"Deviant" Women and Disabled Men: The Portrayal of Prostitutes, New Women and Wounded Veterans in Otto Dix's *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*)

Kaia L. Magnusen, University of Texas at Tyler

Abstract: As a soldier during World War I, *Neue Sachlichkeit* artist Otto Dix experienced the devastation of the war firsthand and he created brutal images of dead soldiers, war wounded, and diseased prostitutes that shocked society during Germany's chaotic Weimar Republic (1918–1933). As a war veteran who had been seriously, but not permanently injured, he was attuned to the presence of disabled veterans who had been reduced to begging on city streets. He was well aware of the socio-political debates surrounding the figure of the *Neue Frau* and the perception that large cities were being overwhelmed by increasing numbers of prostitutes, who were often conflated with the sexually and economically liberated *Neue Frau* and he addressed this in his famed triptych, *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*) of 1927–1928. The work's central panel depicts big city night life and emphasizes dancing New Women. The left panel contains two unfortunate war veterans whose physical and sexual impotency stand in contrast to the brazen sexuality of the lower-class streetwalkers who surround them. The right panel shows a disfigured veteran who salutes the higher-class prostitutes who ignore him as they pass. In representing interwar German society in this way, Dix represented "deviant" women and war wounded veterans as the embodiments of a number of artistic, political and social discourses that were much debated during the inter-war years. Amid anxiety-laden discussions about the consequences of the Great War and growing bourgeois fears about post-war societal decay, Dix utilized the painted bodies of purported "degenerate" women and overlooked disabled veterans to engage Weimar discourses about the perceived threat posed by the sexually and economically liberated *Neue Frau*, the pervasiveness of the so-called "depravity" of metropolitan life including the increased presence of prostitutes, and the lingering national shame that were projected onto the bodies of war wounded soldiers.

KEYWORDS: Otto Dix, *Neue Sachlichkeit, Neue Frau, Großstadt* (*Metropolis*), World War I

In many of the works he created during the years of the Weimar Republic, Otto Dix (1891–1969), who was associated with the artistic tendency the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), conveyed his enduring fascination with the themes of sex and death. The Weimar Republic was marked by political confusion, social disorder and a distinct preoccupation with issues of personal health, societal degeneration and the consequences of those who deviated from established moral norms. In the wake of Germany's loss in World War I (1814-1918) and in light of the contentious debates pertaining to interwar gender politics, Dix used the bodies of women, especially "deviant" women,

who seemed to pose economic, social and sexual threats to traditional German masculinity, to engage perceptions of Germany's moral decline and the perceived emasculation of German men. In his masterpiece of 1927–1928 entitled *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*) (Figure 1), Dix used the bodies of both supposedly immoral women and war cripples as means to engage issues pertaining to the perceived threat posed by the sexually and economically liberated *Neue Frau* (New Woman), the pervasiveness of the so-called "depravity" of metropolitan life including the increased presence of prostitutes, and the lingering humiliating and national shame that were projected onto the bodies of war cripples.

The *Neue Sachlichkeit* arose in Germany during the interwar years. Both it and the artists associated with it were indelibly tied to the culture of the Weimar Republic. As with many men of his generation, Dix's worldview was inarguably inspired by his experiences in World War I. He was called up as an *Ersatz-Reservist* (replacement reservist) and, in Dresden, he completed his initial training as an artilleryman. Then, in September of 1915, he volunteered for service and, for the first years of the war, he fought on the western front in France. He spent the winter of 1917 on the eastern front in Belorussia and beginning in 1918, he was again stationed on the western front. As he was working class, he did not enter as an officer and had to work his way up through the ranks. For his service, Dix received the Iron Cross Second Class and was eventually promoted to the rank of V*izefeldwebel* (vice sergeant) (Herrmann 2010). In the late summer of 1918, he decided to volunteer for a pilot training course and, consequently, went to *Schneidebühl* (Silesia) for training. As an aerial observer, he witnessed the bombed and devastated countryside firsthand (McGreevy 1975).[1] He was still stationed at this training camp when the war ended in 1918 (Herrmann 2010).

Dix's works, in particular those created during the so-called post-inflation "stabilization period" (1924–1929), engaged aspects of this interwar cultural upheaval in ways that works of art by his contemporaries did not. The Germany that existed prior to the Great War was very different from the Germany that developed in its wake. The war contrasted male experience on the battlefield and female experience on the home front. Consequently, in the interwar period, one of the primary objectives of the governmental policies was to reestablish order and a general sense of security by focusing on the restoration of established gender roles in both the domestic sphere and in the

workplace (Abrams and Harvey 1996). While some politicians and social reformers sought to police and otherwise minimize the relative degree of independence achieved by women as a result of the war, many Weimar women rejected such attempts to curtail their newfound freedoms. As a result of men being called to the front, women had gained employment opportunities in offices, department stores and factories. Additionally, with the signing of the Weimar Constitution in 1919, men and women were, at least on paper, guaranteed equal rights and women were afforded some level of political participation and government involvement (Finch 2011). Furthermore, Weimar women increasingly demanded greater sexual freedom, economic liberties and reproductive rights and these appeals were often regarded as manifestations of the perceived erosion of German cultural values. Thus, most women's assessment of their newfound situation differed greatly from that of the traditional, patriarchal establishment, which sought to regain its previously firm hold over the roles, expectations and bodies of German women.

As a result of the highly fraught debates about the increasingly conspicuous presence of women in public life both as new employees in the work force and as emancipated New Women (*Neue Frauen*), the bodies of Weimar women became the primary sites onto which patriarchal fears were projected. In the aftermath of Germany's humiliating military defeat and the subsequent return of large numbers of soldiers, many of whom were severely physically wounded if not psychologically damaged, the perceived attitudes and behavior of many Weimar women seemed only to add insult to individual and national injury. Soldiers who had been assured of a quick and glorious victory over Germany's enemies were instead subjected to a brutal, drawn out war and an embarrassing loss. Furthermore, the punitive measures of the Treaty of Versailles, with provisions perceived as being deliberately orchestrated by the French to shame its Teutonic enemy, only served to aggravate Germany's collective feelings of humiliation and German male soldiers' feelings of dishonor and emasculation. In turn, such feelings were projected onto women, particularly those who refused to conform to patriarchal norms and these "deviant" women became scapegoats for a variety of troubles including the declining birthrate, sexual transmitted diseases and general societal degeneration that burdened the Republic (Hau 2003).[2]

Women's increased visibility in the public sphere coupled with their perceived escalating promiscuity, the rising numbers of individuals suffering from venereal diseases, and the growing

number of abortions despite the procedure's illegality under Paragraph 219 of the German penal code, resulted in women being blamed for the so-called pervasive "depravity" of modern, metropolitan life (Usborne 1996).[3] In particular, "deviant" female behavior, as exemplified both by prostitutes and by the liberated *Neue Frau*, was perceived as a galling affront to long-standing German cultural values. These shifting power relations and the contentious issues surrounding Weimar gender politics were projected onto the bodies of these supposedly debauched women which, in turn, became contested sites in the battle between the retention of long-established, Wilhelmine cultural values and the changing cultural mores of the modern Weimar Republic.

During the interwar period, Dix's art, specifically his images of women, engaged discouses about interwar gender roles. In his masterpiece, *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*), Dix pursued the themes of the interrelation of sex and death and explored the idea of both linking and differentiating New Women and prostitutes. In this large-scale work, Dix used a triptych format to address what scholar Karsten Müller describes as "the contradictions of his age: the gutter and the dance floor, the red-light district and high society, prosthetic leg and Charleston, bare existence as a cripple and life as colorful excess" (Müller 2010, 175). Dance and "deviant" women play prominent, almost parallel, roles in the urban milieu Dix depicts.

Dix began some of the studies for the work while he was still living in Berlin (Müller, 2010). However, in April 1927 he returned to Dresden as he had just become a professor at the Dresden Academy of Art (Rewald 2006).[4] Although the work has been perceived as an iconic depiction of interwar Berlin, Dix actually represented several recognizable people from Dresden among his figures (Rewald 2006).[5] Furthermore, in 1966 Dix remarked that the center panel specifically depicts Dresden (Funkenstein 2005). However, none of the panels feature landmarks specific to any one city and Dix was undoubtedly influenced by his experiences in other large cities, such as Berlin. Thus, *Großstadt (Metropolis)* can be interpreted as a representation of big city life in general, as a generalized metropolis rather than as an exact representation of one particular large city.

Prominently featured in these scenes of big city nightlife are a *Neue Frau* and prostitutes. The masculinized, unaccompanied, dancing *Neue Frau* in the center panel is clearly presenting herself

as being sexually available. This scene is flanked by two panels which both depict groups of prostitutes, who are also sexually obtainable but for a price. The only women shown in these side panels are prostitutes and, in the right panel especially, they almost completely overrun the street along which they walk. Indeed, the increase in number and visibility of prostitutes after the war led some to conclude that Germany, especially large cities such as Berlin and Dresden, were being taken over by prostitutes. Approximately two million German men were killed during the war and another two million seven-hundred-thousand were severely injured (Sharp 2006). Thus, in order to provide for themselves and their families, many women were forced to find work outside the home and some resorted to prostitution.

Several factors resulted in the fear that large cities were being swarmed by prostitutes. The population of cities in general rose during the inter-war period as many people, both men and women, moved to urban areas in search of work. However, due to serious inflation and other economic difficulties, work was not always forthcoming so some individuals resorted to crime or prostitution. These circumstances gave rise to the idea that large cities exerted a corrupting influence over their inhabitants, especially rural transplants, and that "innocent" country girls who came to the city were particularly susceptible to becoming prostitutes (Abrams 1988).

Additionally, as a result of the war, the gender imbalance in the German population became more marked. Prior to the war, there were one million more women than men; after the war, this number had risen to two million (Usborne 1992). As women could not simply remarry in order to gain a greater degree of economic stability, some took jobs in certain occupations, such as secretaries or shop girls, which were increasingly open to women. For instance, the number of female office employees rose from 55,100 in 1907 to 1,433,700 in 1925 (Von Ankum 1997).[6] The number of female prostitutes continued to rise as well although, as many so-called "clandestine prostitutes" refused to register with the police, the exact numbers are difficult to determine. For instance, in 1919 the estimated number of registered prostitutes in Berlin was six thousand but the number of unregistered prostitutes was estimated to be around sixty-thousand (Usborne 1992).[7]

As increasing numbers of prostitutes and working New Women were out in public unaccompanied and as some working women also engaged in "clandestine prostitution," the distinctions between

prostitutes and non-prostitutes became difficult to determine (Sharp 2006). This issue was further complicated by the fact that official police regulations required registered prostitutes to work as discreetly as possible in order to disguise their activities from bystanders. While this ordinance was intended to preserve public morality, it actually resulted in many non-prostitutes being mistaken for prostitutes. In order prevent these embarrassing misunderstandings, policemen were given very thorough instructions regarding how women suspected of prostitution should be treated; women were to be treated as "respectable" ladies until they were in police custody. Thus, as many inter-war individuals discerned little physical or behavioral difference between prostitutes and New Women, women who went out alone in public, especially unmarried working women, were perceived as being sexually available (Von Ankum 1997).

In *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*), the blurring of the sexual lines between New Women and prostitutes begins in the central panel which depicts a lively nightclub scene filled with fashionably dressed patrons. In this work, a disproportionately large saxophone borders the left edge of the panel while a tuxedoed jazz band plays in the upper left portion of the scene. A brown-haired man wearing round glasses plays the grand piano in the uppermost left corner. In front of him stands a blonde man playing the violin. In the uppermost section a tuba is visible to the right of the violinist's head although the man playing the instrument cannot be seen. The face of a man playing a slender horn is partially obscured by the tuba, the violinist and by an older, balding saxophone player who stands at the front of the band. Over the saxophonist's left shoulder and partly obscured by four cylindrical bars extending to the ceiling, sits an African-American drummer.

In the center background, a man in a tuxedo dances either the Charleston or the Shimmy with a red-haired woman wearing a light green dress (Rewald 2006). In the foreground to the right of the dancing couple, dances a dramatic, androgynous figure wearing a fashionable, loose-fitting dress in shades of orange and black that hits above the knees and largely conceals the shape of the woman's body beneath. In the 1920s, "modern" women no longer wore corsets as they were considered old-fashioned and constricting. One could hardly dance the Charleston while wearing a corset. Instead, women wore looser fitting, so-called "flapper" dresses that had become popular in America. She ostentatiously waves a large, pink-feathered fan in the air. The fan is positioned behind her head so that her facial features and her short, dark, slicked back hair are showcased.

This woman is clearly a modern *Neue Frau.* She matches journalist Rudolf Kayser's description of the "new female type" found in his essay "Amerikanismus" ("Americanism"), first published in *Vossische Zeitung* in 1925 (Kayser 1994). This androgynous dancer aligns with Kayser's description of this type because she looks "boyish, linear, and rules by lively movement, by her step, and by her leg" (Kayser 1994). She sports the fashionable hairstyle known as the Eton Crop, which was named after the haircuts of students at the prestigious British boys' school. Short, androgynous hairstyles such as the Eton Crop and the bobbed *Bubikopf* ("pageboy") style were popular at the time and were certainly in contrast with the long, cascading locks that had previously been considered the feminine ideal. Although the cartoon Dix created for this work clearly depicts this figure as a woman, the gender of the figure in the final painting has been debated.[8] However, upon close inspection of both the work itself and a large preparatory cartoon, the figure's breasts are clearly visible underneath her diaphanous dress indicating that Dix intended for the figure to be a modern, New Woman rather than a male transvestite.

This woman's short, androgynous hairstyle calls further attention to her rather androgynous facial features which are accentuated with heavy makeup. She wears brightly colored lipstick and blush and her eyes are encircled by thick lines of black kohl eyeliner. Prior to World War I, makeup was only worn during the day by prostitutes and women of questionable repute. (Hake 1997). Although the use of makeup became more accepted after the war, wearing visible makeup during the day was still stigmatized due it its association with prostitutes. Indeed, when describing the appearances of prostitutes in his book *Statten der Berliner Prostitution,* Willi Pröger, who went by the name WEKA, noted their makeup and specifically mentioned the "*knallrot*" ("bright red") lipstick of streetwalkers who wear it (WEKA 1930).[9] Even for those women who did use cosmetics, wearing heavier makeup, such as red lipstick and dark eyeshadow, was considered to be an evening look. Younger women were generally more receptive to makeup products than were older women. Some bourgeois women used face powder but most eschewed products such as rouge and mascara because they were too closely associated with problematic female sexuality (Hake 1997). These "respectable" middle class women were also wary of red lipstick due to its obviousness and its loaded sexual and social implications. Indeed, the prostitutes on both sides of Dix's triptych all wear bright red lipstick, colorful eye shadow and heavy face makeup. Red

lipstick, in particular, was linked with both prostitutes and the controversial figure of the *Neue Frau* and signified dangerous, liberated female sexuality (Hake 1997).

In addition, various social critics lamented the so-called immorality of the liberated *Neue Frau.* For instance, in his "*Die Verhurung Berlins*" ("Berlin is Becoming a Whore") of 1920, Thomas Wehrlin essentially conflated prostitutes and non-prostitutes in his lament of German cultural decline as evidenced by women in Berlin. In his article, which appeared in *Das Tage-buch*, Wehrlin condemned prostitutes, whom he referred to as "abhorrent females" (*"abschreckender Weiber*"), and decried the general "corruption of the bourgeois woman" ("*die Korruption der bürgerliche Frau"*) (Wehrlin 1920).[10] In his tirade against this supposed "corruption," Wehrlin condemned various behaviors and attitudes he observed among contemporary non-prostitutes in Berlin. He criticized young girls for having love affairs in their teenage years and condemned contemporary women who only seemed concerned with the "sale of their physical charms" (*"die Veräußerung seiner körperlichen Reize"*) (Wehrlin 1920).[11] As evidence of this, he cited the infatuation of Weimar-era women with going to the cinema, wearing short skirts that end above the knee, purchasing popular culture magazines such as *Elegante Welt,* extensive shopping, especially on the *Kurfürstendamm,* and secretly having sex with multiple partners unbeknownst to their husbands or fathers (Wehrlin 1920). Wehrlin explicitly blamed the usage of contraception, a topic inextricably tied to discussions of the *Neue Frau*, for causing women to turn to prostitution. He boldly asserted that "the daily use of contraception instinctively leads to the whoredom of women" (Wehrlin 1920). For Wehrlin, this embrace of measures to prevent pregnancy correlated with the devaluation of motherhood he perceived among the Weimar populace, especially women. He concernedly reported that metropolitan New Women, "these short-skirted, silk-stockinged females" (*"dieser kurzröckingen, seidenstrumpfigen Weiber*") pursued pleasure and had no interest in becoming mothers (Wehrlin 1920).[12] He interpreted this perceived blatant disregard for women's supposed biological destiny as a sign that German society was stuck "in the morass of the most hopeless degeneration" ("*im Moraste hoffnungslosester Degeneration")* (Wehrlin 1920).[13]

Although this emancipated woman is on the dance floor, she does not have a partner, which marks her as being sexually available, if not promiscuous. She presumably came to the club alone and

does not dance with a particular partner; instead, she is free to dance with multiple partners and will likely not leave the club alone at the end of the night. The *Neue Frau* dances by herself while gazing intently at the jazz band. It is difficult to determine which member of the band is the object of her intense gaze, but it seems that her dancing and her ostentatious use of the pink fan are tactics intended to attract the attention of one or more of the musicians. Her flirtations seem to be effective as the short, bald saxophone player gazes at her and directs his suggestively placed, phallic saxophone toward her.

The sexual undertones of the mutual interest between the *Neue Frau* and the jazz band are further underscored by the presence of the African-American drummer. This modern woman dances to a contemporary jazz beat played by the stereotypical African-American drummer who is visible just beyond the saxophone player's shoulder. African-American jazz bands, such as the Chocolate Kiddies who performed in Germany in 1925, were very popular during the Weimar Republic. In interwar Germany, black performers were perceived as being exotic novelties (Rewald **2**006). Indeed, blackness was reductively regarded as connoting Africanness (Nenno 1997). Germans focused on the race, rather than the nationalities, of these entertainers so derogatory notions of African "primitivism" were also applied to African-Americans (Tower 1994). At the time, jazz music, despite its American origins, was regarded as "jungle music" and jazz musicians were considered to be representative of both American modernity and atavistic exoticism. These racially prejudiced stereotypes extended to beliefs about African sexuality. Those of African descent, whether African-American or African-European, were believed to be savage and primitive not only with regard to their own sexuality, but also in their sexual influence over non-Africans, specifically on Caucasian women (Tower 1994).

For interwar Germans, jazz was simultaneously associated with both modern American culture and with racially charged perceptions of African "primitivism." Jazz music and the popular dances performed to such music were perceived as expressing unrestrained, instinctual sexuality that was troubling to traditional German mores. Furthermore, some cultural critics regarded jazz as a debauched, corrupting influence on society and German culture (Tower 1994).[14] The supposedly physical and intuitive qualities of jazz were contrasted with the purportedly mental and intellectual characteristics of European culture in general and German culture in particular (Nenno 1997).

Thus, the inclusion of the stereotypic African-American drummer seems to be a racially charged reminder of not only his supposedly "primitive" sexuality but also the overt, liberated sexuality believed to be encouraged by modern jazz and embraced by the modern, New Woman. Hence, this center panel specifically links modern jazz music and its accompanying modern dances with troubling "deviant" sexuality and the *Neue Frau.*

The left panel is more explicit in its depiction of overt female sexuality. It depicts several heavily made-up female prostitutes standing on a cobblestone street, underneath a red-brick and iron overpass for an elevated train in what appears to be an urban red-light district (Van Dyke 2010). Under the brick arch of the overpass, a woman, presumably a prostitute either urinates or entertains an unseen client.[15] Across the street, a grinning prostitute with a fur-stole scratches the neck of a horse that eats out of a feedbag. In front of her stands a blonde prostitute with a diaphanous bluish shawl around her shoulders. The yellowish-orange color of her dress and her red, ankle strap shoes echo the orange tones of the dress and red shoes of the *Neue Frau* in the center panel. The fingers of her left hand are spread out but slightly curved in a position that echoes the more elegant placement of the *Neue Frau*'s bejeweled left fingers. The blonde prostitute stands with her hand on her hip and looks back over her shoulder at the unfortunate war cripple who totters down the street after the streetwalkers.

This gray-haired war cripple is missing both of his legs and hobbles down the street on two wooden pegs attached to the stumps of his legs. He leans heavily on the wooden crutch nestled in his right underarm. Although World War I had ended ten years prior to Dix's creation of this painting, the legless veteran still wears his uniform jacket and cap leaving no doubt as to how he received his injuries. A brown and black dog resembling a German shepherd stands at the base of the legless veteran's crutch with its mouth open. The dog is either barking or begging but the cripple does not seem to notice; instead, he stares intently at the blonde prostitute.

Neither the crippled veteran nor the prostitutes seem to notice the body of another former soldier lying on his side in a fetal position in the street directly in front of the war cripple. This mustachioed veteran appears to be younger than the other and all of his limbs are intact. In fact, the wooden peg attached to the crippled veteran's left leg seems to be touching the man's feet. This soldier also

wears his uniform but it is tattered and has a tear in the fabric above his right elbow. It is difficult to determine whether this man is dead or has collapsed in the street in a drunken stupor.[16] However, it seems likely that he is simply incredibly drunk. His eyes are open and his tongue lolls out of his slightly open mouth. Furthermore, it appears that he has vomited onto the street as a brownish-tan substance appears on the cobblestone near the purple shoe of the prostitute with the fur stole, which supports the idea that he has collapsed in the street due to excessive alcohol consumption.

Regardless of whether he is dead or "dead drunk," the position of his fully intact legs relative to the stumps of the crippled veteran is bitterly ironic. His bent legs, which are glimpsed between the crippled veteran's wooden stumps, are positioned in such a way that they appear to emanate from the cripple's crotch. Thus, the crippled veteran's lack of legs is also linked with phallic lack. His psychological emasculation due to the effects of the war is mirrored by his wounded physical state. Despite his concentrated focus on the blonde prostitute who looks his way, the viewer is left to conclude that the physically enfeebled veteran is sexually impotent as well. Due to his injuries, he has likely been reduced to begging in the streets and could probably not afford to procure the streetwalker's services. Even if he could, the implication seems to be that his sexual organs would hardly be functional. Thus, the sexual potency of the streetwalkers, especially the blonde prostitute, is contrasted to the physical and sexual impotency of the crippled veteran and the physical incapacitation of the veteran who lies unnoticed in the street.

At the time, employment was associated with the good physical health of both the worker and the body politic so unemployment was regarded as aberrant and potentially dangerous. As work and one's economic output were equated with societal value, those who were unable to work were burdened by negative cultural stereotypes about and prejudices against the unemployed.[17] For men who were unable to work because of physical or psychological ailments caused by their participation in World War I, unemployment denoted their compromised masculinity and failure to fulfill their traditional masculine role (Lerner 2003). Thus, the war cripple in the left panel is not only depicted as being sexually impotent but economically incapable as well. In contrast to the prostitutes who use their bodies to earn money, the wounded veteran's mutilated body prevents him from being employed and earning a living. The contrast between the enfeebled veteran and

the prostitutes lining the cobblestone street in the left panel makes manifest the sexual, economic and military deficiencies of German masculinity (Lerner 2003).

In contrast to the working class street scene depicted in the left panel, the right panel depicts a more upper-class thoroughfare that was perhaps constructed during the affluent years of the Wilhelmine Empire, as indicated by the extravagant architectural facades clustered along the right side of the canvas (Van Dyke 2010). Amidst the decorative façades of these buildings sits a legless man who was, presumably, injured in the war. Unlike the crippled veteran in the left panel, this man does not have any prosthetics attached to the stumps of his legs. Instead, the stubby remains of his injured legs are visible beneath his rolled up pant legs. A black covering resembling an eye patch is tied around his face and covers his damaged nose.

Although it is possible that his nose was disfigured during the war, the presence of the prostitutes could also imply that his nose was marred due to the effects of a sexually transmitted disease. If left untreated, syphilis, in the tertiary stage, can result in lesions in the nose; these lesions can cause the cartilage and bones to break down and collapse resulting in the "saddle nose" deformity (Baykal and Yazganoglu 2010). The number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases rose with the number of prostitutes and venereal diseases, especially syphilis, caused near-hysterical levels of concern among Weimar theorists (Magnusen 2018). Thus, the man in this panel, who wears a shabby jacket that is the color of a military uniform, can be seen as a victim not only of wartime violence but also of the diseased, female “depravity” of the prostitutes around him. He is reduced to resting his Army cap on his mutilated lap in order to collect money as he begs in the street while the able-bodied women who walk past him use their ostensibly intact, but possibly diseased, bodies to earn their money.

Ironically, this severely wounded man salutes the rows of women, who are presumably higher class prostitutes who parade, almost like ranks of soldiers, up and down the street.[18] However, these women are completely oblivious or indifferent to his presence. It is likely that they are prostitutes, but, given the difficulty of distinguishing streetwalkers from non-prostitutes, the occupations of all of the women are not definitive. They wear a variety of flamboyant clothes including opulent furs, gossamer veils, unusual hats and fancy dresses indicating that they are

trying to attract attention. The garment of the plump blonde woman directly behind the legless man has slipped away revealing her ample right breast. This blatant display indicates that she is a prostitute. Her blondeness and the revelation of one of her shoulders vaguely parallels the blonde haired prostitute in the left panel whose iridescent shawl similarly slips to display one of her shoulders.[19] Behind this voluptuous blonde, a dark-haired prostitute wearing black opera-length gloves and a pale blue dress also sports a small, bright pink top hat with fluffy, pink feathers stemming from it. This pink plumage echoes the feathery, pink fan wielded by the *Neue Frau* in the center panel.

Leading this procession of prostitutes down the street is a dark-haired prostitute wearing blue shoes and a fur stole atop a pale red cape. This woman, who also wears a tight-fitting bluish-purple cap ornamented with an orb and a feather, recalls the prostitute in the left panel who also dons a red shawl, fur stole and feathered cap.[20] Her cape has been draped over her shoulders and the ends meet in the middle of her body. The color and arrangement of the folds of the cape coupled with the fur stole surrounding it clearly resembles a vagina. Dix has essentially reduced this particular prostitute to a large vagina with legs. Thus, her proximity to the disabled veteran without legs calls his sexual potency into question. Just as the prostitute's body manifests her obvious erotic power, so too does the body of the war cripple display his lack thereof. His upside-down hat has been placed between his legs. Its proximity to his severed stumps and the concavity of its opening again call to mind themes of castration and phallic lack. His weak, "feminized" body reduces him to begging while the masculinized, sexually "deviant" women who parade past him use their bodies for economic gain. Despite his lack of virility, this veteran bows his head and offers a, perhaps ironic, salute to the prostitutes seemingly in deference to their explicit sexual potency.

This painting links the ideas of female sexual potency, modern dance, physical decay and death. In addition, it blurs the boundary between New Women and prostitutes, both of whom could be viewed threats to inter-war German masculinity. It has been asserted that Dix represented himself as the war cripple on crutches in the left panel or that either the man lying prone in the street in the same panel or the begging cripple in the right panel somehow acted as proxies for Dix.[21] However, such assertions seem problematic in light of the self-portraits Dix created in various media throughout the nineteen-twenties in which he represented himself as a controlled, rational,

masculine, modern man and sexually potent artist. Furthermore, although Dix was injured during the war, he was not maimed and he never suffered from a nervous breakdown. His family was working class so he had not entered the German army as an officer; however, he not only managed to remain alive but he received multiple awards and promotions for his military skill and commitment. Thus, it seems unlikely that Dix would choose to ignore his decorated military record and instead depict himself either in the guise of a mutilated, emasculated, powerless cripple or as an incapacitated, ignored veteran lying next to a pool of his own vomit as in the side panels of *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*).

In fact, Dix does not seem to have included himself among the figures in *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*). Instead, Dix positions himself as an observer-creator, who represents the painted scene and occupies a place outside it. From this standpoint, Dix created an ambivalent representation of New Women and prostitutes that demonstrates that the lines between what was desirable and what was repellent in societal expectations of women were often blurred, much as the distinction between New Women and prostitutes was not always clear. Consequently, this work projects the complexities and tensions of inter-war gender politics onto the bodies of the women at the heart of those often contradictory debates.

The Weimar discourse pertaining to women, especially those, such as New Women and prostitutes, who did not conform to the traditional mores of the time were fraught with concern, if not panic, about perceived social decline and the loss of patriarchal control. These fears were so overstated that the Weimar *Neue Frau* became both an icon of modernity and a convenient scapegoat for the various socio-political and cultural changes that were challenging the traditionally patriarchal domination of German society (West 1995). Due to his military background and his personal fascination with manifestations of modern German sexuality, Dix often depicted scenes that reflected his own interests. The ambivalent representations of New Woman and prostitutes in works such as *Großstadt (Metropolis)* demonstrate that the lines between what constituted "modern" versus improper female behavior were increasingly blurred just as distinction between New Women and prostitutes was not always clear. Works such as *Großstadt* project the complexities and tensions of inter-war gender politics onto the bodies of the women at the heart of those often contradictory discourses. As an avant-garde artist, Dix seemed to embrace modernity

while seemingly remaining skeptical about its effects on gender relations. As a former soldier, he was perhaps more attuned to the increasingly complex relations between the sexes in the wake of World War I; it had been previously regarded as a testing ground for German masculinity, which in light of the nation's defeat, had been found wanting. Indeed, his emphasis on materialism, objectification and suffering alludes to his own pessimistic attitude regarding post-war society. While not all who fought were injured and those on the homefront were removed from the horrors of war, in his *Großstadt* triptych, Dix seems to imply that no one grappling with the effects of the war remained unscathed.

Figure 1 Otto Dix, *Großstadt* (*Metropolis*), 1927-1928, oil and tempera on wood, left panel: 181 x 101 cm (71 ¼ x 39 ¾ in.), center panel: 181 x 201 cm (71 ¼ x 79 1/8 in.), right panel: 181 x 101 cm (71 ¼ x 39 ¾ in.). Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.

Reference List

Abrams, Lynn. 1988. "Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870-1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?" In *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History,* edited by Richard J. Evans, 189-204. London: Routledge.

Abrams, Lynn and Elizabeth Harvey. 1997. "Introduction: Gender and Gender Relations in German History." In *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, edited by Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, 1-37. Durham: Duke University Press.

Baykal, Can and K. Didem Yazganoglu. 2010. *Dermatological Diseases of the Nose and Ears: An Illustrated Guide.* New York: Springer Science & Business Media.

Finch, Maggie. 2011. "Metropolis: The Brilliant and Sinister Art of the 1920s." In *The Mad Square: Modernity in German Art 1910-1937,* edited by Jacqueline Strecker, 191-225. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Funkenstein, Susan Laikin. 2005. "Fashionable Dancing: Gender, the Charleston, and German Identity in Otto's Dix's 'Metropolis.'" *German Studies Review* 28 (1): 20-44.

Hake, Sabine. 1997. "In the Mirror of Fashion." In *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, edited by Katharina Von Ankum, 185-201. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hau, Michael. 2003. *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890-1930.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Herrmann, Ingo. 2010. "Biography: 1914–1923." In *Otto Dix,* edited by Olaf Peters, 235-41. Munich: Prestel-Verlag.

Kayser, Rudolf. 1994. "Americanism." In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook,* edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, 395-97. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lerner, Paul. 2003. *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Magnusen, Kaia L. 2018. "'The Great Imitator': Syphilis and Clandestine Prostitution in Otto Dix's *Die Witwe* Watercolors." *New German Critique* 45 (2): 33-66.

McGreevy, Linda F. 1975. *The Life and Works of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press.

Müller, Karsten. 2010. "The Charleston and the Prosthetic Leg: Otto Dix and the Art of the Balancing Act." In *Otto Dix,* edited by Olaf Peters, 164-77. Munich: Prestel-Verlag.

Nenno, Nancy. 1997. "Femininity, the Primitive and Modern Urban Space: Josephine Baker in Berlin." In *Women in the Metropolis: Gender & Modernity in Weimar Culture*, edited by Katharina von Ankum, 145-161. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rewald, Sabine. 2006. "Cartoon for *Metropolis* (*Triptych)*." In *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, edited by John P. O'Neill, 212-17. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sharp, Ingrid. 2006. "Gender Relations in Weimar Berlin." In *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic,* edited by Schönfeld, Christiane, 1-13. Würzburg: Verlag Könighausen & Neumann GmbH.

Tower, Beeke Sell. 1994. "'Ultramodern and Ultraprimitive:' Shifting Meanings in the Imagery of Americanism in the Art of Weimar Germany." In *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, edited by Thomas W. Kniesche and Stephen Brockmann, 85-104. Columbia: Camden House, Inc.

Usborne, Cornelie. 1992. *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany*: *Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

———. 1996. "Wise women, Wise Men and Abortion in the Weimar Republic: Gender, Class and Medicine." In *Gender Relations in German history: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, edited by Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, 143-76. Durham: Duke University Press.

Van Dyke, James. 2010. "Otto Dix's Philosophical Metropolis." In *Otto Dix,* edited by Olaf Peters, 179-97. Munich: Prestel-Verlag.

Von Ankum, Katharina. 1997. "Gendered Urban Spaces in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (*The Artificial Silk Girl*)." In *Women in the Metropolis: Gender & Modernity in Weimar Culture*, edited by Katharina von Ankum, 162-184. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wehrlin, Thomas. 1920. "Die Verhurung Berlins." *Das Tage-buch* 43 (1): 1381-83.

WEKA. 1930. *Stätten der Berliner Prostitution von den Elends- Absteigequartieren am Schlesischen Bahnhof und Alexanderplatz zur Luxus-Prostitution der Friedrichstraße und des Kurfürstendamms.* Frankfurt: Buchdruckerei Wilhelm Bohn.

West, Shearer. 1995. "Introduction." In *Visions of the 'Neue Frau': Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany*, edited by Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West, 1-8. Brooksfield: Ashgate Publishing Company.

[1] As a soldier, Dix fought in the trenches. He survived mustard gas attacks while serving in the Champagne province in France. He was wounded on several occasions and, as a result of his injuries, he briefly stayed in a French military hospital. When the war finally ended, he was serving guard duty at a Silesian training camp.
[2] Due to their economic independence, perceived sexual promiscuity, and calls for abortion rights, New Women were regarded as being especially suspect. Both prostitutes and New Women were blamed for interwar problems ranging from the declining birthrate to the increase in the number of reported cases of sexually transmitted diseases and other manifestations of so-called national decline.
[3] In March 1927, the German Supreme Court ruled that "therapeutic abortion," meaning abortion on health grounds, was permitted.
[4] Dix left Dresden in 1922. In late 1926, he was appointed to the faculty at the Dresden Academy of Art and subsequently left Berlin for Dresden in April 1927.
[5] The bald saxophone player is Dr. Alfred Schulze who served as the Saxon State Chancellor's representative on the board of the Dresden Academy of Art. The profile head of Fritz Glazer, a prominent lawyer, art collector and supporter of Dix is shown just to the right of the *Neue Frau*'s fan. Also, the man with a monocle seated at the foreground table is Wilhelm Kreis, the head of the architecture faculty at the Dresden Academy of Art.
[6] Women comprised 6.5% of office employees in 1907 and 12.6% of office employees in 1925.
[7] Article 361.6 of the German Penal Code outlawed prostitution. However, prostitution was unofficially condoned as long as prostitutes were monitored by the police through registration, which involved mandatory "health checks" for prostitutes, police surveillance, and other measures.
[8] Beeke Sell Tower refers to the figure with the pink fan as a woman. James van Dyke calls her a "showgirl." Sabine Rewald asserts that while the figure is clearly a woman in the cartoon, the figure in the final painting is a male transvestite.
[9] WEKA's actual name was Willi Pröger and, although his reportage specifically refers to Berlin, his observations are valid for other large cities. WEKA specifically uses the adjective "*knallrot*" to refer to the lipstick of a prostitute who he believes to be about fifty years old. He later also discusses the smudged red lipstick of younger prostitutes.
[10] All translations of Wehrlin's text are my own. In his discussion of prostitution, Wehrlin briefly mentions prostitutes in Paris and Naples but asserts that they cater to the dregs of society whereas prostitutes in Berlin corrupt decent German men.
[11] Wehrlin recounts that he overhead a young Berlin girl rhetorically asking if there are twenty-year-olds who are not having affairs ("*Verhältnisse*"). He then scoffs at the girl's suggestion of twenty years of age and suggests that seventeen or even fifteen would be accurate as well.
[12] To a lesser extent, Wehrlin also scolds city men for allowing women to deviate from their traditionally prescribed path of becoming wives and mothers.
[13] Wehrlin bases this assertion on one of Robert Hessen's writings in which he remarks that an age has to be judged by how it feels about the symbol of the mother and child.
[14] For instance, author Hermann Hesse referred to "jazz as the music of decline" in his novel, *Steppenwolf* (1927).
[15] In the catalogue entry for the cartoon of *Großstadt (Metropolis)* in the *Glitter and Doom* exhibition catalogue, Rewald suggests that the woman is urinating. However, given the setting and the presence of the other prostitutes, it seems plausible that she has pulled her skirt up for a client instead.
[16] Rewald asserts that the war veteran lying in the street is dead but she does not elaborate on why she believes he is dead rather than simply drunk. In his essay, "Otto Dix's Philosophical Metropolis," James A. Van Dyke notes that the soldier could be either dead or drunk.
[17] Lerner is specifically discussing World War I veterans who were unable to work because of psychological issues related to "war neurosis" or because of war-related physical problems.
[18] Van Dyke and Rewald suggest that the prostitutes in the right panel might be going up and down stairs.
[19] Van Dyke also notes the potential link between the blonde prostitutes in the left and right panels
[20] Van Dyke similarly comments on the similarities between the fur-bedecked prostitutes in the left and right panels.
[21] Rewald asserts that the veteran on crutches in the left panel represents Dix from behind. In his essay, "Otto Dix's Philosophical Metropolis," Van Dyke analyzes Bruno Schuch's 1927 photograph of Dix at work on the *Großstadt (Metropolis)* cartoon and the dates of the cartoon and the finished panels to posit that Dix "assumed the point of view" of either the cripple in the right panel or the prone man in the center panel.