisticated than has previously been recognized, and I assert the relevance of his *Kampfmusik* to understanding musical modernism's interwar engagement with technology and popular culture. For Eisler, the steady beat of jazz provided a key discursive link to machine rhythms, and specifically to the rhythms of factory labour. By refunctioning the steady beat of jazz as the sonic representation of factory machines, he was able to claim that his *Kampfmusik* emerged organically out of the rhythms of modern labour, just as earlier folk music was understood to have emerged out of the rhythms of pre-industrial work. His *Kampfmusik* could thus become a new kind of international folk music for the modern industrial world.

This line of reasoning was central to Eisler's revolutionary goals; he believed that the bourgeois-capitalist social order relied on the division of life into separate domains of work and recreation, with music consigned to the latter. By composing music based — via the steady beat of jazz — on the rhythms of modern labour, Eisler sought to reforge the connection between work and music, undermine the current bourgeois social order, and lay the foundations for a future socialist society. More immediately, the steady beat also had an instinctive appeal that enabled it to coordinate activity, from marching and dancing to rationalized labour. Factory workers were accustomed to

² Hanns Eisler, 'Neue Methoden der Kampfmusik', in *Gesammelte Schriften: 1921–1935*, ed. by Tobias Faßhauer and Günter Mayer with assistance from Maren Köster and Friederike Wißmann (Breitkopf & Härtel, 2007), pp. 155–56 (p. 155). Indeed, as Tobias Faßhauer has demonstrated, Eisler also drew on popular marches like those of Sousa and his imitators; 'Fesche Märsche: Hanns Eisler und die Militärmusik', *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, 67 (2019), pp. 4–18.

³ 'Refunctioning' is an admittedly unidiomatic translation of *Umfunktionieren*. It is, however, the standard translation used in Brecht and Eisler scholarship. While 'repurposing' might be more idiomatic, it sacrifices the idea that the 'social function' is what is being changed.

performing small, rationalized tasks whose contribution to the finished product was difficult to appreciate in isolation. By bringing the rhythm of the assembly line into his *Kampfmusik*, Eisler could help workers translate their embodied experience of factory work to revolutionary activity, in which individual revolutionaries also performed small and sometimes seemingly insignificant tasks according to a larger plan. As we will see, his writings and the discourse he draws upon anticipate conversations today about music and entrainment, embodiment, and mental and physical health, as well as music and rhythm as means of disciplining both the individual body and the body politic.

My argument also forces a reconsideration of the racial politics of Eisler's — and, more broadly, German modernism's — engagement with jazz. Previous scholarship on Eisler and jazz has focused on a handful of pieces in which he directly references it (in a style similar to Kurt Weill in *Die Dreigroschenoper*). These pieces draw on specific associations of jazz with the oppression of African Americans, and by focusing on them, scholars have presented Eisler's politics as, for the time, racially progressive. My argument expands the influence of jazz to include the overwhelming majority of his *Kampfmusik*. This not only broadens the scope of its political meanings to include more stereotypically communist topics like organized labour, but it also troubles those previous interpretations. Eisler's use of jazz relies on a thoroughly racialized discourse, but in the process of refunctioning the steady beat, he obscures the cultural labour of African Americans in the creation of jazz (or more accurately, the way German jazz theorists conceptualized African Americans' role in the creation of jazz). Eisler's *Kampfmusik* is thus implicated in a broader process of erasure that remains contested in contemporary debates over race in leftist politics about whether prioritizing class-based oppression ignores or can even perpetuate other vectors of oppression, like race, gender, sexuality, or ability.

I begin this article with a review of Eisler's writings on the social function of music and the role he imagined for his *Kampfmusik*, which lays a foundation to re-examine his writings on jazz. I then turn to Weimar-era jazz discourse to interrogate what exactly Eisler would have meant by the rhythms of jazz, and I show that the steady beat of jazz as described in these writings corresponds to that of the Eisler Bass. With this connection established, I return to the function of Eisler's *Kampfmusik*, first positioning the steady beat within early twentieth-century discourses of labour rationalization and then positioning that rationalization within communist tactics. Finally, I reflect on the broader implications of my analysis as regards the racial politics of *Kampfmusik* and German modernism's interest in jazz.

The Social Function of Music

Eisler produced *Kampfmusik* in a variety of genres, including mass songs, ballads for solo performance, choral music, and music for theatre and film; he even understood his purely instrumental music from this time as *Kampfmusik*. Nevertheless, music with sung text occupied a central role. Beyond stand-alone songs, choruses, and so forth, Eisler's music for theatre also emphasized songs and choruses, and he composed songs specifically for films. He also reused much of his film music in his instrumental music.

Indeed, his instrumental music gained much of its *Kampfmusik* character from audiences recognizing melodies, remembering the songs' texts, or recalling the music's meaning in previous films or theatrical works.⁴ In what follows, my focus will thus be on music with sung text, primarily mass songs, ballads, and songs written for theatre and film.

Eisler's composition of *Kampfmusik* was just one part of a broader engagement with revolutionary proletarian music that began shortly after the Eleventh Party Congress of the German Communist Party in 1927 called for the creation of a new, specifically proletarian culture to replace existing folk and bourgeois forms.⁵ Eisler threw himself into this work as a musician, an organizer, and a theoretician. During this period, before the predominance of socialist realism, there was much debate about exactly what this new revolutionary proletarian culture should consist of, and Eisler's ideas aligned with and found support from a number of German artists and thinkers who published in party and party-adjacent periodicals like *Musik und Gesellschaft* and *Kampfmusik*.⁶

Eisler developed his theory and practice of *Kampfmusik* in parallel during the late 1920s, and by the early 1930s, he was articulating a relatively sophisticated vision of

⁴ Knud Breyer writes in his introduction to the orchestral music volume of the Hanns Eisler Complete Edition: 'All the works in the present volume had already been used in a functional context, either in film or in the theatre, before they were reworked as independent concert music.' Breyer further notes that Eisler also 'reused such music in the open genre of the suite', including 'the following works, also written in the 1930s, the Suites for Orchestra opp. 23, 24, 26, 30, 34 and 40, which draw on music from the films *Opus III*, *Niemandland*, *Kuhle Wampe*, *Pesni o geroyach*, *Dans les rue* and *Le grand jeu*'; 'Introduction', in *Orchestermusik / Orchestral Music*, Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe / Complete Edition, Series IV, ed. by Knud Breyer (Breitkopf & Härtel, 2016), I, pp. xx–xxviii (p. xx).

⁵ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler: Musik einer Zeit, die sich eben bildet* (edition text + kritik, 1976), pp. 61–62. Betz's biography of Eisler has been translated as *Hanns Eisler: Political Musician*, trans. by Bill Hopkins (Cambridge University Press, 1982). After World War II, Eisler retrospectively defined much of this practice as a pursuit of what he called *angewandte Musik* (applied music). As this formulation came later and thus potentially projects post-war concerns onto pre-war practice (especially relevant here given jazz's troubled reception in early Cold-War East Germany), in this article I avoid Eisler's post-war formulations and focus on his writings from the interwar period.

⁶ See especially Hendrik de Man, 'Die Wirkung des Rhythmus im Vollzug industrialisierter Werkarbeit', *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 1.2 (May 1930), pp. 41–43; Ernst Emsheimer, 'Die soziale Bedeutung der Musik im proletarischen Werktag', *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 1.2 (May 1930), pp. 46–50; Hans Engel, 'Rhythmus der Zeit', *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 1.2 (May 1930), pp. 54–56; Peter Watt, 'Musik und Klassenkampf', *Kampfmusik*, 1.2 (March 1931), pp. 2–3; 'Neue Wege und Aufgaben der Arbeiter-Musik', *Kampfmusik*, 1.2 (March 1931), p. 3; 'Spieltruppen und Arbeitermusikvereine', *Kampfmusik*, 1.3 (April 1931), p. 3; Ruck, 'Feierstunden oder Kampfgesang?' *Kampfmusik*, 1.5 (June 1931), pp. 3–4; e. h. m., 'Entstehung und Untergang des Konzerts', *Kampfmusik*, 2.3 (March 1932), pp. 3–4. Eisler's ideas were also close to the then-ascendant Proletcult and Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) in the Soviet Union, although he maintained a more nuanced approach to both folk music and the bourgeois tradition. Before the RAPM was suppressed, Eisler developed close connections with its members during visits to the Soviet Union. On the RAPM, see Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), chapters 3 and 8. On Eisler and the RAPM, see Eisler, '[Gruß an die RAPM]', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, p. 104. Eisler's closest contact in the RAPM was Alexander Davidenko; see Israil Nestjew, 'Eisler und Dawidenko: Schöpferische Beziehungen zwischen zwei Komponisten der Arbeiterklasse in Deutschland und der Sowjetunion', *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 28 (1978), pp. 406–11. For an example of Eisler praising Davidenko, see Anita Garret, 'Eisler Praises Chorus Group', *Daily Worker*, 24 February 1936, p. 5.

how revolutionary proletarian music should work and sound. Using a Marxist conceptualization of history that was both teleological and dialectical, Eisler understood his *Kampfmusik* as intervening in musical culture of the day to facilitate the rise of the proletariat. Critical here are his ideas about music's social function, the relationship between music and work, and the relationship between work and non-work in everyday life.

The first traces of Eisler's Marxist reconceptualization of music date to 1928, in unpublished notes likely produced for a course and later a study group he led on the 'historical-materialist analysis of music' at the Berlin Marxist Workers' School (Marxistische Arbeiterschule or MASCH).⁷ Here, Eisler attempts to formulate fundamental theses for a dialectic materialist music history: his first thesis states that 'music is the organization of notes' and his second that 'the organization of the notes reflects the social situation. A change in production methods, a change in the class structure, also affects a change in the methods of organizing the notes.'⁸ The main task of the music theorist or historian is to study the 'function of music', which he defines in later writings as 'the social purpose of music-making'.⁹ Following from Eisler's theses, musical style is dependent on the then-current social order. Musical materials, like Renaissance polyphony, sonata form, or late-Romantic orchestration, rose to prominence because they enabled music to best serve its function within the economic organization of society. When the social function of music changes, some of these materials are abandoned, while others are adapted to music's new function.

In the Marxist dialectical view of history, each new social order begins with the revolutionary overthrow of the previous one, only for the new order to gradually become reactionary. Eisler argues that the same is true of music. The replacement of feudal music-making with bourgeois concert music, for example, 'was, in the middle of the eighteenth century, a great step forward [... but] today this great step forward has transformed into a reactionary moment'.¹⁰ As a social order and its music become reactionary, they also become unstable, contributing to their inevitable downfall.

⁷ On the MASCH, see Dietrich Urbach, 'Die Marxistische Arbeiterschule Berlin: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Erwachsenenbildung vor 1933', *Internationales Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung*, 2 (1971), pp. 191–200. On Eisler's work at the MASCH, see Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, p. 98.

⁸ Eisler, '[Thesen]' (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 113–15 (p. 113): '§1: Musik ist Organisation von Tönen. §2: Die Organisation der Töne spiegelt wider die gesellschaftliche Situation. Eine Veränderung der Produktionsmethoden, eine Veränderung der Klassenstruktur bewirkt auch eine Veränderung der Organisationsmethoden der Töne.' All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 136: 'Wir müssen hier einen neuen Begriff in unsere Betrachtung einführen, nämlich den Begriff der Funktion der Musik, worunter wir von nun an den gesellschaftlichen Zweck des Musizierens verstehen wollen.'

¹⁰ Eisler, 'Erbauer', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 132–52 (p. 135): 'Sie [die Konzertmusik] war in der Mitte des 18. Jh. der große Fortschritt der kämpfenden bürgerlichen Klasse [...]. Wir werden sehen, dass dieser Fortschritt in der Musik sich heute verwandelt in ein reaktionäres Moment.' Eisler's essay has also been translated as 'The Builders of a New Music Culture' in *Hanns Eisler: A Rebel in Music*, ed. by Manfred Grabs, trans. by Marjorie Meyer (Kahn & Averill, 1999), pp. 36–58.

Expanding on the communist line that capitalism was entering its final phase, Eisler believed that ‘the development of music in the last fifteen years has definitively liquidated the previously stable concepts of bourgeois art’.¹¹ The stage was thus set for a new, revolutionary proletarian music to emerge, one that would contribute to the overthrow of the bourgeois-capitalist social order but also ‘already contain the seeds of the foundations of the methods of musical culture in socialism’.¹²

Eisler rarely cites sources for his ideas, but in a 1931 draft, he references the work of German economist Karl Bücher on the origins and function of music in pre-industrial society going all the way back to the Palaeolithic.¹³ Bücher was interested in the science of labour rationalization, especially as related to energy and fatigue.¹⁴ In the nineteenth century, labour scientists came to understand human energy, both mental and physical, as a finite resource that once drained, needed to be recharged. As opposed to earlier characterizations of fatigue as laziness, lack of willpower, or just feeling tired, it was now understood to be a biological state of energy depletion. As such, it posed a grave threat to the productivity, wealth, and military power of the industrial state, which deployed the tools of science and medicine to counter it.

Fatigue was thought to be a modern condition, brought about by changes in work due to industrialization. In his 1896 book *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Work and Rhythm), which appeared in a sixth, ‘improved and expanded’ edition in 1924, Bücher sought to better understand what made industrial labour so fatiguing by studying the development of labour from the Palaeolithic to the present day.¹⁵ Building on evolutionary theories of culture prevalent at the time, he turned to non-European societies as representative of earlier stages of human civilization, using the cultures of the Amazon and sub-Saharan Africa as models of the earliest human civilizations and European folk culture as the model of the most advanced pre-industrial civilization. His primary methodology was to survey anthropological literature on work songs.¹⁶ In the process,

¹¹ Ibid.: ‘Die Musikentwicklung der letzten 15 Jahre hat endgültig liquidiert die früher stabilen Begriffe der bürgerlichen Kunst.’

¹² Ibid., p. 147: ‘schon im Keime die ersten Fundamente der Methode der Musikkultur des Sozialismus enthalten’.

¹³ Eisler, ‘Die Kunst als Lehrmeisterin im Klassenkampf’ (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 123–32 (p. 124). In the same passage, Eisler also cites the work of Russian Marxist theorist Georgi Plekhanov, but Plekhanov’s ideas are themselves based on Bücher. See George V. Plekhanov, ‘Historical Materialism and the Arts’, in his *Art and Society & Other Papers in Historical Materialism* (Oriole Editions, 1974), pp. 69–107 (pp. 87–90); Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* (Wayne State University Press, 1973), pp. 119–24.

¹⁴ See Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Karl Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Verlag Emmanuel Reinicke, 1924).

¹⁶ Bücher’s sources are overwhelmingly British and French anthropologists. Both his ‘armchair’ approach and his use of evolutionary theory parallel early German comparative musicology. See Vanessa Agnew, ‘The Colonialist Beginnings of Comparative Musicology’, in *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, ed. by Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 41–60; Alexander Rehding, ‘The Quest for the Origins of Music in Germany circa 1900’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 53 (2000), pp. 345–85, doi:10.2307/832011; Eric Ames, ‘The Sound of Evolution’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 10 (2003), pp. 297–325, doi:10.1353/mod.2003.0030.

he developed an idiosyncratic theory that music, dance, and poetry all originated in the rhythms of work. At the time, the origin of music was a major preoccupation in the emerging field of musicology, and Bücher's ideas found wide reception among musicians and musicologists.¹⁷

Bücher identifies two major breaks in the development of human labour. The first occurred in the earliest human societies with a division into what he terms primitive and civilized peoples (*Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*). While *Naturvölker* only work to meet their immediate needs and cease working at or before the onset of fatigue, *Kulturvölker* work 'consistently and methodically' even after they began to experience fatigue. Bücher argues that a steady beat is essential to this 'civilized' form of labour, as its efficiency and entraining power minimizes energy expenditure, both delaying the onset of fatigue and facilitating continued work while fatigued. This beat is also, Bücher claimed, the origin of music. First, an individual began working at a steady rhythm, which gradually expanded into synchronized group work. Eventually, one worker was tasked with playing a simple percussion instrument to reinforce the beat, which then developed to include pitched percussion and later pitched instruments and singing. Poetry arose from the addition of words to the beats and melodies, and dance originated as the imitation of the rhythmic movements of work and was executed to the same rhythms and melodies.¹⁸ Music and its steady beat thus facilitated workers moving seamlessly between work and non-work activities, like dancing and religious rituals. This model was central to Eisler's understanding of music's social function before capitalism and the bourgeoisie's rise to power.

However, things became more complicated at Bücher's second major break in the development of human labour: industrialization. For Bücher, the introduction of mechanically driven machinery fundamentally changed the rhythm of work. The pre-industrial steady beat emerged out of a human collective, and thus could speed up or slow down as individuals rush or drag, and an individual could stop or pause when their fatigue is too great. The mechanically regulated beat of modern factory labour, on the other hand, was inhumanly steady and unrelenting. Rather than naturally arising out of the rhythm of the workers' movements, it was often set by the factory owners, and workers must keep up even as they became increasingly fatigued. Going back to his initial research question, Bücher argues that this change in the rhythm of labour not only made modern factory work fatiguing, but also fundamentally dehumanizing. As evidence, he claims that 'the work song has almost completely disappeared' from the modern factory, and 'the arts hardly play a role in the life of the worker any more'.¹⁹ Factory workers neither sing while they work, nor do they seamlessly transition from work into music and dance that imitates the motions of factory labour after their shifts: 'Work [...] is no longer music and poetry at the same time.'²⁰ Work and music had been relegated to separate domains.

¹⁷ Rehding, 'Origins', pp. 350–51; see also Erich Moritz von Hornbostel's Bücher-influenced discussion of repetition in African dance, 'African Negro Music', *Africa*, 1.1 (1929), pp. 30–62 (p. 59).

¹⁸ On poetry, see Bücher, *Arbeit*, p. 386, and on dance, p. 272 and pp. 334–35.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 460: 'Und damit ist auch der Arbeitsgesang zum guten Teile verschwunden'; and p. 462: 'Im Leben des Arbeiters spielen sie [die Künste] kaum noch eine Rolle.'

²⁰ Ibid., p. 463: 'Die Arbeit ist ihm nicht mehr Musik und Poesie zugleich.'

This divide plays a key role in Eisler's understanding of music's function in capitalism. He argues that all music in capitalist society, whether Brahms or Schoenberg, *The Merry Widow* or jazz, serves the same social function: 'the enjoyment of music' (*Musikgenuss*).²¹ He explains that as a means of enjoyment, 'music is primarily used in bourgeois society as a restorative, for the reproduction of the ability to work'.²² Here, he refers to the Marxist concept of the reproduction of labour power. Drawing on the discourses of labour and fatigue that would later inform Bücher, Marx argues that capitalism turns workers' ability to work, their 'labour power', into a commodity that they sell to their employer. The reproduction of this power, however, is the responsibility of the worker, and thus contributes to the surplus value that the employer exploits.²³ In Eisler's model of capitalism, workers, tired after a long day of work, listen to and make music for recreation so that they will be energized for work the next day.²⁴

Eisler, however, disagreed with Bücher on the fundamentally dehumanizing nature of factory work. As Anson Rabinbach explains, communists welcomed the rationalization of factory work as a means of increasing productivity; it was only the exploitation of rationalized labour they opposed.²⁵ Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer, for instance, published a defence of Taylorism, *Rationalisierung und Fehlrationalisierung* (Rationalization and Mis-rationalization), in 1931. Meanwhile, a Soviet version of Taylorism was developed in the early 1920s, and many Soviet artists sought to integrate

²¹ Eisler, 'Erbauer', p. 134: 'Die Funktion des reinen Musikgenusses, wie wir die Funktion der bürgerlichen Musik beschreiben'.

²² Eisler, 'Neue Methoden der Kampfmusik', p. 155: 'Musik wird von der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft vor allem als Erholung zur Reproduktion der Arbeitskraft benutzt. Sie spielt also eine passive Rolle.'

²³ See Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, Chapter 3. As Eisler explained this concept: 'The sharp division within capitalist means of production between work and recuperation separates all cultural [*geistigen*] activities into those which serve work and those which serve recuperation. Recuperation is a system of reproducing labour power. Recuperation may not consist of what work consists of. Recuperation is dedicated to the non-producer in the interest of production. Those are the social-economic foundations for the specific form of music making in capitalism' ['Der der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise eigene scharfe Gegensatz zwischen Arbeit und Erholung trennt alle geistigen Betätigungen in solche, welche der Arbeit und solche welche der Erholung dienen. Die Erholung aber ist ein System zur Reproduktion der Arbeitskraft. Die Erholung darf nicht enthalten, was die Arbeit enthält. Die Erholung ist im Interesse der Produktion dem Nichtproduzieren gewidmet. Das sind die gesellschaftlichen ökonomischen Grundlagen für die eigentümliche Form der Musikausübung im Kapitalismus']; 'Erbauer', p. 135.

²⁴ Eisler and Adorno's *Composing for the Films* of 1947 falls outside the chronological scope of this article, but many of the book's arguments about popular culture, its relation to society, and its authors' methodological approach that seeks to separate technical and ideological aspects of film and film music creation resonate with Eisler's earlier writings about jazz. In particular, its introduction nicely condenses many of his key arguments made across his writings from the 1920s and 1930s that I synthesize here and below in the section 'Rationalizing the Revolution'. This not only demonstrates certain consistencies in Eisler's thought, but also reveals significant changes based on his experience of exile and working in Hollywood, namely a willingness to work with 'big business' (p. liii) and a new openness to a Schoenbergian-Adornian conception of 'art that does not yield [and] is completely shut off from consumption and driven into isolation' (p. lii). These changes in Eisler's thought exemplify why I have chosen to chronologically limit the scope of this article. See Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (Oxford University Press, 1947; repr. Athlone Press, 1994).

²⁵ Rabinbach, *Human Motor*, p. 241.

its methods into their work.²⁶ Eisler was engaged in a similar process in how he understood the function of his *Kampfmusik*.

On the most practical level, Eisler defines his music's function as 'mobilization to the struggle [*Kampf*] and political education'.²⁷ How exactly it would do this was informed by his analysis of music history. In one of his most detailed discussions of the topic, Eisler argues:

If we — and by 'we' I mean the avant-garde of the proletariat, the revolutionary working class — really want to seize political power, then we must propagate an artistic practice that derives new methods from the daily struggle of the revolutionary working class, that does not just [...] reflect the needs and worries of the working class, but rather that makes concrete the correct methods for seizing power to the broad masses of the hungry and suffering in Germany.²⁸

Here Eisler clarifies two key features of *Kampfmusik*: that it should arise out of the daily struggle of the proletariat and that it should concretely demonstrate how to carry out the revolution. His account of music history helps to explicate just how his *Kampfmusik* would achieve this and the central role of the steady beat of the Eisler Bass in doing so.

Eisler's first claim — that *Kampfmusik* should arise out of the daily struggle of the proletariat — points back to his reading of Bücher and the relationship between music, work, and non-work. The strict separation of work and non-work into separate spheres of activity, with music confined to the latter, was central to the bourgeois social order and music's role in upholding it. *Kampfmusik* needed to dissolve this distinction, and Bücher's account of music in pre-industrial society provided a model for just such a system. This model, however, could not simply be copied, for while Eisler disagreed with Bücher's conclusion that rationalized industrial labour was necessarily dehumanizing, he agreed with his argument that pre-industrial folk music was incompatible with the rhythms of the modern factory. In a 1938 lecture, for example, he paraphrases Bücher:

²⁶ See Roman Abramov, 'Understanding Professionalism in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia: An Analytical Review', *The American Sociologist*, 47 (2016), pp. 81–101 (pp. 85–86), doi:10.1007/s12108-015-9294-5; Jean van Delinder, 'Taylorism, Managerial Control Strategies, and the Ballets of Balanchine and Stravinsky', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48 (2005), pp. 1439–52, doi:10.1177/0002764205277189; and Ana Olenina, 'Engineering Performance: Lev Kuleshov, Soviet Reflexology, and Labor Efficiency Studies', *Discourse*, 35 (2013), pp. 297–336 and 432, doi:10.13110/discourse.35.3.0297. On familiarity with Soviet trends among German left-wing artists, see Hugh Ridley, 'Tretjakov in Berlin', in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Keith Bullivant (Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 150–65.

²⁷ Eisler, 'Neue Methoden der Kampfmusik', p. 155: 'Aktivierung zum Kampf und politische Schulung'.

²⁸ Eisler, 'Erbauer', pp. 151–52: 'Wenn wir — und unter "wir" meine ich die Avantgarde des Proletariats, die revolutionäre Arbeiterschaft — die politische Macht wirklich ergreifen wollen, so müssen wir eine Kunstausübung propagieren, die ihre neuen Methoden aus dem Tageskampf der revolutionären Arbeiterschaft bezieht, die aber nicht nur [...] die Nöte und Sorgen der Arbeiterschaft widerspiegelt, sondern die richtigen Methoden zur Ergreifung der Macht den breiten Massen der Hungernden und Elenden in Deutschland plastisch macht.'

Factory workers cannot sing at work the same way and for the same reasons as the Volga boatmen sang. The tempo and rhythm of their work is dictated by their machines and not by the workers themselves. Spontaneous music culture dies under such conditions. Two generations after the Industrial Revolution the majority of the population was without any music culture at all.²⁹

For Bücher, the disappearance of folk music proved the inhumanity of industrial society. From Eisler's historical materialist perspective, both this disappearance and industrialization were inevitable historical developments; what he lamented was not the loss of the old folk music but of the working class's 'spontaneous music culture'. This contributed to the working class's oppression, as it compelled workers to adopt the bourgeois model that confined music to the domain of non-work.

In his *Kampfmusik*, Eisler sought to reforge the 'spontaneous' connection between music and labour and to bridge the domains of work and non-work. As he claims in a 1934 article: 'The *Kampflied* is the true folk song of the proletariat.'³⁰ However, in order to reforge this connection, Eisler needed a way to conceptualize the rhythms of his *Kampfmusik* as arising out of the rhythms of rationalized factory labour. Traditional associations of a steady beat with pre-industrial musical genres like the march were insufficient to link his music to industrial work. Indeed, the march embodied the humane qualities of pre-industrial labour as described by Bücher: its steady beat emerged out of group movement and was maintained by one or more musicians tasked with playing a steady rhythm. But these musicians were only human — the beat of the march would inevitably vary based on their own imprecision and responses to the other marchers. Jazz, on the other hand, could provide a link to the inhuman precision of machine rhythms, and not just on a conceptual level. The Weimar understanding and practice of jazz also offered Eisler a whole set of rhythmic techniques that he adapted in his *Kampfmusik*.

Eisler and Jazz

Eisler mentions jazz infrequently in his writings from the Weimar period, and when he does, his comments are generally negative. This has led many observers to conclude that he was opposed to jazz on political and aesthetic grounds.³¹ On closer examination, however, his opinions are more nuanced. He was certainly repulsed by jazz as commercial entertainment music and the role it played in bourgeois-capitalist society; nevertheless, he closely analysed it to better understand its effectiveness. As Eisler and

²⁹ Eisler, 'Labor, Labor Movement and Music' (1938), in *A Rebel in Music*, ed. by Grabs, pp. 131–49 (p. 136–37).

³⁰ Eisler, 'Einiges über das Verhalten der Arbeiter-Sänger und -Musiker in Deutschland' (1935), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 214–33 (p. 225): 'Das Kampflied ist das eigentliche Volkslied des Proletariats.' Emphasis in original.

³¹ See Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung* (Metzler, 1972), pp. 98–99; Wolfgang Burde, 'Faszination des Ungehörten: Verfremdete Welt voller Charme', in *Das Lächeln der Euterpe: Musik ist Spaß auf Erden*, ed. by Sabine Borris (Parthas, 2000), pp. 92–97 (p. 95).

Bertolt Brecht write in their 'Comments on *Die Massnahme*' to accompany their eponymous 1930 collaboration:

A rejection of jazz that does not stem from a rejection of its social function is a step backwards. Namely, one must be able to differentiate between jazz as a set of techniques and the repulsive commodity that the entertainment industry has made of it.³²

Eisler breaks jazz into its component parts — what he calls its materials — like melodic conventions, harmonic language, characteristic rhythms, and instrumentation. These materials can be isolated, reconfigured, and then put to use for politically acceptable purposes. Eisler calls this process *refunctioning*, which he defines in a 1934 essay: 'We will apply our critical methods, separate craft from [ideological] content, purify craft from the influence of content, and then out of this new technique, we will bring something new into development by giving it other uses and content.'³³

In Eisler's writings, refunctioning takes two forms. On the one hand, it can involve the transformation of large-scale elements of bourgeois music culture, like the programming of concerts, genres like the oratorio or symphony, or the role of music in theatre and film.³⁴ For example, Eisler advocates refunctioning conventional workers' chorus concerts into political events. To do so, he suggests incorporating communal singing, removing religious oratorios from the repertoire (unless they are first historically contextualized for the audience), and adding non-musical components, like political speeches, skits, or newsreel projections.³⁵

When it comes to the refunctioning of jazz, previous scholarship on Eisler has taken a similarly large-scale perspective, focusing on examples where the composer used many

³² Hanns Eisler, 'Anmerkung zu *Die Massnahme*' (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 115–19 (p. 118): '(Dennoch ist eine Ablehnung des Jazz, welche nicht von einer Ablehnung seiner gesellschaftlichen Funktionen herkommt, ein Rückschritt.) Man muss nämlich unterscheiden können, zwischen dem Jazz als Technikum und der widerlichen Ware, welche die Vergnügungsindustrie aus ihm machte.' This quotation has been used to explain Brecht's approach to jazz, but Eisler likely played a large role in shaping these lines of the 'Comments'. Indeed, when Brecht was preparing the text for translation to Russian a year later, he replaced the first sentence ('Nevertheless a rejection...') with 'This does not mean a rejection of jazz' ['Das bedeutet keine Ablehnung des Jazz']; *Brecht's Modell der Lehrstücke: Zeugnisse, Diskussion, Erfahrungen*, ed. by Reiner Steinweg (Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 112. The idea of 'social function' that Brecht removes is a major theme in Eisler's writings from this period.

³³ Eisler, 'Das revolutionäre Lied', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, p. 229: 'Wir werden unsere kritische Methode anwenden, das Handwerkliche vom Inhaltlichen trennen, das Handwerkliche vom Einfluss des Inhaltlichen säubern und dann manches aus dieser neuen Technik, dadurch dass wir ihr andere Zwecke und Inhalte geben, neu zur Entwicklung bringen.'

³⁴ This is an especially clear example of the mutual influence of Eisler and Brecht. Eisler, for example, published a pamphlet in 1936 titled 'The Crisis in Music' (in *A Rebel in Music*, ed. by Grabs, pp. 114–20 (pp. 117–19)) that presents a comparative chart of bourgeois musical forms and their refunctioned proletarian replacements that is clearly modelled on Brecht's well-known chart comparing dramatic and epic theatre in his 'The Modern Theatre Is Epic Theatre (Notes to the Opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*)'; Bertolt Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*' (1930), in *Bertolt Brecht Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. by Werner Hecht and others (Aufbau Verlag and Suhrkamp, 1991), xxiv, pp. 74–84 (pp. 78–80).

³⁵ See Eisler, 'Neue Methoden der Kampfmusik', pp. 155–56, and 'Einiges über die Aufgaben der Arbeiterchorbewegung', pp. 171–74, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer.

elements of jazz all at once. In these works, Eisler clearly intends for the music to be heard as jazz or jazz-influenced in order to draw on listeners' associations with it. For example, the 'Lied der Baumwollpflücker' (Song of the Cotton Pickers, text: Bruno Traven, 1929) and the 'Ballade vom Nigger Jim' (Ballade of Nigger Jim, text: David Weber, 1931) use jazz to symbolize the oppression of African Americans.³⁶ Such songs seek to teach working-class Germans to understand racist oppression as a symptom of capitalist class oppression and to feel solidarity with oppressed people around the world.³⁷

In other examples, jazz symbolizes more general exploitation under capitalism. When Eisler and Brecht describe the use of jazz in their collaboration *Die Massnahme*, they refer specifically to 'the music of Part 5', which is the 'Lied des Händlers' (Song of the Merchant, also known as the 'Song der Ware' (Commodity Song)). Musicologist Albrecht Dümling's comments about this song are representative of the way Eisler's refunctioning of jazz, both in this song and more generally, has been understood:

As a musical symbol for this mechanism of exploitation and oppression, Eisler selected jazz, or rather the dance music that fell under this rubric at the time. Like the other commodities described in the song, it is a product acquired by capitalists, a modern form of slave labour.³⁸

Indeed, many leftist and communist German musicians at the time used jazz in this way.³⁹

Eisler, however, does not actually describe this use of jazz in his songs as refunctioning, but as *imitation*. On the 'Lied des Händlers', he writes:

The music of Part 5 [...] is an *imitation* of a music that reflects the fundamental attitude of the merchant: of jazz. The brutality, idiocy, self-assurance, and self-contempt of this type of person could be 'represented' in no other musical form.⁴⁰

³⁶ In German at the time, the word *n*gger* was used in two senses, one copying the English racial epithet and the other to refer to African Americans in especially oppressed and destitute circumstances. Eisler uses it in the latter sense. It is not to be confused with the German word *Neger*, which was a Germanization of Negro. As in English, *Neger* was widely used and fairly neutral, although it could be made a racial epithet in certain contexts.

³⁷ Albrecht Dümling, 'Symbol des Fortschritts, der Dekadenz und der Unterdrückung: Zum Bedeutungswandel des Jazz in den zwanziger Jahren', in *Angewandte Musik 20er Jahre: Exemplarische Versuche gesellschaftsbezogener musikalischer Arbeit für Theater, Film, Radio, Massenveranstaltung*, ed. by Dietrich Stern (Argument Verlag, 1977), pp. 81–100 (p. 98).

³⁸ Albrecht Dümling, 'Musikalische Verfahrensweise und gesellschaftliche Funktion: Hanns Eisler und der Jazz', in *'Es liegt in der Luft was Idiotisches...': Populäre Musik zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik*, ed. by Helmut Rösing (Arbeitskreis Studium Populärer Musik, 1995), pp. 118–38 (pp. 129–30): 'Als musikalisches Symbol für diesen Ausbeutungs- und Unterdrückungsmechanismus wählte Eisler den Jazz oder vielmehr die Tanzmusik, die damals unter diese Rubrik fiel. Wie die anderen besungenen Waren ist sie ein von Kapitalisten angeeignetes Produkt, eine Form moderner Sklavenarbeit.'

³⁹ See Alan Lareau, 'Jonny's Jazz: From *Kabarett* to Krenek', in *Jazz and the Germans: Essays on the Influence of 'Hot' American Idioms on 20th-Century German Music*, ed. by Michael J. Budds (Pendragon Press, 2002), pp. 49–60 (pp. 53–57).

⁴⁰ Eisler, 'Anmerkung', p. 118: 'Die Musik zu Teil V [...] ist die *Imitation* einer Musik, die die Grundhaltung des Händlers widerspiegelt, des Jazz. Die Brutalität, Dummheit, Souveränität und Selbstverachtung dieses Typus konnte [sic] in keiner anderen musikalischen Form "gestaltet" werden.' Emphasis mine.

Similarly, critics at the time also described Eisler's recognizable use of jazz as imitation, satire, or parody. In a review of the premiere of *Die Massnahme*, for example, Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt wrote of Part 5 and the 'Lied des Händlers':

Eisler knowingly copies the half-serious jazz style: the heavy chromaticism of the refrain and the sordid turns of the melody denote the sharp and intentional *satire* of the song. The principle of virtuosity (in the trombone part) also has a *parodistic* function here.⁴¹

I argue that it is more useful to think of songs like the 'Lied des Händlers' and the 'Lied der Baumwollpflücker' as parodies than as refunctioning. For while jazz has been refunctioned to a certain extent (it now functions to agitate and educate, as opposed to providing pleasure), it does not fulfil all the requirements in Eisler's definition: to separate craft from ideological content and to give craft new uses and new content. Eisler's parodies of jazz necessarily preserve the music's bourgeois associations; without them, the songs would not make sense. And because meaning in these parodies of jazz is dependent on knowledge of its bourgeois referent, they seem unlikely to contain within themselves any seeds of a future post-revolutionary socialist music.

If we take Eisler's description of refunctioning seriously, we should instead look for how he broke jazz down into its constituent musical materials. He gave a particularly revealing insight into this process in a critique of other communist composers who sought to reproduce the mass accessibility of bourgeois popular music:

Bourgeois popular music [*Schlager*] has a thoroughly corrupt, inactive musical attitude and cannot in any way be taken up by us. Its logic, its melodic construction, and its harmony are completely unusable. It is, however, possible to refunction the rhythm of jazz and to make it taut and energetic.⁴²

The word Eisler uses for 'bourgeois popular music', *Schlager*, would have included jazz, jazz-influenced popular music, and popular music with no jazz influences. Eisler rejects any use — even refunctioning — of bourgeois popular music's melody and harmony, and as the above quotation by Stuckenschmidt makes clear, these two elements were central to the imitation of jazz in songs like the 'Lied des Händlers'. Instead, Eisler argues that rhythm is the only element of bourgeois popular music that can be refunctioned, and he specifies that this is not the rhythm of just any kind of *Schlager* but that of jazz.

Eisler's terminology here is also revealing. Elsewhere he uses the German word *umfunktionieren*, which translates directly as 'to refunction', but here he writes

⁴¹ Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, 'Politische Musik zu Brecht-Eislers *Massnahme*' (1931), in *Die Maßnahme: Kritische Ausgabe mit einer Spielanleitung*, ed. by Reiner Steinweg (Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 343–48 (p. 348): 'Eisler kopiert hier bewußt den halbseriösen Jazz-Stil: die schwierige Chromatik des Refrains, die gemeinen Wendungen der Melodie bedeuten schärfste und gewollte *Satire* des Songs. Auch das Prinzip der Virtuosität (Posaunenstelle) hat hier eine *parodistische* Funktion.' Emphasis mine.

⁴² Eisler, 'Neue Methoden der Kampfmusik', p. 156: 'Die bürgerliche Schlager hat aber eine durchaus korrupte, unaktive musikalische Haltung und kann nicht ohne weiteres von uns übernommen werden. Völlig unbrauchbar am Schlager ist seine Logik, seine Melodieführung und seine Harmonie. Aber es ist möglich den Rhythmus des Jazz umzumontieren und straff und energisch zu machen.'

ummontieren. This word builds on the root *montieren*, which translates as ‘to mount’ or ‘to assemble’; it was used to refer to the assembly process on a conveyer belt, as well as the process of creating a montage. *Ummontieren*, or to reassemble, thus carries strong associations with both factory labour and avant-garde artistic techniques. What exactly Eisler meant by the ‘rhythm of jazz’, however, remains unclear. Comparing Eisler’s compositions with contemporary discussions of jazz demonstrates that he was referring to the steady, driving beat of jazz as it was practised in Weimar Germany.

The Rhythm of Jazz

If asked to identify the ‘rhythm of jazz’, a modern listener would likely say syncopation, but this represents an understanding of jazz based on select American practices that were retroactively elevated in the construction of the jazz canon, or, as Scott DeVeaux has called it, ‘the jazz tradition’.⁴³ As J. Bradford Robinson and Frank Tirro have demonstrated, this tradition has also played an outsized role in the historiography of jazz in Germany.⁴⁴ While a growing body of recent scholarship has illuminated Germany’s idiosyncratic approach to early jazz, the importance of a steady beat remains largely unappreciated.⁴⁵ Re-examining this discourse reveals not only the centrality of the steady beat to early German jazz, but also the specific techniques and practices refunctioned by Eisler in his *Kampfmusik*.

Germany’s unique reception of jazz originated in World War I. Cut off first by the war and then by the economic and political turmoil that followed, Germans were dazzled by reports of jazz from abroad and sought to recreate it by grafting their knowledge of early American popular music (especially ragtime) and what they could glean from images and written descriptions onto German wartime popular music, like operetta, so-called ‘gypsy’ bands, and military marches. Marches especially came to be linked with early German ideas about jazz. During the war, it was popular to use marches to accompany ‘step’ dances, and Astrid Kusser writes that in this period,

⁴³ Scott DeVeaux, ‘Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography’, *Black American Literature Forum*, 253 (1991), pp. 525–60, doi:10.2307/3041812.

⁴⁴ J. Bradford Robinson, ‘Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure’, in *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Bryan Gilliam (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 107–34; J. Bradford Robinson, ‘The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany’, *Popular Music*, 13 (1994), pp. 1–25, doi:10.1017/S0261143000006814; Frank Tirro, ‘Jazz Leaves Home: The Dissemination of “Hot” Music to Central Europe’, in *Jazz and the Germans*, ed. by Budds, pp. 61–82. Whereas Robinson bases his argument on printed sources, Tirro works primarily from historical recordings.

⁴⁵ See n. 44. Jonathan O. Wipplinger has criticized recent scholarship building on Robinson’s work for over-emphasizing the idiosyncrasies and isolation of early German jazz; *The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany* (University of Michigan Press, 2017), pp. 10–11. While Wipplinger identifies a number of new means by which Germans may have known American jazz, these are more supplements to Robinson’s work than contradictions. Both authors agree that Germany experienced greater international jazz exchange after 1925, and most of Wipplinger’s argument focuses on this later period.

'Europeans often danced cakewalks to unsyncopated traditional marches'.⁴⁶ Afterwards, information about the movements of jazz dances like the Charleston or black bottom spread faster than the actual musical forms, and as these dances were in duple time, marches continued to be used in the immediate post-war period to accompany them. This combination of influences, especially that of ragtime and marches, shaped the early German understanding of jazz to emphasize the contrast of a steady bass with a syncopated melody, but with a particular emphasis on the bass. However, in its assimilation into German jazz, the steady beat was transformed, both in how it was played and in how it was understood.

Over the course of the 1920s, Germany was gradually reintegrated into the international circulation of popular music. While some idiosyncrasies of German jazz faded away, the steady beat endured, especially in social dancing, where it helped to keep the dancers in time. In 1929, for instance, a leading guide for jazz-band leaders warned that while the steady beat could be downplayed in symphonic concert jazz, 'deviations from normal metrical schemes [...] are] less advised in functional jazz out of consideration for the dancers'.⁴⁷ The steady beat served a similar function for the high-kicking troupes of dancing girls so famously analysed by Siegfried Kracauer. Jonathan Wipplinger notes that in another contemporary analysis of these troupes, sociologist Fritz Giese (to whom we will return below) had, in his descriptions of the music, to 'gradually strip jazz's rhythm of syncopation' and emphasize instead the importance of the mechanically steady 'beat'.⁴⁸ In such shows, the steady beat not only coordinated the dancers, but also reinforced the visual effect of their synchronization. Additionally, many American and Western European jazz and popular styles that arrived in Germany also featured a steady beat, like new ragtime, boogie-woogie, and stride piano. Based on their previous experience, Germans were predisposed to focus on this steady beat as further evidence of its centrality to jazz.

While the steady beat of German jazz had its origins in the march, it soon developed distinct accent patterns and methods of elaboration. Pedagogical manuals, written primarily for classically trained professional musicians who wanted to expand their repertoire, explain these characteristics in detail and offer valuable insight into how jazz was performed in everyday cafes, bars, and nightclubs. The leading author of such manuals was musicologist and critic Alfred Baresel; his first manual, *Das Jazzbuch* (The Jazz Book), was published in 1925 and went through seven editions before he released an expanded eighth edition in 1929, *Das neue Jazzbuch* (The New Jazz Book).⁴⁹ Baresel

⁴⁶ Astrid Kusser, 'Cakewalking the Anarchy of Empire around 1900', in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. by Volker M. Langbehn (Routledge, 2010), pp. 87–104 (p. 96).

⁴⁷ Alfred Baresel, *Das Neue Jazzbuch: Ein praktisches Handbuch für Musiker, Komponisten, Arrangeure, Tänzer und Freunde der Jazzmusik* (Musik Verlag Wilhelm Zimmermann, 1929), p. 23: 'Während die Kunstmusik, und damit auch der Kunstjazz, durch Abweichungen vom metrischen Normal-schema besondere Reize schafft, ist dies dem Gebrauchs jazz aus Rücksicht auf den Tänzer weniger anzuraten.' See also Bernhard Egg, *Jazz-Fremdwörterbuch* (W. Ehrler & Co., 1927), p. 7.

⁴⁸ Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ On Baresel's status as 'Weimar Germany's authority on jazz music', see *ibid.*, p. 155; Robinson, 'Jazz Reception', pp. 124 and 205 n. 51. Mátyás Seiber, the director of the jazz course at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt from 1928 to 1933, is perhaps better known today, but Seiber's influence was largely limited to his students at the conservatory and a small number of publications that appeared only in the final years of the Republic.

also published manuals for specific instruments, including percussion, banjo, and piano, and articles on jazz in newspapers, magazines, and academic journals. His books are notable for their descriptive, as opposed to prescriptive, approach; as he explains in an introduction, *Das neue Jazzbuch* ‘came to be in an unusual way: far removed from the American birthplace of its subject, it gathers its findings from observations of [jazz’s] European impact’.⁵⁰

From the first edition of *Das Jazzbuch* in 1925 to his final publication on jazz in the Weimar period, *Jazz-Klavierschule* (Jazz Piano Method) in 1932, Baresel consistently describes a steady beat as the defining feature of jazz, which he traces to the military march and German ‘step’ dances. Already in the first edition of *Das Jazzbuch*, he labels the foxtrot, one-step, and blues ‘march-like dances’ and ‘members of the march family’.⁵¹ In the expanded discussions of *Das neue Jazzbuch*, he continues to connect duple-time jazz dances and military marches:

Drawing on the music of the person in step, march music, which has established a tempo division of parade march, swift march, [and] attack march, we can create three groups of the modern duple-metre dances: a slow, middle, and fast group.⁵²

This is especially telling as, for Baresel, jazz dances (foxtrot, one-step, blues) are not distinguished by characteristic rhythmic patterns or forms but by their tempo.⁵³

Nor was Baresel alone in linking jazz to the march. In his 1927 book *Jazz: Eine musikalische Zeitfrage* (Jazz: A Musical Question of our Times), Paul Bernhard also identifies the march and its ‘step’ dances as the source of jazz’s beat:

The old rhythms are dead. A single, simple, familiar rhythm that unites all people, primitive and highly civilized, lives: that of the swift march. [...] The entire youth of Europe knows only one rhythm, the duple metre of the forward drive, the pounding, the ‘step’.⁵⁴

This connection became especially clear in retrospect. Michael Kater, for example, writes that ‘made-in-Germany jazz reminded Berlin’s Hans Blüthner [a leading figure

⁵⁰ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, pp. 6–7: ‘So entstand unser Neues Jazzbuch auf ungewöhnliche Art: fern von der amerikanischen Heimat seines Gegenstandes sammelte es seine Erkenntnisse durch Beobachtung der europäischen Auswirkungen.’

⁵¹ Alfred Baresel, *Das Jazzbuch: Anleitung zum Spielen, Improvisieren und Komponieren moderner Tanzstücke mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Klaviers* (Zimmermann, 1925), pp. 16 and 10: ‘Das geschieht bei marschähnlichen Tänzen’; ‘gehören alle drei der Familie des Marsches an’.

⁵² Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 25: ‘Wir können in Anlehnung an die Musik des schreitenden Menschen, die Marschiermusik, die eine Tempoeinteilung in Parademarsch — Geschwindmarsch — Sturmarsch vornahm, drei Gruppen der modernen geradzähligen Tänze bilden: eine langsame, mittlere und schnelle Gruppe.’

⁵³ Alfred Baresel, *Das Jazzbuch*, p. 10. Dance critic Heinz Pollack similarly saw no difference in the characteristic rhythms of jazz dances of the early 1920s; *Die Revolution des Gesellschaftstanzes* (Sibyllen-Verlag, 1922), p. 10.

⁵⁴ Paul Bernhard, *Jazz: Eine musikalische Zeitfrage* (Delphin-Verlag, 1927), p. 14: ‘Die alte Rhythmik ist tot. Ein einziger, einfacher, allen Menschen, primitiven und hochzivilisierten, geläufiger Rhythmus lebt, der des Geschwindmarsches. [...] Die gesamte europäische Jugend kennt nur einen Rhythmus, den zweiteiligen des Vorwärtsdrängens, des Stapfens, den “Step”.’

in the jazz clubs of the time] of marches'.⁵⁵ This connection even endures in Adorno's critique of jazz, written in exile in England in 1936:

If one wanted to describe the phenomenon of interference in jazz in terms of broad and solid concepts of style, one could claim it as the combination of salon music and march music. [...] The effectiveness of the principle of march music in jazz is evident. *The basic rhythm of the continuo and the bass drum is completely in sync with march rhythm*, and since the introduction of six-eight time, jazz could be transformed effortlessly into a march.⁵⁶

Indeed, J. Bradford Robinson has argued that a number of Adorno's idiosyncratic claims about jazz that leave modern readers puzzled can be explained by Weimar jazz practice.⁵⁷

In response to such conflation, Baresel clarified a subtle but essential distinction: the march emphasized strong beats, creating an oom-pah effect, while jazz accented all four beats evenly, as seen in [Example 1](#). The example is labelled 'Blues accompaniment' because it is notated in common time; recall that, for Baresel, the blues was not fundamentally different from other jazz dances, but was simply at a slower tempo.

Baresel specified that the evenly accented steady beat was to be maintained even when there was an alternation of low and high chords that might imply an oom-pah effect. This is strikingly illustrated in [Example 2](#), taken from the *Jazz-Klavierschule*. The caption accompanying the example translates as:

Jazz accompaniment differs here fundamentally from the accompaniment of a military march, which strongly accents the low notes as opposed to the weak beats. This is not the case in jazz accompaniment; rather, all four beats of the bar are equally strong.⁵⁸

The steady beat even took precedence in dance forms that Baresel did not describe as 'march-like'. He claims that 'jazz has even transformed the rhythmically uneven accompaniment of the tango into four even beats in modern dance usage'.⁵⁹

Thus, while the steady beat of jazz may have had its origins in the march, this beat was transformed as it was assimilated into Weimar dance practice. For inexpert listeners like Adorno or for listeners accustomed to the American and Western European 'jazz tradition', like Hans Blüthner and most readers today, the steady beat of German jazz

⁵⁵ Michael Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 59.

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, 'On Jazz', in *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (University of California Press, 2002), pp. 470–95 (p. 485). Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Robinson, 'The Jazz Essays'. Robinson's analysis remains accepted in Adorno scholarship, but it has been criticized for reducing Adorno's analysis to 'a well-worn lament over the vacuity of the music industry', leaving it 'largely irrelevant for current debates about mass culture'; James Buhler, 'Frankfurt School Blues: Rethinking Adorno's Critique of Jazz', in *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. by Berthold Hoeckner (Routledge, 2006), pp. 103–30 (p. 103). See also Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 197–99, and Robert W. Witkin, 'Why Did Adorno "Hate" Jazz?' *Sociological Theory*, 18 (2000), pp. 145–70 (p. 147), doi:10.1111/0735-2751.00092.

⁵⁸ Alfred Baresel and Rio Gebhart, *Die neue Klaviervirtuosität: Jazz-Klavierschule* (Leipzig, 1932), p. 6.
⁵⁹ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 21: 'Er hat sogar die ursprünglich rhythmisch bewegte Begleitung des Tango im modernen Tanzgebrauch in vier gleichmäßige Schläge verwandelt.'

Example 1. Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 21: March accompaniment and Blues accompaniment.



Example 2. Baresel and Gebhart, *Die neue Klaviervirtuosität: Jazz-Klavierschule*, p. 6.

Die Jazzbegleitung unterscheidet sich hier wesentlich von der Begleitung des Militärmarsches, der die Bässe gegenüber den Nachschlägen stark akzentuiert. Dies ist bei der Jazzbegleitung nicht der Fall, sondern alle vier Schläge eines Taktes sind gleichmäßig stark.



was strongly reminiscent of march music, if not identical. For experts and practitioners of the time, however, the steady beats of jazz and the march were subtly but fundamentally different. Even as they acknowledged the historical origins of jazz's beat in the march, they clearly articulated what made jazz unique.

'Blues Accompaniment' and the Eisler Bass

Eisler's use of the 'rhythm of jazz' incorporated a range of practices related to the steady beat. On a fundamental level, Baresel's 'Blues accompaniment' is strikingly similar to the Eisler Bass, as seen in [Example 3](#), taken from Eisler's 'Einheitsfrontlied' (Song of the United Front, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1935). A steady crotchet pattern evenly accents all four beats; this effect continues in the left hand for the duration of the song, and in the right hand for all but three bars.

This model is typical of Eisler's *Kampfmusik*. The extent to which it drives an individual composition depends on the genre. In mass songs, like the 'Einheitsfrontlied', the steady beat continues through the entire work. In ballads, which were composed for solo performance, the steady beat may or may not occur in the verses but almost always appears in the chorus.⁶⁰ Here, it reinforces a statement of the song's message, and the audience might be invited to sing along. In the 'Lied der Wohltätigkeit' (Charity Song, text: Kurt Tucholsky, 1930), for example, the first portion of

⁶⁰ See Eberhardt Klemm, 'Über Eislers Balladen', in *Hanns Eisler Heute: Berichte — Probleme — Beobachtungen*, ed. by Manfred Grabs (Akademie der Künste der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1974), pp. 46–48.

Example 3. Eisler, 'Einheitsfrontlied' (Song of the United Front, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1935), bars 1–4, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

Mäßige ♩ <Nicht Schleppen, nicht eilen>

1. Und weil der Mensch ein Mensch ist, drum braucht er was zum Es - sen bit - te sehr.
 2. Und weil der Mensch ein Mensch ist, drum braucht er auch noch Klei - der und Schuh.
 3. Und weil der Mensch ein Mensch ist, drum hat er Stie - fel im Ge - sicht nicht gem,
 4. Und weil der Pro - let ein Pro - let ist, drum wird er ihn kein an de - rer be - frein,

Example 4. Eisler, 'Lied der Wohltätigkeit' (Charity Song, text: Kurt Tucholsky, 1930), bars 25–28, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

Bewegt (♩ = ca. 144)

Die Mark ist tau - send und tau - send fach in frem - de Ta - schen ge - flos - sen;

the chorus sums up the lesson of the ballad: charity is a cheap way for the ruling classes to give back only a small portion of what they extract by exploitation (Example 4). This is followed by a slower section that concludes this point and leads to a call to action: 'Take what you get, but call out the bullshit. Think about your class, it will make you strong'.

The Eisler Bass rarely occurs in Eisler's multi-part choral writing, but it does occur in much of his film and instrumental music from the period.⁶¹ As stated above, in the case of instrumental music, he often self-borrows from texted songs, ballads, and film music, intending the audience to associate the instrumental music they hear with the remembered text and message of the song or film scene.

My claim that Eisler's use of the steady beat in this manner is a refunctioning of jazz is supported by his use of a steady beat in his music that imitates it, such as the 'Lied der

⁶¹ Eisler's multi-part choral works instead tend to refunction techniques from Baroque counterpoint, using the repetition of text and melodic patterns as a way to drive home the message; see Eisler, 'Die Erbauer einer neuen Musikkultur', p. 138. In addition to using a steady beat as an underlay for action, Eisler also composed a number of songs featuring the steady beat specifically for films. The *Solidaritätslied* (Solidarity Song, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1931), for instance, comes from the film *Kuhle Wampe* (dir. Slatan Dudow, 1932).

Example 5. Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 74: Variations of the basic rhythm.



Baumwollpflücker' discussed above, as well as an early attempt to write an actual shimmy. This unpublished piece for solo piano, composed in 1926, is untitled but labelled 'Shimmytempo', and it contains a handwritten dedication to a certain 'Frau Edith' referring to it as a 'shimmy'.⁶² Substantial portions feature steady block chords in the left hand with an occasionally syncopated melody in the right. Clearly Eisler was familiar with the use of a steady beat in the German jazz music of his time.

Eisler also varied the steady beat of the Eisler Bass with subdivisions in the middle voices, again following the practices of German jazz. According to Baresel, one could either subdivide every beat or any individual beat, as seen in Example 5, taken from *Das neue Jazzbuch*. The first variant in this example, which Baresel writes is also the most common, will be familiar to Eisler scholars: the first two beats of the bar are the rhythmic pattern Manfred Grabs has identified as the 'Klassenkampf' (class struggle) motif that recurs throughout Eisler's *Kampfmusik*.⁶³ Grabs notes that the rhythm has affinities to jazz, and he and others drawing on his work have considered this as an isolated pattern that could reference jazz or popular music.⁶⁴ However, this pattern is just one of many Eisler refunctioned from jazz practice. Further, while Grabs argues that the rhythm loosens the 'march' rhythm of the Eisler Bass, Baresel writes that such patterns in jazz 'liven up the accompaniment with a simultaneous *strong emphasis on the metre*'.⁶⁵ Examples 6–9 provide a selection of examples of the ways Eisler used and combined variations like those Baresel describes.⁶⁶

The similarities between jazz practice and Eisler's *Kampfmusik* become even more apparent when one considers how the steady beat is orchestrated. As we have seen, in Eisler's piano writing, the steady beat is placed in the left hand and either doubled or varied in the middle voices of the right. The melody appears in the vocal part, often

⁶² Hanns Eisler, 'Shimmy: für Klavier', 1926, Mus.Hs.44282, Musiksammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

⁶³ Manfred Grabs, 'Über Berührungspunkte zwischen der Vokal- und der Instrumentalmusik Hanns Eislers', in *Hanns Eisler Heute*, ed. by Grabs, pp. 114–29 (p. 118).

⁶⁴ Ibid.; Dietrich Stern, 'Soziale Bestimmtheit des musikalischen Materials: Hanns Eislers Balladen für Gesang und kleines Orchester und ihre Beziehung zur Musik Kurt Weills', in *Angewandte Musik der 20er Jahre: Exemplarische Versuch gesellschaftsbezogener musikalischer Arbeit für Theater, Film, Radio, Massenveranstaltung*, ed. by Dietrich Stern (Argument Verlag, 1977), pp. 101–12 (p. 110).

⁶⁵ Baresel, *Das Jazzbuch*, p. 16: 'Ein wichtiges Hilfsmittel zur Belebung der Begleitung bei gleichzeitig starker Betonung der Zählzeit sind rhythmische Unterteilungen.' Emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Similar subdivisions in the middle voices can also be found in a few passages of Eisler's 'Shimmy: für Klavier', again suggesting that he was familiar with this as a jazz practice.

Example 6. Eisler, 'Lied der Bergarbeiter' (Song of the Miners, text: Anna Gmeyner, 1929), bars 31–34, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

31

Und fahr - ren aus den Gru - ben, hohl - äü - gig und zer - fetzt

Example 7. Eisler, 'Ballade vom Soldaten' (Ballad of the Soldier, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1928), bars 19–20, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

Ein wenig rascher ($\text{♩} = 96$) 20

Doch der Sol - dat mit der Doch der Sol - dat mit dem

Example 8. Eisler, 'Lied der Werkkrätigen' (Song of the Workers, text: Stephan Hermlin, 1929), bars 17–18, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

17

Von Mör - dern um-stellt und ins Zucht - haus ge-steckt, uns
Heut bau - en wir kühn un - sern ei - ge - nen Staat des
Es wächst, auch wenn es un - sern Feind nicht ge - fällt, die

doubled in the uppermost line of the right hand. This conforms to Baresel's description:

In solo piano performance, the responsibilities of the accompaniment fall on the left hand. It holds fast to the steady, regular rhythm and plays 'in straight time'. The right

Example 9. Eisler, 'Solidaritätslied' (Solidarity Song, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1931), bars 1–2, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

Marschtempo

Vor - wärts! und nicht ver - ges - sen, wor -

hand brings the artistic means of rhythm into play and plays 'ragtime' [i.e. syncopation].⁶⁷

The same is true of Eisler's ensemble scoring. In German jazz bands, the piano was joined by what we today would call the rhythm section: bass/tuba, banjo/guitar, and percussion.⁶⁸ Mátyás Seiber, director of the first German jazz conservatory course at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, wrote in his 1929 *Schule für Jazz-Schlagzeug* (Manual for Jazz Percussion) that the first of the two main responsibilities of the jazz percussionist was 'to give a rhythmic counterweight to the syncopations of the melody instruments (that is, to hold the fundamental rhythm steady during continual accompaniment)'.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in his discussion of the other rhythm-section instruments, Baresel writes that the banjo 'serves — similarly to the piano — the harmonic effect of the rhythm. It strikes chords in wide spacing on every beat according to the metre of the written bar.'⁷⁰

Eisler follows this practice. He almost always includes piano and banjo in his ensembles, and their parts follow Baresel's guidelines. In an orchestration of the 'Ballade von den Säckeschmeißern' (Ballade of the Cargo Loaders, text: Julian Arendt,

⁶⁷ Baresel and Gebhart, *Die neue Klaviervirtuosität*, p. 3: 'Die Aufgaben der Begleitung fallen beim Solo-Klavierspiel im Prinzip der linken Hand zu, sie hält den geraden, regelmäßigen Rhythmus fest und spielt "in straight time". Die rechte Hand bringt die Kunstmittel der Rhythmik in Anwendung und spielt "Ragtime".'

⁶⁸ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Mátyás Seiber and Paul Franke, *Schule für Jazz-Schlagzeug* (Schott, 1929), p. 2: 'ein rhythmisches Gegengewicht gegen die Synkopen der Melodie-Instrumente zu geben (also bei dauernder Beteiligung am Spiel den Grundrhythmus verlässlich festzuhalten)'.

⁷⁰ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 55: 'Das Banjo dient — ähnlich wie das Klavier — der harmonischen Schlagwirkung, es ist also im besonderen ein rhythmisches Instrument. Es schlägt Akkorde in weiter Lage auf allen Zählzeiten nach Maßgabe des vorgezeichneten Taktes.' For a first-person account of the role of the banjo in Weimar-era jazz bands that largely supports Baresel's characterization, see Michael Danzi, *American Musician in Germany: Memoirs of the Jazz, Entertainment, and Movie World of Berlin during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Era — and in the United States* (Norbert Ruecker, 1986), esp. pp. 25–26 and 34–35.

1930) in the Eisler archive, for example, he places the steady beat in both verse and chorus in the piano and banjo.⁷¹ An archival orchestration of the mass song 'Der heimliche Aufmarsch' (The Secret Deployment, text: Eric Weinert, 1938) also uses piano and banjo in this fashion.⁷² In ensembles without piano or banjo, Eisler uses alternative instruments for the steady beat, as in an alternative orchestration of 'Der heimliche Aufmarsch' found in the archive which uses bassoon to provide middle-voice variation of the steady beat.⁷³

Jazz and Machines

In addition to its association with the march, jazz was famously also associated with machine culture in the 1920s. Beyond vague equations of jazz and machines as symbols of modernity, the similarity of the steady beat of jazz to that of a motor became a common trope. In *Jazz: Eine musikalische Zeitfrage*, Bernhard wrote: 'In the ensemble, the left hand [on the piano] functions as a typical percussion instrument, as a kind of low drum. Typical for the instrumentation is the accompaniment, which stomps forward in an unshakeable, machine-piston rhythm.'⁷⁴ In his 1927 book on modern music, *Die Entgötterung der Musik* (literally 'The De-sacralization of Music', but published in English translation as 'Music Come to Earth'), critic Adolf Weissmann similarly claimed that 'the piano has truly become a machine, in so far as it underscores the pounding beat of jazz in the bass. But jazz allows the right hand of the player enough room for wild figurations.' These figurations, however, are 'restrained by the unyielding rhythm in which the banjo and drums participate in a frantic, machine-like manner'.⁷⁵ Looking back on Weimar jazz from 1939, Ernst Krenek contrasted the *seeming* primacy of syncopation to the true importance of the mechanically steady beat:

At the outset, jazz used real syncopes. [...] But the meter, generally a normal quadruple rhythm, was invariably carried through, mostly by the piano, the bass drum, or the banjo, no matter how far the other instruments might have gone astray in the syncopation. The dull, heavy, unobtrusive throbbing of this central mechanism vibrated with a soothing regularity throughout the piece like a ship's engine, unaffected by raging gales above. [...] The essential feature of jazz is the *fictitious* suspension of the simple metrical fundamental

⁷¹ Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hanns Eisler Archive, Folder 997, Ballade von den Säckeschmeißern, Partitur, Besetzung 1, 1930.

⁷² Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hanns Eisler Archive, Folder 878, Der heimliche Aufmarsch, Grammophon-Partitur, Fassung 2, 1930–31.

⁷³ Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hanns Eisler Archive, Folder 879, Der heimliche Aufmarsch, Partitur, Fassung 4, 1930–31, for flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, percussion, and piano.

⁷⁴ Bernhard, *Jazz*, p. 29: 'Im Ensemble wirkt die linke Hand als typisches Schlaginstrument, als eine Art tiefe Trommel [...] Typisch für die Instrumentierung ist die in unerschütterlichem Maschinenkolben-Rhythmus dahinstapfende Begleitung.'

⁷⁵ Adolf Weissmann, *Die Entgötterung der Musik* (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1928), p. 25: 'das Klavier als Wächter des Rhythmus [...]. Das Klavier ist wirklich zur Maschine geworden, soweit es im Baß den stampfenden Schritt des Jazz unterstreicht, aber er läßt der rechten Hand des Spielers genügend Raum zu wilden Figurationen. [...] Aber die Improvisation wird eingespannt in den unerbittlichen Rhythmus, an dem Banjo und Schlagzeug mit rasender Maschinenmäßigkeit mitwirken.'

scheme. [...] Under all circumstances [...] the subterranean meter [is] imperturbably maintained.⁷⁶

Alongside the mechanical imagery, the emphasis in these quotations on the contrast of syncopation and the steady beat is common in Weimar-era descriptions of jazz. I will return to the effect of this contrast below.

The perceived similarities between jazz and machine rhythms drew the new music into broader debates, as we saw in Bücher's work, over the potentially dehumanizing character of modern labour and modern life more generally. Indeed, all three authors mentioned above voiced such concerns. Bernhard bemoaned that in jazz, 'the piano [...] is simply reduced to a motor, to a piano-machine'.⁷⁷ The extreme steadiness of the beat was fundamentally inhuman: 'Just like flipping an electrical switch the musical motor begins to sound, and it dies exactly in beat and rhythm when the switch is turned off, seemingly without a soul.'⁷⁸ Weissmann similarly lamented that 'the piano, whose soul has been removed and which has been transformed into a percussion instrument, is evidence of de-sacralized music'.⁷⁹ In an essay from 1928, Krenek extended this comparison to the jazz industry and listener, describing the latter as a 'mass-produced person [...] who is created on the conveyor belt and wants to be served by products produced in the same way'.⁸⁰

Other writers reconfigured Bücher's ideas to absolve the mechanically steady beat of its dehumanizing potential. To do so, they extrapolated from jazz's African American origins. I highlight these potentially upsetting examples to clarify the association of jazz with machines, as well as to emphasize how thoroughly racialized and racist Weimar-era understandings of jazz and the steady beat were. In an extended essay on the history of jazz in *Das neue Jazzbuch*, Baresel locates the 'beginnings of jazz' in African music that was further developed by African Americans. Although he cites Bücher, Baresel diverges from the economist when he describes the steady beat of African drumming as identical to that of the modern machine. Instead, he integrates jazz and rationalized labour into a long lineage of healthy rhythms:

Let us now remember, that our heart 'beats' at regular intervals. The human expects this kind of regularity, an equally regular beat of the sounds of the outer world; he is even pleased when he finds it. Regularity makes work easier: this can be seen by the stonecutters, who let their hammers fall on the stone in alternating intervals of equal duration; an even pace, the fusion of all the marching legs in an audible 'cadence',

⁷⁶ Ernst Krenek, *Music Here and Now*, trans. by Barthold Fles (Russell & Russell, 1939), p. 256; emphasis in the original.

⁷⁷ Bernhard, *Jazz*, p. 29: 'Das Klavier [...] ist einfach zum Motor degradiert, zum Klaviermaschine.'

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 49: 'Wie mit der Drehung eines elektrischen Schalters beginnt der Musikmotor zu erklingen und erstirbt genau im Takt und Rhythmus, wenn der Schalter zurückgedreht wird, scheinbar seelenlos.'

⁷⁹ Weissmann, *Entgötterung*, p. 15: 'Das entseelte, zum Schlagzeug werdende Klavier spricht von entgötterter Musik.'

⁸⁰ Ernst Krenek, 'Schubert' (1929), in *Zur Sprache gebracht: Essays über Musik*, ed. by Friedrich Saathen (Albert Langen and Georg Müller, 1958), pp. 35–41 (p. 40): 'An die Stelle ist der Serienmensch getreten, der auf dem laufenden Band erzeugt wird und von ebenso hergestellten Produkten bedient sein will.'

whether induced or accompanied by music, brings the exhausted troops quickly forward; the drudgery of the machine hall becomes more bearable because of the regularity of the machines' beats — monotony is better than chaos, than disorder. For rhythm eases labour, as it substantially reduces the expenditure of willpower it requires (Karl Bücher, 'Arbeit und Rhythmus'). Thus we stand before the beating machine and observe a primal rhythm, a long abundance of regular sounds.⁸¹

Baresel thus links the rhythm of this pre-industrial labour to the modern factory via the cultural work of African Americans. His debt to Bücher is evident not just in his citation, but also in his reference to 'stonecutters', an example taken directly from Bücher of labourers whose work generates an audible beat.

A more complicated example comes from Fritz Giese and his 1925 book *Girlkultur* (Girl Culture). Giese first made a name for himself studying the effects of rationalization and workplace injury (primarily electrical shocks) on telephone operators, who were overwhelmingly young unmarried women.⁸² This led him to write *Girlkultur*, a sociological study of modern life that brought together discourses of labour rationalization and popular culture via the high-kicking chorus girl. Giese proposes several ways of conceptualizing rhythm, the most relevant being his distinction between 'biological-natural' and 'technical-artificial' rhythms. The former includes various rhythms of nature (seasons, heartbeats), as well as pre-industrial work rhythms, while the latter defines modern life and labour: 'modern conveyor belt work [...] the development of Taylorism and the related development of industry, traffic, [...] business, [and] last of all the emergence of the modern metropolis'.⁸³

Giese uses the rhythms of music and dance to illustrate how western culture, which he racializes as white, has become disconnected from modern life: 'The white person dances in a form that is absolutely inappropriate to the rhythm of the metropolis. The

⁸¹ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, pp. 19–20: 'Wir erinnerten bereits daran, dass unser Herz in regelmäßigen Abständen "klopft". Der Mensch erwartet nämlich eine Regelmäßigkeit, ein ebenso regelmäßiges Klopfen von den Geräuschen der Außenwelt; erfreut sich jedenfalls, wenn er es antrifft. Regelmäßigkeit erleichtert die Arbeit: zu beobachten bei den Steineklöpfen, welche ihre Hämmer abwechselnd in gleichmäßigen zeitlichen Abständen klopfend auf die Steine fallen lassen; der gleichmäßige Schritt, das Zusammenfassen aller marschierenden Beine im hörbaren, von der Musik veranlaßten oder begleiteten "Gleichschritt", bringt die ermüdete Truppe schnell vorwärts; die Öde des Maschinensaals wird erträglicher durch die Gleichmäßigkeit des Maschinenstempfens — die Monotonie ist besser als Chaos, als Durcheinander. Denn der Rhythmus erleichtert die Arbeit, weil er den Aufwand an dazu nötiger Willensenergie wesentlich einschränkt (Karl Bücher, "Arbeit und Rhythmus"). Wir stehen also vor der klopfenden Maschine und beobachten einen Ur-Rhythmus, eine lange Reihe regelmäßiger Geräusche.'

⁸² Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (University of California Press, 2006), pp. 183–84 and 194–200.

⁸³ Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur: Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl* (Delphin-Verlag, 1925), p. 25: 'Denn wenn wir immer von Rhythmus sprachen, meinten wir das Biologische der Erscheinung. Meinten wir das Naturgegebene, jenseits und vor allem Menschlichen Liegende. Die moderne Fließarbeit der wirtschaftlichen Fertigung, die Entwicklung aus dem Taylorsystem und die damit zusammenhängende Entwicklung der Industrie, des Verkehrs und Wirtschaftslebens, ja letzten Endes das Entstehen der modernen Großstadt: das alles führt zu einem neuartigen Rhythmusbegriff. Wir stellen dem biologisch-natürlichen den technisch-artifiziellen Rhythmus gegenüber.'

old waltzes, the Boston, or the one-step: they are simply no longer possible.’⁸⁴ The new rhythms of modernity are instead captured by ‘the jazz band and the dance forms connected to it’.⁸⁵ Giese contrasts his characterization of ‘white’ European culture with supposedly ‘primitive’ African culture. He assigns African Americans a mediating role between the two, which he claims enabled them to create jazz. Africans, he writes, ‘are much too close to the primal rhythms of nature’, while African Americans had spent several generations in the United States and forgotten ‘the primal forests of Africa’.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, their African origin gives them a special rhythmic intuition:

[The African American] was the first person who found this new rhythm of the metropolis — the technical, the business-like, and the traffic — absolutely intuitive. [...] This grown-up child of nature responded in a way that was just as unmediatedly instinctive [*motorisch*] as rhythmic, and thus the general cultural good that emerges from America was born: jazz bands and Negro dances.⁸⁷

Returning to his distinction of biological-natural and technical-artificial rhythms, Giese summarizes: ‘The artificial rhythm of the metropolis, whose index was the shimmy and dances that reflected the times, was connected, over and through the nature of the Negro, to the [...] natural, biological rhythm that the Negro possessed.’⁸⁸ The cultural work of African Americans thus bridged the primitive and modern rhythms of work, music, and everyday life.⁸⁹

To understand how Giese makes this connection, consider Krenek’s description of the title character of his 1927 opera *Jonny spielt auf*, an African American jazz musician: ‘Jonny [...] is part of the technical-mechanical side of the world, he reacts just as easily, happily, exactly, and amorally as one of these well-constructed machines.’⁹⁰ By this, he means that Jonny does not have the rational or emotional capacities that give the opera’s European characters control over their own behaviour. Instead, Jonny responds

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 34: ‘Der Weiße tanzt in einer Form, die absolut unangemessen ist dem Rhythmus der Großstadt. Der alte Walzer, ein Boston oder One Step: das ist eigentlich nicht mehr möglich.’

⁸⁵ Ibid.: ‘Es entstehen daher aus der Jazzband und mit ihr Tanzformen neuer Art.’

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 29: ‘Das Naturvolk des schwarzen Erdteils, andere Primitivvölker, stehen dem Urrhythmus der Natur viel zu nahe’; and p. 30: ‘Sie sind Bürger dieses neuen Landes und das Urwaldafrika verschwindet den dort Geborenen.’

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 32: ‘Er war der erste Mensch, der diesen Rhythmus der Großstadt, der Technik, des Wirtschaftlichen und des Verkehrs ganz und gar intuitiv empfand. [...] Dieses erwachsene Kulturkind reagierte ebenso unmittelbar motorisch wie rhythmisch und so entstand das, was heute von Amerika ausgehend Gemeingut ward: Jazzband und Negertanz.’

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 34: ‘Und so kann man rückwärts sagen, dass auch der künstliche Rhythmus der Großstadt, dessen Exponent Shimmy und zeitentsprechende Tänze waren, dass auch er über und durch das Naturell der Neger verbunden wurde mit dem obenerwähnten Rhythmus erster Ordnung, dem natürlichen biologischen Rhythmus, den die Neger besaßen.’

⁸⁹ The dual conceptualization of jazz as both primitive and modern in this period, as well as the role of race in this conceptualization, has attracted substantial attention. For instance, it plays a key role throughout Wipplinger’s *Jazz Republic* as well as Andy Fry’s study of jazz in mid-century France, *Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920–1960* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁹⁰ Ernst Krenek, ‘Von *Jonny* zu *Orest*’ (1930), in his *Im Zweifelsfalle: Aufsätze über Musik* (Europaverlag, 1984), pp. 33–35 (p. 33): ‘Jonny ist in diesem Sinn geradezu ein Teil der technisch-mechanischen Weltseite, er reagiert ebenso leicht, erfreulich, exakt und amoralisch wie eine dieser wohlkonstruierten Maschinen.’

to the world instinctively, following only the biological design of the human body, just as a machine responds according to its mechanical design. That Giese's and Krenek's goal was to critique European culture as decadent does not lessen the racism at play here.⁹¹ Indeed, racist imagery of African American impulsiveness as a salve to European over-refinement was common in defences of jazz in the Weimar Republic.⁹²

Reflex Reactions

The term Giese uses to describe the instinctive reaction of African Americans to the rhythms of modern industry, *motorisch*, has obvious connections back to machine culture, but it also refers to an instinctive bodily response. In both German and English, the neurons involved in reflex reactions are called *motor* neurons. The idea of instinctive responses to rhythms again recalls Bücher, who argued that because regular repetition was the most efficient form of motion, evolution had hard-wired animal life to instinctively synchronize movement to a steady beat.⁹³ For him, this formed a biological basis to aesthetics; today it is studied as an effect of entrainment.⁹⁴ Such instinctive responses to rhythm were central to the discourse of both jazz and labour rationalization. In German jazz discourse, they became particularly tied up to ideas about not just the steady beat, but also syncopation. They thus form the next step in understanding Eisler's refunctioning of the steady beat and also provide an opportunity to consider the role of syncopation and rhythmic disruptions in his *Kampfmusik*.

Weimar jazz discourse used instinctive, biological responses to the steady beat to explain the music's popularity. Jazz apologists and opponents alike highlighted its infectious quality: you just couldn't help but tap your foot. As an article in the radio journal *Deutsche Welle* humorously noted: 'People who otherwise won't budge are rooted out by jazz: [They say,] "Sure, we can do that. Just a few steps." This comes from the music, something foolishly pleasing. One mocks, but one participates.'⁹⁵ Siegfried Kracauer described a similar experience while attending a jazz revue in Frankfurt

⁹¹ On the idea of African American jazz as an antidote for European decadence, see Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 142–64. This idea was quite widespread, and even serves as the foundation of the plot of Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*.

⁹² See Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, p. 149.

⁹³ Bücher, *Arbeit*, p. 411.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 435. Gary Tomlinson describes entrainment 'in musical usage' as 'our ability to perceive the regularity of an isochronous series of pulses, to predict the continuation of the series, and to coordinate our activities in advance to this continued regularity'. This process may or may not be conscious; 'Before *homo sapiens*: Toward a Deep History of Entrainment', in *Musical Implications: Essays in Honor of Eugene Narmour*, ed. by Lawrence Bernstein and Alexander Rozin (Pendragon Press, 2013), pp. 383–408 (p. 402). In addition to research into early humans, entrainment continues to be a topic in studies of jazz; see Mark Doffman, 'Groove: Temporality, Awareness and the Feeling of Entrainment in Jazz Performance', in *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, ed. by Martin Clayton and others (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 62–85; Vijay Iyer, 'Embodied Mind, Situated Cognition, and Expressive Microtiming in African-American Music', *Music Perception*, 19 (2002), pp. 387–414, doi:10.1525/mp.2002.19.3.387.

⁹⁵ Bg., 'Aus dem allgemeinen Programm Jöde und Jazz: Zum Vortrag Dr E. Kroll, 8. Mai, 17.30 Uhr', *Deutsche Welle*, 18 (1931), p. 159: 'Leute, die sich sonst nicht vom Fleck rühren, werden vom Jazz aufgestöbert. Na, das können wir auch noch. Die paar Schritte. Und dann liegt so was in der Musik, so was Dämlich-Vergnügtes. Man schimpft, aber man macht mit.'

in 1928: 'It is a hard lot, only being able to look, for the music goes straight to your legs, which want to dance along at any price.'⁹⁶ Related to this are the many descriptions of jazz as 'hypnotic music', in which the regularity of the beat mesmerized dancers and compelled them to dance. As one observer noted, dancers 'did not move themselves how they wished: they are set into motion by this music'.⁹⁷

Others were more ambivalent. While they celebrated jazz, they also expressed reservations about the hypnotic effect of the steady beat and its power to suppress individual subjectivity; above we saw Weissmann and Bernhard describing this as dehumanizing. A common solution to this conundrum was to valorize the rhythmic contrast provided by syncopation. Like the steady beat, syncopation was thought to trigger its own instinctive and bodily response. It had a natural disruptive quality, as illustrated in an account by the journalist Hans Siemsen:

[The dancers] *march* calmly and slowly according to the beat of the bass drum, but suddenly a shrill note on the flute drives into their bones, their knees knock together, and they proceed a few steps with completely contorted and shivering legs, until they once again find the calm beat of the bass drum.⁹⁸

But while the steady beat had an instinctive appeal on its own, Weimar jazz writers generally understood the effect of syncopation as arising from its contrast with a well-articulated steady beat. As Baresel writes:

The excitement of jazz music lies in the way that a rhythmic struggle between melody and accompaniment plays out before our eyes, or rather, our ears. The melody constantly rebels against the correct flow of the beat, and this *only becomes noticeable and appealing* because the accompaniment does not [...] waver in this flow.⁹⁹

For many observers, it was thus the contrast of the steady beat and syncopation that redeemed jazz of potential negative dehumanizing associations. In an article titled 'Sociology of Jazz', Manfred Bukofzer explicitly read these issues through the lens of

⁹⁶ Siegfried Kracauer, 'Haupt- und Staatsaktion im Schumann-Theater' (1928), in *Frankfurter Turmhäuser: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1906–30*, ed. by Andreas Volk (Edition Epoca, 1997), pp. 120–21 (p. 120): 'Es ist ein hartes Los, nur zusehen zu dürfen, denn die Musik fährt in die Beine, die um jeden Preis mittanzen möchten.'

⁹⁷ Hans Siemsen, 'Weltbühne', in *Brevier der neuesten Tänze*, ed. by F. W. Koebner (Dr Eysler & Co., 1921), pp. 17–18. See also Robert L. Leonard, 'Jazz, Shimmy, Steinach & Co.', in *Brevier der neuesten Tänze*, pp. 120–22 (p. 122). The latter is discussed in Wipplinger, *Jazz Republic*, pp. 44–45; Wipplinger discusses jazz's instinctive appeal and its associations with machines, but he does not specify what specific rhythms create this effect.

⁹⁸ Hans Siemsen, 'Weltbühne', pp. 17–18: 'Sie *marschieren* ruhig und langsam nach dem Takt der großen Trommel dahin, aber plötzlich fährt ihnen ein schriller Flötenton in die Knochen, die Knie knicken ihnen zusammen, und sie gehen ein paar Schritte mit ganz verrenkten und schlotternden Beinen, bis sie wieder den ruhigen Schritt der großen Trommel gefunden haben.' Emphasis mine. This quotation dates from the early days of jazz in Germany, when instrumentation was in flux and a flute was hardly unusual.

⁹⁹ Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 28: 'Der Reiz der Jazzmusik liegt gerade darin, dass sich ein rhythmischer Kampf zwischen Melodie und Begleitung vor unseren Augen bzw. Ohren abspielt. Die Melodie lehnt sich immer wieder gegen den korrekten Ablauf der Zählzeiten auf, und dies wird *dadurch erst deutlich und reizvoll*, dass die Begleitung auf diesen Ablauf nicht [...] verzichtet.' Emphasis mine.

modern machine labour. Syncopation (which he terms polyrhythm) represents the triumph of individual subjectivity over the steady beat of the machine:

Today, people want to forget the everyday through the everyday; in art, they re-encounter the everyday. In music, they detect the rhythm of the machines that they must serve. Improvised polyrhythm, the strategic destruction of the motor principle, neutralizes the monotonous stomping with countermotion. It represents the triumph of the spirit over the machine to which the person is subjected.¹⁰⁰

Bukofzer's analysis is especially notable because he participated in Eisler's study group at the Berlin Marxist Workers' School, and therefore we might expect Eisler to have a similar view.¹⁰¹ Eisler's treatment of syncopation in his *Kampfmusik*, however, suggests that while he shared Bukofzer's evaluations of these rhythms' effects and connotations, his end goal was rather different.

Previous scholarship on Eisler has emphasized that he wanted his listeners and musicians to critically engage with the words of his songs. His fleeting use of syncopation or similar metric disruptions have thus been understood as jarring moments of rhythmic dissonance that force an active, critical mode of listening, much like Brecht's alienation effect.¹⁰² While the context above supports this interpretation, we should be careful not to over-emphasize the disruptive effect. Outside of those ballads that parody jazz, syncopation or other metrical disruptions occur rarely in Eisler's *Kampfmusik*. For example, there is only one occurrence of syncopation in the entire 'Einheitsfrontlied' (Example 10). Notably, Eisler's practice is unlike that of other classically trained communist composers who also emphasized critical engagement with text and ideas. For example, Werner Fuhr writes that in Wladimir Vogel's 'Jungpionierschritt' (March of the Young Pioneers, text: Franz Bönsch, 1931), 'the strong beats of the metre [...] are not sounded in the sung melody or in the accompaniment, but rather are made unclear; the marchers must set their steps against the music'.¹⁰³ However, in Eisler's fleeting moments of syncopation, he follows jazz practice. As shown in Example 10, syncopation occurs in the melody, creating a

¹⁰⁰ Manfred Bukofzer, 'Soziologie des Jazz', *Melos*, 8 (1929), pp. 387–91 (p. 391): 'Heute will der Mensch den Alltag durch den Alltag vergessen, in der Kunst findet er den Alltag wieder. Er spürt in der Musik den Rhythmus der Maschinen, dem er dienen muss. Doch die improvisierte Polyrhythmik, die planvolle Destruktion des motorischen Prinzips, fängt das eintönige Stampfen mit entgegengesetzter Bewegung auf. Sie zeigt den Triumph des Geistes über die Maschine, der der Mensch zwar körperlich unterworfen ist. — Jazz als Erlösungsform von der Maschine hat so seine ursprüngliche Funktion verloren, — sie hat sich zu einer uns gemäßen gewandelt.'

¹⁰¹ Diego Alonso, 'From the People to the People: The Reception of Hanns Eisler's Critical Theory of Music in Spain through the Writings of Otto Mayer-Serra', *Musikologische Austriaca* (2019) <<https://www.musau.org/parts/neue-article-page/view/76>> [accessed 31 August 2022].

¹⁰² See Brinkmann, 'Kompositorische Massnahmen', p. 10; Thomas Phelps, 'Music Content and Speech Content in the Political Compositions of Eisler, Wolpe, and Vogel', in *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollections*, ed. by Austin Clarkson (Pendragon Press, 2003), pp. 59–73 (p. 66).

¹⁰³ Werner Fuhr, *Proletarische Musik in Deutschland 1928–1933* (Verlag Alfred Kümmerle, 1977), p. 224: 'die Taktschwerpunkte (an denen sich der Marschschritt normalerweise orientiert) weder in der gesungenen Melodie noch in der Begleitung eindeutig dargestellt, sondern im Gegenteil verunkelt werden; die Marschierenden müssen ihren Schritt gegen die Musik durchsetzen.'

Example 10. Eisler, 'Einheitsfrontlied' (Song of the United Front, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1935), bars 5–8, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig. Note the syncopation in the melody, bar 7.

Es macht ihn ein Ge - schwätz nicht satt, das schafft kein Es - sen --- her.
 Es macht ihn ein Ge - schwätz nicht warm und auch kein Es - sen da - zu.
 er will un - ter sich kein - en Skla - ven sehn und ü - ber sich kein - en Herrn.
 es kann die Be - frei - ung der Ar - bei - ter nur das Werk der Ar - bei - ter sein.

contrast with the steady beat in the middle and lower voices. Eisler clearly wanted to emphasize primarily the steady beat, with only rare disruptions.

The same is true of metrical disruptions other than syncopation in Eisler's *Kampfmusik*. Such disruption occurs somewhat more frequently, from shifts between duple and triple time to interpolations of bars of irregular metre.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, these shifts are accompanied by a steadily articulated sub-tactile beat. An extreme example is the ballad 'O Fallada, da du hangest' (O Fallada, Because You Stumbled, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1932). It is sung from the perspective of a horse who stumbles and falls on the streets of Berlin during the final months of World War I, when Germany faced severe food shortages. Residents of the nearby houses, who had previously doted on it, now rush out and flay the not-yet-dead horse for its meat. The steady beat comes at the end of the song as the horse reflects on the social conditions that led to this situation; as in the examples of ballads earlier, this is the lesson of the song that is meant to stick in the audience's memory. Here the steady beat articulates regular quavers as the implied metre of the melody shifts from 6/8 (bars 63–66), to 3/4 (bars 67–73), 2/4 (bar 74), and back to 6/8 (bars 75–78) (Example 11).

Eisler's extensive use of the steady beat makes clear that he was drawn to its anti-subjective potential. Communist thought embraced 'enlightened collectivism' over 'capitalist individualism'.¹⁰⁵ Individual subjectivity was understood to be a bourgeois invention, and the 'machine man' as an icon of the individual stripped of their subjectivity was a popular trope in communist and leftist culture.¹⁰⁶ While Eisler's

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, the insertions of bars of 1/4 into the otherwise 3/4 Prologue to *Die Massnahme*.

¹⁰⁵ Tijana Vujosevic, *Modernism and the Making of the Soviet New Man* (University of Manchester Press, 2017), p. 16. On this ideology in Germany, see Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and their Century* (Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 30–31; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. by Richard Deveson (Penguin Books, 1991), p. 161. On this ideology in Eisler's music, see Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, pp. 79–80. Eisler frequently lodged complaints against individualism in the music of other supposedly socially conscious modern composers, like Hindemith; see, for example, 'Die Kunst als Lehrmeisterin', p. 126; 'Erbauer', p. 141; and 'Einiges über das Verhalten der Arbeiter-Sänger', p. 229, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Mackenzie, 'The Athlete as Machine: A Figure of Modernity in Weimar Germany', in *Leibhaftige Moderne: Körper in Kunst und Massenmedien 1918 bis 1933*, ed. by Michael Cowan and Kai Marcel Sicks (Transcript Verlag, 2005), pp. 48–62 (pp. 49–50).

Example 11. Eisler, 'O Fallada, da du da hangest' (O Fallada, Because You Stumbled, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1932), bars 63–78, © by Deutscher Verlag für Musik Leipzig.

65

Was für ei - ne Käl - te muß un - ter die

70

Men - schen ge - kom - men sein? Wer schlägt da so auf sie

75

ein - daß sie so durch und durch er - kal - tet.

use of syncopation and metric disruption indicates that he wanted performers and listeners to think critically about the songs' texts, this only went so far. Active engagement was meant to deepen one's understanding and commitment, not open the possibility that communism was wrong.

Rationalizing the Revolution

As mentioned above, Eisler claimed that his *Kampfmusik* ‘derives new methods from the daily struggle of the revolutionary working class’ and ‘makes concrete the correct methods for seizing power’.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, it would also become ‘the true folk music of the proletariat’.¹⁰⁸ Just as folk music had emerged from the rhythms of pre-industrial labour and thus had been able to facilitate a seamless transition between work and non-work activities, the steady beat of jazz, understood to be a sonic equivalent to the steady beat of a motor, provided Eisler with a rhythm that enabled his *Kampfmusik* to be heard as emerging from the labour of modern factory workers. It could thus also facilitate their seamless movement between work and non-work. But rather than dance or religious ritual, as in Bücher’s account of pre-industrial society, Eisler’s workers engaged in a different kind of non-work activity.¹⁰⁹ Here, we turn our attention to how Eisler’s *Kampfmusik* ‘makes concrete the correct methods for seizing power’.

On a superficial level, refashioning the steady beat of workers’ labour (their struggle) provided a beat for marching (a concrete activity that contributed to seizing power). On a more fundamental level, just as the steady beat of the machines was essential to the rationalization of factory labour, the steady beat of *Kampfmusik* made concrete the correct method for seizing power by rationalizing revolutionary activity. Communist workers were intended to behave in ways modelled on their behaviour in the factory — not their actual motions at the machines, but their performance of small, rationalized tasks. Just as specialist engineers worked out the most efficient means of manufacturing a product, so too did the party’s political specialists work out the (supposedly) most efficient means of achieving revolutionary social change. As on the conveyor belt, the specific tasks assigned to an individual revolutionary may have seemed insignificant, but they contributed to the creation of a larger product: the revolution.¹¹⁰

Such rationalized revolutionary activity required the same psychological adjustments from workers that they were accustomed to in their rationalized factory work, most importantly the suppression of the individual ego. This was an explicit lesson of Eisler and Brecht’s stage work *Die Massnahme*. In this piece, a young activist ignores his

¹⁰⁷ See n. 28 above.

¹⁰⁸ Eisler, ‘Erbauer’, pp. 151–52: ‘die ihre neuen Methoden aus dem Tageskampf der revolutionären Arbeiterschaft bezieht’. Eisler, ‘Das revolutionäre Lied’, p. 225: ‘Das Kampflied ist das eigentliche Volkslied des Proletariats.’

¹⁰⁹ Notably, many modern dancers at the time were exploring the relationship of choreography and the movements of machines and factory workers, sometimes accompanied by jazz or musical imitations of machine sounds. See Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Although it comes from Australia, not Germany, this relationship between factory work and party work was similarly articulated by communist organizer Richard Dixon, who claimed: ‘We have to recognise that any individual who is working under a boss has to work quickly, etc., and in his party work he carries the same method into the work and also the discipline that he learns in the factory’; minutes of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia, 22–23 February 1935, cited in Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 240.

instructions from the party and instead does what seems right from his perspective in the moment. His actions lead to violent suppression of the workers and endanger the entire party. In the end, he agrees that his comrades must kill him and destroy his body in order to protect their revolutionary work — the ultimate subordination of individuality to the collective.¹¹¹ In less explicit ways, this message of self-abnegation and submission to the strictures of rationalized revolutionary work permeates Eisler's other *Kampfmusik*, from songs calling on workers to join specific revolutionary organizations to ballads instructing workers in the larger social forces that oppress the working class.

Additionally, Eisler's ideas about *Kampfmusik* becoming 'the true folk music of the proletariat' point to his broader international ambitions and the meanings of jazz.¹¹² Just as the spread of modern factory labour liquidated local folk cultures, Eisler argued that jazz played a key role in capitalism's gradual erasure of national cultures and the nation state as part of the dialectic of history.¹¹³ He observed that:

Light bourgeois music has transformed its patriarchal entertainment character, which shows national characteristics, into an international, industrialized intoxicant. One hears the same jazz music in the bars of Berlin, Shanghai, or Chicago. [...] At the same time, the death of folk music is completed: in the industrialized nations, there is no more folk music; the farmer in Germany, in Scotland, [...] in North America, the Negro in South Carolina listens to the same international popular music on the radio.¹¹⁴

In his dialectical analysis, industrialization and jazz cleared the way for a new international workers' culture to take shape. This goal was stated explicitly in the 'Solidaritätslied' (Solidarity Song, text: Bertolt Brecht, 1930), the second verse of which opens with an address to people 'black, white, brown, [and] yellow'.¹¹⁵ Brecht reiterated this sentiment in a 1938 claim that Eisler's mass songs had become the shared heritage of 'millions of workers of white, black, and yellow races'.¹¹⁶ These references to skin colour may be intended simply to capture the widespread international appeal of Eisler's music, but they also emphasize cross-cultural acceptance of the music by these people. The use of skin colour as a convenient marker for cultural difference should

¹¹¹ See Yasco Horsman, *Theaters of Justice: Judging, Staging, and Working Through in Ardent, Brecht, and Delbo* (Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 1–3, 112, and 123–24; Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück*, p. 98.

¹¹² Eisler often described his *Kampfmusik* as 'international'; see 'Problems of Working Class Music: Interview with Hanns Eisler', in *A Rebel in Music*, ed. by Grabs, pp. 95–100 (p. 99).

¹¹³ Many jazz writers described jazz as 'international folk music'. See Baresel, *Das neue Jazzbuch*, p. 19; Bernhard, *Jazz*, pp. 70–71.

¹¹⁴ Eisler, 'Die Aufgaben der Musikkonferenz des MRTÖ' (1932), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Faßhauer and Mayer, pp. 157–64 (p. 159): 'Die leichte bürgerliche Musik hat ihren patriarchalischen Vergnügscharakter, der nationale Eigenschaften aufzeigte, verändert in ein internationales industrialisiertes Rauschmittel. Man hört dieselbe Jazz-Musik in den Kneipen von Berlin, Schanghai oder Chikago. [...] Zu gleicher Zeit ist das Sterben der Volksmusik beendet: in den industrialisierten Ländern gibt es keine Volksmusik mehr, der Bauer in Deutschland, in Schottland, der Farmer in Nordamerika, der Neger in Süd-Karolina hört denselben internationalen Schlager im Radio.'

¹¹⁵ *Solidaritätslied*, bars 11–13, verse 2: 'Schwarzer, Weissner, Brauner, Gelber'.

¹¹⁶ Bertolt Brecht, 'Kleine Berichtigung' (1938), in *Bertolt Brecht Werke*, ed. by Hecht and others, xxii, pp. 402–03 (pp. 402): 'Die Millionen von Arbeiter weißer, schwarzer und gelber Rasse, die die Massenlieder Eislers geerbt haben'.

remind us of the racialized discourse of jazz on which Eisler's entire project rests, demanding a consideration of the racial politics of his *Kampfmusik*.

Based on the previous narrow view of Eisler's refunctioning of jazz, Eisler scholarship has tended to praise the composer for his progressive racial politics.¹¹⁷ As we saw above, ballads like the 'Lied der Baumwollpflücker' parody jazz to symbolize racial oppression, and others, like the 'Lied des Händlers', abstract the parody of jazz to symbolize capitalist oppression more generally. This abstraction is central to the message of these ballads: German workers learn that racial oppression is part of a broader system of capitalist oppression and that both the struggle for racial liberation abroad and the workers' struggle in Germany are part of an international struggle for workers everywhere. This message exemplifies an affirmative answer to one of the great controversies about Marxism and race: whether or not racial oppression should be understood as a subcategory of class-based capitalist oppression (sometimes referred to as a 'class-first' approach).¹¹⁸

Already at the time, communist anti-colonial activists mounted critiques of this class-first approach and advocated the importance of considering the specificity of race and other identities as a vector of oppression.¹¹⁹ Contemporary historians have further critiqued the class-first approach for leading, in practice, to the erasure of difference within the party and the construction of an imagined working-class subject (or working-class *masses*) who was white, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied. Issues that directly affected those with this constellation of identities were considered universal concerns of the working class, while issues that did not were considered secondary to the broader class struggle.¹²⁰ To remain with the example of race, Robbie Aitken and others have explored how this impacted the Weimar Republic's non-white

¹¹⁷ For example, Betz, *Hanns Eisler*, p. 87; Dümling, 'Symbol des Fortschritts', p. 98; Dümling, 'Musikalische Verfahrensweise', pp. 129 and 135.

¹¹⁸ See Roderick Bush, 'The Class-First, Race-First Debate: The Contradictions of Nationalism and Internationalism and the Stratification of the World-System', Chapter 3 of *The End of White Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Colour Line* (Temple University Press, 2009), pp. 87–131.

¹¹⁹ See Jeffrey B. Perry, 'Introduction', and Hubert Harrison, 'Race First versus Class First', in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey B. Perry (Wesleyan University Press, 2001), pp. 1–30 and 107–09 (pp. 15–19 and 107–09); Carol Boyce Davies, 'Caribbean Left: Diasporic Circulation', in *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights, and Riots in Britain and the United States*, ed. by Robin D. G. Kelley and Stephen Tuck (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 55–74 (pp. 62–66).

¹²⁰ On gender, see Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Sara Ann Sewell, 'The Party Does Indeed Fight like a Man: The Construction of a Masculine Ideal in the Weimar Communist Party', in *Weimar Culture Revisited*, ed. by John Alexander Williams (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 161–82; Eric D. Weitz, 'Communism and the Public Spheres of Weimar Germany', in *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990*, ed. by David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz (Berghahn, 1998), pp. 275–91. On this issue in Eisler's music, see Werner Fuhr, *Proletarische Musik*, pp. 203–05; Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Camden House, 1997), p. 58. On sexual orientation, see Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (Knopf, 2014), p. 237; Bodek, *Proletarian Performance*, pp. 118–19; and Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 154, 157, and 168. On ability, see Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (University of Michigan Press, 2007).

population of mostly former colonial subjects: after World War I, their ambiguous legal status in Germany as well as general racial prejudice made it difficult for them to find work and housing or to access basic services.¹²¹ Yet these concerns were not taken up by the German Communist Party, which tended to view workers from Germany's former colonies not as members of the German working class but as representatives of colonized lands, to be trained and returned to organize communist anti-colonial activity. Some were also recruited as lecturers to educate the German working class about the anti-colonial struggle and international solidarity, but not about racial prejudice in Germany.¹²²

Eisler's parodies of jazz in songs like the 'Lied der Baumwollpflücker' may seem to represent at least a partial counterexample to such claims of erasure. While they locate people of colour outside Germany's borders (thus still erasing Black populations at home), they do evince a certain degree of active concern with racial oppression in the United States as a form of capitalist oppression. Eisler's broader practice of refunctioning the steady beat, however, is deeply tied to larger patterns of erasure. Indeed, it is fundamentally based on a form of erasure: that of supposed 'ideological content'. By stripping jazz down to a single feature, the steady beat, Eisler removed much of what made the steady beat identifiable as jazz, like its combination with syncopated melodies or jazzy harmonies. In its new context, one might still recognize it as jazz-derived if one focused on it in isolation. But heard in the full context of the *Kampfmusik*, this association would be buried in a list of other, more readily apparent references that focus attention on the concerns of the imagined white, male, working-class subject.

This can be seen in the reception of Eisler's *Kampfmusik*, both in its time and since. I've highlighted a handful of examples where interwar critics linked the driving rhythms of the *Kampfmusik* to jazz, but these are relatively rare. They demonstrate that it certainly was possible for a listener of the time to recognize the influence of jazz in the Eisler Bass, but also how easy it was for listeners of the time to focus on other referents. Indeed, most criticism focuses on how the music relates to workers or workers' issues, or to debates about communist aesthetics. Meanwhile, the narrow focus on Eisler's songs that imitate jazz in the historiography of his *Kampfmusik* demonstrates how easily the jazz influence on the Eisler Bass could be lost.

Eisler's participation in the erasure of race in German communist culture had real-world consequences. As scholars like Atina Grossmann have demonstrated, the German Communist Party's erasure of gender difference and neglect of 'women's issues' contributed to its perpetual difficulty recruiting women, and thus to its failure to

¹²¹ Robbie Aitken, 'Surviving in the Metropole: The Struggle for Work and Belonging amongst African Colonial Migrants in Weimar Germany', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 28.2–3 (2010), pp. 203–23, doi:10.1080/02619288.2010.484248. On the experience of East Asian immigrants in Germany, see Dagmar Yu-Dembski, *Chinesen in Berlin* (be.bra verlag, 2007).

¹²² See Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, 'Practicing Diaspora: Politics 1918–1933', Chapter 6 in their *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also Weijia Li, 'Otherness in Solidarity: Collaboration between Chinese and German Left-Wing Activists in the Weimar Republic', in *Beyond Alterity: German Encounters with Modern East Asia*, ed. by Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock (Berghahn, 2014), pp. 73–93.

realize its political ambitions.¹²³ Grossmann's findings are generally applicable to the party's similar challenges recruiting Germans of colour (as well as queer and disabled Germans).¹²⁴ While a thorough investigation of gender (or sexuality or ability) in Eisler's *Kampfmusik* is beyond the scope of this article, we can see that as regards race, by so effectively promoting the ideals of the German Communist Party, Eisler also perpetuated its biases and likely contributed to its failure to achieve its political ambitions.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Eisler's refunctioning of jazz in his *Kampfmusik* extended further than has previously been recognized. Beyond a small number of ballads that, in his own words, 'imitate' jazz, Eisler also refunctioned the characteristic rhythm of jazz as it was understood in Weimar Germany: a steady beat. This beat became a defining feature of his music, the so-called 'Eisler Bass', and was central to his music-political ambitions. On the one hand, the beat was understood to have an instinctive appeal that brought listeners into coordinated movement. Eisler's working-class audiences were already conditioned to working to a mechanically steady beat in their factories; by refunctioning this rhythm into his *Kampfmusik*, the composer not only roused the workers to revolutionary activity, but coordinated them according to the rationalized revolutionary plans of the Communist Party. On the other hand, because this beat, and by extension Eisler's *Kampfmusik*, emerged out of the rhythms of modern factory labour and participated in the transfer of actions from the factory into the wider world, it dissolved the bourgeois division of work and non-work, laying the foundation for the future socialist society. Jazz provided a crucial discursive link, enabling a mechanical beat to fulfil a function previously thought only capable of being filled by the 'natural' rhythms of pre-industrial labour.

Eisler's nuanced engagement with jazz and machine aesthetics expands our understanding of the way modernist composers approached these influences in the interwar period. Especially in the early 1930s, as many composers began to move away from direct mimetic imitations of the sounds of jazz or of machines, Eisler's treatment of the steady beat helps us to trace their enduring but less obvious influence in twentieth-century music. Hearing the Eisler Bass as the refunctioned rhythm of jazz and the factory also draws Eisler's *Kampfmusik* into conversations beyond the history of musical modernism. His theories and the discourse on which he drew anticipate interest today in issues of embodiment, entrainment, and music's ability to discipline the body and the body politic. Meanwhile, the racialized nature of this discourse and Eisler's treatment of race provide historical examples for discussions of cultural appropriation, erasure, and the place of identity politics in political debates then and now.

¹²³ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 94.

¹²⁴ See nn. 120 and 121 above.

For the modern listener, it likely remains difficult to hear a steady beat as ‘jazzy’, as this idiosyncrasy of German jazz reception has been largely forgotten. The connection was further obscured after World War II, when Eisler reorchestrated much of his *Kampfmusik* to reduce any potential similarities between it and the military marches so closely associated in the popular imagination with the Nazi regime.¹²⁵ That said, we should keep in mind that Eisler’s goal was not for his use of the steady beat to be immediately recognized as jazz; when he wanted to draw on specific cultural meanings associated with jazz, he wrote music that imitated it. Rather, the Eisler Bass sought to capture the instinctive appeal and entraining power of jazz. Rediscovering this legacy of German jazz and the steady beat opens up a much richer understanding of Eisler, his music, and his times. It allows us to hear, in the words of the communist newspaper *Berlin am Morgen*, that ‘Eisler knows how to make artistic use of the pounding rhythms with which jazz has convinced our spineless time that it has a beat’.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ David Robb, ‘Mühsam, Brecht, Eisler, and the Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Heritage’, in *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, ed. by David Robb (Camden House, 2007), pp. 35–66. An interview with Eisler in 1958 demonstrates just how problematic the march’s associations with the Nazis were. In it, the composer claimed: ‘No one can say that, for example, the text of the “Einheitsfrontlied” or its music — or above all, this wonderful poem by Brecht, the “Solidaritätslied” — has anything to do with this genre [the march]’ [‘Kein Mensch kann sagen, dass zum Beispiel der Text des “Einheitsfrontlied” als auch die Musik — oder vor allem dieses herrliche Gedicht von Brecht, das “Solidaritätslied” — etwas mit diesem Genre zu tun haben’]; Hans Bunge, *Fragen Sie mehr über Brecht: Hanns Eisler im Gespräch* (Rogner & Bernhard, 1972), p. 51.

¹²⁶ F. C. W. and P. H., ‘Das Oratorium von Morgen: “Die Maßnahme”’, *Berlin am Morgen*, 16 December 1930, p. 7: ‘Die stampfenden Rhythmen, mit denen der Jazz eine rückgratlose Zeit von ihrem eigenen Pulsschlag überzeugte, weiß er als kunstgerechtes Ausdrucksmittel zu verwerten.’